

Pursuant to written notice sent to Committee Members and pursuant to notice posted at least forty-eight hours prior to the meeting, copies of said notice having been sent to the FRTA's 41-member towns, the meeting of the Transit Advisory Committee of the Franklin Regional Transit Authority was held on May 9, 2019 at the John W. Olver Transit Center, 12 Olive St., Greenfield, MA 01301.

### **1. INTRODUCTIONS:**

Present were the following TAC Members:

Chair George Touloumtzis, Vice-Chair Elizabeth Quirk, Megan Rhodes, and Deb Wilson.

Also present were:

Rachel Fichtenbaum, Luisa Plump, Jeff Singleton, Carol Letson, Molly Morin; FTM General Manager, Jenna Howitt, FTM Assistant General Manager, and Michael Perreault; FRTA Assistant Administrator.

George Touloumtzis called the meeting to order at 3:00pm and it was noted that a quorum **was** present to hold a meeting.

### **2. REVIEW MEETING MINUTES FROM MARCH 14, 2019:**

Megan Rhodes made a **motion** to accept the minutes from the March 14, 2019 meeting. Elizabeth Quirk seconded, the vote was unanimous, and the **motion** carried.

### **3. DISCUSSION ON RTA TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT:**

Michael Perreault updated on the RTA Task Force and since the last TAC meeting their report was finalized and submitted into the legislature. There were five main categories discussed within the report on how RTAs can improve and innovate: Investment in Performance, Accountability, Service Decisions, Quality of Service, and Environmental Sustainability. A couple of highlights from the report include an increase in RTA funding for FY20 and an automatic inflator in subsequent years; all state funding be tied to a MOU between MassDOT and each RTA with performance measures; all RTAs should complete a comprehensive regional transit plan every five years; RTAs should identify routes in their service areas where there is a demonstrated community need for seven day a week and evening and night service; and in lower density areas RTAs should

seek to provide on-demand service, microtransit service, or partner with other mobility services.

FRTA is waiting for the next step, which would be meeting with MassDOT to complete a Memorandum of Understanding as recommended in the RTA Task Force report. There was some discussion about the added costs for the recommended transit plans called for in the report and questions as to where the money to fund those studies would come from. Carol Letson asked how much the last comprehensive regional transit study cost. Michael Perreault stated he was unsure of the cost as it was part of a consortium agreement with other RTAs and paid for by MassDOT. Jeff Singleton stated that he is a little critical of the report and is concerned about using metrics and tying it to funding. Michael Perreault reiterated that it is important that FRTA's metrics and goals should be tailored to our rural transit system and not compared to the other MA RTAs. Rachel Fichtenbaum asked if members from the RTA Task Force would be involved in establishing the terms of the MOUs between MassDOT and the RTAs. Michael Perreault stated he believes the language for the MOUs would be determined between only MassDOT and the RTAs. Molly Morin asked if the language for the MOUs would be the same for all RTAs. Michael Perreault stated that the report indicated that the MOUs would be tailored to each individual RTA based upon their own individual regional characteristics and services. Jeff Singleton asked what the roll of the Advisory Board would be, if any, with the MOU. Michael Perreault indicated he didn't know and that FRTA has not seen a draft copy of the MOU yet.

#### **4. UPDATE ON REPLACEMENT OF MASSRIDES PROGRAM:**

Michael Perreault updated that discussion from the last meeting was that the MassRIDES program is ending as of June 30<sup>th</sup>. Since then Michael Perreault received an email from MassRIDES indicating that there would be a transition to Agile Mile, Inc., which will continue sponsor the Bay State Commute online site that allows individuals to track their transit usage. The Emergency Ride Home program and the business/employer outreach programs will be ending after June 30<sup>th</sup>. MassDOT has also released some additional information that they will be developing a new Workforce Development Grant. Megan Rhodes stated that there are plans for an upcoming 'listening' session for businesses in the Franklin County/Pioneer Valley area about this new grant. Rachel Fichtenbaum added that the money from MassRides is going to be used as a competitive grant program for workforce development projects. More information on this grant should be coming out in the coming weeks and months.

#### **5. REGIONAL COORDINATING COUNCIL TOPICS:**

Rachel Fichtenbaum provided the following updates and information to the group:

- MassDOT is getting ready to open their application period for transit projects through their annual Community Transit Grant Program. This program is geared toward awarding funds for projects that assist seniors and people with disabilities, including funding for purchasing vehicles, operating expenses, and mobility

management projects. There is an upcoming training session for new applicants on May 24<sup>th</sup> at PVPC from 10am-12pm.

- April 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> was the MassDOT Transportation Innovation Conference in Worcester. People can email any feedback from the conference or ideas for next year's conference to Rachel Fichtenbaum at [rachel.fichtenbaum@state.ma.us](mailto:rachel.fichtenbaum@state.ma.us). George Touloumtzis asked if there was any indication on the conference attendance levels compared to years past. Rachel Fichtenbaum suggested that the conference has been steadily grown over the last several years but does not have exact attendance figures for this year yet.
- Monday May 13<sup>th</sup> will be the next statewide volunteer driver meeting at the North Andover Council on Aging.
- There will be an introduction to travel training workshop in Fitchburg June 5-7<sup>th</sup>. You can contact Rachel Fichtenbaum at [rachel.fichtenbaum@state.ma.us](mailto:rachel.fichtenbaum@state.ma.us) for more information about the workshop and information about registration.

## **6. FRCOG REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATE:**

Megan Rhodes gave an update to the FRCOG Regional Transportation Plan. The FRCOG is in the process of wrapping up the plan. The recommendations from the plan will help set the transportation priorities for the next 3-5 years for this region. The plan will go out for a 21-day public comment review period at the end of June. The FRCOG will be hosting public meetings to get feedback on the plan. There is a big emphasis on improving transit service in this year's plan and is recommending more frequency, weekend service, more routes, and more on-demand transit services.

## **7. FRTA UPDATES:**

Michael Perreault stated that FRTA is waiting for the upcoming Community Transportation Grant Program, which FRTA is expecting to submit grant requests for vehicle replacements and possibly a grant for operations or mobility management.

Michael Perreault was awarded a discretionary grant from MassDOT to pilot a microtransit project. FRTA is working on launching a new transportation program and are working on the final details about the project. We hope to have more detailed information about the project soon with the expectation to launch the new pilot project in July.

Michael Perreault gave an update on the FY20 State budget. The House budget came out just after the last TAC meeting with \$86 million for RTAs. This week the Senate released initial figures of \$87 million for RTAs and an additional \$3.5 million in discretionary grants. The next steps are waiting for the Senate to finalize their version of the budget, then the budget will go to Conference Committee, and then on to the Governor to sign the final budget. FRTA remains cautiously optimistic that we will see an increase in funding for RTAs in FY20.

## **8. PUBLIC COMMENTS, TRANSPORTATION QUESTIONS, OR SUGGESTIONS FOR AGENDA TOPICS:**

Megan Rhodes discussed that FRCOG is working on educating the public on the 2020 U.S. Census. This year the U.S. Census Bureau will be having people fill out the census online. It is important that everyone completes the census so that everyone is counted as the census impacts federal funding allocations over the next 10 years. The FRCOG will be holding a public information session on June 5<sup>th</sup> to start brainstorming ways to get the word out about the upcoming census.

Megan Rhodes announced that Baystate Bike Week and FRCOG's Bike Week Breakfast will be on May 14<sup>th</sup> from 8:00-10:00am. There will be free breakfast and other give-aways.

Michael Perreault stated that Dump the Pump Day will be on June 20<sup>th</sup> with FRTA offering free fixed route transportation; and the Community Action Belly Bus food drive will be on August 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Michael Perreault stated that FRTA had recently reached out to Rep. Natalie Blais to do a 'Ride the Bus' event. Rep. Blais is excited about the idea and we will work to schedule the event later this year.

Elizabeth Quirk stated that she recently found an article about global climate change to share. It is predicted that within three years there will be no more arctic ice. Additionally, it is predicted that, unlike coastal cities such as Boston, Franklin County will not see significant flooding and that there is expected to be an influx in population in Franklin County.

George Touloumtzis suggested that FRTA could try to put a bus into the Franklin County Fair this fall.

Jenna Howitt stated that FRTA will have an information table at the Franklin County Pride Parade on June 15<sup>th</sup>.

Luisa Plump announced that CSO's 15<sup>th</sup> Mental Health Awareness Fair will be held at the Greenfield Energy Park on May 15<sup>th</sup>.

The next FRTA Advisory Board meeting will be Thursday May 16<sup>st</sup> at 4:00pm.

Michael Perreault stated that if anyone has agenda topics at an upcoming meeting can send them to [michael@frta.org](mailto:michael@frta.org).

The next meeting is scheduled for September 12, 2019. The meeting was adjourned at 4:00pm.