



Worcester Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board Meeting Minutes April 21, 2022

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

AB MEMBERS ATTENDANCE VIA TELECONFERENCE

Present by teleconference: Mark Binnall – Auburn, Kristen Las – Shrewsbury, James Nee – Charlton, Douglas Belanger-Leicester, Robert Spain – Millbury, Jeffrey Bridges – Spencer, Jacquelyn Ryan – Southbridge Alt, Brian Bullock – Holden, Adam Menard – Auburn Alt Gary Rosen - Worcester.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Motion: To accept the minutes for March 24, 2022

By: Jacquelyn Ryan. 2nd: Robert Spain.

Vote: (all in favor none opposed) vote passed.

REPORT ON AND RECOMMENDTION FROM THE AUDIT & FINANCE COMMITTEE ON THE FY`23 BUDGET

Mr. Belanger stated the recommendation of the Audit and Finance Committee to have the board adopt the FY`23 Budget. (referenced for a total of \$31,276,096 per budget sheet provided to the advisory board- see attached) Mr. Belanger informed the board that the Union Contract figures were not included in the budget.

Mr. Lipka stated that the budget is at level funding and they are awaiting what the State will do. Mr. Lipka commented that Senator Chandler is working to advocate for additional funding.

The Chairperson opened the floor for questions and discussion.

Mr. Lipka responded to questions about fare revenue in the budget. Mr. Lipka stated that fare revenue has to be shown in the budget if using CARES Act monies.

The Chairperson asked for a motion for the recommendation by the Audit and Finance Committee for the FY`23 budget.

I move that the WRTA Advisory Board adopt the FY`23 budget as recommended by the Audit and Finance Committee.

On motion by Robert Spain, seconded by Mark Binnall (roll call) the Advisory Board voted to adopt the FY`23 budget as recommended by the Audit and Finance Committee. The vote was carried. (9 in favor 0 opposed)

Mark Binnall	yes
Gary Rosen	yes
Kristen Las	yes
James Nee	yes
Doug Belanger	yes
Brian Bullock	yes
Jacquelyn Ryan	yes
Robert Spain	yes
Jeffrey Bridges	yes

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	



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

Mr. Lipka announced that the WRTA has revised its mask policy to support a masks optional policy. The WRTA strives to stay in compliance with TSA, CDC, State and Federal regulations. All fixed route buses show “masks optional” but still scroll free fares as well. The WRTA will continue with the present bus cleaning schedules. The WRTA presently has a procurement out for a bus air sanitizer system. Mr. Lipka thanked Mr. Coyne, Mr. Burnham, CMTM, Elder Bus and PBSTM for their efforts during the budget process. Each of these mentioned touches the budget for its completion. Mr. Lipka spoke about the upcoming out-to-bid management contract, Security procurement as well as the labor contract. Mr. Lipka stated that the WRTA is presently under two audits. The Triannual (Federal) and a State audit looking at PBSTM. The WRTA has been sending all necessary information electronically. They are scheduled for the week of the 9th to meet both via Zoom and possibly in person. The WRTA will report to the board when completed. Nine (9) new buses are set to arrive by mid-summer which will relieve some of the older buses in the fleet. The WRTA will retain some of the older buses as surplus. The WRTA is reviewing applications for the marketing position. The WRTA is seeking to implement an electronic signage advertising project as well as increase outreach with this marketing position.

UPDATE ON ELECTRIC BUSES

Mr. Lipka stated they are looking into the use of solar (at the M&O) for possible electrical use/storage regarding charging electric buses. They are also looking into using the gas fired generator to off-set high demand charges. The WRTA is using a consultant to move forward on this project. The WRTA is seeking viable options in the newer electric buses that will meet their specific needs. They are looking at the manufacture Gillig from which they presently purchase non-all electric buses. One advantage is the easy cross over on other parts. The present electric buses are now outdated and there are numerous issues pertaining to the charges as well as their continued performance. Mr. Lipka stated how the WRTA is in a unique position with 10 years of experience. The WRTA also can use National Grid as a sole or back up supplier. Mr. Lipka confirmed their intention to move forward with a sustainable plan for electrification.

UPDATE ON NEW FARE COLLECTION SYSTEM

There will be a kick off meeting sometime at the end of April. Card readers have been ordered and should be ready for testing on the buses in October. The administration is working on a recommendation for a new fare policy. When presented to the board (this summer) they will ask the board to go to public hearings. Gary Rosen asked if the public would just be responding to administration’s policy recommendations. Mr. Lipka acknowledged that public input is welcome. The administration is looking at many prior and present fare practices used by other RTA’s as well as other considerations.

NEW WEB PAGE

The WRTA is looking into working with Trillium (a MassDOT contractor) to enhance the web page. The board will be informed throughout the process.

BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD

Gary Rosen mentioned outside concerns about showing revenue in the budget. Gary Rosen stated that suspension of fares remains and how there is a long decision process in creating a new fare policy. James Nee inquired about the timeline for full electrification of the WRTA fleet. Mr. Lipka replied purchases would need to be based on a viable procurement schedule. Electric buses costs twice as much as diesel buses. There would be considerations regarding necessary components as well as bus production schedules. As he sees it, the high-performance batteries and technology remain tentative but they are viable. Mr. Lipka stated that should the WRTA choose to electrify its fleet it would be closer to 10 to 15 years. This timeframe is largely due to demand set by the increase in government funding. Companies/suppliers would need time to adjust to the demand and to ramp up production.

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Worcester Regional Transit Authority

Moving Our Region Forward

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Gary Rosen mentioned the City of Worcester 300th Anniversary celebration. He asked for signage on the bus marquee and about coordination for street closings. Mr. Lipka responded that operations is working with the city planners of this event. Mark Binnall asked if the new website would be accessible for the visual impaired. Mr. Lipka said they would look into these aspects. James Nee asked about the progress of the triennial review. Mr. Lipka stated how they have documented reasons for all the things done. We will review with the board the FTA evaluations and our procedure changes, if any. Some examples of topics are; Cost of pandemic, use of electric buses, procurements with minority contractors and others. Gary Rosen asked if the FTA has an interest in the suspension of fare policy and if they will likely comment on that use of CARES Act funds. Mr. Lipka stated that payment for the suspension uses federal money. Any recommendations by the FTA will be discussed with the board. Gary Rosen inquired about the bathrooms at the hub. Mr. Lipka replied that the bathrooms cost \$25,000.00 a year to keep operational. These private one-use bathrooms are closed due to COVID. It was mentioned that there are facilities at Union Station. Mr. Lipka restated that it will likely be a choice between public bathrooms or lobby seating.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:14 a.m.

By: Mark Binnall, 2nd: Brian Bullock

Vote: All in favor (9 in favor 0 opposed)

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next WRTA Advisory Board Meeting will be on May 19, 2022 at 8:30 a.m., via teleconference due to the Governor’s State of Emergency provisions for public meetings extended until 7.15.2022.

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth R Pokoly

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