



**Worcester Regional Transit Authority
Advisory Board Meeting Minutes January 16, 2025**

Chairperson Belanger called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

AB MEMBERS ATTENDANCE

Present by Zoom webinar: Steve Rolle – Worcester, Robert Spain – Millbury, Douglas Belanger – Leicester, Mark Binnall – Auburn, Austin Cyganiewicz – Rutland, Jasmin Rivas – Southbridge Alt., Laura Wilson, Oxford Alt, Brian Pigeon, Alt – Worcester, Brian Bullock – Holden, Kelly Bol – Northbridge, Nelly Medina- Worcester RCP, Heather-Lyn Haley – Leicester Alt., Robin Grimm – Sturbridge, Jennifer Gingras – Westborough, Suzanne Lewandowski – North Brookfield, Hollie Lucht, Alt-Shrewsbury.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Motion: To accept the minutes for November 21, 2024

By: Mark Binnall. 2nd: Robert Spain. Vote: (14 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC – A member of the public asked about accessibility for the Rebranding Survey. There was discussion on the first question being not accessible to those that are visually impaired. Heather-Lyn Haley offered to assist the person in this regard. Chairperson Belanger asked that the necessary correspondence be set up at a later time.

Chairperson Committee update

Chairperson Belanger highlighted the personnel committee’s schedule for the Administrator’s evaluation. Evaluations will be tallied by the deadline of January 31, 2025. Doug Belanger will work with the new chairperson Mark Binnall. The personnel committee is likely to meet in March with Josh Rickman. The final recommendation will likely be presented to the board in the March or April board meetings.

The Administration will report the budget summary at the March board meeting. The Audit and Finance Committee will likely meet in late March to review the whole budget and make a recommendation to the board for April’s meeting.

Chairperson Belanger introduced the WRTA Administrator Josh Rickman for the Administrator’s update.

Public Meetings Update Nick Burnham (Director of Operations and Planning)

Four public meeting have taken place and one virtual meeting is scheduled. In order to fill the gap for those not able to attend the public meetings; tabling sessions (staffed with employees) are being done in the lobby. The closing date for feedback is January 31, 2025. Once the comments have been collected/reviewed the administration will look into any feasible adjustments. All the feedback will be posted to the website. The board will review the report at the February meeting for a possible vote. Expected change on service would be the last Saturday of April. This is due to the nature of all the routes being affected. The schedules, presentation and translations of the schedules are all available on the WRTA website. An email specific to this project was set up comments@therta.com.

Mark Binnall had questions pertaining to RT27. Administration will forward additional information to Mark Binnall. Nelly Medina commented on the absence of Spanish translation during the public events. Administration stated that all handouts were available in several languages on the website. Board members were email information and asked to share with their cities and towns. All the feedback will be posted to the website as well.

Connecting Communities Final Report Nick Burnham (Director of Operations and Planning)

The final report is under its last review for Shrewsbury, Westborough and Northborough services. The study included VIA, Fixed Route, Non-ADA, senior centers, disability commissions/advocates and COA services. Also, included were all communities and their stake holders. The WRTA will be sharing the report with the board and posting to the website. The report lists short, medium, and long-term goals under this review. Further information on “The Extra Mile” is posted at therta.com.

Kelly Bol asked for information on VIA services for Blackstone Valley. Nick Burnham stated they could look into this and open up first discussions. Questions from board members about Mircotransit, ADA, COA and Non-ADA and VIA services were addressed. Chairperson Belanger informed the members that inquiries about these services, their coverage and/or expansion (and how they apply to specific towns) can be sent directly to the WRTA Administration. Jasmin Rivas asked how VIA services differ

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



from SCM Elderbus. Nick Burnham gave a brief explanation. Chairperson Belanger encouraged board member to contact the Administration directly with their specific concerns.

WRTA Re-Brand Jamie Winters (Director of Marketing and Communications)

Jamie Winters reviewed with the board the online survey and encouraged them to fill it out. Jamie Winters spoke about the outreach for the survey and the unique signage on the bus ceilings. The goal of the survey is to help guide the structuring of the design direction. Engagement is at 115 responses and they are hoping to have a couple hundred. The branding will be for the bus fleet. Chairperson Belanger stated that consistency plays to a better brand and easier identification. Mark Binnall asked if the van's colors would be different from the buses. Mark Binnall stated that people often approach van's like they are a bus. Jamie Winters express the Administration's openness to vans having a different color. Jamie Winters stated that the 1970's style has had some positive feedback given the 50th anniversary bus.

Chairperson Belanger expressed delight about all the new discussions centered on positive changes. Years ago, the discussions came at struggling times. Chairperson Belanger then introduced the Administrator Josh Rickman.

Josh Rickman addresses the YouTube video posted recently about a WRTA Bus incident. Josh Rickman reviewed the report given by their contractor CMTM. The video shows itself as being from a distance and sped up. The review states an individual approached the bus door but did not board the bus. The driver went to the door and someone (who claimed they knew the person) got off the bus and entered into a medical situation. The driver attempted to contact an EMT/WPD however when the driver went to call a police car was driving by and was flagged down. When the police officer was on the scene the driver was then directed to leave so that the emergency response team could get to the individual. Josh Rickman stated the importance of how notifications occur not only within the WRTA but to the board and the public. Josh Rickman has been working with CMTM to have continual comprehensive communication regarding incidents occurring across all 37 communities. Josh Rickman stated that the driver did a great job in responding to the WPD. Josh Rickman also informed the board that they are seeing an uptake in incidents. The WRTA is working with the City of Worcester and will continue to fine tune communications. The WRTA did recently review communications protocol from CMTM while additional training on reporting incidents/first responding approaches has increased.

- Bids should be in February with construction Spring-late Fall - opening date December 1, 2025.
- A demand response survey (MassDOT funded) will start in the Spring and be completed by the Fall. The WRTA will use the same consultant as the CS survey. The survey will be designed individually given the variety of user groups and they are hoping for a 70% response.
- Results of the Customer Satisfaction survey will be sent to the board by the end of the month. The WRTA will report on the answers and how they can best address them with an approachable timeline.
- WRTA's five-year plan which outlines goals by fiscal year will be sent to the board.
- Reminder of the additional weekend service starting on the 25th of January to routes 19,33 and 30.

BUSINESS FROM THE ADVISORY BOARD – out of order

Nelly Medina commented on the need for working to establish a protocol for the use of Narcan by the WRTA bus drivers. Nelly Medina commented on the need for driver training given the higher incidents. Nelly stated that the WRTA security does not administer Narcan. Josh Rickman recapped the prior discussions between the board and the administration on this matter. Josh Rickman stated that the administering Narcan by the drivers has many health & safety concerns. Handling physical reactions or violence after administering, confined space within the bus, controlling that space for other passengers' safety, lack of consistent pull over/sidewalks, training needed and oversight to ensure health and safety. Brian Bullock suggested an agenda item for February. Chairperson Belanger asked the administration to prepare for the agenda item.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:04 a.m.
By: Brian Bullock, 2nd: Mark Binnall
Vote: All in favor (14 in favor 0 opposed)

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next WRTA Advisory Board Meeting will be on February 20, 2025 at 8:00 a.m., via hybrid teleconference due to the Governor's State of Emergency provisions for public meetings extended until March 31, 2025.
Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth R Pokoly

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