

Approved 11/19/20

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 September 17, 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>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	1.99
Joshua Garcia	Blandford	1.43
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.74
Sarah Reynolds	Charlemont	2.46
Robert Daley	Chester	1.21
Don Walker	Conway	1.00
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.28
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.08
William Stathis	Greenfield	28.64
Jeff Singleton	Montague	11.80
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.81
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.62
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	<u>1.04</u>
	Total	60.10

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, Elizabeth Quirk, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Vice-Chair, Megan Rhodes, FRCOG and FRTA Transit Advisory Committee.

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 JUNE 18, 2020 MEETING:

Jeff Singleton made a **motion** to accept the meeting minutes from June 18, 2020. Randy Crochier seconded, and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	1.99	Abstain
Joshua Garcia	Blandford	1.43	Abstain
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.74	Yes
Sarah Reynolds	Charlemont	2.46	Abstain
Robert Daley	Chester	1.21	Abstain
Don Walker	Conway	1.00	Abstain
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.28	Abstain
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.08	Abstain
William Stathis	Greenfield	28.64	Abstain
Jeff Singleton	Montague	11.80	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.81	Lost Communication
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.62	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	<u>1.04</u>	Abstain
	Total	60.10	

Yes – 16.16

No – 0.00

Abstain – 40.13

Lost Communication – 3.81

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

OLD BUSINESS:

3. MAINTENANCE FACILITY PROJECT UPDATE:

Tina M. Cote explained that the 30% cost estimate for the project came back way over budget so back to re-negotiate the contract with its design team, STV, to be able to design a facility within our project budget. Unfortunately, FRTA was unsuccessful in re-negotiating with STV and has since started the process of contract termination. FRTA is working to obtain copies of all project documents from STV and will be going back out to bid later this year to search for another design team for our project. In a recent discussion with MassDOT and FTA, FRTA must be able to obligate federal project funds by July 2021.

Jeff Singleton asked if Montague officials were aware of this update. Michael Perreault stated that he had just notified Town Administrator, Steve Ellis, prior to the board meeting. Jeff Singleton stated that Greenfield officials need to be informed of this update and also brought up to speed with the history of this project. Dawn Scaparotti asked if there was a written history available to board members. Peter Otten suggested emailing a document out to the board.

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

Tina M. Cote explained that things continue to move forward in a positive direction with our Discretionary Grant on for our microtransit pilot project; FRTA Access. Throughout COVID-19

FRTA flexed the Access program to cover riders' essential trips that were impacted by our fixed route service reductions. There are two grants covering this pilot project. The first grant goes through the end of September at which point the second grant picks up October 1st and goes through June 30, 2021. With the start of the 2nd grant we are looking to expand the project to include the Town of Erving and allow for travel between zones.

Tina M. Cote updated on the status of the Workforce Development Grant. FRTA was recently contacted by MassDOT to say the MassDOT is withdrawing the funding. This is extremely disappointing news as this grant would have piloted a new project geared towards providing transportation to area employers during second and third shifts. There were many business and employer partners that had supported and pledged match funds for this project. We are waiting for an official letter from MassDOT on the cancellation of this grant before we will be sending out notices to all of the business and employer partners. Andrew Baker asked if there was any sense from MassDOT if FRTA would be able to reapply in the future. Tina M. Cote stated that FRTA would certainly reapply if the grant funds become available again in the future. Jeff Singleton asked if MassDOT cancelled all project grants for all RTAs. Tina M. Cote stated that as far as she is aware MassDOT cancelled for all statewide projects.

5. FRTA/MASSDOT FY20 MOU 2ND, 3RD, AND 4TH QUARTER REPORTING:

Michael Perreault presented the MOU reports for the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th quarters for FY20 (see attached). FRTA is required to provide MassDOT certain performance metrics grouped by fixed route service, demand response service, and combined fixed route and demand response. Anyone with questions or that would like further detail on any of the reports and metrics used can contact Michael Perreault. Teri Anderson asked about trends in the reports. Michael Perreault stated that this was the first year FRTA was required to report on such performance standards and then with COVID hitting halfway into the year would make it extremely difficult to comment on any type of trends so far. Baselines we set based upon an average of the three previous fiscal years and targets were incrementally set, up or down, based on those baseline averages. Andrew Baker asked if we've seen any upward or downward trends since the onset of COVID and particularly if we've seen any trends with on-demand transportation. Michael Perreault stated that initially when COVID in April we saw a drop in fixed route ridership dropped 80-90%. Since that point it has bounced back to 70-80% pre-pandemic totals. For demand response, ADA, and Access microtransit service, they dropped about 50-60% and remains about 50% pre-pandemic levels. Tina M. Cote also added that not only did FRTA temporarily suspend some of the fixed routes, but some of the COAs shut down during a portion of the pandemic and the Med-Ride program remain shut down since the end of March.

NEW BUSINESS:

6. NOMINATION/ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR FY21:

Peter Otten announced that since the last meeting Lance Fritz has stepped down from his position as Chair and is no longer serving on the Advisory Board. Peter Otten commented that he has no issue taking over as Chair but that he is retired and will be travelling again once the pandemic is over so there would need to be a strong Vice-Chair that would need to fill in when

he is travelling. Randy Crochier made a **motion** to elect William Stathis as Chair. Peter Otten seconded and with no other nominations the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	1.99	Yes
Joshua Garcia	Blandford	1.43	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.74	Yes
Sarah Reynolds	Charlemont	2.46	Yes
Robert Daley	Chester	1.21	Lost Communication
Don Walker	Conway	1.00	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.28	Yes
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.08	Yes
William Stathis	Greenfield	28.64	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	11.80	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.81	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.62	Yes
Teri Anderson	Westhampton	<u>1.04</u>	Yes
Total		60.10	

Yes – 58.89

No – 0.00

Lost Communication – 1.21

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

7. NOMINATION/ELECTION OF FINANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE FOR FY21:

Peter Otten stated that the Finance and Audit Committee is comprised of himself, Robert J. Decker III from Deerfield, and formerly Lance Fritz from Leyden. Teri Anderson made a **motion** to elect Peter Otten, Robert J. Decker III, and William Stathis to the Finance and Audit Committee for FY21. Paula LeBlanc seconded and with no other nominations the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	1.99	Yes
Joshua Garcia	Blandford	1.43	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.74	Yes
Sarah Reynolds	Charlemont	2.46	Yes
Robert Daley	Chester	1.21	Yes
Don Walker	Conway	1.00	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.28	Yes
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.08	Yes
William Stathis	Greenfield	28.64	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	11.80	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.81	Yes
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.62	Yes

Teri Anderson	Westhampton	<u>1.04</u>	Yes
		Total 60.10	

Yes – 60.10
 No – 0.00

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

8. COVID-19 UPDATES AND PLAN FOR TRANSITIONING BACK TO NORMAL OPERATIONS:

Tina M. Cote gave the following updates regarding operations during COVID-19:

- Temporarily reduced fixed route service with last service changes on June 15th and filling in gaps with FRTA Access microtransit service.
- Enforcing social distancing on buses with rear door boarding, reduced vehicle capacity limits, and not enforcing fare collections.
- Continuing to operate demand response, ADA, and microtransit services.
- Using CARES Act funds to cover expenses related to pandemic expenses such as personal protective equipment, cleaning/disinfecting supplies, and to cover shortfalls in revenues.
- JWO Transit Center remains closed to the public. FRTA has been flexible with allowing employees to work remotely from home. Most FRCOG employees still working remotely with some working in the office. Continuing to limit exposure to employees in the building. Maintenance staff used opportunity to deep clean facility and catch up on maintenance projects.
- FTM driver at transit center to clean buses in between driver runs during layovers.

Tina M. Cote further explained that FRTA has received a \$1.8 million contract for CARES Act funding to cover expenses during COVID over the next three years. The FRTA normally collects about \$150,000 a year in farebox revenues. These funds help take the pressure off of the normal operating budget. FRTA continues to wait until the upcoming flu season to see if things with the pandemic continue to get better or if we see another surge of cases. Tina M. Cote asked the board if they wanted FRTA to resume fare collections/enforcement or to continue using CARES Act funds to cover losses in fare collections.

Dawn Scaparotti asked if this has been discussed with the Finance and Audit Committee and if they had an opinion on the matter. Peter Otten stated that the Finance and Audit Committee has not met to discuss this but that in his opinion there is no reason not to use the CARES Act funds. Dawn Scaparotti asked if those funds can be used for other things. Tina M. Cote stated that funds be used to cover other COVID related expenses such as cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment, additional staffing hours for cleaning and operating, etc. Peter Otten stated that FRTA continually stays on budget and has no issues with the proposal to continue using CARES Act funds to cover fare losses. Megan Rhodes asked if FRTA will be re-evaluating the re-opening of the transit center for riders to have access to restrooms and ability to wait inside during inclement weather as winter approaches. Tina M. Cote explained that while there is a concern for rider’s needs, FRTA has concerns about does not have the staff to police

mask wearing and social distancing inside of the facility. Dawn Scaparotti asked how other RTAs are collecting fares and staying safe. Molly stated that PVRTA and other RTAs are larger in size and have other means of collecting fares at their disposal, such as electronic payment and contactless payment options.

Jeff Singleton made a **motion** to continue not enforcing fare collections and use CARES Act funds to cover farebox revenue losses. Paula LeBlanc seconded, but it was realized that William Stathis had left the meeting so there was no longer a quorum to vote on this **motion**. This discussion will be tabled until the next Advisory Board meeting.

9. EMPLOYEE/CONTRACTOR MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND SUPPORTS:

Tina M. Cote stated that since the start of COVID there has also been an increase in stress both in and out of work and we wanted to make sure the board was aware of programs already in place and steps FRTA has taken to address this, which include employee (drivers, dispatchers, maintenance employees) health insurance, employee assistance programs, and employee schedule changes. Molly Morin further explained that these things were in addition to physical safety procedures put in place to protect employees including personal protective equipment. Reducing fixed route service allowed the opportunity to put employees on rotating schedules with pay. The Employee Assistance Program offers assistance to employees and their families with financial issues, substance use, and everything in between.

10. HST RFP UPDATE:

Tina M. Cote updated that the State put the Human Services Transportation (MassHealth) brokerage contract out to bid with the new contract starting in July 2021. The RFP has closed and there were three or four bidders that had responded including two or three RTAs and one private vendor. No official word on results yet. With the brokerage contract FRTA provides scheduling, billing, office/vehicle inspections, etc. The brokerage contract makes up approximately 50% of FRTA's budget. Currently the State is divided into 12 brokerage regions and with the new RFP they are looking to consolidate into 1-3 regions. FRTA tried partnering with BRTA but concluded they could not submit a bid that met all of the requirements of the RFP. FRTA is hoping to find out the official decision soon and then work with the winning bidder(s) to see if there is a way to partner/subcontract with them. Currently FRTA is down two full-time and one part-time positions working in the call center/HST department and is waiting to re-hire positions lost from earlier this year until after the results from the RFP award is released. Jeff Singleton asked if the new provider(s) do not agree to work with FRTA will there be any budgetary impacts from this RFP. Tina M. Cote responded that it would reduce our budget by about 50% and the impacts would most likely involve layoffs.

11. UPDATE ON COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL TRANSIT PLAN AND EFFICIENCY STUDY FOR PARATRANSIT SERVICES:

Michael Perreault stated that FRTA began working with a consultant earlier this year to update our Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan which was last done in 2015. Early on the idea was to look at the last plan and what has changed over the last five years and then update and look

ahead for the next five years. Once COVID hit the plan changed to instead to break the plan up into three parts; the first part looking at historic data from 2015 to 2019, the second part focusing separately on 2020 and impacts COVID has had on our operations, and the third part looking at the next five years, addressing transit gaps, and also how COVID will shape our operations moving forward. Public comments were taken through the summer and draft of the report with recommendations will be completed soon. The final report is due to be completed by December to be submitted to MassDOT and into the State Legislature. Early feedback has been unsurprising with much feedback on lack of transportation in our service area including weekend service, weekend service, and frequency of service.

In addition, MassDOT awarded FRTA funds separately for an efficiency study specifically for demand response, ADA, and now microtransit services. This study was geared towards looking at FRTA's operations of services, how FRTA works with its contractors, and how other systems operate to see if there are any efficiencies FRTA can gain. Information from this efficiency study will also be included in the Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan.

Jeff Singleton stated that FRTA and the Advisory Board need to rethink the overall goals of the transit system to expand and broaden the base of the transit system. Jeff Singleton stated that the Advisory Board should be voting on the Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan before it is finalized. Tina M. Cote stated that she does not believe the plan needs to be voted on by the Advisory Board. Jeff Singleton stated that he would like the Advisory Board to vote on the plan and would like to put on the agenda for the next meeting in November. Peter Otten asked if there will be a plan ready for the Advisory Board to review prior to the next Advisory Board meeting. Tina M. Cote stated that she would need to speak with MassDOT to get clarification on their schedule for finalizing the plan. Andrew Baker suggested that getting the Advisory Board vote would be another form of feedback from a "constituency" on the plan.

Peter Otten suggested FRTA send a letter to Lance Fritz thanking him for his years of service on the Advisory Board.

Elizabeth Quirk commented that she is interested in serving on the Advisory Board as the Rider Representative. Michael Perreault clarified that the Rider Representative position will be addressed at the next Transit Advisory Committee meeting. There was discussion that the process for filling the roll of the Rider Representative has been to collect interest from people through the Transit Advisory Committee, then submit a list of interested people to the AFL-CIO for approval, and then submit the list of interested people to the Town to be appointed. Discussion concluded that the next appointing town is the Town of Russell and the Rider Representative does not have to live in the appointing town.

The next Advisory Board meeting will be on November 19, 2020.

The meeting concluded at 5:11pm.