



**Worcester Regional Transit Authority
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
October 21, 2021**

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

AB MEMBERS ATTENDANCE VIA TELECONFERENCE

Present by teleconference: Mark Binnall – Auburn, Kristen Las – Shrewsbury, Douglas Belanger – Leicester, Barbara Connelly – Grafton, Ron San Angelo – Rutland, Jacquelyn Ryan- Southbridge Alt, Michael Kennedy - Millbury DP, Laura Wilson – Oxford, Nancy Garr-Colzie-Worcester RCP, Adam Menard – Auburn Alt, Brian Pigeon – Worcester Alt, Gary Rosen - Worcester. Brian Bullock-Holden 8:38a.m. Sean Hendricks – Millbury, Michael Ward - Clinton 8:48 a.m. Doug Belanger left 9:30 a.m.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Motion: To accept the minutes for September 23, 2021

By: Doug Belanger. 2nd: Mark Binnall.

Vote: (10 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC

There was no business from the public.

Chairperson Rosen introduced Committee Chairperson Doug Belanger from the Personnel Committee for an update.

Doug Belanger stated that Mr. Lipka was interested in a one to two-year contract. Doug Belanger gave a brief overview of the committee’s recommendation to move forward with negotiating a contract for Mr. Lipka. The committee recommends a one plus one year “new” contract. Personnel committee members: Gary Rosen, Douglas Belanger, Kristen Las, Robert Spain, Mark Binnall, Adam Menard. Gary Rosen called for any discussion by the committee members and then the board. Gary Rosen commented on looking forward to the negotiations.

I move that the WRTA Advisory Board authorize its Personnel Committee to enter into negotiations with the WRTA Administrator, Dennis Lipka, for the purpose of amending, extending, or creating an employment contract for up to two years beyond his current agreement.

Motion: WRTA Advisory Board votes to authorize its Personnel Committee to enter into negotiations with the WRTA Administrator, Dennis Lipka, for the purpose of amending, extending, or creating an employment contract for up to two years beyond his current agreement.

By: Doug Belanger. 2nd: Kristen Las.

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

The WRTA Advisory Board voted to authorize its Personnel Committee to enter into negotiations with the WRTA Administrator, Dennis Lipka, for the purpose of amending, extending, or creating an employment contract for up to two years beyond his current agreement.

Communities Served:

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



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

Mr. Lipka informed the board members that the Auditor’s report was emailed to them. Mr. Lipka reported there were no finding on the Auditor’s report. The report contains two charts which include the municipal contributions requested in September’s meeting. Gary Rosen highlighted Worcester’s contribution as increasing by \$400,000. Mr. Lipka explained that contributions are based on specific formulas and by the amount of service provided. Worcester receives the bulk of the fixed route service (75%). Mr. Lipka is proposing to mail out letters of contribution to member communities to help promote better communication and awareness. The fare system company has extended their deadline. Hopefully, the administration will have a recommendation on this for November’s board meeting. Mr. Lipka informed the board members of his initiative for an analysis of ridership trends during the pandemic. This report would include not only our own numbers but outline comparisons with the other RTA’s in Massachusetts. Mr. Lipka stated that the report will be used by administration to assist with recommendations to the advisory board. CMRPC issued the analysis as an independence body of work and it is being presented to the board. A copy of the report and presentation will be emailed to the board members after the meeting.

CMRPC PRESENTATION

Mr. Lipka introduced Mr. Narron from CMRPC. Mr. Narron stated how CMRPC did their analysis over the summer. Looking at pre-pandemic ridership averages and comparing them to pandemic ridership averages from July 2018 through June 2021. Outreach came from public comment from transit-related meetings; comment from MassDOT and FTA; discussions with WRTA Administration and Operations; interviews with other RTA; analysis of available reports and related information on Fare Free. Mr. Narron gave the power point presentation entitled Future of Fares at the WRTA. This analysis will be used by the Administration to make their recommendation to the board pertaining to Fare collections going forward. Mr. Narron explained that the report is a quantitative data analysis of WRTA ridership over time (July 2018-June 2021) with some comparisons to other MA regional transit agencies.

The report specifically addresses; a qualitative assessment of pros and cons of free fare, a technical assessment of mobile fare payment systems and an income-based fare policy. Pros of fare free were listed as: equitable for all, transit in line with other public services which are free at access point, faster, more reliable boarding process, smaller-than-expected fiscal losses due to costs associated with fare collection, remaining fiscal losses can be made up with state and federal funding, if current bills like SB4278 are passed to provide for this. Cons: perceived negative effects on onboard safety and rider/driver experience, fiscal losses can be significant, including increased service delivery costs, not easy to make up fiscal losses with currently-available additional state/federal funding, fiscal losses can mean reduction in service which winds up hurting everyone, can cause “death spiral” permanently crippling agency’s operability.

The Consideration of Fare Options & Impacts chart outlined the Net impact of Fare box, Fare Free and Mobile Fare Payment System. Listed under neutral, negative or positive by a tally of plus and minuses in each category. Fare box (pre-pandemic) showed a total of neutral with issues regarding social impact, ridership impact and on time performance. Fare Free (now) showed more negative tallies due to reporting impact for funding, expansion and enhancements, financial impact and perceived impact onboard safety. Mobile Fare Payment System tallied positive with a negative in on time performance. A mobile system would allow for data collection and can accommodate fare flexibility which addresses social impact. Mr. Narron stated going forward they will be conducting a ridership survey and possible focus groups. The report was done with neutrality and the floor was opened for questions.

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Board member Jacquelyn Ryan asked about any other form of data collection. Jacquelyn Ryan commented on the negative reported on fare free due to data collection. Mr. Narron stated that there are two systems presently in use at the WRTA to collect data. The fare collection system and the APC which is at the bus door. APC is not tied to the fare collection system and has problems, is less detailed and is often wrong. It was discussed that the WRTA uses the fare box numbers for the necessary comparison to align the APC figures.

Gary Rosen questioned the reports statement that state and federal money is not covering fare free. Mr. Narron replied the report takes into consideration that the present granted monies were of a one-time nature. At this point, there is no sustainable funding for Fare Free however present grants have been offsetting suspension of fares. Mr. Lipka stated how the WRTA received more money then the other RTA's and the suspension of fares was due to the pandemic measures. Any changes to the fare policy need to go out for public hearings and voted on by the board. Technically, suspension of the fare was an exceptional call by the Administrator.

Mr. Lipka stated that the report's purpose is to assist the administration in making their recommendation to the board on the boarder aspects of a fare collection system which would include fare free. Mark Binnall asked if the paratransit numbers were included in the report. Barbara Connelly asked for those numbers to be added. Mr. Lipka responded that a separate document would be issued with the requested information and sent to the board. Mike Kennedy offered a motion to have a fare free announcement on the bus marquee. There was no second. Gary Rosen acknowledged this as a prior request to administration and stated he would continue to work with the administration.

BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD- out of order

Gary Rosen asked about services to Polar Park. Mr. Lipka stated that mid-night service started late August which was at the end of their season. The fixed route buses have not seen much increase to the area. The WRTA has some signage ideas for the Spring of 2022. Gary Rosen commented on the Worcester's upcoming school bus system. Mr. Lipka informed the board members that by charter the WRTA can't provide school bus transportation. The WRTA runs fixed route services to both the middle and high schools.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:34 a.m.

By Jacquelyn Ryan: 2nd: Mark Binnall:

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

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting will be November 18, 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 (as heard)

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