

**Worcester Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board
 Meeting Minutes April 17, 2025
 Hybrid 3rd Floor Conference Room & Zoom Webinar**

1. **Chairperson Belanger called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m.**
2. **Clerk Doug Belanger & Robin Grimm called roll**
 In person: Stephen Rolle – Worcester, Mark Binnall – Auburn, Carol Grueneich –Northborough. Zoom: Douglas Belanger – Leicester, Austin Cyganiewicz – Rutland, Laura Wilson - Oxford, Jennifer Gingras – Westborough Alt, Kelly Bol – Northbridge, Brian Pigeon, Alt – Worcester, Brian Bullock – Holden, Robert Blair- Berlin, Michael Ward – Clinton, Mike Kennedy – Millbury DP, Heather-Lyn Haley – Leicester Alt., Robin Grimm – Sturbridge, Suzanne Lewandowski – North Brookfield, Hollie Lucht - Shrewsbury. Jasmin Rivas-Southbridge. Entered after the roll call Zoom: Adam Menard – Alt-Auburn, Nelly Medina – Worcester RCP
3. **Approval of Minutes from March 20, 2025**
Motion: To accept the minutes for March 20, 2025 By: Brian Bullock. 2nd: Mark Binnall. Vote: (16 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed.

Stephen Rolle	yes
Doug Belanger	yes
Brian Bullock	yes
Mark Binnall	yes
Robert Blair	yes
Michael Ward	yes
Kelly Bol	yes
Carol Grueneich	yes
Suzanne Lewandowski	yes
Laura Wilson	yes
Austin Cyganiewicz	yes
Hollie Lucht	yes
Jasmin Rivas	yes
Robin Grimm	yes
Jennifer Gingras	yes
Michael Kennedy	yes
4. **Business from the Public**
 Chairperson Doug Belanger stated that board members would not be responding but can direct the Administrator to follow up and investigate. Adam Thielker, Founder Tasks for Transit introduced himself and spoke about reliability/frequency issues as well as problems with the bus tracking system. Adam Thielker commented favorably on the present bill to expand the disability & ridership position to beyond one year. David Webb spoke to the board about his recent issues concerning staff, security and existing protocol regarding the denial of entry request to the Personnel Committee/Personnel Committee Executive session meeting on March 7, 2025. David Webb acknowledged the reply from the WRTA's attorney to his public records requests for information in this regard. David Webb acknowledge and thanked the Administration for the present hybrid format but questioned why on March 7, 2025 he was threatened to be removed. David Webb commented on the inadequacies within the system for getting out information to the rider. There were no comments from the chair or board members regarding public comments.

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5. Business from the Advisory Board

Approval of Board for Advisory Board Chairperson to sign the Administrator's contract

Chairperson Doug Belanger gave an overview of the motion (approved 2.20.25) to approve the administrator's contract. Chairperson Doug Belanger stated that the motion did not include an approval for the Chairperson to sign the administrator's contract. The Chairperson asked for a motion to approve the signing of the administrator's contract approved on February 20, 2025.

Motion: The WRTA Advisory Board votes to approve the chairperson to sign the administrator's contract as approved by the Advisory Board on February 20, 2025. By: Robin Grimm. 2nd: Mark Binnall. Vote by Roll Call: (17 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed unanimously.

Stephen Rolle	yes
Doug Belanger	yes
Brian Bullock	yes
Mark Binnall	yes
Robert Blair	yes
Michael Ward	yes
Kelly Bol	yes
Carol Grueneich	yes
Suzanne Lewandowski	yes
Laura Wilson	yes
Austin Cyganiewicz	yes
Hollie Lucht	yes
Jasmin Rivas	yes
Robin Grimm	yes
Jennifer Gingras	yes
Michael Kennedy	yes
Nelly Medina	yes

6. FY'26 Budget Presentation (Thomas Coyne, Deputy Administrator & CEO)

Thomas Coyne gave a brief overview of the RAN which showed the timeline for receiving monies to operate the WRTA. The RAN loan is used to cover the gaps between funding sources timelines. The balances in the CARE ACT money (if approved budgeted FY'26) would be \$12,300,791 and American Rescue Plan Act would be \$1,909,729. Thomas Coyne gave a brief presentation of the FY'26 budget. Increases in pension and medical are expected along with liability insurances. The WRTA has two procurements out with expected increases. Thomas Coyne stated that they are still in negotiations for health insurance. Thomas Coyne spoke briefly about the line item changes that amended the budget from the prior full board's briefing. Highlighted was the use of CARES Act monies to offset both the Operating Assistance Special Rule and fare revenues for FY'26. The WRTA may receive additional monies for continuing fare free into FY'26. The Audit and Finance committee made no changes to the expense line items. The budget as presented did not include the labor negotiations for the union contract. Board Member Mark Binnall asked about diesel fuel prices and more money for PBSTM. Thomas Coyne commented on the current contract which is \$0.22 cents less than prior and covers FY'26. The increase for PBSTM was directed to the ADA overflow line item for ADA transportation. The WRTA does not use a consortium for fuel purchases. Chairperson Doug Belanger responded as to why fare free decisions are made yearly. The WRTA receives its funding yearly therefore the decision for continuation follows the yearly funding amount.

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7. Audit and Finance Committee

Chairperson Brian Bullock gave a brief overview of discussions and direction made by the Audit and Finance committee meeting on April 7, 2025. After a full review the committee agreed to fare free for FY'26 and revenue changes in terms of using CARES ACT monies. The committee members agreed that the CARES ACT monies should be further spent down. The committee voted to direct the Administration to look into using more CARES ACT money whenever possible. Chairperson Brian Bullock requested that the recommended budget with amendments by the Audit and Finance Committee to the Advisory Board for Approval.

Motion: The WRTA Advisory Board votes to accept the recommendation of the FY'26 Budget with amendments by the Audit and Finance committee in the amount of \$38,754,911. By: Brian Bullock.

2nd: Robin Grimm. Vote by Roll Call: (17 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed unanimously.

Stephen Rolle	yes
Doug Belanger	yes
Brian Bullock	yes
Mark Binnall	yes
Robert Blair	yes
Michael Ward	yes
Kelly Bol	yes
Carol Grueneich	yes
Suzanne Lewandowski	yes
Laura Wilson	yes
Austin Cyganiewicz	yes
Hollie Lucht	yes
Jasmin Rivas	yes
Robin Grimm	yes
Jennifer Gingras	yes
Michael Kennedy	yes
Nelly Medina	yes

8. April 26, 2026 Fixed Route Service Changes Communications (Jamie Winters, Director Marketing and Communications)

Jamie Winters gave a presentation outlining the time schedule for the fixed route service changes communication. The new schedules will be blue in color and will arrive on April 24, 2025. The WRTA is using multiple platforms to reach the public during this campaign. The WRTA website has an updated landing page with the new schedules. The buses carry destination board messaging and door hanger's announcements are hung on the grab bars. The shelters will have posters and a refreshing social media campaign on Facebook and X. QR codes are used throughout most printed media and social media communications. Digital Signage with the WRTA's community partners is being accessed. Jamie Winters welcomed additional contact information from board member's communities. A performance snapshot was provided from Facebook and X from April 17, 2025 regarding viewing of the campaign. Board Member Mark Binnall asked that the Audit Journal be notified for announcements. Jamie Winters stated that the schedules would be out on the buses Friday night and Saturday. Josh Rickman thanked the board for their participation in this service change process. Josh Rickman stated how reliability is the goal with these service changes. Board Member Nelly Medina stated that she was impressed with the uptake in outreach on this campaign and thanked the Administrator.

Chairperson Doug Belanger introduced the WRTA Administrator Joshua Rickman for the Administrator's update.

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9. Administrator's Report

CAD/AVL contract Award

Joshua Rickman explained the new computer aided dispatch & automatic vehicle location system. The WRTA awarded a contract to EQUANS – Ineo Systrans USA, with the expectation of a roll out on January 2, 2026. All fixed route and paratransit vehicles will be equipped. Joshua Rickman explained how this technology allows for greater customer facing tools like the use of real time trip planning. Google app and Transit app will show real time information for the rider. Joshua Rickman commented on how this change is a giant step forward for the WRTA and its ridership. The benefits of the system were listed and reviewed.

- Installing infotainment on the buses (via TV screen)
- Enhancements for our operation's needs (a one source for data)
- Detours programed in real time
- Compatible with forthcoming new paratransit software goals
- Provides a quality feed for rider choices
- Future real time signage feed on the buses

Board Member Mark Binnall asked about paratransit van location calls. Joshua Rickman replied that software handles communication. They are presently looking into new software and will look into designated location calls. Board Members Mark Binnall asked if the vendor has prior experience with RTA's. Joshua Rickman replied that both Lowell RTA and Attleboro use the system.

Demand Response Survey

The WRTA received a MassDOT technical grant and will be doing a demand response survey. AECON was awarded the task and the project manager is the same as for the fixed route survey. The survey's focused only on existing ridership. The demand response will be done via a sample grouping formula as oppose to a wide base. The sample groups are determined by pulling from a confidential list of users and then divided into ADA, COA and Elderbus groups. For those sampled and with disabilities there are available responding options. The goal is a 70% response and is expected to wrap up at the end of the summer. The WRTA will present the findings to the board in the fall. This regional survey wraps up the present MassDOT funding. Joshua Rickman responded to an inquiry about non-rider participation. Joshua Rickman stated later in FY'26 (with the necessary funding) this can be reviewed.

Bus Stop Design Guidelines and Capital Plan

The WRTA is working on its bus stop & guidelines plan with information from the on-call coordinator Nelson Nygaard. Improvements to our bus stop signage out in the fields is a priority across the board. The project will be over a 12-month period. In the summer an inventory of the 1,300 stops will be taken. Recommendations for rebalancing of the stops will take into consideration safety and liability issues. Also included will be guidelines for what warrants amenities at stops like shelters, benches and lighting. Board Member Steve Rolle stated how the City of Worcester will be working with the WRTA on bus stop locations. Joshua Rickman expressed excitement about this project and the enhancements it will bring to the riders. Rebranding work will run parallel to this project so new signage will reflect that. The WRTA is talking with the towns of Auburn & Shrewsbury to place bus stop signs at specific locations. A timeline was not announced in this regard. Board Member Mark Binnall asked how the design will be determined. Joshua Rickman stated how Studio Six did a survey and that feedback would be used.

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10. Advisory Board members and Other(s) as directed by the Chairperson

Chairperson Doug Belanger commented on the wait list considerations being address by state legislations regarding expanding rider/disability positions. Doug Belanger stated his suggestion to have optional term language instead of a set number. Board Member Mike Kennedy stated he was happy to serve on the board with the fare free continuing and updates to vehicle tracking. Board Member Nelly Medina voiced concern about buses not being able to go to specific bus slip. Board Member Nelly Medina stated that having designated locations would better assist all riders and would also greatly benefit those with disabilities. Board Member Nelly Medina spoke about people having issues with hearing the announcements for the slip which makes finding the right slip difficult. Joshua Rickman stated there are 24 fixed route buses and only 8 slips at the Hub which is the biggest constraint. He will continue to look for ideas and solutions regarding this issue. Board Member Nelly Medina acknowledged the recent outreach efforts by the Administration as a good improvement. Board Member Kelly Bol thanked Karen Andersen-Walsh, Jamie Winters and Nick Burnham for the informative meeting in Northbridge.

12. Adjourn

Motion: To Adjourn at 9:15 a.m. By: Brian Bullock, 2nd: Mark Binnall Vote: All in favor (17 in favor 0 opposed)

Stephen Rolle	yes
Doug Belanger	yes
Brian Bullock	yes
Mark Binnall	yes
Robert Blair	yes
Michael Ward	yes
Kelly Bol	yes
Carol Grueneich	yes
Suzanne Lewandowski	yes
Laura Wilson	yes
Austin Cyganiewicz	yes
Hollie Lucht	yes
Jasmin Rivas	yes
Robin Grimm	yes
Jennifer Gingras	yes
Michael Kennedy	yes
Nelly Medina	yes

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next WRTA Advisory Board Meeting will be on May 15, 2025 at 8:00 a.m., Hybrid: in-person & Zoom Webinar.

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth Pokoly

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