

Approved 6/18/2020

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 21, 2019 at the John W. Olver Transit Center, 12 Olive St., Greenfield, MA 01301.

**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	1.99
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.74
Robert Daley	Chester	1.21
Donald Walker Jr	Conway	1.00
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.82
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.28
William Martin	Greenfield	28.64
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	0.00
Lance Fritz	Leyden	1.00
Jeff Singleton	Montague	11.80
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.36
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.62
Jonathan von Ranson	Wendell	1.21
Jasper Lapienski	Rider Community	1.00
	<u>Total</u>	<u>60.67</u>

Also present were:

Tina M. Cote; FRTA Administrator, Michael Perreault; FRTA Assistant Administrator, Edward Sanborn, FRTA Bookkeeper, Molly Morin; FTM General Manager, Jenna Howitt, FTM Assistant General Manager, George Touloumtzis, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Chair, Elizabeth Quirk, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Vice-Chair, and Megan Rhodes, FRCOG and FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Member.

Chairman Lance Fritz 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 MAY 16, 2019 MEETING:**

Peter Otten made a **motion** to accept the meeting minutes from September 19, 2019. Jonathan von Ranson seconded and the vote was as follows:

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

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	1.99	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.74	Yes
Robert Daley	Chester	1.21	Yes
Donald Walker Jr	Conway	1.00	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.82	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.28	Yes
William Martin	Greenfield	28.64	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	0.00	Yes
Lance Fritz	Leyden	1.00	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	11.80	Yes
Paul McLatchy	Rowe	1.36	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.62	Yes
Jonathan von Ranson	Wendell	1.21	Yes
Jasper Lapienski	Rider Community	<u>1.00</u>	Not Present
		Total	60.67

Yes – 59.67

No – 0.00

Not Present – 1.00

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

Without objection, Lance Fritz asked to move Agenda Item 11: Update from Transit Advisory Committee before Agenda Item 3: Public Comments.

### **3. UPDATE FROM TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE:**

George Touloumtzis provided the following updates from the Transit Advisory Committee:

- Much discussion on the new pilot microtransit project, FRTA Access.
- Continued discussion on GCC Work-Study marketing project to address stigma of riding public transportation.
- Discussion on TAC recommendations on AFL-CIO representative to the FRTA Advisory Board.
- Discussions on lobbying strategies for weekend transit service and getting in sync with the state legislative budget cycle.

### **4. PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

There were no public comments.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

### **5. MAINTENANCE FACILITY PROJECT AND GMTA LEASE UPDATES:**

Tina M. Cote updated that the Categorical Exclusion document is still pending. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) recently reached out indicating that the process is nearing completion and the document has been sent to two area Native American tribes for review. The tribes will have thirty (30) days to review and submit comments back to the FTA before making their final decision on accepting our Categorical Exclusion document and allowing us to move forward on the purchase of the property in Montague for construction. In addition, FRTA met with representatives from MassDOT on the funding for our Maintenance and Operations facility project. They indicated to FRTA that there is no additional funding and that we will need to work within the existing budget to construct the facility.

Tina M. Cote explained that after the previous Advisory Board meeting she was notified by the GMTA with a change in the proposed lease terms to include a provision for FRTA to pay for capital improvements to the facility. Tina M. Cote consulted with legal counsel, Donna MacNicol, who advised FRTA not to sign the lease with the amended language. Tina M. Cote also consulted with MassDOT and they advised FRTA to not sign the lease with the amended language as they will not permit FRTA to spend capital funds on a leased facility that does not guarantee a long-term lease agreement. FRTA is prepared to sign the previous lease agreement as proposed at the previous Advisory Board meeting and is now awaiting the results from the next GMTA meeting before proceeding.

William Martin stated that his understanding is that the Montague Selectboard is not comfortable with the potential exposure to capital repairs to the facility and was looking for FRTA to shoulder that cost with the new lease language. The November elections in Greenfield resulted in the vote for the town library construction passing and that project is now slated to move forward as planned. The Town of Greenfield will be looking for temporary housing for its Fire Department during the library construction process, most likely sometime in 2021. There was some discussion as to FRTA's rights as tenant now that there is no lease agreement in place. Discussion concluded that FRTA is a tenant at-will and are on a month-to-month basis. William Martin added that, since the last FRTA Advisory Board meeting, the FRTA has been paying the new lease amount and back-rent for the difference of the new lease amount has been paid up.

Jeff Singleton asked what the proposed end date in the lease agreement was. Tina M. Cote stated that it was through the end of June 2020. At that point FRTA could potentially be a tenant at-will again. Robert J. Decker III stated that as long as the tenant is paying the rental amount, they have a full rental period, which would be thirty (30) days. William Martin stated that the proposed lease would give FRTA one hundred twenty (120) days' notice. Jeff Singleton asked if the Advisory Board should be concerned that FRTA may be without a home for its maintenance and operations facility for its buses. Tina M. Cote stated that it is a real possibility and that we should all be concerned, but FRTA is continuing to do everything it can to build a new facility as quickly as possible and continue to work out of the current facility as long as possible.

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

Tina M. Cote explained that FRTA was awarded grant funding in July to launch a microtransit pilot project, similar to Uber/Lyft. FRTA launched the pilot on October 1<sup>st</sup> where riders can download a smartphone application to book trips electronically. The fares for the pilot are \$5.00 for each one-way trip and \$2.50 for each additional passenger. For the month of October there were 38 total trips. FRTA is now working on marketing this pilot project, including holding some public tabling session at the beginning of December. FRTA is hoping to be awarded additional FY20 discretionary funding to continue this project for another year and also allow funding to open up travel between zones and expand operating hours even further.

Molly Morin added that she is seeing more trips completed to date in November than all of October. Tina M. Cote concluded that FRTA will be completing some rider surveys to help understand users experience and expectations. Jasper Lapienski asked what FRTA is doing to collect information from people that don't have smartphones and stated that FRTA should be actively engaging individuals that don't have smartphones or live in places that don't have cell service. Robert J. Decker III asked to clarify the fares for the pilot project. Tina M. Cote explained that fares are \$5.00 for each one-way trip and that any additional passengers are \$2.50 each one-way trip. Tina M. Cote explained that the expanded hours for this pilot project also extend to Demand Response riders as well. Jasper Lapienski stated that there is no customer base in the Greenfield area because of technology access issues, which is why there are no Uber/Lyft drivers in this area.

Tina M. Cote announced that FRTA has applied for MassDOT Workforce Transportation Grant funding and has partnered with MassHire, FRCOG, and others to extend the microtransit pilot model for getting people to work for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> shifts. Grant award announcements are expected soon and FRTA is excited at the opportunity to launch a later evening service. Jasper Lapienski stated that participation thresholds need to continue with existing partners. Tina M. Cote explained that FRTA was very thoughtful and cautious in submitting their grant request and projected in such a way that this pilot would be able to be sustained within the budget moving forward.

## **7. VOTE TO HOLD PUBLIC HEARINGS FOR ROUTE 23 EXPANDED SERVICE AND SENIOR FREE TUESDAYS:**

Robert J. Decker III made a **motion** for FRTA to hold public hearings for the Route 23 expanded service. Peter Otten seconded, and discussion continued. Tina M. Cote clarified that public hearings are only to discuss the two new run times on the Route 23. In addition, FRTA will look to also collect survey information on the new microtransit project and weekend service. Jeff Singleton asked if the public hearings could include discussions on the High St. portion of the Route 24 as well. Lance Fritz stated it could not as it is outside of the scope of the motion. William Martin asked about how the local assessments are impacted by the pilot service. Michael Perreault indicated that at the onset of the pilot project only the Town of Montague indicated their willingness to pay local assessments for the two additional runs. Part of the discussion along with the public hearings is to also discuss local assessment charges for

Greenfield and Montague if the two additional runs will be added permanently. Discussion concluded, the vote was unanimous, and the **motion** carried.

Robert J. Decker III made a **motion** for FRTA to hold public hearings for the Senior Free Tuesdays program. Peter Otten seconded, and discussion continued. Eric Twarog asked what age seniors are eligible for free fixed route transportation under this program. Tina M. Cote stated that it would include anyone 60 years and older. Jasper Lapienski asked for data on the number of seniors riding on Free Tuesdays vs. last year. Robert J. Decker III asked why FRTA is running this pilot. Jeff Singleton stated that it is a way for FRTA to encourage senior to use fixed route transportation over the more expensive demand response transportation. Molly Morin indicated that early feedback about the pilot is positive. Jasper Lapienski indicated that that while it is great to hear this pilot is a success it is important to capture factual statements. George Touloumtzis asked if demand response ridership has been reduced on Tuesdays. Michael Perreault added that it is very difficult to extrapolate data from this pilot for comparison. Prior to the pilot FRTA was not tracking senior ridership on the fixed route individually, instead that information was being grouped together and tracked with other reduced fare riders. In addition, FRTA expanded hours/days of service for demand response at the same time as the introduction of this pilot, making it difficult to know if this pilot is drawing conventional demand response riders to try the fixed route. There was final discussion as to if FRTA would be holding two separate public hearings. Tina M. Cote stated that the hearing would be coordinated in such a way to address both pilot programs and in addition expects to also collect feedback on the microtransit pilot project and feedback on weekend service. Discussion concluded, the vote was unanimous, and the **motion** carried.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

### **8. FRTA/MASSDOT MOU 1<sup>ST</sup> QUARTER REPORTING:**

Michael Perreault presented the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Reporting on the performance measures outlined within the FRTA/MassDOT MOU. George Touloumtzis wondered if there was any correlation in the farebox recovery ratios from month to month. Michael Perreault explained that in July and August there tends to be lower ridership and lower farebox collections. In September there tends to be an uptick in ridership with schools getting back in session which leads to increased farebox collections. In addition, FRTA has a contract with Lifepath that runs along the federal fiscal year, from October 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup>. With the last contract negotiations there was a clause that stipulated a minimum reimbursement amount and a maximum reimbursement amount. As the contract year closed out, FRTA received a higher monthly reimbursement amount to reach the minimum reimbursement amount for the year. Jonathan von Ranson asked why costs in July were higher than other months. Michael Perreault explained that some costs are paid in full at the beginning of the fiscal year; most notably FRTA's auto liability insurance coverage. While this is a large cost to incur in one month this allows FRTA to save on reoccurring billing charges by paying in full.

### **9. REVIEW FY19 AUDIT AND UPDATED WEIGHTED VOTE:**

Peter Otten stated that since the last Advisory Board meeting in September, the Finance and Audit Committee met and reviewed the FY19 audit. The auditor reported no deficiencies or

weaknesses in his report. There were two recommendations from the report to which FRTA administrative staff has already committed to addressing.

William Martin asked specifically about the recommendation in the Management Letter on cyber attacks and ransomware. Tina M. Cote explained that FRTA has discussed insurance coverage with our agent and that we are in the process of purchasing a policy and looking into trainings for staff as recommended in the Management Letter. Robert J. Decker III suggested something similar happened with the Chicopee School Department recently.

Tina M. Cote explained that in addition to the final audit information, new local assessments and weighted vote calculations are enclosed. Jasper Lapienski asked why the new weighted votes listed indicate the year as FY19. Michael Perreault stated that the year reflect the latest audited figures.

#### **10. NOMINATION/ELECTION OF CLERK FOR FY20-21:**

Lance Fritz explained that the current Clerk has retired from the Advisory Board and asked for volunteers to serve as the Clerk for the remainder of the term. Robert J. Decker III made a **motion** to nominate Jeff Singleton as Clerk for FY20-21. Jasper Lapienski seconded, but Jeff Singleton declined to accept the position, so Robert J. Decker III withdrew his **motion**. Randy Crochier volunteered to serve as Clerk. Paul McLatchy made a **motion** to nominate Randy Crochier as Clerk for FY20-21. Jasper Lapienski seconded, the vote was unanimous, and the **motion** carried.

#### **11. DEMAND RESPONSE TRANSPORTATION DISCUSSION:**

Lance Fritz opened the floor for discussion and questions regarding Demand Response transportation. Jonathan von Ranson asked about efficiencies with the scheduling software and indicated that a rider from Wendell had experienced some circuitous travel routes when previously using the FRTA Demand Response. Molly Morin explained that there are a lot of factors that go into the computer creating a schedule including linking trips and pickup and drop off windows to ensure riders get to their appointments on time. Michael Perreault added that the computer software ranks different data points in creating the schedule. One example is ranking getting people to their appointments higher than getting people home from their appointments. Michael Perreault added that we would need more specific information in order to trouble shoot specific issues. Jasper Lapienski asked if drivers have discretion for choosing best route of travel. Molly Morin stated that while the software provides suggested routes of travel, drivers do have discretion in altering route paths based upon factors that the software can not account for, such as detours and congestion patterns. Elizabeth Quirk stated that the new FRTA Access program could also be adding last minute trips which could also impact scheduling throughout the day. Peter Otten noted that this discussion is only impacting trips in the greater Greenfield area and the Shelburne Senior Center Demand Response program in West County hand schedules and dispatches. Robert J. Decker III stated that the South County COA Board is interested in working with FRTA and PVTA in getting more Sunderland seniors to the senior center located in South Deerfield. Tina M. Cote explained that FRTA is more than happy to have a discussion with PVTA, the COA Board, and Towns involved to address that issue. Jasper

Lapienski commented that UMass is the primary funder for Sunderland fixed route transit services, which may add an additional layer into any discussions.

## **12. OTHER FRTA UPDATES:**

Tina M. Cote gave some brief updates on the following FRTA projects:

- FRTA held its Transit Orientation meeting in late September with about 20 individuals representing different area social service and human service agencies.
- FRTA will again have a free fare day on the Friday after Thanksgiving on all fixed routes.
- FRTA will again hold Friday give-a-ways during the month of December. FRTA staff will surprise individuals at random bus stop locations on Fridays in December with give-a-ways included free bus passes. This was a huge success last year and provided great promotion of FRTA on social media.
- Yesterday FRTA staff met with representatives from MassDOT for our annual Program Preview meeting. MassDOT gave much praise to FRTA for innovative transportation practices including our ‘free senior Tuesdays’ and new microtransit pilot project.

Tina M. Cote also recognized Mayor Martin as this will be his last FRTA Advisory Board meeting. She offered her thanks for his years of service as Mayor of Greenfield and working with the FRTA.

The next Advisory Board meeting will be on March 19<sup>th</sup>.

Robert J. Decker III made a **motion** to adjourn. Peter Otten seconded, and the meeting concluded at 5:08pm.