



Worcester Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board Meeting Minutes April 23, 2020

Chairperson Lehtola called the meeting to order at 8:30a.m.

AB MEMBERS ATTENDANCE VIA TELECONFERENCE

Present by teleconference: Barbara Connelly-Grafton, Brian Bullock – Holden, Kristen Las – Shrewsbury, Gary Rosen-Worcester, Douglas Belanger-Leicester, Robert Spain- Millbury, Roseann Carrier-Brookfield and William Lehtola - Spencer. Judith O’Connor – Millbury Alt, Brian Pigeon-Worcester Alt, Adam Menard – Auburn Alt. Arrived 8:50am Michael Suprenant – Sturbridge.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Motion: To accept the minutes for February 20, 2020

By: Doug Belanger. 2nd: Mark Binnall.

Vote by roll call: (6 in favor 2 abstentions) vote passed.

Barbara Connelly	yes
Brian Bullock	yes
Kristen Las	yes
Gary Rosen	yes
Douglas Belanger	yes
Robert Spain	Abstention
Roseann Carrier	Abstention
William Lehtola	yes

Chairperson Lehtola thanked all the employees of the WRTA for their continued service during this pandemic.

BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC

The public was invited to attend the teleconference of the advisory board meeting. No business from the public was taken.

BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD

Robert Spain commented on the importance of including electric buses for future purchases. Mr. Lipka commented that the present electric buses have limited usefulness due to aging, battery issues and parts procurement difficulties. Mr. Lipka also mentioned that their electric buses do not have driver’s shields. These factors and others were the reason that the upcoming capital plan did not include any electric buses. Mr. Lipka stated they would be open to looking at electric buses in the future and that overnight charging would be their priority.

Communities Served:

Auburn	Brimfield	Douglas	Grafton	Millbury	North	Paxton	Southbridge	Wales	West Boylston
Barre	Brookfield	Dudley	Holden	New Braintree	Brookfield	Princeton	Spencer	Warren	West
Berlin	Charlton	East	Holland	Northborough	Oakham	Rutland	Sturbridge	Webster	Brookfield
Boylston	Clinton	Brookfield	Leicester	Northbridge	Oxford	Shrewsbury	Sutton	Westborough	Worcester



Mr. Coyne informed the board that two new buses arrived last summer and five are due in September (pending any delays from Covid-19). The goal of the capital plan is to purchase five to seven per year until the current fleet of 52 buses are replaced. Mr. Coyne informed the board that eleven vans are scheduled for this summer (pending any delays from Covid-19). William Lehtola asked the cost of the buses being purchases. Mr. Coyne commented that a 35 foot clean diesel buses cost about \$535,000 dollars while electric buses ranges about \$790,000 dollars. Mr. Lipka added that the WRTA was under the 20% surplus spare ratio for its buses. Mark Binnall asked if there was a contract for the gasoline pertaining to the vans. Mr. Lipka stated there was no contract for the vans. Mr. Lipka stated in light of the drop in fuel prices the Administration would be negotiating for their 2022 needs. Gary Rosen asked that the administration look into getting the existing 2021 contract (at \$1.99) down to a lower price. Gary Rosen stated the importance of making every effort to renegotiate the existing contract. Judith O'Connor stated that Millbury is running limited ADA services.

BUDGET FY`21

Mr. Lipka gave an explanation of the budget presented to the Audit and Finance Committee. Mr. Lipka credited Mr. Coyne for his outstanding job on the assessments of what will happen. Mr. Lipka stated that the lack of a House or Senate budget coupled with an anticipated decline in state revenues makes budgeting more difficult. Mr. Lipka assured the board members that the best and most reasonable approach was used when incorporating the budgeting figures for FY`21. Mr. Lipka stated how maintaining a balanced budget for both FY`20 and FY`21 is the Administration's priority. Mr. Lipka described how the CARES Act money is attainable by a request for reimbursement process. The WRTA has 5 million already committed for their needs. Mr. Lipka explained the WRTA Administration is working to develop the necessary policies and protocols to deal with current and post pandemic realities. Mr. Lipka asked for a vote on the budget presented.

AUDIT AND FINANCE COMMITTEE UPDATE ON BUDGET FY`21

Mr. Belanger stated that the Audit and Finance Committee reviewed the FY`21 budget. The committee members after discussion voted to recommend the budget to the full board for approval.

Motion: The Worcester Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board moves to approve the recommendation of the Audit and Finance Committee to approve the FY`21 Budget as presented in the amount of \$28,246,882 dollars.

By: Doug Belanger. 2nd: Robert Spain.

Vote by roll call: (8 in favor 0 opposed).

Barbara Connelly	yes
Brian Bullock	yes
Kristen Las	yes
Gary Rosen	yes
Douglas Belanger	yes
Robert Spain	yes
Roseann Carrier	yes
William Lehtola	yes

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OPERATIONAL UPDATES REGARDING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mr. Lipka explained ridership levels are at 20% to 25% of normal. Ridership numbers were stated as follows: 2,400 to 2,700 per weekday, 1,000 on Saturdays, and 200-800 on Sundays. Weekday's the buses run from 5:45am to 10:30pm via a Saturday schedule due to staffing and ridership levels. The WRTA is using rear door entry and persons with mobility issues are handled by using the front door. The first two rows of bus seating are not being used for safety reasons. The WRTA is following the guidelines in place at the MBTA regarding masks. The WRTA continues to post notices on recommendations and changes in policy or scheduling. Ridership on the buses is generally below 10 persons but at some peak times there are over 14 persons. Mr. Lipka stated they are monitoring the situation and adapting with the changing times. Mr. Lipka acknowledged that facility and shelter cleaning cost would rise in the spring. The Administration is seeking to off-set these expenses with the CARES Act funding to ensure a balanced budget for FY`20.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE: Chairperson announces results of the review of the WRTA Administrator

Chairperson Belanger gave a summary of the personnel committee meeting. The committee members gave their individual scores within 7 categories. The combined average score for Mr. Lipka was 8.85 and the overall summary by committee members was positive. In regards to improvements; some members discussed the need for better communication with member communities. Chairperson Belanger stated that the consensus was Mr. Lipka had a high work ethic, and high marks in general for communication and responsiveness. No vote was taken for this review. Chairperson Belanger informed the board members that Mr. Lipka is working on his goals and objectives. Chairperson Belanger announced that board members can request documents pertaining to the committee meeting by emailing a request to Elizabeth Pokoly.

Some personnel committee members commented regarding their review. Kristen Las commented positively on staff recruitment and the union work. She recommended weekly or bi-weekly communication with the board members. Bill Lehtola commented that Mr. Lipka exceeded other Administrators. Gary Rosen commented (acknowledging being new to the board) his communication to and responses from Mr. Lipka and his team regarding his inquiries has been impressive.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:23 a.m.

By: Doug Belanger, 2nd: Barbara Connelly

Vote: All in favor (9 in favor 0 opposed)

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next WRTA Advisory Board Meeting will be on May 21, 2020 at 8:30 a.m., via teleconference due to the Governor's State of Emergency provisions for public meetings.

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth R Pokoly

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