



Worcester Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board Meeting Minutes February 18, 2021

Chairperson Lehtola called the meeting to order at 8:32a.m.

AB MEMBERS ATTENDANCE VIA TELECONFERENCE

Present by teleconference: Barbara Connelly-Grafton, Kristen Las – Shrewsbury, Adam Menard - Auburn, Gary Rosen-Worcester, Douglas Belanger-Leicester, Robert Spain-Millbury, Michael Suprenant – Sturbridge, Michael Kennedy – Millbury DP, Nancy Garr-Colzie-Worcester RCP, Brian Pigeon-Worcester Alt. Judith O’Connor – Millbury Alt., William Lehtola - Spencer. Ron San Angelo – Rutland
8:35 a.m. Kristen Las – Shrewsbury left 9:30 a.m.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Motion: To accept the minutes for January 21, 2021

By: Robert Spain. 2nd: Doug Belanger.

Vote by roll call: (9 in favor 1 abstained 0 opposed) vote passed.

Barbara Connelly	yes
Kristen Las	yes
Adam Menard	yes
Gary Rosen	yes
Douglas Belanger	yes
Robert Spain	yes
Michael Suprenant	yes
Michael Kennedy	abstained
Nancy Garr-Colzie	yes
William Lehtola	yes

Chairperson Lehtola spoke about the importance of having mended the past fiscal responsibilities and the move to a 5-year budgeting plan. Chairperson Lehtola supports the administration’s efforts to maintain the integrity of their responsibilities in long term planning. Chairperson Lehtola stated how he cares about what happens 5 years from now. Chairperson Lehtola stated that “now” spending is not fiscally sound and puts a burden on your ridership by impacting service. Chairperson Lehtola reminded the board members that the WRTA is accountable to the FTA and MassDOT when spending funds.

BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC – Congressman James McGovern, Massachusetts’s 2nd congressional district spoke about the importance of transit and the present transportation bill as possible funding considerations. Speakers Kristiana Lachiusa, Community Engagement Manager, Livable Streets Alliance and Brenna Robeson, Zero Fare WRTA Coalition spoke on behalf of continuing zero fares and the importance of having fare free as a policy. Ms. Lachiusa spoke about possible options for funding and how pilot programs are important to jumpstarting expending discussions for fare free overall.

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



Chairperson Lehtola thanked the speakers for their time.

BUSINESS FROM THE AUDIT & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Chairperson Lehtola summarized the discussion at the Audit & Finance committee meeting held on 2.11.21. The committee recommend to continue the suspension of fares until June 30, 2021.

Chairperson Lehtola asked the administrator for clarification on both the federal and state funding sources. Chairperson Lehtola asked Mr. Lipka to discuss his recommendations.

RESUMPTION OF THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE WRTA FARE POLICY

Mr. Lipka detailed the restrictions of federal vs. state money and how the CARES ACT money is a one-time amount. Mr. Lipka stated that the yearly budgeted amounts are estimates as expenses continue to raise. The object of the administration is to provide clean, safe and consistent service for its ridership. Mr. Lipka explained how it would not be advisable to continue using CARES ACT for suspension of fares. His recommendation is to discontinue the suspension of fares March 20, 2021. Mr. Lipka stated if the intended legislative efforts are awarded and their restrictions/conditions are permissible, viable or intended for such purpose; then that is the time to address possible changes. Mr. Lipka informed the board that the updated Comprehensive Service Plan is due to be release in March.

Chairperson Lehtola opened the discussion to the board members for their comments.

BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD

Gary Rosen thanked the speakers and mentioned Senator’s Chandler’s intended co-sponsoring for funding to be used by the MBTA and WRTA for free fares pilots. Gary Rosen asked the board members to consider continuing the suspension of fare until the end of April as well as going beyond. Robert Spain proposed continuing the suspension until the end of the fiscal year. Board members discussed taking from the last year budgeted to pay for continued suspension of fares until June 30, 2021. Mr. Lipka explained that it is not a swap situation but rather a collective of grants issued based on projections for future needs. Board member discussed specific points of the funding vehicles and their restrictions. Board members discussed how that would affect the budget if suspension were to continue until June 30, 2021. Most board members agreed that a permanent revenue stream outside of the CARES ACT money would be needed for long term fare free considerations by the board.

Robert Spain: made a motion that the WRTA Advisory Board vote to continue the suspension of fares until June 30, 2021. The Chairperson called for a second: Ron San Angelo seconded.

Chairperson Lehtola opened the motion up for discussion. Mike Kennedy asked if COA’s and Paratransit services are affected by this vote. Mr. Lipka responded that suspension of fares includes all services. Mike Kennedy stated he favored suspension if the administration were to seek other funding sources like colleges. Mr. Lipka responded that local colleges have been included when seeking funding options but there have been no commitments.

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Doug Belanger made a friendly suggestion to Robert Spain that if his motion included (until July 1, 2021 at which time fares will be reinstated short of a new revenue source attributed to fare reimbursement) it would likely please all parties. Robert Spain replied in agreement.

Motion: the WRTA Advisory Board votes to continue with suspension of fares until July 1, 2021 at which time fares will be reinstated short of a new revenue source attributed to fare reimbursement.

On motion by Robert Spain, seconded by Ron San Angelo (roll call) Advisory Board voted to continue with suspension of fares until July 1, 2021 at which time fares will be reinstated short of a new revenue source attributed to fare reimbursement. (8 votes with 1 abstention) the vote was carried.

Barbara Connelly	yes
Adam Menard	yes
Gary Rosen	yes
Douglas Belanger	yes
Robert Spain	yes
Michael Suprenant	yes
Michael Kennedy	yes
Nancy Garr-Colzie	yes
William Lehtola	abstained

REPORT ON RESPONSES OF RFP PERTAINING TO THE FARE COLLECTION SYSTEM

This item was not reported by administration due to time constrains.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 10:05 a.m.

By: Douglas Belanger, 2nd: Robert Spain

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

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next WRTA Advisory Board Meeting will be on March 18, 2021 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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