

Approved 5/26/22

Pursuant to written notice sent to Board Members and pursuant to notice posted at least forty-eight hours prior to the meeting, copies of said notice having been sent to the Secretary of the Commonwealth, William F. Galvin and the Secretary of the Executive Office of Administration and Finance, Michael Heffernan, the meeting of the Advisory Board of the Franklin Regional Transit Authority was held on March 17, 2022 virtually on the Zoom.us platform by computer and by phone.

1. INTRODUCTIONS:

Present were the following Advisory Board Members and/or Member Designees:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>
Paul McLatchy	Ashfield	1.60
Jennifer Reynolds	Bernardston	2.26
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.44
Daniel Girard	Charlemont	2.29
Joe Kurland	Colrain	1.09
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.12
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	31.56
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.81
Mary Bowen	Northfield	1.37
Patrick Williamson	Plainfield	1.00
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.56
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.21
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02
	<u>Total</u>	<u>63.33</u>

Also present were:

Tina M. Cote; FRTA Administrator, Michael Perreault; FRTA Assistant Administrator, Wayne Waldron, FTM General Manager, Catherine Connolly, FTM Safety and Training Manager, Elizabeth Quirk, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Chair, Megan Rhodes, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Vice-Chair, and Deb Wilson, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee.

Chairman Eric Twarog called the meeting to order at 4:00pm and it was noted that a quorum **was** present to hold a meeting.

2. REVIEW AND VOTE TO ACCEPT MINUTES FROM NOVEMBER 18, 2021 MEETING:

Jeff Singleton made a **motion** to accept the meeting minutes from November 18, 2021. Paul McLatchy seconded, and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Paul McLatchy	Ashfield	1.60	Yes
Jennifer Reynolds	Bernardston	2.26	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.44	Yes
Daniel Girard	Charlemont	2.29	Yes
Joe Kurland	Colrain	1.09	Not Present
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.12	Not Present
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	31.56	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.81	Yes
Mary Bowen	Northfield	1.37	Yes
Patrick Williamson	Plainfield	1.00	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.56	Not Present
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.21	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
	<u>Total</u>	<u>63.33</u>	

Yes – 55.56

No – 0.00

Abstain – 0.00

Not Present – 7.77

The vote passed and the **motion** carried.

OLD BUSINESS:

3. UPDATE ON HST AND LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE:

Information on the HST Legislative Task Force was provided in the meeting packet. Jeff Singleton asked if FRTA staff was still receiving complaints from consumers. Tina M. Cote explained that some complaints were still coming into FRTA with most of them regarding long hold times on the phone, but it seems like consumers, for the most part, are getting used to the “new” HST system with MART. There was discussion that the Task Force was intended to hold monthly or bi-monthly meetings through the remainder of the calendar year. This agenda item was asked to stay on the agenda to follow up at the next Advisory Board meeting.

4. MAINTENANCE FACILITY PROJECT UPDATE:

Michael Perreault provided a brief update on construction activities related to the new maintenance facility project. Those included: starting in late January the contractor started mobilizing, grubbing and clearing the site, temporary fencing and silt fencing was installed; in March building and electrical permits were submitted, job trailers were set up, temporary electric service was installed; by the end of March/beginning of April removal of unsuitable fill, bringing in structural fill in lifts, rebar to be ordered, and excavating for footings and foundations starting at the north end of the facility. Tina M. Cote added that the address for the new facility will be 3 Sandy Lane in Turners Falls. Jeff Singleton asked about the project schedule and if there is any delay in the project schedule. Michael Perreault stated that early on in the project there was a bid

protest from one of the electrical subcontractors. That subcontractor had since withdrawn their protest prior to the hearing. The general contractor has expressed some concerns over the issue with some delays in the fabrication and delivery of the prefabricated building materials. To date neither the project architect nor the owner's project manager feel that either of these issues will cause a delay in the current project schedule. If there are any delay claims by the general contractor that can be substantiated, FRTA will update the Advisory Board with any changes to the project or project schedule. Tina M. Cote added that current substantial completion is scheduled for December 2022/January 2023. Jeff Singleton asked about the recent GMTA meeting relating to the lease agreement with FRTA and the current maintenance facility. Tina M. Cote stated that GMTA had approached FRTA looking to reinstate a formal lease agreement through the end of the construction period to give enough time for FRTA to move into its new facility. The general terms of the lease agreement were to keep the same monthly fee as currently being paid, but there are some outstanding language discrepancies surrounding capital improvements. FRTA, its legal counsel, and GMTA have been communication to work through a lease agreement everyone is comfortable with. Robert J. Decker III asked about the proposed time period for the new lease agreement. Tina M. Cote stated that the language is currently for a maximum of two years with one optional extension for an additional nine months. There is additional language proposed for a cancellation clause with a 60-day notice. Robert J. Decker III asked about any contingency funds for the construction of the new maintenance facility. Tina M. Cote stated that there is currently enough money programmed to complete the project and Michael Perreault added that there are no contingency funds included in this project. FRTA is in discussions with MassDOT to use federal COVID funds to flex over to cover any unexpected additional costs associated with the project in order to not impact any Towns' local assessments.

5. DISCUSSION/UPDATE ON DISCRETIONARY GRANT AND WORKFORCE TRANSPORTATION GRANT:

Information on the most recently quarterly report for the Workforce Transportation grant was provided in the meeting packet. From June 2021 through January 2022 there were over 2,300 trips delivered to 34 individual clients. Tina M. Cote stated that funds for both the Discretionary grant, used for supporting the Access program, and the Workforce Transportation grant, used for supporting the 2nd/3rd shift employment program, have been exhausted by the third quarter of the fiscal year. These projects will continue to operate through the remainder of the fiscal year and will be supported by existing funds in the FY22 operating budget. Robert J. Decker III asked if FRTA was utilizing COVID funds to support these projects. Tina M. Cote confirmed that FRTA continues to utilize COVID funds to support ongoing transit operations.

Michael Perreault updated that FRTA has begun an additional partnership with the FRCOG and their receipt of grant funds from Senator Comerford to be used on our Access program. We're working with local agencies to help with transportation for their clients. In addition, as part of FRTA's updated 5-year plan there was a recommendation to expand the use of our automated scheduling software (Ecolane) to include our COA partners. Since the previous Advisory Board meeting, FRTA began working with the Southwick COA and their transportation provider, Hulmes Transportation Services, on using Ecolane. Southwick COA and Hulmes Transportation staff have gone through basic software training, and we anticipate to go-live with using Ecolane by the end of March. FRTA has also met with the Bernardston COA, Erving COA, Hilltown

CDC, and a joint partnership with Southampton COA and Westhampton COA to begin initial discussions on working with Ecolane. Teri Anderson asked about the joint partnership between Southampton and Westhampton. Michael Perreault explained that the Southampton COA operates a van transportation program, and the Westhampton COA operates a volunteer driver program. There have been some instances where residents of Westhampton that use a wheelchair are unable to utilize the volunteer driver program. This brought about some initial discussions between the two towns to be able to help in those instances where the Southampton COA can transport Westhampton wheelchair users.

6. DISCUSSION/UPDATE ON COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL TRANSIT PLAN AND WEEKEND FIXED ROUTE SERVICE:

Since the last meeting Elizabeth Quirk, Megan Rhodes, and George Touloumtzis from the Transit Advisory Committee agreed to assist Eric Twarog, Jeff Singleton, and FRTA staff on this discussion. There's been some staffing changes at Franklin Transit Management that have delayed some of the progress on this project. Jeff Singleton stated that there have been ongoing discussions with FRTA on creating a pilot project for weekend fixed route service. The level of service needs to be agreed upon and resolved and the pilot project plan will be brought to the full Advisory Board for discussion. Tina M. Cote stated that some of the challenges remain around driver hiring and retention. Jeff Singleton added that in addition to a weekend fixed route pilot project, a larger discussion remains on 'expanding the base' of the transit system and perhaps there are grant funds out there to help on research and outreach on this. Daniel Girard asked if the weekend fixed route service would include all fixed routes in the pilot. Tina M. Cote indicated that part of the current discussion will be to determine if all fixed routes be included in the weekend pilot project.

7. DISCUSSION/UPDATE ON PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Megan Rhodes updated that FRTA and the FRCOG have engaged in an agreement to assist on public outreach including: to create surveys, hold public meetings, and provide a summary report to the Advisory Board at the May meeting. The current plan is to hold 1-2 online meetings, create paper and electronic surveys in both English and Spanish, collect survey data, and provide a summary report of the survey results for the Advisory Board. Information will be collected on free fixed route fares, the Access program, and the 2nd/3rd shift employment program.

NEW BUSINESS:

8. REVIEW ADVISORY BOARD BY-LAWS:

After the previous Advisory Board meeting, Michael Perreault sent out copies of the by-laws for Advisory Board members to read and provide comments for updates/changes. Included in the meeting packet were comments received to date. Jeff Singleton stated that the role of the Advisory Board is not well defined within the by-laws. Eric Twarog and Joe Kurland agreed that the role of the Advisory Board should be more clearly defined. There was consensus that this agenda item be carried forward to the next meeting to continue discussions. Michael Perreault will continue to take comments from board members to present at the next meeting.

9. TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Elizabeth Quirk gave the following updates:

- There remains high interest in a fixed route weekend service pilot project.
- Discussions continue about ways to reduce stigma of riding public transportation.

10. FRTA UPDATES:

Tina M. Cote gave the following updates:

- Wayne Waldron was officially introduced as the new General Manager for FTM. Previous General Manager, Molly Chambers, had left in December for a career in a different field.
- Steve Pardoe was officially introduced as the new Assistant General Manager for FTM, replacing Wayne Waldron in that position.
- FRTA will be moving to a new fixed route software company in the coming months under a new contract with Passio. This will include real-time tracking information and automated passenger counters.
- At a recent meeting of the Pioneer Valley Round Table there was a lot of discussion for the need for additional funds for all RTAs in the upcoming state FY23 budget.

Jeff Singleton stated that he had heard that the amount of funding in the Governor's proposed FY23 budget was level funded for RTAs, which was the only line item in MassDOT to be level funded. Representative Blais is introducing an amendment in the upcoming draft House budget for additional funds for RTAs. Tina M. Cote stated that the legislature is supposedly putting in an increase to the line item for all RTAs up to \$101,000,000. Jeff Singleton suggested the Advisory Board submit a letter highlighting inequities with RTAs in the proposed budget. Teri Anderson stated that she had submitted a letter through the Westhampton Selectboard and suggested letters be submitted through the municipal letter or through individual letters.

The next Advisory Board meeting will be on May 19, 2022.

Peter Otten made a motion to adjourn. Robert J. Decker III seconded, and the meeting concluded at 5:10pm.