

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 November 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>
Paul McLatchy	Ashfield	1.60
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.44
Daniel Girard	Charlemont	2.29
Robert Daley	Chester	1.02
Joe Kurland	Colrain	1.09
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.12
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	31.56
Mary Bowen	Northfield	1.37
Patrick Williamson	Plainfield	1.00
Carrie Florek	Russell	1.02
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.29
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.56
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.21
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00
	<u>Total</u>	<u>56.59</u>

Also present were:

Tina M. Cote; FRTA Administrator, Michael Perreault; FRTA Assistant Administrator, Ed Sanborn, FRTA Bookkeeper, Molly Chambers; FTM General Manager, Wayne Waldron, FTM Assistant General Manager, Elizabeth Quirk, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Chair, Karl Stinehart, Southwick Town Administrator, and George Touloumtzis, 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 SEPTEMBER 23, 2021 MEETING:

Peter Otten made a **motion** to accept the meeting minutes from September 23, 2021. Paula LeBlanc 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	Abstain
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.44	Yes
Daniel Girard	Charlemont	2.29	Abstain
Robert Daley	Chester	1.02	Abstain
Joe Kurland	Colrain	1.09	Abstain
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.12	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	31.56	Yes
Mary Bowen	Northfield	1.37	Yes
Patrick Williamson	Plainfield	1.00	Yes
Carrie Florek	Russell	1.02	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.29	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.56	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.21	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Abstain
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
		<u>Total</u>	56.59

Yes – 49.57
 No – 0.00
 Abstain – 7.02

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

OLD BUSINESS:

3. UPDATE ON HST AND LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE:

As of the start of this fiscal year FRTA is no longer a broker for the State’s Non-Emergency Human Service Transportation program. From the last Advisory Board meeting there were indications that a Legislative Task Force would be created to review and discuss the State’s program and it was suggested that this agenda item be carried forward to this meeting. Tina M. Cote confirmed that there is still some confusion with HST clients unaware that FRTA is no longer the broker and continue to call FRTA for trip requests. A Legislative Task Force was formed recently with representation from the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA) as a rural transportation member, along with the Greater Attleboro-Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA) and the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) as the two current state-wide brokers. The Task Force held their first meeting at the beginning of November.

Teri Anderson asked if the Advisory Board could somehow intervene. Tina M. Cote is not aware of any way for the Advisory Board to help intervene. Clients and/or Town officials could contact the States HST office with comments, complaints, or other feedback. Eric Twarog asked

if there is a way to get any concerns directly to the Task Force. Tina M. Cote stated that FRTA will participate in the Task Force meetings any way we can and offer any feedback from our experiences as a broker. Joe Kurland asked why the contract was moved to another vendor. Tina M. Cote stated that the State put out an RFP looking for 1-3 brokers to cover transportation for the entire state. FRTA did not feel it could not compete and meet the requirements of the RFP and opted not to submit a bid. Michael Perreault added that the State has a website dedicated to the Task Force with information about members, meetings, and contact information. If anyone is interested, please contact Michael Perreault and he can send a copy of this website link. Eric Twarog suggested keeping this agenda topic on the next meeting so that the Advisory Board can continue to follow this important issue.

4. MAINTENANCE FACILITY PROJECT UPDATE:

Michael Perreault provided an update on the maintenance facility construction project. FRTA received six bids for General Contractors for the project, but unfortunately all bids came in higher than our project budget. Upon review, the lowest bid did comply with the bid requirements and was found to be responsive. FRTA has been working with MassDOT on all possible options to get total project funding covered to continue moving forward with our project. We should have more information on the status of the contract award at our next Advisory Board meeting.

Mary Bowen asked where the new facility will be constructed. Michael Perreault stated that the current facility is located on Deerfield Street in Greenfield. Over the summer FRTA purchased property off Sandy Lane in Turners Falls. The new facility is situated on a larger lot compared to the current location and roughly 3.5 miles from the current facility.

5. DISCUSSION/UPDATE ON CONTINUING DISCRETIONARY GRANT AND WORKFORCE TRANSPORTATION GRANT AND VOTE TO HOLD PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Michael Perreault included in the meeting agenda information quarterly reports for FRTA’s discretionary grant project (FRTA Access) and for FRTA’s workforce transportation project (Taxi and Livery Partnership). These are ongoing projects that have shown great success during these grant pilot phases and FRTA is looking to add these programs permanently into our transportation services. Peter Otten made a **motion** for FRTA to hold public hearings to collect information on the current discretionary grant and workforce transportation grant projects. Carrie Florek 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
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.44	Yes
Daniel Girard	Charlemont	2.29	Yes
Robert Daley	Chester	1.02	Yes
Joe Kurland	Colrain	1.09	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.12	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	31.56	Yes

Mary Bowen	Northfield	1.37	Yes
Patrick Williamson	Plainfield	1.00	Yes
Carrie Florek	Russell	1.02	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.29	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.56	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.21	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
		<u> </u>	
		Total	56.59

Yes – 56.59
No – 0.00
Abstain – 0.00

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

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

Michael Perreault stated that since the last Advisory Board meeting FRTA staff met twice with Eric Twarog and Jeff Singleton to review our Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan and work towards coming up with a pilot project for weekend fixed route service. As these discussions continue, anyone interested in joining in on this group should contact Michael Perreault.

7. REVIEW AND VOTE TO RESUME FARE COLLECTION/ENFORCEMENT OR USE CARES ACT FUNDS AND VOTE TO HOLD PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Tina M. Cote stated that currently fixed route fares remain suspended through December 31, 2021. FRTA would like to see this extended beyond that date. The Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) Advisory Board recently voted to suspend fare collections through January of 2023. Tina M. Cote explained that federal CARES Act funds have been used to cover farebox losses to date and would continue should this be extended beyond December 31st. Robert J. Decker III suggested that if fares continue to be suspended after CARES Act funds run out those additional costs will fall back on the Towns’ Local Assessments and asked if FRTA knows what an estimate of that cost would amount to. Tina M. Cote stated that FRTA would need to explore that more to get those figures, but this also gives us time to explore other ways to offset those costs, such as with local businesses/organizations to fund transportation in lieu of passenger fares. Teri Anderson asked about a timeline for the spenddown of CARES Act funds. Tina M. Cote stated that she didn’t have the exact figures, but FRTA has enough funding for at least three years. Michael Perreault added that FRTA has federal CARES Act funds, CRRSAA funds, and ARPA funds that it has access to with a projected spenddown over several fiscal years. Eric Twarog asked if there is a preferred specific date to extend to. Tina M. Cote suggested at least through the end of the fiscal year to give us additional time to collect feedback from public hearings.

Robert J. Decker III made a **motion** to continue suspending fare collections on the fixed routes through June 30, 2022. Teri Anderson 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	Abstain
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.44	Yes
Daniel Girard	Charlemont	2.29	Yes
Robert Daley	Chester	1.02	Yes
Joe Kurland	Colrain	1.09	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.12	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	31.56	Yes
Mary Bowen	Northfield	1.37	Yes
Patrick Williamson	Plainfield	1.00	Yes
Carrie Florek	Russell	1.02	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.29	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.56	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.21	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
		<u>Total</u>	56.59

Yes – 54.99

No – 0.00

Abstain – 1.60

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

Michael Perreault added that as FRTA will already be going out to public hearings for its Access and Employment Transportation programs, it could take advantage of these same hearings to collect information on fixed route fares. Robert J. Decker III made a **motion** for FRTA to hold public hearings to collect information on fixed route fare collections. Mary Bowen 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
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.44	Yes
Daniel Girard	Charlemont	2.29	Yes
Robert Daley	Chester	1.02	Yes
Joe Kurland	Colrain	1.09	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.12	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	31.56	Yes
Mary Bowen	Northfield	1.37	Yes
Patrick Williamson	Plainfield	1.00	Yes
Carrie Florek	Russell	1.02	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.29	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.56	Yes

Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.21	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
		<u>Total</u>	56.59

Yes – 56.59
 No – 0.00
 Abstain – 0.00

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

NEW BUSINESS:

8. REVIEW FY21 AUDIT AND UPDATED WEIGHTED VOTE:

Peter Otten stated that the Finance and Audit Committee met with Adelson & Company in September to review the FY21 audit. Some of the highlights include an increase in net worth due to the new maintenance facility construction project, loss of the Human Service Transportation contract, and some staff reductions due to the contract loss. Overall, the audit was complete and there were no deficiencies or other recommendations. Paul McLatchy made a **motion** to accept the FY21 audit report. Carrie Florek 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
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.44	Yes
Daniel Girard	Charlemont	2.29	Yes
Robert Daley	Chester	1.02	Yes
Joe Kurland	Colrain	1.09	Abstain
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.12	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	31.56	Yes
Mary Bowen	Northfield	1.37	Yes
Patrick Williamson	Plainfield	1.00	Yes
Carrie Florek	Russell	1.02	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.29	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.56	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.21	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
		<u>Total</u>	56.59

Yes – 55.50
 No – 0.00
 Abstain – 1.09

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

Michael Perreault presented the updated local assessment calculations and weighted votes from the results of the FY21. FRTA goes through a net cost of service calculation process to allocate local assessments to each individual town after the audit is finalized. If anyone is interested in the net cost of service allocation process, please feel free to contact Michael Perreault for more information or to schedule a time to meet and discuss in more detail.

9. DISCUSSION ON FTM DRIVER RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT:

Molly Chambers updated that hiring has been very difficult over the last several months (Molly Chambers' connection cut out). Tina M. Cote added that the FRTA has been expanding services during the pandemic with projects such as the Access program and now in a position to pilot weekend fixed route services but hiring and retention of drivers has been very difficult. Transit agencies nation-wide are experiencing a struggle to hire drivers as the competition across all job markets has sharply increased. FTM is continuing hiring for both CDL and non-CDL positions and does have the capability of training non-CDL drivers to obtain their CDL license. Mary Bowen asked how many driving positions FTM is currently looking to hire. Tina M. Cote suggested that there are about 8-9 open driving positions, both part-time and full-time. Robert J. Decker III asked the status of the current union contract and when it expires. There was discussion that the current contract was just ratified in March of 2021, and it is a three-year contract. Discussion continued with current wage rate information and that FTM non-CDL drivers starting rate is \$16.40 with a top rate of \$18.59 and for CDL drivers the starting rate is \$18.59 with a top rate of \$21.87 per hour.

Robert J. Decker III mentioned a new federal requirement for new CDL drivers that will be implemented soon which will impact who and how drivers can get trained to obtain a CDL license. Molly Chambers (connection restored) confirmed that there are new regulations surrounding CDL licensing and training requirements that will be implemented at the beginning of 2022 but added that FTM will be registered as a training provider and will continue to meet all requirements for providing CDL training. Teri Anderson suggested that she will reach out to Molly Chambers offline to discuss working with MassHire on driver recruitment. Molly Chambers also explained some of the differences in hiring eligibility between non-CDL driver and CDL drivers. Non-CDL drivers must have drivers license for at least three years and be over 21 years old. CDL drivers must be over 18 years old. Robert J. Decker III suggested working with local high schools or technical schools on career opportunities in public transit.

Discussion concluded with Molly Chambers discussing the importance of employee retention in addition to recruitment. Some of the highlights managers have done more recently to help with current employee retention are: Employee of the Month recognition, holiday gift cards, potlucks, and Driver/Employee Appreciation Day.

10. TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Megan Rhodes gave the following updates:

- The Transit Advisory Committee continues working to spread the word on filling the role as Community Rider Representative on the Advisory Board.

11. FRTA UPDATES:

Tina M. Cote gave the following updates:

- FRTA recently received the FTA's Administrator's Award.

The next Advisory Board meeting will be on March 17, 2022.

Robert J. Decker III made a motion to adjourn. Peter Otten seconded, and the meeting concluded at 5:25pm.