

Approved 9/10/2020

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 September 12, 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, Gary Daniele, Megan Rhodes, and Deb Wilson.

Also present were:

Rachel Fichtenbaum, Jeff Singleton, Russ Fisher, Bill Martin, 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. ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

Megan Rhodes made a **motion** to elect George Touloumtzis as Chair. Deb Wilson seconded, the vote was unanimous, and the **motion** carried. Megan Rhodes made a **motion** to elect Elizabeth Quirk as Vice-Chair. Deb Wilson seconded, the vote was unanimous, and the **motion** carried. It was noted that the position of Secretary remains vacant.

3. REVIEW MEETING MINUTES FROM MAY 9, 2019:

Megan Rhodes made a **motion** to accept the minutes from the May 9, 2019 meeting. Elizabeth Quirk seconded, the vote was unanimous, and the **motion** carried.

4. FY20 STATE BUDGET UPDATE AND RTA FUNDING:

Michael Perreault announced that the FY20 State Budget included \$90.5 million in funding for the RTAs. This included \$87 million in operating funding and \$3.5 million

set aside for discretionary grant funding to be released later in the fiscal year. In FY19 state operating funding for all RTAs was \$82 million. The \$5 million increase in funding equates to approximately \$60,000 for FRTA. As a condition to the state funding for this fiscal year, all RTAs were required to sign onto a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MassDOT which lays out reporting requirements and establishes performance metrics. The discretionary grant requirements were recently released, and all applications are due by October 11th. Jeff Singleton stated that he has some serious concerns about the MOU and is looking to present those concerns at the FRTA Advisory Board meeting next Thursday. George Touloumtzis asked if a copy of the MOU could be sent out to the TAC members. Michael Perreault indicated that he would send a follow up email with that document.

5. MICROTRANSIT PILOT PROJECT:

Michael Perreault stated that FRTA was awarded funding for the creation of a microtransit pilot project. FRTA is working with its current demand response scheduling software to create a smartphone application that will allow the general public to schedule next-day and same-day trips. This project will utilize existing demand response vehicles with the goal of filling vacant seats on the buses while still allowing seniors and people with disabilities priority scheduling. FRTA had begun beta testing the new application in August and are ramping up to the launch of its new microtransit pilot project on September 16th. One of the last hurdles which could delay the launch of the project is that we are waiting for confirmation Google that they have accepted our application and will post it onto the Google Play Store for download. The pilot project will consist will be two zones: Zone 1 consists of Greenfield, Montague, Deerfield, Whately, Gill & Leyden and service will operate Monday through Friday from 7:00am to 6:00pm; Zone 2 consists of Orange, New Salem, Warwick and Wendell and service will operate Monday through Friday from 8:00am to 5:00pm. For this pilot project riders can only travel within each respective zone and cannot travel between zones. All rides are \$5.00 per one-way trip and all additional riders are \$2.50. Rides are open to the public on a first come-first serve basis.

Russ Fisher asked how FRTA came up with this project. Michael Perreault stated that there has been a big industry push in the last couple years for a new on-demand model for public transportation similar to Uber/Lyft. For some people that don't live along the fixed route corridor, that the fixed route schedule doesn't work for them, or that don't otherwise qualify for demand response or ADA transportation will now have another option for transportation that may work for them. FRTA recognizes there remain many transportation gaps in our service areas is this is designed to fill one of those gaps using existing vehicles and drivers.

Deb Wilson asked if people using the new smartphone application will be riding on the same vehicle as the current demand response riders. Michael Perreault indicated that everyone would be riding on the same vehicles. Meghan Rhodes added this project allows FRTA to better utilizes existing resources by opening seats to the general public on vans already transporting seniors and people with disabilities.

Gary Daniele asked if riders would have a similar wait time as ADA riders. Michael Perreault explained that there are pick up windows similar to ADA and demand response transportation. The scheduling software will take the time in which someone is looking to be picked up or dropped off and then negotiates a time within 30 minutes to use as the optimum pick up time. The schedule then gives a pick up ‘window’ of 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after the negotiated time to allow for enough flexibility in the scheduling software to account for additional trips being added to the schedule and/or trips being cancelled up until the actual delivery of that trip. Molly added that the application has the ability to send text messages about your trip and push notifications when you are the next scheduled pick up and you can then pull up a map to see your vehicle approaching in real-time, including the vehicle number. Jenna Howitt also added that the smartphone application will give users instant information on their trip request. If the trip is accepted, then the ride is guaranteed to happen; there is no chance on the trip being ‘bumped’ or cancelled by another trip. If the trip cannot be accommodated that application will tell the user that the ride was denied. Trips can be denied if the trip is outside of the days/hours of operation, outside of the geographical limitations of the pilot project, or if there is no room in the schedule to fit the ride.

George Touloumtzis asked how the trip cost compares to demand response or ADA. Molly Morin stated that ADA fares are \$3.00 for each one-way trip and that demand response fares vary from \$1.00 to \$2.50 for each one-way trip. George Touloumtzis asked if someone doesn’t have a smartphone if they are able to access this pilot project to schedule trips. Michael explained that if individuals don’t have smartphones, they would not be able to schedule trips another way at this time.

6. REGIONAL COORDINATING COUNCIL TOPICS:

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

- MassMobility recently updated their website with added information on transportation funding for both individuals and organizations.
- Microtransit projects are relatively new in MA. With FRTA’s soon-to-be launched project there are only two others in the state; GATRA launched a project in June and the City of Newton launched a project in August.

7. FRCOG REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN FINAL REPORT:

Megan Rhodes announced that the FRCOG Regional Transportation Plan has been completed. This is a 4-year plan that covers goals for the region on roads, bridges, walking, biking, trains, and buses. The final plan is up on the FRCOG website and includes an interactive map. 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.

Megan Rhodes also introduced that the FRCOG is currently working to update their Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan. This plan allows the

FRTA and local Councils on Aging eligible to receive Federal Section 5310 funding for transportation programs supporting seniors and people with disabilities. Megan Rhodes will send a draft copy to Michael Perreault to forward to the TAC to review. All comments on the plan should be sent to MRhodes@frcog.org by the end of September.

8. FRTA UPDATES:

Michael Perreault announced that there is Western MA Transportation Forum (see attached flyer) scheduled for Friday, September 13th at the Northampton Center for the Arts. This forum invited all the western MA legislative delegation to speak with them about advocacy in funding and support for transportation initiatives in Berkshire, Franklin, Hamden, and Hampshire Counties. Megan Rhodes added that this forum was invite only and the registration is full. Jeff Singleton will be one of the keynote speakers at the event. More information about the event will be available at the next TAC meeting. Russ Fisher stated that he hopes that people are at the forum that speak up and advocate for buses transportation and not just train service. George Touloumtzis wondered if there would be discussion about the FRTA not having any weekend service. Megan Rhodes stated that both she and (FRTA Administrator) Tina Cote will be on a will be presenting about rural transportation challenges in Franklin County and FRTA.

Michael Perreault stated that new train service, named the Amtrak Valley Flyer, began service on August 30th. This is a new pilot service that operates between Greenfield and Springfield which adds two southbound trains in the morning and two northbound trains in the evening.

Michael Perreault announced that FRTA is working with Greenfield Community College about partnering on a work-study project to create a marketing campaign to address the stigma of using public transportation. FRTA is excited about this new partnership with the college and looks forward to bringing in a local student to help with this new marketing campaign.

Michael Perreault announced that FRTA will be hosting another systemwide orientation on September 20th. FRTA has invited several social service and human service agencies to send staff to the orientation to learn about FRTA's different services and an ample opportunity to have their questions answered.

Michael Perreault stated that MassDOT recently released a Workforce Transportation Grant opportunity. This is a competitive grant focused on providing transportation solutions for access to employment. FRTA has been meeting with the FRCOG, MassHire, and the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board to look at potential projects to apply for grant. This is a statewide grant totaling approximately \$4.5 million and is open to RTAs, employers, and other organizations. Grant proposals are due by September 27th. Russ Fisher suggested an idea of having volunteers to assist people in using public transportation.

9. PUBLIC COMMENTS, TRANSPORTATION QUESTIONS, OR SUGGESTIONS FOR AGENDA TOPICS:

Bill Martin reported that he rode on the inaugural train leaving Greenfield to Northampton and then rode the FRTA Route 31 from Northampton back to Greenfield.

Bill Martin announced that the intersection, roadway, and sidewalk improvements around Bank Row, Olive St, and Hope St have been completed. The FRTA and Town of Greenfield partnered together to complete this project.

Jeff Singleton stated that he is looking to work with FRTA to come up with venues to have serious conversations about public transportation and creating a lobbying strategy for weekend transportation.

The next FRTA Advisory Board meeting will be Thursday September 20th at 4:00pm.

Michael Perreault stated that if anyone has agenda topics at an upcoming meeting can send them to michael@frta.org.

The next meeting is scheduled for November 14, 2019. The meeting was adjourned at 4:05pm.