



**Worcester Regional Transit Authority
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
January 20, 2022**

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

AB MEMBERS ATTENDANCE VIA TELECONFERENCE

Present by teleconference: Kristen Las – Shrewsbury, Douglas Belanger – Leicester, Barbara Connelly – Grafton, Brian Bullock-Holden, Mark Binnall – Auburn, Jacquelyn Ryan- Southbridge Alt, James R. Nee – Charlton, James Delage, Worcester DP, Sean Hendricks – Millbury, Nancy Garr-Colzie-Worcester RCP, Adam Menard – Auburn Alt, Brian Pigeon – Worcester Alt, Gary Rosen - Worcester. The following members arrived after the meeting was called to order; Laura Wilson – Oxford, Michael Ward-Clinton.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Motion: To accept the minutes for November 18, 2021

By: Jacquelyn Ryan. 2nd: Nancy Garr-Colzie

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

Chairperson Rosen welcomed James Delage as Worcester’s Disability appointment. Chairperson Rosen acknowledged Nancy Garr-Colzie’s overall service on the advisory board. Chairperson Rosen thanked her for serving her present term as Worcester’s Ridership which ends January 2022.

Chairperson Rosen introduced Mr. Lipka for the Administrator’s report.

Mr. Lipka informed the board that the FTA Tri-Annual review was in process. Due to COVID it was delayed a year so the data collection now covers four (4) years. This collected information goes to the FTA sub-contractor who will take from 60 to 90 days to process and produce the necessary report. Mr. Lipka stated he will share the results with the board when completed.

UPDATE ON MASABI CONTRACT STATUS

Mr. Lipka announced that an agreement has been reached and a contract is being drawn up. The administration’s target date is still holding at January 1, 2023. Once the contract is signed the administration will start working on the fare policy component.

Mr. Lipka briefly highlighted what is known about the infrastructure component adopted by Congress. This money is an add-on to the original Fast Act funding received annually. The increase is for a period of time (until 2026) but no specifics have been given for allocation. Furthermore, the FTA is to determine the assessment of funding based on the federal year (October through September). When they do so an award letter will be forthcoming for the FY`23 total. Fast Act monies are split between capital and operation spending. We were awarded \$10 to \$11 million but the proposed would put it at about \$18.5 million. Mr. Lipka emphasized that the figure is subject to the appropriation of funds by the Congress. This yearly funding increase does not affect the CARES ACT or ARA monies. Preliminary talks on the fund’s usage appear to lean towards electrified service, expansion of services and providing for the underserved and the disabled. There has been no confirmation of use for fares.

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
Boylston	Clinton		Leicester	Northbridge	Oxford	Shrewsbury	Sutton	Westborough	



The WRTA is distributing its latest round of COVID supplies to the COA's. In response to Barbara Connelly's request concerning COA's financial challenges; the administration will be reimbursing loss of fares up to the budgeted amount of the contracts for FY'22. The WRTA will pay out about \$80,000 dollars total in reimbursements. Upon follow up discussion by board members. Mr. Lipka explained how each COA has an agreement amount for service and is paid out less their fare revenue (which they report) the WRTA would be basically reimbursing the lost fares up to the budgeted amount of their whole contract. The COA's will receive notification on this matter.

In service expansions. The WRTA is seeking to expand to the bio tech park at UMass Medical School and to keep their existing extended night service.

UPDATE ON SERVICES

The COVID Pandemic hit the transit agencies hard as our services are operational 17 hours a day, 5 days a week, 15 hours on Saturdays, and 14 hours on Sundays. The WRTA has strived to keep its services as consistent as possible. Mr. Lipka commented on the dedication of CMTM, PBSTM and other staff as the main factor for the steady rise in ridership (almost back to pre-COVID numbers). Mr. Lipka expressed a "hat's off" to the employees of the WRTA for their outstanding work. Chairperson Rosen acknowledged the challenges and also complimented the driver's, mechanics, operational staff as well as all WRTA employees for their commitment.

Mr. Lipka informed the board members about the lack of available bus drivers and how they have been managing within this challenge. Mr. Lipka stated "on the books" they have enough drivers however COVID related absences, vacation/sick time and usage of the FMLA have decreased the numbers. Presently, at the earlier part of the week has been backfilled using overtime. Overtime hours have a limited use of 59.9 hours and this leaves Friday's service short. On Friday's there is generally about 1,038 trips and we were missing a couple hundred trips. Mr. Lipka stated that in order to maintain the best services for the majority of riders the WRTA has temporarily adjusted scheduling for FRIDAY's only. Routes 25 and parts of 11 as well as 31 on Park Ave will not operate on Friday's. Those routes do have alternative means from other buses in the system. Mr. Lipka hopes come June they will return to normal scheduling. Again, this is due to driver shortages as to who is available on a given day. Mr. Lipka stated that missing routes is more impacting to the ridership but acknowledges that not option would be painless.

North High School students will be affected on the outbound to the Hub due to the Friday change. The bus from Hamilton Street is available for that afternoon. The WRTA is not able to expand the Hamilton bus to North High as it would affect the route's timing. Services changes/adjustments will be posted on the website and all social media. At this time there is no impact to paratransit, or Council on Aging services.

BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC - out of order

No business from the public.

BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD – out of order

James Nee commented on the choice to focus on a Friday's only vs. changes throughout the weekdays. Mr. Lipka confirmed lower numbers and least impact on Friday services, overtime considerations, ridership data on routes chosen and general staffing considerations. Mr. Lipka working with operations believes this change is the best option. Mr. Lipka took Mr. Nee's comments as a possible point under advisement. Mr. Nee asked about ridership reports by day. Chairperson Rosen stated that requests for reports can be emailed to Elizabeth Pokoly. Doug Belanger asked for an update for bathrooms at WRTA Hub lobby. The Administration is seeking this Spring for an architectural firm to review options. Mr. Lipka stated there was no viable interest in having another commercial vendor in the lobby. Leasing the space requires a vendor to pay the city taxes. Mr. Lipka commented on how multiply stall public bathrooms would eat up most of the lobby. While the single close door model is not a viable option. Mr. Lipka confirmed that COVID money cannot be used to expand the footprint of the building. Gary

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
Boylston	Clinton		Leicester	Northbridge	Oxford	Shrewsbury	Sutton	Westborough	



Rosen asked about vending machines. Mr. Lipka replied it may be an option however we would not be able to service them. Doug Belanger announced that the personnel committee would be scheduling an executive session meeting within two weeks. The purpose is to discuss the administrator's contract.

Mark Binnall asked about public notices for the ridership opening. Mr. Lipka stated that the notices have all gone out. Kristen Las asked for consideration of expanding transit in Shrewsbury due to several developments. Market Basket is projected to open this fall. Kristen Las commented on the permit process for a 250-unit senior housing to be located at South Street. Mr. Lipka stated that the administration is looking into expanding services for Route 20. Mr. Lipka commented on how VIA maybe a good short-term solution to these upcoming developments.

Chairperson Rosen requested that the administration honor Rosa Parks by leaving one front seat on each bus empty but marked with a sign picturing Rosa Parks on a bus. Suggested wording; "Reserve in honor of Rosa Parks on her birthday," In Montgomery, Alabama in 1955, by not giving up her seat when told to do so, her actions and subsequent arrest served as a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement and affirmed that everyone has the equal right to public transportation. "We honor her actions and her bravery." Board members discussed the option of keeping that seat labelled all of February to acknowledge National Black History Month. Mr. Lipka replied that operations would work on granting the request and run the campaign for the entire month of February.

I move that the WRTA Advisory Board approved the request to reserve on February 4, 2022 in honor of Rosa Parks, one front seat on each WRTA bus to be left empty, but marked with a sign picturing Rosa Parks on a bus and for that front seat and sign to be left up for the duration of the month of February to honor National Black History Month.

Motion: WRTA Advisory Board votes to approve the request to reserve on February 4, 2022 in honor of Rosa Parks one front seat on each WRTA Bus to be left empty, but marked with a sign picturing Rosa Parks on a bus and for that front seat and sign to be left up for the duration of the month of February to honor National Black History Month.

By: Jacquelyn Ryan. 2nd: Michael Ward
Vote: (13 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

The WRTA Advisory Board voted to reserve a front seat with signage honoring Rosa Parks and to leave front seat and signage up for the duration of February to honor National Black History Month.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:29 a.m.

By Jacquelyn Ryan: 2nd: Doug Belanger:

Vote: All in favor (13 in favor 0 opposed)

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting will be February 17, 2022 at 8:30 a.m., via teleconference due to the Governor's continuation of remote participation of public bodies until April 20, 2022.

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth R Pokoly

Communities Served:

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