



Worcester Regional Transit Authority

Moving Our Region Forward

Union Station Hub 60 Foster Street Worcester, MA 01608

508.453.3403 Fax: 508.752.1676 therta.com

**Worcester Regional Transit Authority
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
March 21, 2024**

Chairperson Belanger called the meeting to order at 8:02 a.m.

AB MEMBERS ATTENDANCE VIA TELECONFERENCE

Present by Zoom webinar: Stephen Rolle – Worcester, Brian Pigeon – Worcester Alt, Mark Binnall – Auburn, Robert Spain – Millbury, Robert Blair – Berlin, Douglas Belanger – Leicester, Heather-Lyn Haley – Leicester Alt, Michael Ward – Clinton, John Jovan – Southbridge, Jasmin Rivas – Southbridge Alt, Heather Monroe – Paxton, Hollie Lucht - Shrewsbury Alt, Brian Bullock – Holden, Austin Cyganiewicz-Rutland, Marcelino Guerra - Southbridge, (DP). Members entering after call to order: Winifred Octave – Worcester (RCP), Shannon Smith – Grafton, Adam Menard – Auburn Alt, Kendra Faldetta- Northborough.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Motion: To accept the minutes for February 15, 2024

By: Robert Blair. 2nd: Mark Binnall. Vote: All in Favor (12 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Chairperson introduced Senator Kennedy. Senator Kennedy spoke about the need to build partnerships with all stake holders. Senator Kennedy spoke about the Fare Share Amendment and continuing efforts. Senator Kennedy commented on the importance of accessibility and support for free fare. Senator Kennedy thanked Josh Rickman for his leadership and his participation in the “White Cane” experience. The Chairperson introduced Josh Boucher from the Worcester Regional Research Bureau. Josh Boucher gave an overview of the numerous reports published by the bureau and how they can benefit the advisory board members. Josh Boucher stated how other RTA’s are seeing measured success with fare free pilots. Chairperson introduced Andy Saltzberg from the Zero Fare WRTA Coalition. The presentation used data from “the MassINC Polling Group”. It was noted that 50% of the polling was not in Worcester. From the presentation 54% supported zero fare transit, over two-thirds supported using revenue from a new surtax on income over \$1 million, 45% said they would change riding habits if fares returned. The presentation broke down the top bus destinations by purpose. The main three were listed as health care, shopping/errands and work. Andy Saltzberg summarized the importance of the WRTA remaining Fare Free.

FY`25 ADMINISTRATOR’S GOALS

Josh Rickman gave a summary of his goals for FY`25

Capital – Re-design of Central Hub lobby with constructability in or before FY`26

Customer Experience- create and propose recommendations from customer satisfaction survey

Operations – proposed fixed route service change concept to enhance reliability

Technology/Procurement – successful procurement and award of ITS contract

Vision – develop a five-year strategic plan for WRTA

Josh Rickman stated a fresh look is needed for the existing lobby space. The WRTA is working with STV on design concepts.

Customer survey done with MassDOT funding will be used to assist with improvements in Customer Service. The recent change in employee status will assist with a plan to enhance reliability for services. In FY`25 procurement and implementation of new technology for services will be the directive.

Motion: The WRTA Advisory Board votes to approve the goals as presented by Joshua Rickman, WRTA Administrator for FY`25. By: Brian Bullock. 2nd: Mark Binnall. Roll Call Vote:

Steve Rolle	yes
Doug Belanger	yes
Robert Spain	yes
Brain Bullock	yes
Hollie Lucht	yes
Mark Binnall	yes
Robert Blair	yes
Michael Ward	yes
Austin Cyganiewicz	yes
Heather Monroe	yes

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	



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Jasmin Rivas	yes
Winifred Octave	yes
Marcelino Guerra	yes

All in Favor (13 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

Josh Rickman gave a WRTA Board Member Introduction. The presentation included an overview of the organizational structure, all services provided and ridership numbers from FY'19 to FY'23. The presentation also explained the role of the Advisory Board members and general procedures. Chairperson Belanger spoke about the sensitive nature of meetings held in executive session and the need for compliance to confidentially.

Chairperson Belanger commented to the members that the WRTA staff consisted of only 4 persons. The management company handles the operations side of the business. Josh Rickman state that the WRTA would be seeking to hire a Senior Accountant.

FY'25 BUDGET PRESENTATION

Thomas Coyne gave an overview of the FY'25 budget. Thomas Coyne highlighted the percentage increases for wages, pensions, insurances, worker's comp and professional services. The largest being increases in medical, liability, workers' comp and a planning cost. Passenger revenue is estimated at \$4,533,426 for FY'25. Should the board choose to extend then CARES ACT monies would be used to offset that revenue item. The WRTA is actively pursuing the US EPA and MassDOT grants to cover Fare Free. The FY'25 consolidated budget figures are as follows: Total Expenses FY'25 are \$37,250,134 up 8.2% from FY'24 at \$34,435,512. Net Cost of Service: FY'25 is \$26,068,314 up 0.6% from FY'24 at \$25,918,635. State Contract Assistant is holding the same as FY'24 at \$19,931,480 and local assessments increase by 2.5% as indicated by law. Revenues for FY'25 are \$4,865,654 which is an increase of 100.5% from FY'24 at \$2,427,300. Administration Revenues were down 38.9% and the WRTA will likely not be selling any surplus vehicles in FY'25. Total Federal Operating Assistance for FY'25 is \$6,316,166 up 3.7% from FY'24 at \$6,089,577. CARES ACT Balance (not including use in FY'25) is at \$20,550,484 while American Rescue Plan Act for FY'25 budgeting stands at \$2,812,085. Tom Coyne stated the American Rescue Plan Act purpose is to cover the expanded services. These grant monies must be spent down by September of 2029.

Motion: The WRTA Advisory Board moves to direct the Administration to supplement the line item funding the budget from collected fares to available funds in order to continue Fare Free through FY 25. Further move to send the proposed amended budget to the Audit and Finance Committee for their review and recommendation to the full Advisory Board. By: Robert Spain, 2nd: Marcelino Guerra. Roll Call Vote:

Steve Rolle	yes
Doug Belanger	yes
Robert Spain	yes
Brain Bullock	yes
Hollie Lucht	yes
Mark Binnall	yes
Robert Blair	yes
Michael Ward	yes
Austin Cyganiewicz	yes
Heather Monroe	yes
Jasmin Rivas	yes
Shannon Smith	yes
Winifred Octave	yes
Marcelino Guerra	yes

All in Favor (14 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

TITLE VI UPDATE/PUBLIC HEARINGS REQUEST

Nick Burnham gave a presentation outlining the Title VI Program which is required by the FTA. The document outlines how the level and quality of the WRTA's services are provided for those that are covered under the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The WRTA makes available Notice of Beneficiaries, right to file a complaint and the complaint process and complaint forms. These are found on the website, posted on buses, in the facilities and at Customer Service. The WRTA has a language

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Boylston	Clinton		Leicester	Northbridge	Oxford	Shrewsbury	Sutton	Westborough	Worcester



Assistance Plan for those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The Administration is asking the board to approve the release of the draft 2024 Title VI Program for public review and comment. April 8th is the (pending approval) date for a virtual hearing. The public comments will be incorporated into the final draft and submitted to the board for a vote at the April meeting. The WRTA then submits the approved document to the FTA.

Motion: The WRTA Advisory Board votes to approve release of the draft 2024 Title VI Program for public hearings for review and comment. By: Robert Spain, 2nd: Robert Blair. Roll Call Vote:

- Steve Rolle yes
- Doug Belanger yes
- Robert Spain yes
- Brain Bullock yes
- Hollie Lucht yes
- Mark Binnall yes
- Robert Blair yes
- Michael Ward yes
- Austin Cyganiewicz yes
- Heather Monroe yes
- Jasmin Rivas yes
- Shannon Smith yes
- Winifred Octave yes
- Marcelino Guerra yes

All in Favor (14 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

MEMBERS COMMENTS

Heather-Lyn Haley asked why the travel trainer position was not specifically listed on the company’s organizational tree. Josh Rickman relied that the job comes under CMTM management. Heather-Lyn Haley asked if the renovations for the lobby would have any riders input. Josh Rickman stated input could be included in the process. Mark Binnall commented on the number of unanswered calls to PBSTM. Mark Binnall asked if the new IT would include an app to count down for PBSTM services. Heather Monroe thanked the Administration for their efforts on behalf of paratransit services in the town of Paxton.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:25 a.m.
By: Brian Bullock, 2nd: Winifred Octave
Vote: All in favor (14 in favor 0 opposed)

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next WRTA Advisory Board Meeting will be on April 18, 2024 at 8:00 a.m., via hybrid teleconference due to the Governor’s State of Emergency provisions for public meetings extended.

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth R Pokoly

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