

Approved 3/18/21

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 19, 2020 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>
Joshua Garcia	Blandford	1.34
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48
Sarah Reynolds	Charlemont	2.32
Don Walker	Conway	1.01
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.12
William Stathis	Greenfield	32.58
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.28
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	<u>1.02</u>
	Total	61.54

Also present were:

Tina M. Cote; FRTA Administrator, Michael Perreault; FRTA Assistant Administrator, Edward Sanborn, FRTA Bookkeeper, Molly Morin; FTM General Manager, Wayne Waldron, FTM Assistant General Manager, George Touloumtzis, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Chair, Megan Rhodes, FRCOG and FRTA Transit Advisory Committee, and Krystal Oldread, AECOM Transportation Planner.

Chairman William Stathis 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 17, 2020 MEETING:**

Jeff Singleton made a **motion** to accept the meeting minutes from September 17, 2020. Joshua Garcia seconded, and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Joshua Garcia	Blandford	1.34	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48	Yes
Sarah Reynolds	Charlemont	2.32	Not Present
Don Walker	Conway	1.01	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96	Abstain
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18	Yes
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.12	Yes
William Stathis	Greenfield	32.58	Abstain
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98	Yes
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.28	Abstain
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
		<u>Total</u>	
		61.54	

Yes – 20.40  
No – 0.00  
Not Present – 2.32  
Abstain – 38.82

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

**OLD BUSINESS:**

**3. PRESENTATION ON DRAFT COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL TRANSIT PLAN:**

Krystal Oldread made a presentation about the FRTA’s Draft Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan (CRTP) [see attached]. A summary of the plan are as follows:

- CRTP is comprised of two parts; one part is a fare policy required by MassDOT and approved by the Advisory Board, and other part is the update to the original CRTP from 2015.
- 2019 MOU with MassDOT included updating the CRTP.
- During COVID ridership dropped off substantially.
- COVID gave an opportunity to better understand vital services and ability to take a hard look at the transit system as a whole.
- The plan includes 8 goals.
- The plan includes information on historical trends since 2015.
- Outreach included online survey, social media push, direct mailers, email blasts, and vehicle postings.
- Feedback identified 68 needs grouped in 9 categories.
- Recommendations to address needs assigned a scenario and scored based on complexity, impact, and cost.
- Top recommendations include fixed route weekend service, evening service, consistent demand response hours/days of service, consolidated scheduling, improved technology use, and data info. Other non-service recommendations include Automatic Passenger Counters, promoting services, and other things to improve customer experience.

Jeff Singleton asked when the plan would be finalized. Krystal Oldread explained that the plan is anticipated to be finalized by the end of December and then be published for public comments. Jeff Singleton had the following comments: the fare review is good, but the public outreach was so-so; the Advisory Board should vote on this report before sending it off to MassDOT; this report doesn't address broadening the base of FRTA ridership to include people that own cars; and the need for developing a lobbying strategy for weekend service. Krystal Oldread clarified that MassDOT is not requiring board approval of this report but is requiring board approval of the fare policy. Tina M. Cote suggested that the Advisory Board could create a sub-committee to address Jeff Singleton's comments.

Teri Anderson asked if the report evaluated the impact of ability and access to technology and electronic ticketing for low-income people. Krystal Oldread stated that mobile ticketing questions were included on the outreach survey. In addition, one of the recommendations is to evaluate FRTA moving toward fare-free fixed route service which would remove barriers for people that are low income or have technology challenges. There are also opportunities for other business or municipal partnerships for funding in lieu of collecting passenger fares.

Don Walker asked about plans for electric buses. Molly Morin stated that the battery life on electric buses would more than likely need to be charged between each run and that there would need to be infrastructure considerations for both facility chargers and on-route chargers. Don Walker stated that he has been doing some research into this over the last few years and that this should be a consideration with this report. Krystal Oldread added that a section on alternative fuel vehicles is included in the report. Jeff Singleton suggested that Don Walker would have the opportunity to review the report and then be able to report back to the Advisory Board at the next meeting with his point of view.

#### **4. MAINTENANCE FACILITY PROJECT UPDATE:**

Michael Perreault gave the following updates on the maintenance facility project. FRTA is currently out to bid for architectural and engineering services and bids are due back by December 4<sup>th</sup>. Anyone interested in being part of the review committee for selecting design team please contact Michael Perreault. We expect to award the design contract by end of December. The project has set an aggressive schedule to have 100% design and cost estimate by May 2021. At that point we will seek approval from FTA to obligate federal funds for the project, plan to go out to bid for construction in summer 2021 and begin construction in the fall of 2021. We expect substantial completion in 15 months and project completion by 18 months.

William Stathis asked for more regular meetings with Greenfield and Montague with the progress of the project. Robert J. Decker III asked about the purchase of the property. Michael Perreault stated that we have a draft purchase and sale and that we anticipate prior to going out to bid for construction. Robert J. Decker III asked if we have received a release of the plans from the previous architect that we can pass on to the new architect. Michael Perreault stated that we have received all of the documents from the architect but will double check with legal counsel to make sure there is nothing else we need. Steve Ellis suggested that FRTA and the Town of Montague should get together soon to discuss requirements for purchase of property. Dawn Scaparotti asked about the financing of the project and implications for member towns. Tina M.

Cote explained that funding for this project is from Federal and State funds and that there will be no local funds used for this project.

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

Tina M. Cote stated that FRTA was awarded a Workforce Development Grant but due to COVID MassDOT cancelled the grant and retracted the award. This grant would have provided a pilot project focusing on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> shift employment transportation. FRTA will continue to look for future grant opportunities for this project.

Tina M. Cote also updated that the Discretionary grant for FRTA's micortransit pilot project (FRTA Access) is still going strong and we received another round of funding through the Discretionary Grant Program to continue the project through June 30, 2021. Some recent changes to the project included additional locations, restructuring fares, and adding access to scheduling through an online web portal.

William Stathis asked if there were any official project cancellation letters from MassDOT regarding the Workforce Development Grant. Tina M. Cote stated that we did recently get the official cancellation letter on the grant. William Stathis asked if the Western Mass Delegation have been made aware of the project or the cancellation of the grant. Michael Perreault stated that we had not reached out directly to any of the Western Mass Delegation on this.

## **6. UPDATE ON HST RFP:**

Tina M. Cote announced that the State's Human Services Transportation RFP has finally been awarded. There were three bidders to operate the brokerage system for the entire state and we understand that MART was awarded the western part of the state FRTA is currently contracted for. FRTA has reached out to MART to be a subcontractor for them under the new contract starting on July 1<sup>st</sup>. This change will impact FRTA administration and will likely cause some staffing restructuring. We will have more updates on this at the March meeting.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

## **7. DISCUSSION AND VOTE TO RESUME FARE COLLECTIONS/ENFORCEMENT OR USE CARES ACT FUNDS:**

Tina M. Cote stated that this topic was tabled from the last meeting. FRTA had suspended fare enforcement on the fixed routes due to the COVID pandemic. Currently those lost fares are being recovered by federal CARES Act funds. FRTA is looking for direction from the board if we should continue with suspension of fare enforcement on fixed routes and using CARES Act funds to recover lost fare revenue. Teri Anderson made a **motion** to continue suspension of fare enforcement on fixed routes and approve the use of CARES Act funds as recommended to cover lost fixed route fares through April 1<sup>st</sup>. Peter Otten seconded, and discussion followed. William Stathis asked what other things the CARES Act funds is or could be used for. Tina M. Cote stated that in addition to covering lost fixed route fares, CARES Act funds can be used for

covering state funding shortfalls and other lost revenues from commissions, advertising, etc. Dawn Scaparotti asked if COA fares could also be suspended in the same fashion. Tina M. Cote stated that she would need to investigate this more before offering an opinion. Robert J. Decker III suggested suspending the fares until FRTA can hold fare hearings about the topic. The discussion concluded and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Joshua Garcia	Blandford	1.34	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48	Yes
Sarah Reynolds	Charlemont	2.32	Yes
Don Walker	Conway	1.01	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18	Not Present
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.12	Yes
William Stathis	Greenfield	32.58	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98	Yes
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.28	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	<u>1.02</u>	Yes
	Total	61.54	

Yes – 60.36  
 No – 0.00  
 Not Present – 1.18

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

**8. REVIEW AND VOTE TO ACCEPT FARE POLICY:**

Tina M. Cote explained that the fare policy was presented as part of the presentation in Agenda Item 3 earlier and that FRTA needs to submit an approved plan to MassDOT by the end of December. Robert J. Decker III made a motion to accept the fare policy as presented. Peter Otten seconded, and discussion followed. Jeff Singleton asked if there were several different options in looking at setting or changing fares. Michael Perreault stated that voting on the policy is not about changing any of the current fares or fare structures but for us to use as a guide moving forward in reviewing our fares and potentially making decisions on changing fares in the future. Dawn Scaparotti asked if the policy gives more flexibility in COA fares as well. Michael Perreault stated that the fare policy is very broad based and that there is information in the policy regarding both fixed route specific fares and demand response specific fares. Discussion concluded and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Joshua Garcia	Blandford	1.34	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48	Yes
Sarah Reynolds	Charlemont	2.32	Yes
Don Walker	Conway	1.01	Yes

Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18	Not Present
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.12	Yes
William Stathis	Greenfield	32.58	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98	Yes
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.28	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	1.02	Yes
	<u>Total</u>	<u>61.54</u>	

Yes – 60.36  
 No – 0.00  
 Not Present – 1.18

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

**9. REVIEW FY20 AUDIT AND UPDATED WEIGHTED VOTE:**

Peter Otten gave a brief presentation about the FY20 audit. The Finance and Audit committee met with the auditor and there were no findings and FRTA continues to maintain a balanced budget. William Stathis added that the auditor was very professional and fully explained and answered questions presented by the Finance and Audit Committee.

Michael Perreault presented the new local assessment calculations and weighted vote calculations based on the final FY20 audit (see attached) and offered for anyone on the board to reach out to him with any questions on calculations from the audit.

**10. TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATES:**

Tina M. Cote gave the following updates on behalf of George Touloumtzis:

- Still looking for a regular bus rider to serve as the Rider Community Representative to the Advisory Board. Megan Rhodes has volunteered to take that position so that it does not become vacant.
- The Committee is looking to establish a sub-committee to discuss lobbying strategies for weekend service.

William Stathis asked if there was a Rider Community Representative on the Transit Advisory Committee and the Advisory Board. Tina M. Cote clarified that the Rider Community Representative is only on the Advisory Board, but the Transit Advisory Committee works to help volunteers to serve in that position. William Stathis asked if the Town of Russell needs to appoint the representative and would people looking to hold that position need to meet with the Board of Selectmen. Michael Perreault stated that the role of the Transit Advisory Committee is to assist in finding people willing to serve in the role and the Town appoints someone from that list of people presented. There have been occasions in the past that a Selectboard has requested that volunteers attend a Selectboard meeting, but it is not a requirement per the Mass General Law.

## **11. FRTA UPDATES:**

Tina M. Cote gave the following updates:

- Due to the COVID pandemic, the JWO Transit Center remains closed to the public. FRTA and FRCOG employees continue to use the facility. FTM drivers can use the restrooms and employees are stationed at the facility to clean the buses in between runs. MassDOT's offices remain closed until March and FTA's offices remain closed until the end of January.
- FRTA received three new buses in the summer and recently went into service. One of the new buses is our first low floor demand response van. The other two are conventional high floor demand response vans.
- No COVID cases reported for FRTA, FTM, or COAs.
- Med-Ride operations remains suspended until further notice.

Molly Morin added that Wayne Waldron has been working with the City of Greenfield to install bus stop signs throughout Greenfield.

## **12. Discussion of Any Other Subject Not Anticipated Prior to the Notice Being Sent to the Advisory Board Members Pursuant to Article II, Section 4 of the By-Laws or Anticipated 48 Hours Prior to the Meeting Pursuant to the Open Meeting Law or a Subject Which Cannot be Delayed Until the Next Advisory Board Meeting, Including the Need for an Executive Session:**

William Stathis stated that a letter was sent out today to FRTA from the Mayor of Greenfield requesting that the Transit Center be used as a warming shelter during the upcoming winter. The Mayor is concerned about and looking for ways to work together. Tina. M. Cote stated that she is in receipt of the letter and is working with legal counsel to address and respond formally to the letter. There are concerns regarding social distancing and other safety precautions during the pandemic.

The next Advisory Board meeting will be on March 18, 2021.

Robert J. Decker III made a motion to adjourn. William Stathis seconded, and the meeting concluded at 5:35pm.