



Worcester Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board Meeting Minutes March 16, 2023

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

AB MEMBERS ATTENDANCE VIA TELECONFERENCE

Present by teleconference: Mark Binnall – Auburn, Kevin Mizikar - Shrewsbury, Robert Spain- Millbury, Laura Wilson – Oxford, Heather-Lyn Haley – RCP, Brian Bullock - Holden, Shannon Smith – Grafton, Robin Grimm – Sturbridge, Heather Crump – DP, Adam Menard – Auburn Alt Brian Pigeon – Worcester Alt, Hollie Lucht – Shrewsbury Alt. Gary Rosen - Worcester, Members entering meeting after call to order, Jasmin Rivas - Southbridge, Michael Ward – Clinton, Sean Hendricks – Millbury, Doug Belanger – Leicester.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Motion: To accept the minutes for February 16, 2023

By: Robert Spain. 2nd: Mark Binnall.

Vote: All in Favor (10 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. Paul Matthews, Exec. Director and CEO of the Worcester Regional Research Bureau, who gave a brief overview of their agency. Paul Matthews spoke about the All Aboard: Financing a Fare-Free WRTA report and support for continued Free Fares at the WRTA. Paul Matthews spoke in favor of the financial tend from the State to better fund the RTA's. Paul Matthews offered open communication should board members have questions pertaining to the reports from WRRB. Chairperson Rosen stated that board members should feel it their duty to lobby our legislators for more funding.

BUSSINESS FROM THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE - CHAIRPERSON

Chairperson Belanger gave an overview of their meeting on March 1th and a brief review of the timeline sent to the board members. The next meeting is March 20th to discussion and direct how Community Paradigm Associates would be handing the hiring process. It was announced that the interviews of selected candidates would be in full board meetings and the initial selection of those candidates would be done by the personnel committee. Public outreach extends to a public Zoom meeting (TBA) as well as a survey posted on all WRTA media. Both are to gather public comment on priorities and experience for the administrator's position. Robert Spain informed the board members that they are welcome to send comments and attend committee meetings. Chairperson Belanger assured the board members that updates will be forthcoming throughout this process. There was no set timeline for the completion of hiring. Chairperson Belanger informed the board that Dennis Lipka is willing to stay on a month by month basis after June 30, 2023. Heather-Lyn Haley offered to inquire as to sharing a hiring tool kit being developed by the Coalition for a Healthy Greater Worcester.

FY'24 BUDGET

Dennis Lipka gave an overview of projects as they effect 2023-2024.

- New webpage
- 23 Electric buses and the possibility to meet 50% of the fleet by 2030
- Solar array project for the M & O
- VIA Service in Shrewsbury and Westboro
- Working to improve viable options for ridership in more community areas

Communities Served:

Auburn	Brimfield	Douglas	Grafton	Millbury	North Brookfield	Paxton	Southbridge	Wales	West Boylston
Barre	Brookfield	Dudley	Holden	New Braintree	Princeton	Spencer	Warren	West Brookfield	
Berlin	Charlton	East Brookfield	Holland	Northborough	Oakham	Rutland	Sturbridge	Webster	Worcester
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Dennis Lipka cautioned about the onset of the following for FY`24.

- Higher interest charges and higher fuel pricing
- New Labor Contract
- Steady increases in operational and management of WRTA systems overall

Dennis Lipka stated how it looks promising that more direction in funding for the RTA’s is the topic at the State level. The WRTA has many opportunities moving forward but also many challenges to move through and with. Dennis Lipka introduced Tom Coyne, Deputy Administrator & CEO to give the presentation. A copy of the presentation would be emailed to the board members at the close of the meeting.

Tom Coyne reviewed the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Presentation for the WRTA Advisory Board Meeting March 16, 2023. Ridership trends are now back to prior pre-pandemic levels and have increase in 2022 to 2023 topping about 3.6 million. Cost trends from 2019 – 2024 saw an increase of 36.1%. Regarding CMTM Operations: The PFMLA benefit use has led to increases in overtime expenses up \$391,000 or 20.2%, with an annual total cost reaching \$850,000 dollars a year. The WRTA put in measures by adjusting time schedules for fixed route services on Friday’s to counter absences (missed trips) however OT is still paid to cover PFMLA use. Increases in Pension up 28.7%, Medical Insurance up \$314,000 or 17.5%, Liability Insurance up 3.9% and diesel fuel continues to be monitored. Purchased Transportation – Yellow Cab is up 15% or \$99, 588 due to driver shortages on WRTA Vans. The WRTA historically offers the highest wages (excluding MBTA) and generous fringe benefits. Tom Coyne explained more of the costs and revenues.

Cost Drivers:

Administration

- Wages +\$71,291 +12.1%
- Medical Insurance +\$39,176 +54.7%
- Planning -\$42,500 -11.6%
- Shelters / Signage +24,280 +34.7%
- Debt Service - RAN Interest +\$209k +81.2%. Note: \$1.2m additional borrowing, 3.75% rate vs 2.28% last year

Revenue Sources included a placeholder amount for fare collection in the FY`24 budget. This was not an indication that fares would be automatically implemented. The WRTA budget must reflect all revenue sources and funding sources and how they are applied.

Initial Budget Assumes Resumption of Fare Collection

- Passenger Revenue +\$3.64m
- Federal Assistance -\$2.35m -18.3%

If Advisory Board votes to continue the suspension of fare collection, Federal Assistance will have a net increase of: \$1.29m 10.0%.

- State Assistance +639k +4.8%, If prior year Try Transit funding is not included, increase is actually: +1.04m +8.0%
- Local Assessments +145k +2.5%

The status of Special Funding was outlined and it was noted that the (ARPA) monies would continue to be used until 2029 to support the prior expansion of Routes 11,19,26,30 voted by the board. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

Original Apportionment \$5,992,829

Fiscal Year 2022 use \$619,440

Fiscal Year 2023 projected \$813,878

Fiscal Year 2024 budgeted \$842,359

Balance \$3,717,152

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Worcester Regional Transit Authority

Moving Our Region Forward

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Tom Coyne reviewed the Consolidated Budget for 2024. The WRTA FY`24 budget is 6.4% or about 2 million up from FY`23. This budget covers the cost of existing services and does not cover any new service or expansion. The WRTA Shelter project continues with a steady replacement of the old bubble top shelters. Eight (8) new shelters are due by the end of the summer. All new shelters will have solar lighting and an internal frame for WRTA Signage. CMTM budget increased to cover wage and fringe increases. The WRTA pays about \$26,800 dollars per employee for benefits. The present medical company split is 75% company and 25% employee. The WRTA administration has adjusted its salary to reflect a new Administrator and for an open position due to be filled. The WRTA has been decreasing the potion paid to CMRPC to fill this open position.

	FY 2024 Budget	FY2023 Budget	\$ Increase / (Decrease)	% Increase / (Decrease)
Expenses:				
Transit Services				
Fixed Route	\$ 24,603,304	\$ 23,005,283	\$ 1,598,021	6.9%
Demand Response	5,423,905	5,339,217	84,688	1.6%
Brokerage / Customer Service	1,786,859	1,694,967	91,892	5.4%
Administration	1,824,027	1,730,070	93,957	5.4%
Debt Service	467,448	258,025	209,423	81.2%
Management Fee	415,368	402,332	13,036	3.2%
Total Expenses	34,520,911	32,429,893	2,091,017	6.4%

	FY 2024 Budget	FY2023 Budget	\$ Increase / (Decrease)	% Increase / (Decrease)
Revenues:				
Passenger Revenue	3,646,253	-	3,646,253	-
MassDOT Community Transit Grants	72,000	72,000	-	0.0%
Administration Revenues	261,540	241,700	19,840	8.2%
Other - Non-Transportation	25,488	30,855	(5,367)	-17.4%
Total Revenues	4,005,281	344,555	3,660,726	1062.4%
Federal Operating Assistance:				
Operating Assistance Special Rule	6,866,689	6,125,575	741,114	12.1%
CARES Act	2,297,694	5,435,911	(3,138,217)	-57.7%
American Rescue Plan	842,359	813,873	28,486	3.5%
CMAQ - Westborough/VIA	500,705	486,198	14,507	3.0%
Project Administration	20,818	20,310	508	2.5%
Total Federal Operating Assistance	10,528,265	12,881,867	(2,353,602)	-18.3%

The CARES ACT monies is being used to off set increases in the budget as well as continued health and safety measures among other things.

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES)

Original Apportionment \$36,048,200

Fiscal Year 2020 use \$373,647

Fiscal Year 2021 use \$4,626,360

Fiscal Year 2022 use \$3,426,381

Fiscal Year 2023 projected \$5,435,911

Fiscal Year 2024 budgeted \$2,297,694

Balance \$19,888,207

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Further details would be address within the Audit and Finance committee meeting including fare revenue funding options.

Motion: I move that the WRTA Advisory Board votes to send the FY’24 budget to the Audit and Finance Committee for review and to make a recommendation to the full board.

By: Robert Spain. 2nd: Doug Belanger. The WRTA Advisory Board voted to send the FY’24 budget to the Audit and Finance Committee for review and to make a recommendation to the full board. Vote by roll call: (13 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

- Gary Rosen yes
- Doug Belanger yes
- Brian Bullock yes
- Mark Binnall yes
- Michael Ward yes
- Shannon Smith yes
- Robert Spain yes
- Heather-Lyn Haley yes
- Kevin Mizikar yes
- Robin Grimm yes
- Laura Wilson yes
- Heather Crump yes
- Jasmin Rivas yes

BUSINESS FROM THE ADVISORY BOARD Out of Order

Tom Coyne reported that the WRTA is seeing increases in applications due to the hiring campaign on Social Media. This is due to a joint effort from Jamie Winters, Marketing and Communications Manager and the CMTM management team. The exact numbers would be email to Mark Binnall regarding that inquiry.

Gary Rosen asked if the committee would be considering in their recommendation fare free. It was explained in discussion the role of the committee. The Audit and Finance Committee would include review and discussion of all funding sources, placeholder fare, and any implications. The full board in April would then vote to accept, amend or not accept their recommendation. Gary Rosen took exception to the placement of fare revenue in the FY`24 budget. Gary Rosen was concerned that it may be perceived as going back to fares by some people in the general public. Doug Belanger explained that for budgeting purposes a figure is relevant because whether fares are charged or not the money needs to be applied from some available source. The budget must be balanced and completed. Gary Rosen requested that the budget presentation be worded as “possible” fares. Comments were made as to whether this was necessary and perhaps more political then practical given the budgeting process in general.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:53 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 April 20, 2023 at 8:30 a.m., via teleconference due to the Governor’s State of Emergency provisions for public meetings.

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth R Pokoly

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