

Approved 11/18/21

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 September 23, 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>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	2.15
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96
William Bembury	Erving	2.77
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.12
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	32.58
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98
Mary Bowen	Northfield	1.58
Patrick Williamson	Plainfield	1.06
Carrie Florek	Russell	1.01
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.55
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00
	Total	65.69

Also present were:

Tina M. Cote; FRTA Administrator, Michael Perreault; FRTA Assistant Administrator, Molly Chambers; FTM General Manager, Elizabeth Quirk, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Chair, and Karl Stinehart, Southwick Town Administrator.

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 20, 2021 AND RECORD OF EVENTS FROM JUNE 3, 2021 MEETINGS:

Peter Otten made a **motion** to accept the meeting minutes from May 20, 2021. Jeff Singleton seconded, and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Hayley Bolton	Bernardston	2.15	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.48	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.96	Yes
William Bembury	Erving	2.77	Yes
Randy Crochier	Gill	1.18	Yes
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen	1.12	Abstain
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	32.58	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	10.98	Yes
Mary Bowen	Northfield	1.58	Abstain
Patrick Williamson	Plainfield	1.06	Not Present
Carrie Florek	Russell	1.01	Abstain
Ed Gibson	Southampton	1.55	Not Present
Paula LeBlanc	Southwick	2.27	Yes
Megan Rhodes	Rider Community	1.00	Yes
		<u>Total</u>	65.69

Yes – 59.37
No – 0.00
Not Present – 2.61
Abstain – 3.71

The vote passed and the **motion** carried. There were no comments regarding the record of events for the meeting from June 3, 2021.

OLD BUSINESS:

3. UPDATE ON HST RFP FINAL CONTRACT DECISION:

Michael Perreault stated that the FRTA has been a broker for the State’s Human Service Transportation program for more than two decades for the greater Franklin County region. Tina M. Cote added that as of July 1st FRTA’s HST Brokerage contract was moved to MART. There is supposed to be a legislative task force that will start to convene during this fiscal year to review HST’s brokerage operations and medical transportation services. With the loss of the HST contract, FRTA was forced to make some budget concessions as previous outlined in the May Advisory Board meeting. This change does not impact Fixed Route or Demand Response services but has impacted and restructured FRTA Administrative staffing and operations. Jeff Singleton has heard about complaints from consumers about the transition of the contract to MART. Tina M. Cote explained that any complaints called into FRTA are being passed onto the HST office to address. In addition, the list of complaints received by FRTA is being compiled to send to the task force and/or legislators to review in their task force meetings. Jeff Singleton stated that he had been researching some data on the HST program and would send to Michael Perreault to share with the Advisory Board members. Jeff Singleton asked if FRTA was aware if there were any changes to local vendors/drivers that provide the transportation. Tina M. Cote indicated that there were originally 12 transportation vendors with FRTA and as far as she was aware there are now only 5 transportation vendors that made the transition to MART. Eric

Twarog requested that this topic could be put onto the next meeting agenda in November. Mary Bowen asked to clarify if FRTA gave up the contract or lost the contract to MART. Tina M. Cote explained that during the RFP process FRTA tried to partner with BRTA but that they could not meet the requirements outlined within the RFP. The contract was subsequently awarded to MART and GATRA to cover the entire state.

4. MAINTENANCE FACILITY PROJECT UPDATE:

Michael Perreault gave a brief overview and update on the status of the Maintenance Facility project. At the end of FY21 FRTA was successful in purchasing the property from the Town of Montague. Bids for construction were released on September 15th, a pre-bid meeting is scheduled for September 23rd; filed sub bids are due on October 7th; general contractor bids are due on October 21st, an anticipated award on November 4th, anticipated fully executed contract on November 18th, and anticipated Notice to Proceed issued on November 29th. Mary Bowen asked about the location of the new facility. Michael Perreault stated that currently FRTA is leasing the facility on Deerfield St. in Greenfield and will be moving to Sandy Ln. in Turners Falls. Jeff Singleton asked about the timeline for construction. Michael Perreault stated that construction is expected to be completed in 12 months, but some of the early activities is weather dependent. It is expected that substantial completion would be around the end of November 2022. Helene Karl Architects (HKA) is the designer for the project. Jeff Singleton added that HKA was the same designer for the new Montague DPW facility and the Town was very pleased with the outcome of that project.

5. DISCUSSION/UPDATE ON CONTINUING DISCRETIONARY GRANT AND WORKFORCE TRANSPORTATION GRANT:

Michael Perreault reviewed information on quarterly reports highlighting both the discretionary grant program, which is the FRTA Access microtransit project, and the workforce development transportation grant program, which is the most recent pilot project working with local taxi and livery providers to provide transportation to 2nd and 3rd shift employers.

For the baseline in FY19 FRTA was projecting 750 trips per month for its Demand Response and ADA programs and the goal for the discretionary grant was to deliver an average of 900 trips per month including Access trips. By the end of the quarter for April, May, and June 2021 FRTA delivered 960, 1,196, and 1,204 trips per month respectively. This grant is available through June 30, 2022.

The grant from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council was designed and funded specifically to deliver 2nd and 3rd shift employment transportation using local taxi and livery providers for individuals living in Franklin County and the North Quabbin and working in Franklin County. The project launched on June 3, 2021, and through the first two months delivered 389 trips. This grant is available through December 31, 2021.

Tina M. Cote announced that FRTA was nominated by MassDOT for a Federal Transit Administration Administrator's Award at the upcoming Rural Public and Intercity Transportation Conference for our work on the FRTA Access microtransit pilot program.

Dawn Scaparotti asked about granular data on ridership for the Access program looking for information on where trip originate and end. Michael Perreault stated that information is not included in the report, but our pilot project is based primarily with residents that are living in Greenfield, Montague, Deerfield, Whately, Orange, New Salem, Warwick, and Wendell. Our hope is to use this pilot project to replicate this with our other COAs in the rest of our remaining towns. Tina M. Cote added that this project began with individuals downloading and using a smartphone app to schedule and manage their own trips. The next phase added an option to schedule trips though on online webportal for those that don't have smart phones. More recently, FRTA has been allowing individuals to call in to schedule Access trips with the call center. Jeff Singleton suggested next steps for microtransit is to target the Hilltowns and to reach out to Town Selectboards and get onto their agendas for discussions. FRTA did meet recently with Southwick COA to discuss the possibility of piloting our scheduling software with them. We are hoping to use them as a model for other Towns/COAs that operate demand response to be able use our scheduling software for their programs and expand the Access program as well. Any Town or COA that is interested in learning more should contact Michael Perreault to discuss.

Elizabeth Quirk asked if clients could call the dispatch desk for an issue with Demand Response or Access transportation or to schedule a ride. Molly Chambers stated that if riders are looking to schedule a trip and call the dispatch desk during the day the call would get forwarded to the call center. After hours dispatch would be available to help with the scheduling of rides. FTM is continuing to increase staffing levels to provide more availability for trips both during the week and on the weekend. Tina M. Cote added that in addition FRTA is working to update information in our brochures and online.

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

At the last Advisory Board meeting both Eric Twarog and Jeff Singleton volunteered to be part of a sub-committee to discuss the progress with starting weekend Fixed Route service as well as review the recommendations of the 5-year plan for FRTA to start prioritizing improvements over the coming years. Jeff Singleton suggested inviting Advisory Board members, Town Energy Committees, etc. to join the sub-committee and will report back at the next Advisory Board meeting. Anyone interested in joining this sub-committee should reach out to either Eric Twarog, Tina M. Cote, or Michael Perreault. Two of the main recommendations out of the 5-year plan was to implement Fixed Route weekend service and increasing the ridership base of the transit system.

NEW BUSINESS:

7. APPOINT AD HOC BY-LAW REVIEW COMMITTEE:

Michael Perreault stated that the by-laws had not been reviewed since 2018 and suggested a review of the by-laws just to make sure that they are up to date and reflect current practices and not restrictive in any way. There was discussion that there would only need two or three people on the committee. Peter Otten asked if we needed to appoint a committee for this and suggested

we avoid the committee by having Advisory Board members review individually and send in feedback. There was no interest during the meeting for creating a committee to review the by-laws, so Eric Twarog suggested that Michael Perreault send out an email to the Advisory Board members asking to review and submit any comments, edits, etc.

8. DISCUSSION ON TRANSITION BACK TO 'NORMAL'/PRE-COVID OPERATIONS:

Eric Twarog suggested that due to the ongoing COVID pandemic FRTA Advisory Board meetings should continue to be held virtually. Tina M. Cote stated that one of the benefits to allowing for virtual meetings is that there has been more participation, particularly from smaller, farther out Towns. Michael Perreault added that FRTA has recently acquired a new projector and 360° camera and microphone for the meeting room at the transit center to allow for virtual/hybrid meetings in the future. Jeff Singleton agreed that FRTA should continue moving toward virtual and/or hybrid meetings as part of a permanent, long-term solution. Discussion concluded that while we are still under emergency order that allows for virtual meetings, we should look further into the regulations to allow for virtual and/or hybrid meetings into the future.

Michael Perreault stated that the next planned service increase is scheduled for the beginning of October. While not returning to full pre-pandemic service, this increase will include bringing back some additional Fixed Route runs that have been suspended due to the pandemic as well as additional drivers for our Demand Response and Access programs. Tina M. Cote stated that gaps in fixed route service will continue to be filled with the help of the Access program. The transit center operating hours remain from 7am-3pm Monday-Friday with no expansion planned in the immediate future.

9. REVIEW FRTA/MASSDOT FY21 MOU 2ND, 3RD, AND 4TH QUARTER REPORTING:

Michael Perreault provided a brief overview of the MOU reports for the previous quarters. The MOU is a two-year agreement with FY20 being year one and FY21 being year two of the agreement. Each quarterly report includes three spreadsheets: one for fixed route statistics, one for demand response statistics (including ADA and Access), and one for combined fixed route and demand response statistics. Jeff Singleton asked if FRTA could include some additional information to explain the metrics with a little narrative. Michael Perreault suggested he could meet with Jeff Singleton offline to discuss narrative that would be helpful to board members.

10. TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Elizabeth Quirk gave the following updates:

- New bus stop seating has been installed along Main St. and Federal St. in Greenfield.
- 2nd/3rd shift employment transportation grant going well.
- FTM continues to hire more drivers.
- The next Transit Advisory Committee meeting will be moved to the same date as the Advisory Board meeting due to a conflict with Veterans Day.

11. FRTA UPDATES:

Tina M. Cote gave the following updates:

- FRTA recently increased one part-time maintenance employee to full-time status to continue with the cleaning and maintenance functions at the transit center.
- Free fares on the fixed route through the end of December has been very popular with riders and with increasing ridership back towards pre-pandemic numbers, but the Access program has also been extremely popular with riders as well.
- FRTA has entered into initial discussions with the Mayor of Greenfield on a lease agreement for the GMTA property while we wait for completion of our new facility.

Molly Chambers congratulated FRTA on the nomination of award and stated that the Access program has taken rural transportation to a new level.

Robert J. Decker III asked if there were any other authorizations needed from the Advisory Board for the construction of the new maintenance facility. Tina M. Cote stated that there were no other authorizations needed but can certainly check back with legal counsel to confirm.

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

Robert J. Decker III made a motion to adjourn. Peter Otten seconded, and the meeting concluded at 5:20pm.