

RECORD OF EVENTS

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 November 12, 2020 virtually on the Zoom.com platform by computer and by phone.

1. INTRODUCTIONS:

Present were the following TAC Members:

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

Also present were:

Rachel Fichtenbaum, Carol Letson, Trevor Boeding, Wayne Waldron; FTM Assistant General Manager, Catherine Connolly; FTM Safety and Training 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 not** present to hold a meeting.

2. REVIEW MEETING MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 10, 2020:

Meeting minutes for September 10, 2020 were tabled until the next meeting.

3. DISCUSSION ON AFL-CIO FY21 RIDER COMMUNITY REP:

Michael Perreault updated that since the last meeting an email was sent out to the TAC mailing list and posters were put upon the buses to seek people interested in this position on the FRTA Advisory Board. At the last meeting Megan Rhodes, Elizabeth Quirk, and Jan Gibeau stated that they were interested in this position, but since that meeting Elizabeth Quirk and Jan Gibeau had retracted their interest at this time. Megan Rhodes clarified that she would serve in this role but would defer to a regular rider. George Touloumtzis asked if there were any other suggestions for recruitment. Megan Rhodes offered to post onto the FRCOG's Facebook page. Carol Letson suggested that including a statement about the number of meetings and responsibilities on the FRTA Advisory Board may be helpful. Rachel Fichtenbaum suggested sending the flyer to the FCRN listserv. Michael Perreault stated that there is still time to search for additional interest as the current position is in place until February.

4. LOBBYING STRATEGY FOR WEEKEND SERVICE:

George Touloumtzis stated that at the last meeting Jeff Singleton suggested establishing a sub-committee to work on this topic between meetings. Elizabeth Quirk had offered to help and had done a little bit of homework to date. FRTA has a current 5-year plan which details a three-phase process of which parts called for implementing weekend service. Phase 2 was implementing Saturday service and Phase 3 was implementing Sunday service. The plan was unclear exactly how to get from Phase 1 to Phase 2 but there are some assumptions that funding was the main issue. Currently, with the pandemic has caused a whole host of new issues which has further delayed any attempt at weekend service. FRTA is currently going through updating the plan for the next five years. The FRTA Advisory Board is the decision body which directs FRTA in implementing all services. Michael Perreault added that the original 5-year plan was adopted in 2015. Near the end of the calendar year the update to the plan for the next 5 years will, once again, highlight and discuss the need for weekend transportation. Michael Perreault added that he believes that what Jeff Singleton is looking for is identifying steps to secure additional funding to implement weekend service. FRTA has in the past come up with plans in the past to implement weekend service but have not been successful in securing the funding needed.

Elizabeth Quirk informed everyone that there is an article in the Recorder today about the Transportation Climate Initiative (https://www.recorder.com/Initiative-aims-to-aid-areas-underserved-by-transportation-unprepared-for-climate-change-37270048?utm_source=HeadlineAlerts&utm_medium=DailyNewsletter&utm_campaign=HeadlineAlerts). There's an initiative to expand transportation options in western Mass and improve transportation services statewide and regionwide.

Megan Rhodes suggested the next logical step may be to approach the local legislators to see if they will support funding for weekend service. George Touloumtzis suggested that having information come from an advisory committee such as the TAC representing ridership may help with those conversations. Megan Rhodes added that options like microtransit service may carry a smaller price tag than traditional fixed route service and may give a better chance at getting funded for a weekend service pilot project. Michael Perreault agreed that outside-of-the-box thinking of services may be the best way forward and hopefully some of that will also be included in the updated 5-year plan.

5. REGIONAL COORDINATING COUNCIL TOPICS:

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

- A listing of upcoming funding opportunities (including transit authorities, municipalities, and non-profits) can be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/funding-for-community-transportation#apply-today!-upcoming-deadlines>
- Information on the upcoming Moving Together Conference (conference will be held virtually this year) can be found here: www.movingtogetherma.org

- Recent article on MassMobility Newsletter on FRTA Access Microtransit project. A link to the Newsletter or to subscribe can be found here:
www.mass.gov/massmobility-newsletter

6. FRTA UPDATES:

Michael Perreault provided an update to the FRTA Access program. On November 2nd FRTA rolled out some new changes including new locations: Erving, Downtown Shelburne Falls, Charlemont Park & Ride, Athol Hospital, Athol YMCA, and Athol Market Basket Plaza. In addition, riders can now travel between zones and re-adjusted fares to travel within a zone was reduced from \$5.00 each way to \$3.00 each way and travel between zones is \$4.00 each way. Lastly, FRTA added a web portal for riders to access, schedule, and manage trips online which is in addition to its smartphone app.

George Touloumtzis asked about the use of the program. Michael Perreault stated that just prior to COVID the program was averaging about 100 trips per month. When the pandemic hit FRTA had to make some service reductions to the fixed routes but we were able to use the Access program to provide essential trips for people who were affected by the service reductions.

George Touloumtzis asked about the update to the by-laws since the last meeting. Michael Perreault stated that there were no issues with the changes to the by-laws. George Touloumtzis asked if Michael Perreault could reach out to all of the board members to recognize the change in the by-laws and just try to confirm that members are still willing to attend meeting moving forward.

Megan Rhodes asked if there are any plans to re-open the transit center this winter. Michael Perreault indicated that at this time there are no plans to re-open the transit center. FRTA continues to monitor information at the federal, state, and local level about the pandemic, but the first priority is keeping employees of the building safe.

Trevor Boeding asked about the status of the Med-Ride program. Michael Perreault stated that at this time FRTA continues to follow closely state numbers of COVID cases in hopes to start seeing a downward trend in positive cases. For the time being the Med-Ride program remains suspended. There has not been a lot of calls for long distance medical trips and its difficult to tell if people are reluctant to travel or have found other means of travel. Trevor Boeding offered to provide information from focus groups on transportation needs offline after this meeting.

Elizabeth Quirk suggested that tele-health appointments may continue to be prevalent which could be a factor in transportation needs now and in the future.

George Touloumtzis asked if there are any changes in the fixed routes or any plans for future changes. Michael Perreault stated that FRTA doesn't have any plans for changes in fixed route service levels, vehicle capacity, or fare enforcement at this time. Any questions about transportation please contact the dispatch desk at 413-773-8090 Ext. 103.

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

There were no public comments, transportation questions, or suggestions for agenda topics.

Franklin County Resource Network Virtual Legislative Forum on the 13th at 9:30am. Any questions about the forum please contact Mary McClintock at 413-376-1108.

Carol Letson attended a Transportation Climate Initiative program recently. The goal is to provide cleaner, more affordable transportation across the Commonwealth.

The next FRTA Advisory Board meeting will be Thursday November 19th 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 March 11, 2021. The meeting was adjourned at 4:00pm.