



**Worcester Regional Transit Authority
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
February 16, 2023**

Chairperson Rosen called the meeting to order at 8:31a.m.

AB MEMBERS ATTENDANCE VIA TELECONFERENCE

Present by teleconference: Mark Binnall – Auburn, Hollie Lucht – Shrewsbury, Robert Spain- Millbury, Laura Wilson – Oxford, Heather-Lyn Haley – RCP, Douglas Belanger – Leicester, Brian Bullock - Holden, Jeffrey Bridges – Spencer, Andrew Golas – Charlton, Heather Crump – DP, Adam Menard – Auburn Alt Brian Pigeon – Worcester Alt, Gary Rosen - Worcester, Members entering meeting after call to order: Robin Grimm – Sturbridge, Michael McCall- Southbridge, Michael Ward – Clinton.
49740375

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Motion: To accept the minutes for January 19, 2023

By: Doug Belanger. 2nd: Mark Binnall.

Vote: All in Favor (11 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC – Out of Order

Chairperson Rosen introduced the following person requesting to address the board via Zoom participation. Che Anderson, Assistant Vice Chancellor for City & Community Relations at UMass Medical School. Che Anderson made an introduction and expressed support for Zero Fare. Che Anderson expressed the benefits of public transit within the context of offering opportunities with the phase; make money, spend money, get healthcare.

BUSSINESS FROM THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE - CHAIRPERSON

Chairperson Belanger gave an overview of their meeting on February 14, 2023. Chairperson Belanger commented that the administrator’s contact ending date is June 30, 2023 with an optional one-year extension to June 30, 2024. Mr. Lipka has been under numerus contracts/extensions over his time here as administrator. He is now seeking to retire. Doug Belanger stated that Mr. Lipka’s contributions have been substantial and positive for the WRTA. The committee sent out four invitations and received three replies. Two interviews occurred and one proposal by mail. The committee voted to request proposals from those interviewed. The committee discussed a “not to exceed” amount of \$20,000 dollars. As proposals had not yet been submitted the figure was based on general estimates. Gary Rosen suggested a revision to \$25,000. There was no disagreement to the proposed figure. Chairperson Belanger stated that should the board approve the request; the committee will meet to discuss and select a proposal. Chairperson Belanger assured the board members that updates will be forthcoming throughout this process.

Motion: I move that the WRTA Advisory Board votes to authorize the personnel committee to enter into agreement with the selected company and to not exceed \$25,000 dollars.

By: Doug Belanger. 2nd: Robert Spain. The WRTA Advisory Board voted to authorize the personnel committee to enter into agreement with the selected company and to not exceed \$25,000 dollars. **Vote by roll call:** (12 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

- Gary Rosen yes
- Jeff Bridges yes
- Doug Belanger yes
- Brian Bullock yes
- Mark Binnall yes
- Andrew Golas yes
- Robert Spain yes

Communities Served:

Auburn	Brimfield	Douglas	Grafton	Millbury	North	Paxton	Southbridge	Wales	West Boylston
Barre	Brookfield	Dudley	Holden	New Braintree	Brookfield	Princeton	Spencer	Warren	West
Berlin	Charlton	East	Holland	Northborough	Oakham	Rutland	Sturbridge	Webster	Brookfield
Boylston	Clinton	Brookfield	Leicester	Northbridge	Oxford	Shrewsbury	Sutton	Westborough	Worcester



Worcester Regional Transit Authority

Moving Our Region Forward

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Heather-Lyn Haley	yes
Hollie Lucht	yes
Robin Grimm	yes
Laura Wilson	yes
Heather Crump	yes

WRTA Advisory Board Appointment – Out of Order

Chairperson Rosen announced that under his authority Brian Bullock was appointed to the position of Treasurer. Brian Bullock would assume the responsibility until the end of the term- June 30, 2023. Elections for officers are held every June in accordance with the By-Laws. Chairperson Rosen also appointed Brian Bullock to the personnel committee. Brian Bullock accepted both appointments.

UPDATE ON SERVICE CHANGES DUE TO AVAILABILITY OF DRIVERS

Mr. Lipka offered a presentation showing Fixed Route Service by percentage from 2019 to 2022 for trips operated and monthly missed trips. Mr. Lipka gave a comparison of fixed route monthly missed trips from 2019-2022 that showed trending higher increases from August 2022 to December 2022. The monthly missed trips peaked at 948 during that time. Mr. Lipka stated that daily the WRTA does about 1,100 trips. While 2020-2021 showed upward trending in November and December. Mr. Lipka then gave a brief overview of the accomplishments of the recent service adjustments to address this issue. Mr. Lipka reported that the WRTA had no missed trips over the past 4 weeks. The service changes are working to keep the available driver pool covered. The WRTA and CMTM will continue to review the situation. Mr. Lipka informed the board that there has not been an overwhelming drop in present staff absences but they are working initiatives to build viable solutions. Mr. Lipka spoke briefly about the FY'23 Quarterly Ridership projections. For Fixed Route the estimates (total) for the WRTA is 3.6 million and it is very likely that the WRTA will near or hit the 4 million mark. The WRTA has exceeded their Pre COVID-ridership levels. Paratransit rides are up due to frequency of trips taken by those already in the system. The WRTA is one of the few RTA's that has managed ridership expansion and is trending upward. Gary Rosen commented that the WRTA has been free of fares for 3 of these years.

Mr. Lipka broke down a current legislative proposal that would increase the RTA's funding levels to 150 million. Mr. Lipka stated that this increase (if enacted) would be a "game changer". He spoke about the benefits to transit and the details of the proposal. Board members commented on the importance of support from the cities and towns as well as advocate groups for this proposal. Mr. Lipka stated that at this time the proposal has not been assigned a bill number. The proposal's purpose is to advance access for RTA in the area of service 7 days per week and increase night service. Expansion may also affect service in rural communities as well. This proposal appears to have wide support in the legislator. Mr. Lipka stated that the WRTA already has coverage 7 days a week/late night service but the funding would still benefit the WRTA. The WRTA is seeing increases in its weekend ridership. Mr. Lipka introduced Jamie Winters, Marketing and Communications Manager for the WRTA. Jamie Winters showcased social media and marketing materials regarding hiring. Jobs outlined were Drivers, Mechanics, and Customer Service. This new hiring initiative seeks to accommodate and sustain viable service now and in the future. Jamie Winters confirmed that both HR and marketing are working on outreach and using social media to cultivate interest and increase visibility. This effort will remain a priority and be ongoing as the Summer offers more community outreach. Gary Rosen commented on sharing information with board members and community leaders and organizations. Many board members agreed to support the current effort in hiring and funding outreach. Mark Binnall asked about testing opportunities for the website regarding access for the visually impaired. Jamie Winters commented on reviewing the request and would follow up with all parties' expressing interest.

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Mr. Lipka updated the board on the issues being addressed by the WRTA.

- Inquiries from FedEx company to review any possible service expansion options.
- The Spring roll out for the WRTA new website. Riders should have better format adaption with the new website.
- Bus Tracker continued upgrades (cost est. \$250,000) to the software
- Bus Tracker’s present reload of data is being completed
- Marketing is working on increasing social media presence.
- Completed all bus stop signage issues from the “talking transit” meeting.
- Full audit for Bus Stops is scheduled for some time in the Spring.
- Bus macaque programming was overhauled. The macaque now shows Masks Optional and Fare Free messaging only.

Introduction of SCM Elderbus Director

Jorge Morales was introduced and welcomed as the new director of SCM Elderbus. Mr. Lipka stated how the WRTA is seeking options to expand their delivery of services. Mr. Lipka informed the board that they are the largest sub-contract of the WRTA. Their service area covers some of the western portion of the WRTA area.

START OF THE FY’24 BUDGET DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Lipka commented on how the board voted to review fare policies within the budget process. Mr. Lipka stated that the Governor’s budget is due in the beginning of March. Therefore, the March meeting would focus on the FY’24 budget with discussions on fares and other items pertaining to the budget. Mr. Lipka pointed out that with ridership increases comes a higher rate of reimbursements and operating expenses. Mr. Lipka thanked his administrative and operational teams for their efforts.

BUSINESS FROM THE ADVISORY BOARD Out of Order

Robert Spain asked how the WRTA compared to other RTA’s for missed trips. Mr. Lipka stated that all RTA’s are having issues with missed trips and that the driver shortage is nationwide. Gary Rosen and others commented on the benefits of using social media to showcase the WRTA accomplishments. Doug Belanger suggested giving presentations to schools, community centers, and employment offices.

BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD CHAIRPERSON

Chairperson Rosen asked for figure on the cost of fare revenue replacement should the board vote to suspend fare for FY’24. Mr. Lipka explained that previous year’s figures were based on ridership and they are working out calculations for the March meeting. Revenue figures increases would be in or above the 4.2 million range. Chairperson Rosen reminded board members to submit the requested Summary of Conflict of Interest Law forms to Elizabeth Pokoly for the board’s records.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:56 a.m.
By: Doug Belanger, 2nd: Robert Spain
Vote: All in favor (13 in favor 0 opposed)

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next WRTA Advisory Board Meeting will be on March 16, 2023 at 8:30 a.m., via teleconference due to the Governor’s State of Emergency provisions for public meetings extended until 3.31.2023.

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth R Pokoly

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