

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 18, 2021 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>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	2.15
Cara Letendre	Blandford	1.34
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48
Bob Daley	Chester	1.03
Janice Gibeau	Chesterfield	1.12
Don Walker	Conway	1.01
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	32.58
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98
Gabriele Voelker	Orange	5.38
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.28
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.50
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.55
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27
Jonathan von Ranson	Wendell	1.16
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00
	<u>Total</u>	<u>74.99</u>

Also present were:

Tina M. Cote; FRTA Administrator, Michael Perreault; FRTA Assistant Administrator, Molly Morin; FTM General Manager, Wayne Waldron, FTM Assistant General Manager, Catherine Connolly, FTM Safety and Training Manager, George Touloumtzis, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Chair, Donna MacNicol, FRTA Counsel, and Steven Ellis, Montague Town Administrator.

Vice-Chairman Peter Otten 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 19, 2020 MEETING:

Paul McLatchy made a **motion** to accept the meeting minutes from November 19, 2020. Paula LeBlanc seconded, and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	2.15	Yes
Cara Letendre	Blandford	1.34	Not Present
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48	Yes
Bob Daley	Chester	1.03	Abstain
Janice Gibeau	Chesterfield	1.12	Yes
Don Walker	Conway	1.01	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	32.58	Abstain
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98	Yes
Gabriele Voelker	Orange	5.38	Abstain
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.28	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.50	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.55	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27	Yes
Jonathan von Ranson	Wendell	1.16	Not Present
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
	Total	74.99	

Yes – 33.50
 No – 0.00
 Not Present – 2.50
 Abstain – 38.99

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

OLD BUSINESS:

3. COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL TRANSIT PLAN:

Jeff Singleton suggested that the Advisory Board vote on adopting the Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan. Jeff Singleton made a **motion** that the Advisory Board formally comment on the 5-year draft Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan during the 30-day comment period. Don Walker seconded and discussion continued. Teri Anderson stated that at the last the Advisory Board Tina M. Cote was going to check in with MassDOT if this plan required a vote to adopt by the Advisory Board. Tina M. Cote updated that the Advisory Board does not need to vote to adopt this plan. Steven Ellis suggested that the central point of the motion is for the Advisory Board to formally review and adopt for thoughtful consideration. Tina M. Cote stated that the

30-day public comment period would allow for the Advisory Board to submit public comment on the plan. Robert J. Decker III stated that the by-laws allow for an Executive Committee that could be used to review and provide comments on behalf of the Advisory Board. Peter Otten commented that there was a previous Executive Committee, but the Advisory Board pulled it back. Janice Gibeau suggested that the principle and process is to be inclusive, encourage participation, and provide feedback. Bob Daley stated that the 30-day comment period gives that Advisor Board another opportunity to look at the report. The discussion concluded and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	2.15	Yes
Cara Letendre	Blandford	1.34	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48	Yes
Bob Daley	Chester	1.03	Yes
Janice Gibeau	Chesterfield	1.12	Yes
Don Walker	Conway	1.01	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	32.58	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98	Yes
Gabriele Voelker	Orange	5.38	Yes
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.28	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.50	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.55	Not Present
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27	Yes
Jonathan von Ranson	Wendell	1.16	Not Present
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
		<u>Total</u>	74.99

Yes – 72.28
 No – 0.00
 Not Present – 2.71
 Abstain – 0.00

The vote passed and the **motion** carried

The FRTA will meet with Peter Otten after the meeting to coordinate a meeting with the Advisory Board to discuss next steps on providing comments on the Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan.

4. MAINTENANCE FACILITY PROJECT UPDATE:

Tina M. Cote updated that, since the last meeting, FRTA has secured contract with a new design team and the schematic design documents are expected to be completed next week. The purchase and sale of the property is underway and legal counsel is working to update the draft

document to share with the Town of Montague. Eric Twarog asked for an update on the timeline for FRTA moving out of the current facility. Michael Perreault stated that it is anticipated that the project should begin construction in the summer/fall of 2021, with substantial completion in approximately 12 months, and punch list completed in approximately 15 months.

5. DISCRETIONARY GRANT/MICROTRANSIT PILOT AND WORKFORCE TRANSPORTATION GRANT UPDATE:

Tina M. Cote reiterated that the current discretionary grant runs through the end of FY21. FRTA just launched the newest phase of the project on February 14th which started operating the Access program on the weekends. The project now operates Monday through Friday from 6:30am to 7:30pm and Saturday and Sunday from 9:30am to 5:30pm.

FRTA was also awarded a Workforce Development grant in December to provide 2nd and 3rd shift transportation for \$150,000. This is a new award, and we are still in the very early stages of working out a lot of the details. As part of the grant requirements FRTA is required to work with local area taxi and livery companies to deliver the transportation. In addition, we are working with Andrew Baker and MassHire to get the word out to local employers and potential employees and job seekers. The grant is only through December 31, 2021 and we anticipate a soft launch in early April.

Jeff Singleton asked if the discretionary grant is a steppingstone to get weekend fixed route service. Tina M. Cote stated that we are using this pilot to see travel patterns and to see what fixed routes would work best for operating on the weekends. FRTA has been trying for years to get weekend service and this grant opportunity is hopefully getting our foot in the door.

Tina M. Cote also added that as part of the discretionary grant includes funds for advertising and marketing of the pilot program. FRTA has created some bus ads, and started local radio ads, and is working to bus wraps.

Andrew Baker stated that the grant for providing 2nd and 3rd shift transportation is more specific to workforce development; targeting people looking for jobs but have transportation barriers, but not specific to weekend transportation.

Jeff Singleton stated that while he supports micortransit, workforce development, and small towns that do not have any fixed route service, but there is still an equity issue with FRTA not having weekend fixed route service in Franklin County that needs to be addressed.

6. DISCUSSION AND VOTE TO RESUME FARE COLLECTION/ENFORCEMENT OR USE CARES ACT FUNDS:

Tina M. Cote updated that overall ridership remains down, employment in our region remains down, and schools are not fully back in person. FRTA is looking to get a sense from the Advisory Board wants us to continue using CARES Act funds to cover farebox losses or look at going back to collecting fares. Michael Perreault stated that at the last Advisory Board meeting the board voted to suspend fare collections through April 1st. Jeff Singleton made a **motion** for

FRTA to continue to suspend fare collection/enforcement on fixed route service through June 1, 2020. Ed Gibson seconded, and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	2.15	Yes
Cara Letendre	Blandford	1.34	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48	Yes
Bob Daley	Chester	1.03	Yes
Janice Gibeau	Chesterfield	1.12	Yes
Don Walker	Conway	1.01	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	32.58	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98	Yes
Gabriele Voelker	Orange	5.38	Yes
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.28	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.50	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.55	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27	Yes
Jonathan von Ranson	Wendell	1.16	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
		<u>Total</u>	<u>74.99</u>

Yes – 74.99

No – 0.00

Not Present – 0.00

Abstain – 0.00

The vote passed and the **motion** carried

7. HST RFP AND IMPACTS OF CONTRACT LOSS:

Tina M. Cote explained that the FRTA has held the brokerage contract for the State’s MassHealth program in Franklin County for many years, which is a fully funded program. This past year the State put out an RFP for brokerage services again, and the new contract was awarded to two RTAs; MART and GATRA, with MART taking over services in our area starting on July 1st. FRTA approached MART to see if there would be an opportunity to subcontract with them, but MART was not interested. The impact of this contract loss represents approximately half of the FRTA’s operating budget. Peter Otten asked what impacts this contract loss will have on FRTA’s day to day operations. Tina M. Cote explained that since the beginning of COVID, FRTA has lost one and a half staff in the call center, with only two full-time staff left. Teri Anderson asked about the use of American Recovery Act funds to support operations. Tina M. Cote stated that she is not aware of what, if any, American Recovery Act funds we will receive or what they can be used for. With the HST contract loss FRTA will need to look closely at the impact on the budget for next year and moving forward.

NEW BUSINESS:

8. NOMINATION/ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR FY21 AND VACANCY OF FINANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE:

Robert J. Decker III made a **motion** to elect Peter Otten as Chair and Paul McLatchy seconded. Jeff Singleton made a **motion** to elect Eric Twarog as Chair and Paul McLatchy seconded. Peter Otten stated that he doesn't mind being Chair, but is happy to remain on as Vice-Chair and asked to withdraw his nomination for Chair. Robert J. Decker III withdrew his **motion** and Paul McLatchy seconded. The vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	2.15	Yes
Cara Letendre	Blandford	1.34	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48	Yes
Bob Daley	Chester	1.03	Yes
Janice Gibeau	Chesterfield	1.12	Yes
Don Walker	Conway	1.01	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	32.58	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98	Yes
Gabriele Voelker	Orange	5.38	Yes
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.28	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.50	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.55	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27	Yes
Jonathan von Ranson	Wendell	1.16	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
		<u>Total</u>	
		74.99	

Yes – 74.99
No – 0.00
Not Present – 0.00
Abstain – 0.00

The vote passed and the **motion** carried

Peter Otten made a **motion** to elect Eric Twarog to the Finance and Audit Committee. Robert J. Decker III seconded and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	2.15	Yes
Cara Letendre	Blandford	1.34	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48	Yes

Bob Daley	Chester	1.03	Yes
Janice Gibeau	Chesterfield	1.12	Yes
Don Walker	Conway	1.01	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	32.58	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98	Yes
Gabriele Voelker	Orange	5.38	Yes
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.28	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.50	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.55	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27	Yes
Jonathan von Ranson	Wendell	1.16	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
	<u>Total</u>	<u>74.99</u>	

Yes – 74.99
 No – 0.00
 Not Present – 0.00
 Abstain – 0.00

The vote passed and the **motion** carried

9. DISCUSSION OF STRATEGY FOR WEEKEND SERVICE:

Tina M. Cote stated that on February 14th FRTA expanded its microtransit pilot project to operate on the weekends on both Saturday and Sunday from 9:30am to 5:30pm. As we continue advocating for weekend service, FRTA is hoping to use the microtransit pilot project to show the need for more services. Jeff Singleton stated that equity needs to be front and center and made a **motion** that the Chair send a letter to MassDOT requesting to meet with the Advisory Board to explain why FRTA does not have weekend fixed route service. Ed Gibson seconded, and discussion continued. Tina M. Cote stated that there is a need to have both fixed route and microtransit service operate on the weekends. Jeff Singleton clarified that he is not against microtransit but will continue advocating for fixed route services on the weekends. Teri Anderson stated that FRTA should have weekend service but is not sure which type of service is more effective and suggested that we engage the State Legislators in the discussion. Steven Ellis stated people need to have the ability to move between central hubs for services and employment and that fixed route service is an important part of this. Megan Rhodes commented she is hesitant to focus on one form of transportation over another and emphasized the need to be flexible, utilizing different options, with a focus on equity and looking for permanent funding. Teri Anderson suggested that if we are going to advocate for more funding for service, we should have a plan and an estimate for how much this will cost. Tina M. Cote stated that FRTA can come up with different cost models. Janice Gibeau reiterated that equity should be the overarching message. Jeff Singleton agreed that a lot of this still needs to be explored and suggested that the Advisory Board should get a meeting with both MassDOT and our local

Legislators. Molly Morin added that this microtransit pilot project is providing a lot of data; showing people’s travel patterns, which may be different during the week than on the weekends. That may help to better plan for weekend fixed route service. Bob Daley suggested that essence of this discussion is to have the Advisory Board put the pressure on MassDOT to get results and our local representatives, such as Natalie Blais, could help with that. The discussion concluded, and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	2.15	Yes
Cara Letendre	Blandford	1.34	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48	Yes
Bob Daley	Chester	1.03	Yes
Janice Gibeau	Chesterfield	1.12	Yes
Don Walker	Conway	1.01	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	32.58	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98	Yes
Gabriele Voelker	Orange	5.38	Yes
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.28	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.50	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.55	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27	Yes
Jonathan von Ranson	Wendell	1.16	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
	<u>Total</u>	<u>74.99</u>	

Yes – 74.99
 No – 0.00
 Not Present – 0.00
 Abstain – 0.00

The vote passed and the **motion** carried

10. DISCUSSION ON BATTERY ELECTRIC BUSES:

Don Walker updated that since the previous meeting he has done some additional research on battery electric buses and he was mistaken with the discussion from the last Advisory Board meeting. It appears that China does not need to export electric vehicles and instead uses coal plants to generate electricity for its own electric buses and vehicle needs. Current technology is still new and some provide as little as 60 miles per charge. Perhaps an alternative would be hybrid diesel/electric buses which would help reduce Green House Gas emissions. Jeff Singleton stated that Don Walker provided an interesting report and that this is a complicated policy issue, and the Advisory Board should continue to engage FRTA with this.

11. TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATES:

George Touloumtzis gave the following updates:

- Megan Rhodes has been appointed to serve as the Rider Community Representative to the Advisory Board.
- The Committee is looking to work on a more proactive search for the Rider Community Representative moving forward and simpler messaging for regular transit users.

12. FRTA UPDATES:

Tina M. Cote gave the following updates:

- Due to the COVID pandemic, the JWO Transit Center remains closed to the public. FRTA is looking at steps to re-opening the JWO Transit Center but has no formal plans as of now.
- Union negotiations are ongoing and a three-year contract is expected.

The next Advisory Board meeting will be on May 20, 2021.

Robert J. Decker III made a motion to adjourn. Ed Gibson seconded, and the meeting concluded at 5:30pm.