



Worcester Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board Meeting Minutes November 18, 2021

Chairperson Gary Rosen called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m.

AB MEMBERS ATTENDANCE VIA TELECONFERENCE

Present by teleconference:., Kristen Las – Shrewsbury, Douglas Belanger – Leicester, Barbara Connelly – Grafton, Brian Bullock-Holden, Robert Spain – Millbury, Jacquelyn Ryan- Southbridge Alt, James R. Nee – Charlton, Michael Kennedy - Millbury DP, Laura Wilson – Oxford, Michael McCall – Southbridge, Nancy Garr-Colzie- Worcester RCP, Adam Menard – Auburn Alt, Brian Pigeon – Worcester Alt, Gary Rosen - Worcester. Michael Lapinski – Warren, 8:50am., Mark Binnall – Auburn, 9:01am, Sean Hendricks – Millbury, 9:03am,

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES Out of Order

Motion: To accept the minutes for October 21, 2021

By: Doug Belanger. 2nd: Jacquelyn Ryan.

Vote: (12 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

Chairperson Rosen announced a change in the order to accommodate the six speakers and allow for discussion based on the Administration’s recommendations. Chairperson Rosen thanked the board members for their participation. Chairperson Rosen welcomed Charlton’s new board member James Nee. Chairperson Rosen acknowledged the public’s participation specifically regarding Fare Free. Chairperson Rosen commented on receiving about 50 correspondences pertaining to fare free.

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

Mr. Lipka highlighted the WRTA’s present funding sources as Federal Transit Administration (FTA), State Contract Assistance, Local Aid from Cities and Towns and Fare Revenue. Fare Revenue has not been collected during the suspension period but has been offset by the CARES ACT. Mr. Lipka briefly explained the funding resources and their specific considerations for applying and usage as well as an overview of the prior and present trends in government funding. Mr. Lipka outlined how local aid is 2.5% and basically fixed and calculated on service & population. Operational costs are moving towards 4% so budgeting and funding needs to meet this demand. This would leave FTA and State Contract Assistance as the major revenue sources. Mr. Lipka noted that money received during the pandemic is one-time money. Mr. Lipka commented that without permanent funding to continue to capture loss of income the WRTA will have sustainability issues. There is also funding and budgeting implications for Council on Aging and Paratransit Services which will need further examination. Mr. Lipka stated the importance of moving from the suspension of fares to the creation of a new fare policy. Mr. Lipka explained why keeping options open was so important and that going back to the old fare box system was not a viable option

Mr. Lipka stated that the administration is recommending the following items for consideration of a vote. These items if approved will allow the WRTA to enhance data collection, create a new fare policy and allow for time to implement and align budgets, as necessary.

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	



Mr. Lipka gave a listing of the proposed recommendations of consideration for a board vote. They are listed as follows:

1. WRTA Advisory Board votes to create a new fare Policy for January 2022 and start the public hearing process for adoption of the new fare policy.
2. WRTA Advisory Board votes to move to a new mobile fare payment system using the FTA grant to purchase this system, and that this system will be available by January 1, 2023.
3. WRTA Advisory Board votes to extend the administrative suspension of fare collection for one year starting on January 1, 2022 and ending on December 31, 2022.

BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC – out of order

Speakers: Tim Murray, CEO of the Chamber of Commerce, State Representative David LeBoeuf, Garren Kalter, Michael C. Baker, Zero Fare Kristiana Lachiusa, Director of Transit + Outreach, Livable Streets Alliance, Paul Matthews, Executive Director and CEO, Worcester Regional Research Bureau

Tim Murray spoke in favor of the administration’s recommendations and on the benefits of free fares for the businesses and communities of the region. David LeBoeuf, supported free fares and spoke about a bill he co-signed in support of these efforts. Garren Kalter, Kristiana Lachiusa and Paul Matthews spoke in favor of the free fares and its continuation as both a local issue and beyond. Written Comments from Paul Matthews were distributed to the board members via email the morning of the meeting.

BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD -out of order

Some board members discussed a range of topics regarding replacement funding sources in acknowledgment of the one-time FTA funding. One suggestion was to look at a surcharge on parking which would go to the WRTA while others spoke for a need for clarification of the identified resources. All members who spoke were in support of the items presented by the administration. There were comments about the need for further budgeting inquires for council on aging and paratransit funding. Board officers, Robert Spain, Doug Belanger and Kristen Las spoke in support of the items and the need for having long term sustainable funding resources. Kristen Las and Barbara Connelly both pointed out how towns also face service funding issues with the implementation of fare free.

James Nee commented on the costs of paratransit services which was noted as 5% of the riders at 20% of the cost. He spoke of a need for policy changes at the state and federal levels for these services to be sustainable within a fare free policy. Mr. Lipka responded that paratransit is costlier as well as COVID measures that will remain post pandemic for all services. Mr. Lipka explained why keeping options open allows for better planning with these unknowns. In response to a new fare policy, it was recommended that a committee be formed to research funding options. There was no further discussion. There was a brief discussion about the purpose and value of data collection. Chairperson Rosen suggested stating “data collection” after new and before mobile fare payment system. After comments and further discussion, the three items were put to a motion (as read and presented by the Chairperson). The items were proposed and stated to be collectively voted.

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I move that the WRTA Advisory Board approved all three recommendations collectively: as read by the Chairperson.

Motion: WRTA Advisory Board votes to approve all three motions collectively; as read and presented by the Chairperson:

WRTA Advisory Board votes to create a new fare Policy for January 2022 and start the public hearing process for adoption of the new fare policy.

WRTA Advisory Board votes to move to a new data collection mobile fare payment system using the FTA grant to purchase this system, and that this system will be available by January 1, 2023.

WRTA Advisory Board votes to extend the administrative suspension of fare collection for one year starting on January 1, 2022 and ending on December 31, 2022.

By: Doug Belanger. 2nd: Robert Spain.

Vote: (13 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

- Gary Rosen yes
- Doug Belanger yes
- Brian Bullock yes
- Mark Binnall yes
- James Nee yes
- Barbara Connelly yes
- Robert Spain yes
- Kristen Las yes
- Laura Wilson yes
- Jacquelyn Ryan yes
- Nancy Garr-Colzie yes
- Mike Kennedy yes
- Michael Lapinski yes

The WRTA Advisory Board voted to approve all three recommendations collectively.

BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD- out of order

There was no new business at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:48 a.m.

By Doug Belanger: 2nd: Robert Spain:

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

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting will be December 16, 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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