

**Worcester Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board**

**Meeting Minutes May 21, 2026 Zoom Webinar**

1. **Chairperson Doug Belanger called the meeting to order at 8:03 a.m.**
2. **Clerk Robin Grimm called the roll**

Remote Attendance members: Doug Belanger – Leicester, Brian Pigeon Alt – Worcester, Brian Bullock – Holden, Robert Spain – Millbury, Suzanne Lewandowski Alt – North Brookfield, Robin Grimm – Sturbridge, John Jovan – Southbridge, Mark Binnall – Auburn, Carol Grueneich Alt – Northborough, Stephenie Abate Alt – Grafton, Laura Wilson Alt - Oxford, Rose Russell Alt- Auburn, Heather-Lyn Haley Alt – Leicester, Mike Ward – Clinton, Mike Kennedy CDP – Millbury, Nelly Medina RCP - Worcester. Remote attending after roll call: Kelly Bol Alt – Northbridge, Robert Blair - Berlin.

Chairperson Doug Belanger asked for a motion to accept the minutes from April 23, 2026.

3. **Approval of Minutes from April 23, 2026**

Motion: To accept the minutes for April 23, 2026. By: Brian Bullock. 2<sup>nd</sup>: Mark Binnall. Vote by Roll Call: (14 in favor, 0 opposed) vote passed.

|              |     |               |     |                     |     |               |     |
|--------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| Brian Pigeon | yes | Robin Grimm   | yes | Suzanne Lewandowski | yes | Brain Bullock | yes |
| Nelly Medina | yes | John Jovan    | yes | Mike Ward           | yes | Laura Wilson  | yes |
| Robert Spain | yes | Mike Kennedy  | yes | Stephenie Abate     | yes |               |     |
| Mark Binnall | yes | Doug Belanger | yes | Carol Grueneich     | yes |               |     |

4. **Business from the Public**

No Business from the public.

5. **Brief Update on June 2026 Service Changes - Nick Burnham, Dir of Transit Operations & Planning**

The Administration presented changes for Routes 12, 14, and B–Grafton/Northbridge. Due to the minor nature of the changes (less than 25%), they do not meet the requirements for board approval. Select trips to North High School are noted as not in service during the summer schedule. This affects two outbound and three inbound from June 28<sup>th</sup> to August 23<sup>rd</sup> of 2026. One round-trip remains in service each weekday for summer programming at the school. Route 14 will run on a summer schedule, operating every 60 minutes each day, rather than the usual 30 minutes, from 7:42 AM to 3:56 PM, accommodating the Burncoat schools and QCC during regular session. Route 14 discontinued its turnaround at Porter & Chester Institute at the property owner's request. The bus remains on Brooks St. and uses a dead-end loop with no service impacts. As of now, the system shows that Porter and Chester stops are diverted (since the change was made off-bid); however, that will be fixed for June. Route B is adjusted roughly 3-4 minutes later than the current schedule due to minor timing changes to the MBTA Commuter Rail schedule.

6. **Route A and Route B Public Meetings - Nick Burnham, Dir of Transit Operations & Planning**

An overview was provided, including details on routes, ridership numbers, costs, and service scope for Grafton and Northbridge, including Council on Aging vans and volunteer driver programs. The WRTA worked with the towns and Nelson Nygaard to develop alternative service approaches for Routes A & B. Option One included operating a reduced WRTA shuttle in Northbridge and eliminating Grafton service, or Option Two, implementing WRTA's mobility management model (MMM) for Grafton and Northbridge COA services. These options were identified by working with the town's existing assessment resources and available transportation services while considering the advantages and disadvantages of each. Option One would offer a single route in Northbridge with no service to Grafton.

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East Brookfield • Grafton • Holden • Holland • Leicester • Millbury • New Braintree • Northborough • Northbridge  
North Brookfield • Oakham • Oxford • Paxton • Princeton • Rutland • Shrewsbury • Southbridge • Spencer  
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This option applies all of the town of Northbridge's assessments and, for FY 2027, supports 6 hours per day, 9 AM to 3 PM, 4 days a week. The disadvantages are no MBTA Station (Grafton) connection and limited service. Also, due to annual cost escalation, fewer service hours will likely be available each year. Option two (preferred by both towns) would integrate Grafton and Northbridge COA's into the Mobility Management Model. WRTA would assume responsibility for paratransit trip reservations, scheduling, and dispatch, and would own and maintain the fleet. The town would hire and compensate drivers, cover fuel, and obtain vehicle insurance. Vehicles serve each town (most often) and the surrounding areas (occasionally). Joining the MMM would lower the town's contribution to COA transportation costs, eliminate vehicle maintenance, and allow those in the service to travel regionally, including to medical appointments in Worcester. The drawbacks are that trip reservations no longer go through the COA staff, some trips may be handled by drivers unfamiliar with customers, and service is limited to customers with disabilities and/or those 60 years or older. Mark Binnall asked if Yellow Cab would be used to handle any overflow for these communities. Nick Burnham stated that it has not been decided at this point.

Chairperson Belanger asked for a motion to conduct public meetings in the Towns of Grafton and Northbridge to discuss and review changes to Routes A & B.

**Motion: The WRTA Advisory Board votes to authorize the Administrator to conduct public meetings in the towns of Grafton and Northbridge to review and discuss changes to the WRTA Routes A & B, including the possibility of service reductions or discontinuation of existing service. By Robert Spain. 2<sup>nd</sup>: Brian Pigeon. Vote by Roll Call: (14 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed unanimously.**

|              |     |               |     |                     |     |                 |     |
|--------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| Brian Pigeon | yes | Robin Grimm   | yes | Suzanne Lewandowski | yes | Brain Bullock   | yes |
| Nelly Medina | yes | Kelly Bol     | yes | Mike Ward           | yes | Stephenie Abate | yes |
| Robert Spain | yes | Mike Kennedy  | yes | Robert Blair        | yes |                 |     |
| Mark Binnall | yes | Doug Belanger | yes | Carol Grueneich     | yes |                 |     |

Upon approval, the WRTA Administration will hold public meetings in both towns in June. Public findings will be presented at the July WRTA Advisory Board meeting for a vote on recommendations. The timeline for potential elimination of Routes A & B, and potential onboarding of the Grafton & Northbridge to MMM has yet to be determined.

## 7. Administrator's Report – Josh Rickman

### Central Hub Lobby Update

At this time, the lobby renovations schedule includes the following: flooring the week of May 25, Real Time Signs the week of June 1<sup>st</sup>, seating the week of June 8th, and curtain wall/sliding doors completed by mid-July. The WRTA will have installed Tactile domes for VIP, which have been applied in a variety of environments, including transit facilities. These tactile domes create paths for VIP's from both lobby entrances to the seating area, customer service, and bathrooms.

### Quarterly Paratransit Rider Forum

The 2nd Quarterly Zoom meeting is on May 21, 2026, from 1:00 PM to 2:30 PM. Topics will include a presentation from the ADA Paratransit Education series. Updates on Demand Response Software and overflow procurements. Renovation status on the lobby and a public participation session. Mark Binnall asked that abbreviations be used less often in presentations.

### MassDOT Board Process

The WRTA estimates it will receive state assistance funding from MassDOT of over \$15 million. Due to a MassDOT threshold, their board must approve the release of the funds. No action is required by the WRTA Board or the Administration regarding this internal MassDOT policy.

### Other Administration Items

There were no other administrative items at this meeting.

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

Robert Spain responded to the term “shortfall” in town assessments. Robert Spain explained that assessments are generally short overall for services in communities. Josh Rickman stated they would rewrite the wording regarding assessments. Doug Belanger commented on the traffic and timing regarding the Millbury Shops. Doug asked that the administration reach out regarding the priority use of the newer traffic area. Josh Rickman stated that the area is open to the public, but has been used with the assistance of the provided police detail. Mark Binnall thanked Jamie Winters for the recent incident reporting. Mark Binnall asked about position replacements when drivers move to full-time buses. Josh Rickman stated that our contractor has been prepared and will report next month with an update.

**Adjourn**

**Motion: To Adjourn at 8:58 a.m. By: Robert Spain, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Mark Binnall Vote by Roll Call: All in Favor (15 in favor 0 opposed) vote passed unanimously.**

|              |     |               |     |                     |     |               |     |
|--------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| Brian Pigeon | yes | Robin Grimm   | yes | Suzanne Lewandowski | yes | Brain Bullock | yes |
| Nelly Medina | yes | John Jovan    | yes | Mike Ward           | yes | Laura Wilson  | yes |
| Kelly Bol    | yes | Robert Spain  | yes | Mike Kennedy        | yes | Robert Blair  | yes |
| Mark Binnall | yes | Doug Belanger | yes | Stephenie Abate     | yes |               |     |

**NEXT MEETING DATE**

The next WRTA Advisory Board Meeting will be on June 18, 2026, at 8:00 a.m., via Zoom Webinar.

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth R. Pokoly