



**Worcester Regional Transit Authority
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
August 19, 2021**

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

AB MEMBERS ATTENDANCE VIA TELECONFERENCE

Present by teleconference: Laura Wilson – Oxford, Mark Binnall – Auburn, Kristen Las – Shrewsbury, Barbara Connelly – Grafton, Michael Kennedy - Millbury DP, Robert Spain – Millbury, Brian Bullock – Holden, Nancy Garr-Colzie-Worcester RCP, Adam Menard – Auburn Alt, Brian Pigeon – Worcester Alt, Gary Rosen - Worcester. Michael McCall – Southbridge entered 9:12 a.m.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Motion: To accept the minutes for June 24, 2021

By: Robert Spain. 2nd: Barbara Connelly.

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

BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no public requests.

BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD

Chairperson Rosen introduced and welcomed Laura Wilson the new representative for the Town of Oxford. Chairperson Rosen spoke briefly about his quarterly newsletter and welcomed contributions from other board members. Requesting that they send items to Elizabeth Pokoly. Chairperson Rosen discussed his goals to increase board participation. Suggested were emails reminders to board members. Chairperson Rosen inquired as to public attendance with the onset of virtual meetings. Mr. Lipka stated that attendance virtual or otherwise is generally determined by specific topics of interest. The continuing COVID considerations also contribute to general participation by the public.

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

UPDATE ON SERVICE CHANGES FOR AUGUST 28th 2021

Mr. Lipka recalled the 4 routes (11,19,26,30) slated for increased frequency of service (during peak hours) and extended operation hours to midnight. The WRTA has seen a slight increase in ridership in these already busy routes. The cost per year is about \$800,000 and we have allocated about \$5.8 million over 6 to 7 years. The routes were approved by the board and the money comes from the American Recovery Act funding. Budgeting for this duration allows for job security and more access for our ridership on those routes. New schedules will be out five days before the change date. The WRTA posts notices on the buses and at customer service as well as the website. The WRTA will monitor all costs associated with this expansion and report back to the board by the end of the year. The WRTA is presently paying overtime due to a driver shortage. This shortage is generally stemming from issues surrounding the COVID pandemic as well as Family Medical Leave Act participation.

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 asked for an update on the budget and funding figures for federal and state monies. Brian Bullock asked for a specific breakdown of money awarded, spend or budgeted. Chairperson Rosen asked that it be an agenda item for September’s meeting. Chairperson Rosen discussed the need to start a conversation about the fare policy and the importance of reviewing all financial information. Mr. Lipka reviewed with the board how the WRTA received \$38 million in CARES ACT money. Mr. Lipka announced that over \$5 million has been spend in replacing lost fare revenue covering up until December 31, 2021. In the second round of funding the WRTA did not qualify for funds while in the third round the American Recovery Act gave \$6 million to the WRTA. The Administration has budgeted the American Recovery Act monies for the upcoming 4 route expansion of service. The WRTA Budget for FY2022 is funded at \$90.5 million however the funding level is now at \$87 million. The RTA’s are awaiting the next round of votes from the Senate and Governor on an additional \$7 million which will meet our budgeted number. If not met the WRTA will need to make up the difference.

UPDATE ON FARE COLLECTION SYSTEM

Mr. Lipka stated that they were working with the selected vendor on the details and this will continue into September. The WRTA received a grant of \$726,000 from the FTA (capital money) towards the cost of purchasing a fare collection system. The installation of the system is pretty much self-contained and can be done in a timely manner. The system will not be linked to any other RTA and/or the MBTA at this time. The WRTA would be the first to have this new system. All existing passes would need to be changed and any adjustments to the fare policy will require working with the vendor. Fare payments will be done by a variety of electronic media. This new system will allow for more fare pricing options. The process pertaining to any fare policy change will involve the board and a public hearing schedule.

UPDATE ON WEBSITE

The RFP is being developed to go out for bid. Mr. Lipka informed the board how they are seeking to roll out the website updates with the new fare collection system. Mr. Lipka announced the marketing person has moved on to other opportunities. They are in the process of hiring for that position.

SHELTER IMPROVEMENTS AND SHELTER SIGNS

Mr. Lipka reviewed with the board members the new holiday signage and ongoing COVID cleaning. A brief presentation was given showing the improvements and cost. Mr. Lipka confirmed that the buses remain under the same cleaning protocol started with COVID. Mr. Lipka assured the board that the health and safety of the ridership is a priority. Brian Pigeon requested a list of shelters which would indicate WRTA owned from privately owned bus shelters. Mr. Lipka stated he would have one sent to him.

Chairperson Rosen asked about changes and updates under consideration regarding bus stop signage. Chairperson Rosen has researched other signage formats and emphasized the need for better signage. Robert Spain commented on how the bus stop signs are the “face” of the WRTA. Mr. Lipka informed the board that the WRTA has about 1,200 bus stop signs. Improvements or changes for bus stop signage would be paid for by capital funds. Mr. Lipka stated that costs will depend upon the type of signage and installation. The range is likely to start at one quarter of a million dollars. Mr. Lipka is looking to have the new marketing person work on this project and will keep the board informed. Presently, the WRTA is having the existing signage reviewed and old signs replaced. The WRTA is working with Polar Park on some unique signage in their area. As the Polar Park season is ending the project is slated for next season. Nancy Garr-Colzie asked if the signage would have contrasting colors. Mr. Lipka explained that the RFP would be written to include compliance with ADA and include contrasting colors. Chairperson Rosen asked who makes the decisions on bus stops. Mr. Lipka stated that the WRTA decides and petitions the City for approval. The towns use a flag stop so no bus stop signage is available – generally.

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Union Station Hub 60 Foster Street Worcester, MA 01608

508.453.3403 Fax: 508.752.1676 therta.com

Mr. Lipka closed by stating that 6 new buses (capital money) have been delivered and will be used for the expansion of service on those 4 routes. These are diesel buses and are now being fitted for service at the M&O. Next year another 8 are due. The WRTA needs replacements due to the age and use of the bus inventory. Van purchases follow their own protocol and the administration remains on schedule. The WRTA worked successfully with Polar Park on school activities/events in both July and August. Mr. Lipka thanked Dave Trabucco and his team for their great organizational efforts. Mr. Lipka mentioned the Senior Baseball program was also a success. The WRTA will continue to work with Polar Park on an advertising plan going into next season. Chairperson Rosen asked about COVID increases and how it may affect transit. Mr. Lipka stated that all cleaning protocols will continue and mask mandates were extended (TSA) until January 2022.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:22 a.m.

By Robert Spain: 2nd; Mark Binnall

Vote: All in favor (12 in favor 0 opposed)

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting will be September 23, 2021 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

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