



Worcester Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board Meeting Minutes December 15, 2022

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, Laura Wilson – Oxford, Robert Spain – Millbury, Douglas Belanger – Leicester, Robin Grimm – Sturbridge, Michael Ward – Clinton., Adam Menard – Auburn Alt Brian Pigeon – Worcester Alt, Gary Rosen - Worcester, Members entering meeting after call to order: Heather-Lyn Haley- RCP.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Motion: To accept the minutes for November 17, 2022

By: Doug Belanger. 2nd: Robert Spain.

Vote: All in Favor (8 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. Senator Moore thanked the board for being able to speak to them about his support for free fares beyond the present 2023 date. Senator Moore listed state legislators, businesses and the Worcester Chamber of Commerce as supporting free fares. Senator Moore credited the increase in ridership to free fares as well as the use of CARES ACT money for further funding. Senator Moore spoke about seeking additional funding and measuring up existing pilot programs for their funding resources. There were no specifics mentioned on additional funding streams or specific funding ideas for the next budget cycle. Dennis Lipka informed Senator Moore that the WRTA was under a suspension of the fare policy and not in a fare free pilot program. Chairperson Rosen thanked the speaker.

Dennis Lipka spoke about the current and longstanding trend to level fund the RTA’s budget. The WRTA uses the CARES Act money to assist with the ongoing increased expenses and to keep with compliances for health and safety, due to this factor.

PRESENTATION OVERVIEW BUDGET PROCESS FOR FY’24

Mr. Lipka introduced Tom Coyne who gave a brief overview of the budget timeline requested by the board. February’s board meeting would review the options suggested for the fare policy with budget figures for each. A vote would be taken to approve going out to public hearings. Tom Coyne stated there would likely be 3 to 4 options. February 20 thru March 10th public meetings to be held both in person and remote. At the March board meeting the administration would present a draft summary budget. The board would likely recommend it to the Audit and Finance Committee. The April 20, 2023 board meeting would review any recommendation from the Audit and Finance Committee and vote on the budget, if in agreement. The budget needs to be voted on in April due to the application deadline for RAN monies.

Dennis Lipka informed the board members that detailed public hearing information would be timely and posted at therta.com and WRTA’s social media platforms. CMRPC will run the public meetings and WRTA staff will attend.

Chairperson Rosen introduced Dennis Lipka for his overview of the Electrification of Buses.

OVERVIEW OF ELECTRIFICATION OF BUSES

Dennis Lipka gave a recap of the prior electric buses (6) by Proterra. These early production models and their charging systems are now outdated and problematic to the point of being taken out of service. The buses are not road worthy and given the technology changes are not sustainable. The WRTA did not get the life span to use they

Communities Served:

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|----------|------------|-----------------|-----------|---------------|------------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 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 | Rutland | Sturbridge | Webster | Worcester | |
| Boylston | Clinton | | Leicester | Northbridge | Oxford | Shrewsbury | Sutton | Westborough | |



were hoping for from these buses. Going forward with electrification would require the following: Better vendor support, better swapping of parts within the fleet for maintenance, solar panels to help offset electrical costs (at the M&O) and the ability to negotiate purchase of off-peak electricity. Due to the prior buses the WRTA has the ability for charging but is proceeding with due diligence. Fuel whether in the form of diesel or electric is a large budget item. The WRTA is seeking to purchase from Gillig which is the same company used for our existing buses. The WRTA has reviewed Gillig electric buses in action at GATRA. Their buses are averaging about 180 to 200 miles a day on one charge. The WRTA is more optimistic with the updated technology on the newer buses. The WRTA would also pay for the lifetime warranty on the batteries. Federal money would be used to purchase the buses at a cost estimated at about \$1.2 million per bus with a 20-month lead time. Solar panels and the microgrid would also be covered by a grant. Dennis Lipka thank Senator Chandler for her support in funding. The WRTA is expected to order 7 electrical buses in the last quarter (March 31, 2023) for delivery in FY'25. The wait is the standard manufacturing lead time. The WRTA has 56 buses in total and would like to continue to purchase more electric buses. Dennis Lipka commented that there is no electric option for their van fleet at this time. The electric buses would have sounds for the convenience of the ridership.

Board members discussed the importance of maintaining a balanced fleet given their prior experience with Proterra. Board member discussed the raising cost of both diesel and electrical costs.

Doug Belanger requested that a personal committee meeting be schedule in January 2023 to go over the Administrator’s contract and to look into a consultant for hiring an administrator. Doug Belanger commented that an audit and finance committee meeting would also be forthcoming. Doug Belanger asked that Elizabeth Pokoly please email members for the purpose of scheduling meetings.

BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD

Heather-Lyn Haley commented on the need for hybrid board meetings and asked for the request to be a motion. Chairperson Rosen stated that hybrid meetings have been discussed and her comments will be taken under advisement. Chairperson Rosen stated that there would be no motion in this regard. Brian Pigeon commented on the need to promote the WRTA’s electrification of its buses.

Chairperson Rosen gave an overview of the “Talking Transit” meeting held on December 12, 2022 via Zoom Webinar. This meeting was specifically for public comment pertaining to the services provided by the WRTA. The minutes from that meeting were emailed to the board prior to the meeting. Chairperson Rosen, WRTA Administrator and WRTA staff were fielding questions from the public. Majority of comments/questions were about bus stop signage, bus stop redesign, bus tracker issues and alerts. Questions on the new card readers and their use. Chairperson Rosen stated that the card readers would not be operational due to the fare suspension. About 46 attendees participated in this first-time meeting. Gary Rosen asked Dennis Lipka about the status of the flags at the M&O. Elizabeth Pokoly confirmed that a new flag was on order. Mr. Lipka acknowledged that complains and comments from the meeting were being addressed by the administration.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:34 a.m.
By: Doug Belanger, 2nd: Robert Spain
Vote: All in favor (9 in favor 0 opposed)

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next WRTA Advisory Board Meeting will be on January 19, 2022 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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