

Approved 11/16/23

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, Matthew Gorzkowicz, the meeting of the Advisory Board of the Franklin Regional Transit Authority was held on September 21, 2023 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	1.45
Jennifer Reynolds	Bernardston	2.28
Christopher Dunne	Blandford	1.23
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.43
Sarah Reynolds	Charlemont	2.17
Bob Daley	Chester	1.02
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.28
Jim Loynd	Erving	3.55
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.23
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	30.93
Greg Gagnon	Hatfield	2.32
Will Cosby	Hawley	1.08
Elissa Viarengo	Heath	1.03
Jeff Singleton	Montague	11.89
Bernie Boudreau	Northfield	1.30
Sue Dougherty	Petersham	1.00
Carrie Florek	Russell	1.04
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.07
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.64
Karl Stinehart	Southwick	2.32
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	1.03
	<u>Total</u>	<u>78.29</u>

Also present were:

Tina M. Cote; FRTA Administrator, Michael Perreault; FRTA Deputy Administrator, Wayne Waldron, FTM General Manager, Steven Pardoe, FTM Assistant General Manager, Catherine Connolly, FTM Safety and Training Manager, Elizabeth Quirk, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Chair, Megan Rhodes, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Vice-Chair, George Touloumtzis, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee, and Donna MacNicol, FRTA Legal Counsel.

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 MAY 18, 2023 MEETING:

Paul McLatchy made a **motion** to accept the meeting minutes from May 18, 2023. 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	1.45	Yes
Jennifer Reynolds	Bernardston	2.28	Yes
Christopher Dunne	Blandford	1.23	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.43	Abstain
Sarah Reynolds	Charlemont	2.17	Abstain
Bob Daley	Chester	1.02	Abstain
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	5.28	Yes
Jim Loynd	Erving	3.55	Abstain
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.23	Not Present
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	30.93	Yes
Greg Gagnon	Hatfield	2.32	Abstain
Will Cosby	Hawley	1.08	Yes
Elissa Viarengo	Heath	1.03	Abstain
Jeff Singleton	Montague	11.89	Yes
Bernie Boudreau	Northfield	1.30	Abstain
Sue Dougherty	Petersham	1.00	Abstain
Carrie Florek	Russell	1.04	Yes
Andrew Baker	Shelburne	3.07	Yes
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.64	Yes
Karl Stinehart	Southwick	2.32	Yes
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	1.03	Not Present
		<u>Total</u>	
		78.29	

Yes – 62.21
 No – 0.00
 Abstain – 13.82
 Not Present – 2.26

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

OLD BUSINESS:

3. REVIEW/DISCUSSION ON ADVISORY BOARD BY-LAWS:

Jeff Singleton stated that the current by-laws don't clearly define the roll and powers of the Advisory Board particularly on things such as approving the long-range transit plan or the MOU with MassDOT on ridership goals. Jeff Singleton has been trying to propose an amendment to

the by-laws and is looking for some legal advice on this. Donna MacNicol provided some background information on MGL 161B Sections 6 and 8. Section 6 lists the authority's powers to be exercised by the Administrator. Section 8 outlines the powers of the Advisory Board, including real estate transactions, concession for lease of property, approval of fare changes, setting the annual budget, and review and acceptance of audit documents. Functions included in Sections 6 and 8 can be included in the by-laws as well, but powers outlined in MGL 161B can't be taken away through the by-laws.

Michael Perreault will send out copies of MGL 161B Sections 6 and 8 to the Advisory Board members prior to the next meeting. Tina M. Cote added that she intends to give a PowerPoint presentation for Advisory Board members, that other RTAs have found helpful, at the next meeting.

Robert J. Decker III added that the Advisory Board could always ask the legislature to amend MGL 161B either across the board or specifically for FRTA. Donna MacNicol concluded by stating that the Administrator is the Executive Director, similar to a mayor or governor. The Advisory Board is a check and balance with the ultimate authority to hire and fire the Administrator.

4. MAINTENANCE FACILITY PROJECT UPDATE:

Tina M. Cote provided a brief update on the completion of construction activities related to the new maintenance facility project. All maintenance and operations have been moved into the new facility and all utilities at the old facility have been turned off. There are some remaining odds and ends that need to be completed at the new facility, including the final installation of the air compressor but overall things are good. FRTA has received its permanent certificate of occupancy.

Eric Twarog asked about the status of the solar project at the new maintenance facility. Tina M. Cote stated that MassDOT is having us temporarily put a hold on that project. MassDOT just went through a federal audit and needs to do some internal housekeeping before allowing us to move forward on our project. Robert J. Decker III asked if the contractor has been paid or if there are any outstanding invoices or changes orders. Tina M. Cote explained that there are still a couple of outstanding invoices for work that was completed in the new fiscal year, but FRTA is working to cover those invoices within this year's capital contract.

5. DISCUSSION/UPDATE ON ACCESS PROGRAM AND WORKFORCE TRANSIT PROGRAM:

Tina M. Cote updated that the Access program continues to operate at capacity. FRTA is working to meet with Senator Comerford and Representative Blais to highlight successes of this project and look for additional funding to continue expanding the Access program.

Tina M. Cote updated that the 2nd and 3rd shift workforce transportation program continues to operate, but ridership has been slow-going over the last few months. FRTA is working with one provider out of Springfield, but also continues to look for additional partners closer to the

Franklin County area for this project. Robert J. Decker III asked about the marketing of this project. Tina M. Cote explained that we posted flyers at the transit center and on buses. In addition, staff have reached out to local staffing agencies about this project. Jeff Singleton asked why FRTA is working with a vendor outside of the area. Tina M. Cote explained that FRTA had previously worked with this vendor through the MassHealth transportation program, so we were familiar and comfortable working with them again on this project.

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

Tina M. Cote announced that additional funding will be made available to RTAs through the State. There has been a lot of discussion on equity funding and that FRTA is the only RTA with no Saturday fixed route service and one of only a few RTAs that have no Sunday fixed route service. The hope is that these additional funds will help level the playing field for all RTAs to have some sort of base-level of services. FRTA staff had been meeting with a small group last fiscal year to discuss plans for weekend fixed route services, but those discussions were put on hold. Eric Twarog asked about the timing of the new funds. Tina M. Cote stated that she was unsure of the exact timing, but the hope would be that MassDOT would have more information soon. Jeff Singleton stated that the group that was meeting with FRTA on plans for weekend fixed route service was close to a consensus for operating just Saturday service. The biggest obstacle was coming up with a plan for drivers to work Saturdays. Jeff Singleton suggested the group re-start those discussions again.

7. DISCUSSION/UPDATE ON FARE POLICY:

Michael Perreault provided an update on the working group that has been discussing FRTA fare policy and doing a deeper dive into FRTA fares. An analysis of fixed route fare collections found that costs for collecting, tracking, and reporting fares are approximately \$180,000 per year. Pre-COVID fixed route fares revenues were approximately \$100,000-\$125,000 per year. Since COVID FRTA has been utilizing CARES Act funds to cover shortfalls as to not impact services. Part of the current fare policy recommended this exercise to determine if FRTA should continue to go towards fare free or look to replace its fareboxes/fare system. Dawn Scaparotti asked if FRTA has purchased any other fareboxes since its initial purchase. Tina M. Cote stated no, but further explained that over the years FRTA has been fortunate enough to receive farebox equipment from other RTAs. Dawn Scaparotti asked if FRTA has researched any current equipment costs for new fareboxes. Michael Perreault indicated no, that FRTA has only used inflation estimates from the original purchase to estimate an approximate current cost.

A second exercise included the group reviewing current Demand Response fare structure and the different service areas each Demand Response provider operated. Then FRTA looked at the system as a whole to see if there would be an opportunity to create a new system-wide fare zones. The current fare policy indicates that there are two distinct fare structures and recommends looking at the possibility of creating a single fare structure the next time fare changes are addressed.

The Advisory Board will need to review the current fare policy and decide if anything within the policy needs to be updated. A new/updated policy would need to be adopted for the next upcoming three-year period.

NEW BUSINESS:

8. DISCUSSION ON FY23 STATE BUDGET:

As discussed briefly in Item 6, Tina M. Cote explained that there will be a total of \$56 million for all RTAs from the Fair Share Act and of that FRTA is expected to receive \$1,094,650. There is an additional \$15 million allotted for free fare projects for all RTAs, but at this point it is unclear how those funds will be distributed. There will also be \$3.5 million in discretionary grants for innovative projects, with the hope that FRTA could receive some of those funds to expand the Access program. The timing of the spend-down of these additional funds is expected to be one year, but that has not been officially determined. Hopefully there will be more information at the next meeting in November on these questions.

Jeff Singleton asked how much funding the RTAs received prior to the additional Fair Share Act funds. Tina M. Cote stated that the base funding was \$94 million for all RTAs. Dawn Scaparotti asked about the correlation between allocation of additional funding and each Town's local assessments. Michael Perreault explained that those calculations are unrelated. Additional state funds from the Fair Share Act is based on each RTAs total ridership, total square-mile service area, and population. Local assessments are calculated after the fiscal year is completed and the financial audit has been finalized and based on each town's usage of transportation services after netting out all other revenues. Dawn Scaparotti stated that there are rural conversations happening with the Governor and asked if FRTA had anything they would want Towns to bring forward in these discussions. Tina M. Cote stated that it is often difficult when having to compete with funding with all RTAs. Another uniqueness is that Massachusetts only has three rural RTAs (FRTA, NRTA, and VTA). While FRTA has the largest service area, its funding is relatively small in comparison to its neighboring RTAs.

Around 5:20pm, FRTA staff began having internet connectivity issues.

9. TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Transit Advisory Committee updates were tabled until the next meeting.

10. FRTA UPDATES:

FRTA updates were tabled until the next meeting.

The next Advisory Board meeting will be on November 16, 2023.

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