

Approved 11/9/23

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 14, 2023 at the John W. Olver Transit Center, 12 Olive St., Greenfield, MA 01301 and virtually on the Zoom.com platform by computer and by phone.

### **1. INTRODUCTIONS:**

Present were the following TAC Members:

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

Also present were:

Jeff Singleton, Erica Jensen, Rachel Fichtenbaum, MassDOT Manager of Grant Programs & Mobility Management, Wayne Waldron, FTM General Manager, Steve Pardoe, FTM Assistant General Manager, Catherine Connolly, FTM Safety and Training Manager, and Michael Perreault; FRTA Assistant Administrator.

Elizabeth Quirk called the meeting to order at 3:05pm and it was noted that a quorum **was** present to hold a meeting.

### **2. REVIEW MEETING MINUTES FROM MAY 11, 2023:**

George Touloumtzis made a **motion** to approve meeting minutes from May 11, 2023. Megan Rhodes seconded, and the vote was as follows:

Megan Rhodes: Yes

George Touloumtzis: Yes

Deb Wilson: Yes

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

### **3. FRCOG MARKETING CONSULTANT DISCUSSION/UPDATE:**

Megan Rhodes stated that the FRCOG has received an additional \$10,000 to continue assisting FRTA on marketing/rebranding projects. These funds need to be spent down by

the end of December 2023. One of the original projects created a commercial which is being hosted on YouTube. Now some of the additional funds are targeting GCC and UMass students about free fixed routes during September and October through geofencing messages. Some of the funds will also be used to help update the FRTA website, making it more user-friendly, more mobile-friendly, and maintaining accessibility requirements.

Michael Perreault asked if there was a way for FRTA to continue similar geofencing targets in the future. Megan Rhodes stated that, while not familiar with the specifics, FRTA should be able to through a number of different social media channels such as YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter.

Rachel Fichtenbaum added that MassDOT has some rural funding for training that could be used to help FRTA with marketing and will follow up with Michael Perreault to discuss more after the meeting. This funding is specific for rural transit providers.

George Touloumtzis stated that while grants are always good to get things started, there needs to be a plan to sustain over the long term to keep good projects like this going into the future.

Jeff Singleton suggested that a potential target market would be landlords in Montague Center and Millers Falls. As both tend to be bedroom communities for UMass and many landlords are unaware of the transit service that could be marketed as a benefit towards renters.

#### **4. FRANKLIN COUNTY REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN FINAL REPORT:**

Megan Rhodes updated that the FRCOG completed the update to their Regional Transportation Plan. There was a robust outreach that received a lot of feedback and requests for improvements. The top requests included more transit services along with improved pedestrian access improvements. The final plan can be found online at: <https://frcog.org/publications/franklin-county-regional-transportation-plan-2020/>. Megan Rhodes added that from the plan the FRCOG has submitted a grant application to create 1 ½ miles of new sidewalk from Leyden Woods to the I-91 overpass on Leyden Rd. in Greenfield. Elizabeth Quirk asked if the sidewalks would connect with Nash's Mill Rd. Megan Rhodes indicated that she wasn't certain and would need to look into that further.

George Touloumtzis asked about improvements to Turners Falls Rd. in Greenfield stating that pedestrian and bicyclist safety is a concern and with the terrain being very challenging, it appears that it would be easiest to change the vehicle speed on that road. Megan Rhodes indicated that the FRCOG submitted a grant application to conduct a conceptual study to look at feasible safety improvements for Turners Falls Rd. Elizabeth Quirk added that the hairpin turn at the bottom of the hill leaves nowhere for pedestrians to get off of the roadway. George Touloumtzis suggested that the use of paint to create narrower travel lanes and a safety/education campaign for drivers could help. Megan

Rhodes added that MassDOT may re-align the White Bridge to help make safety improvements for Turners Falls Rd as well. Jeff Single stated that someone from the Town or State used to trim back the brush along Turners Falls Rd, but that needs to be maintained in the future as part of the overall safety.

## **5. FRTA FARES WORKING GROUP UPDATE:**

Michael Perreault gave a brief update on FRTA's fares working group over the last few months. The group reviewed and documented cost estimates for fixed route fare collections. Next the group reviewed individual provider service areas for Demand Response and Access programs for ways to suggest changes to streamline both service areas and fares structures. Lastly, the group has been working on a draft survey to collect information on the existing Demand Response programs and provide feedback on potential fare and fare structure changes. Michael Perreault will present this information next week to the Advisory Board to consider as they look to amend and adopt an updated fare policy.

## **6. MASSDOT MOBILITY MANAGEMENT UPDATES:**

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

- MassDOT's latest round of Community Transit Grant Program is in the process of reviewing applications for operating and mobility management grants and plans to announce awards later this fall. Vehicle awards are currently delayed and are expected to come out later this year.
- MassDOT has a \$15 million discretionary grant for innovation, rural connectivity across RTA boundaries, and weekend/evening service. There will also be an additional \$4 million to expand the Community Transit Grant Program to include low-income riders. These grants will be under the same application.
- MassDOT is working to refresh and relaunch the RideMatch website which includes fixes to some technical glitches. The relaunch is expected to be in June 2024.
- MassDOT's consultant, AECOM, has been conducting a study on regional mobility managers. MassDOT is currently reviewing their draft report. Some of the initial findings included ensuring that funding of a program does not come at the expense of delivering transportation, ensuring that a program will last over the long term, and finding a consensus on defining "regions" throughout the state. The final report from AECOM will also identify next steps.

Rachel Fichtenbaum also announced that she will be taking some parental leave later this fall and may miss the next TAC meeting in November, but people can reach out to for information or with questions.

For more information on any of these project and programs please contact Rachel Fichtenbaum at: [Rachel.L.Fichtenbaum@dot.state.ma.us](mailto:Rachel.L.Fichtenbaum@dot.state.ma.us).

## 7. FRTA UPDATES:

Michael Perreault provided the following updates and information:

- FRTA launched its new Fixed Route scheduling and tracking software at the end of August. The intent is to beta test the software and equipment to make sure it is working properly prior to pushing it out to riders. One of the remaining technical glitches is the line of code that displays route names on the customer facing smart applications and website. The hope is to have the software fully up and running soon to be able to announce it to the public. If anyone is interested in helping to test the smartphone application during the testing phase please contact Michael Perreault at: [michael@frta.org](mailto:michael@frta.org).
- For the last several months FRTA has been working with Hilltown CDC on using its automated scheduling software in their Demand Response service area – Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen, Plainfield, and Worthington. More recently, those towns have also expressed interest in operating the Access program as well and FRTA has been in contact with individual Selectboards to discuss further.
- The Town of Middlefield has expressed interest in providing Demand Response services to its residents. FRTA has met with Town officials and the Selectboard and looks forward to continuing discussions.

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

George Touloumtzis stated that he had sent Michael Perreault an email over the summer from a Bernardston resident looking to use the Access program and asked if the Town had reached out to FRTA. Michael Perreault indicated in the email exchange that the resident should speak to the Town Administrator and/or the Selectboard about their transportation issues and suggest that they could reach out to FRTA to discuss. To date the Town has not reached out to FRTA for further discussion.

George Touloumtzis asked if wi-fi on FRTA buses has been considered recently, adding that it could be an appealing amenity for riders. Michael Perreault stated that FRTA has not considered public wi-fi access on buses recently but would look into it and report back at the next TAC meeting.

The next scheduled FRTA Advisory Board meeting is Thursday, September 21, 2023 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](mailto:michael@frta.org). Jeff Singleton requested an agenda item for an update on weekend fixed route service at the next TAC meeting.

The next Transit Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for November 9, 2023. George Touloumtzis made a **motion** to adjourn, Megan Rhodes seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:00pm.