

Approved 5/12/22

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 March 10, 2022 virtually on the Zoom.com platform by computer and by phone.

1. INTRODUCTIONS:

Present were the following TAC Members:

Chair Elizabeth Quirk, Thuan Le, Kim Scammon, George Touloumtzis, and Deb Wilson.

Also present were:

Rachel Fichtenbaum, Carol Letson, Jeff Singleton, Bill Glabach, Wayne Waldron; FTM General Manager, Catherine Connolly; FTM Safety and Training Manager and Michael Perreault; FRTA Assistant Administrator.

Elizabeth Quirk 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 NOVEMBER 18, 2021:

George Touloumtzis made a **motion** to approve meeting minutes from November 18, 2021. Kim Scammon seconded, and discussion followed. George Touloumtzis had a couple of comments on the minutes. On page 2, last paragraph at the bottom of the page the word should be changed to 'bringing'. On page 3, first paragraph at the top of the page there was a comment from Carol Letson about clients for the Center for New Americans are sometimes reluctant to attend in-person classes. Carol Letson clarified that the concern was there were challenges for clients getting to the Center for New Americans to attend classes. Michael Perreault stated that he would make those changes. Discussion concluded, the vote was as follows:

Thuan Le: Yes

Kim Scammon: Yes

George Touloumtzis: Yes

Deb Wilson: Yes

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

3. DISCUSSION ON AFL-CIO FY22 RIDER COMMUNITY REP:

Michael Perreault continued discussions on the AFL-CIO FY22 Rider Community Representative from the previous meeting. There were two individuals that were interested in the position and the Shelburne Selectboard chose a rider from Orange. George asked what the individual's name is and if they will be attending the next meeting. Michael Perreault stated that her name is Samantha Kivlin and she had reached out to confirm she would attend the upcoming Advisory Board meeting. As this process proved successful, Michael Perreault will continue to take letters of interest throughout the year and give an additional push through email towards the end of the year.

4. UPDATE ON ACCESS SERVICE AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT GRANTS:

Michael Perreault gave some brief updates on the Access and Workforce Development grants. The Workforce Development grant funds had been fully spent down at the end of January and the FRTA will continue to operate the program in its same form through the end of the fiscal year. From June 2021 through January 2022 the project has averaged approximately 313 trips per month.

The Access project continues its success and since the previous meeting FRTA has been working with the Southwick COA and their transportation provider, Hulmes Transportation, on bringing them online using the FRTA's automated scheduling software. Training with the software has been completed at the beginning of March and it is expected that Southwick COA will be going live with the software by the end of the month. FRTA continues to meet with other COA/Demand Response partners on the benefits of the automated scheduling software to continue bringing online additional partners expanding the project.

Recently, FRTA was engaged by the FRCOG through a grant from Senator Comerford to partner with local organizations to provide transportation to their clients through the Access program. Initial partners include the Community Health Center of Franklin County, Baystate Franklin Medical Center, Brick House, and Greenfield Community College. This grant is going to covering fares for clients.

George Touloumtzis asked if ridership for these programs continues to be plateaued. Michael Perreault stated that we're continuing to see small increases in trips month over month but still struggling with driver hiring and retention.

5. DISCUSSION ON WEEKEND FIXED ROUTE SERVICE AND EXPANDING THE BASE OF THE TRANSIT SYSTEM:

Michael Perreault explained that this topic was continued from the previous meeting and included discussions with the TAC. FRTA is working to put together a scope for a weekend fixed route pilot project and the FRTA Advisory Board initiated a subcommittee to discuss and assist FRTA staff in this process. Jeff Singleton stated that the group

needs to decide on the level of service for a pilot project and look for additional grant funds to bring on a consultant to help with a plan to expand the base of the transit system. Elizabeth Quirk recently met with a local art group which received a grant to help the community. There was an initial discussion about an art project with helping to reduce stigma of riding the bus. Advisory Board Chair, Eric Twarog, and Montague representative, Jeff Singleton, have volunteered to be on the committee and suggested that others outside of the Advisory Board could also volunteer to assist. Elizabeth Quirk and Megan Rhodes had previously expressed interest in joining the committee. George Touloumtzis stated that he would like to join the committee as well.

6. REGIONAL COORDINATING COUNCIL TOPICS:

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

- Volunteer Driver Network held a meeting in January with a presentation from a local volunteer driver example, Lifepath's Rides for Health. This included both door-to-door as well as door-through-door transportation options. Please contact Rachel if you'd like to receive a recording of that meeting.
- In early February MassMobility, MassDOT, and MA Health Aging Collaborative held a virtual forum on mobility management. Recording will be made available soon.
- Travel Instruction Network held a meeting on 3/10/22 about helping older adults and people with disabilities with using apps, such as FRTA Access app, Uber/Lyft apps, and others.

For more information on MassMobility and its monthly newsletter please contact Rachel Fichtenbaum at rachel.fichtenbaum@state.ma.us.

George Touloumtzis asked for a further explanation of door-through-door transportation. Rachel Fichtenbaum explained that door-through-door is specific transportation where the driver can provide extra assistance to passengers into their home or into their doctor's office. This is generally beyond what most transportation programs can perform.

7. FRTA UPDATES:

Michael Perreault provided the following updates and information:

- FRTA welcomed new Franklin Transit Management General Manager, Wayne Waldron. Previous General Manager, Molly Chambers, has moved on to a new job in a new field.
- The FRCOG has agreed to assist FRTA in upcoming public surveying and public meetings seeking feedback on the Access pilot project, the Workforce Development pilot project, and Fixed Route fares. Surveys will be created in both English and Spanish, survey collection and meetings will take place over the month of April, and a summary report will be prepared for the FRTA Advisory Board to discuss at their May meeting.

- New Fixed Route buses will be arriving over the course of the next several months. FRTA will be receiving 5 large low-floor transit buses and 3 low-floor minibuses: all replacing older high-floor models.

Kim Scammon asked if any of the new buses will be electric. Michael Perreault stated that this next round of buses will not be electric, but that FRTA is working with MassDOT and their consultant to come up with a transition plan moving FRTA fleet to electric buses.

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

George Touloumtzis asked if COVID and mask mandates on the buses have put any stress on driver retention. Michael Perreault stated that he is not aware of any widespread compliance issues with wearing masks on the buses but will let Wayne Waldron speak more to this. Wayne Waldron stated that there has been some added stress ensuring mask compliance, especially early in the pandemic, but it has gotten better now that we're two years in. Jeff Singleton stated that he's observed some drivers overreact too quickly in some situations. Elizabeth Quirk stated that she's observed drivers handling situations very well regarding mask compliance. Deb Wilson asked about seatbelt requirements on the buses. Elizabeth Quirk stated that seatbelts are required on demand response and Access buses but not required on fixed routes. Michael Perreault clarified that not all of the fixed route buses are equipped with seatbelts, so seatbelts are not required on the fixed route. Conversely, all vehicles used for ADA, demand response, Access, and workforce transportation are equipped with seatbelts and wearing of seatbelts is required. Elizabeth Quirk stated that she had received a complaint from another passenger about the cleanliness of the buses. Wayne Waldron stated that he did receive a complaint and is aware of the situation. Franklin Transit Management has one utility worker at the bus garage charged with washing and cleaning the buses and one utility worker at the JWO transit center charged with cleaning and sanitizing the buses in between runs.

The next scheduled FRTA Advisory Board meeting is Thursday, March 17, 2022 at 4:00pm via Zoom.

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

The next Transit Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for May 12, 2022. George Touloumtzis made a **motion** to adjourn, Deb Wilson seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:00pm.