



Approved April 22, 2020

**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation  
DRAFT Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting  
Wednesday, March 25, 2020**

Per RSA 91-A:2,III(b) the COAST Chair has declared the COVID-19 Outbreak an emergency and has waived the requirement that a quorum be physically present at the meeting

**PRESENT:** Scott Bogle, Arthur Capello, Denis Hebert, Margaret Joyce, Valerie Labrie, Colin Lentz, Dave Sandmann, Dennis Shanahan, Dave Sharples and Juliet Walker

**ABSENT:** Jim Campbell, Steve Fournier, Marty Pepin, Maria Stowell, Shelley Winters and Thomas Wright

**STAFF:** Rad Nichols, Michael Williams, Heather Hesse-Stromberg

**I. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The meeting was called to order at 8:33am.

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Dennis S. made a motion to accept the minutes as presented and Mr. Capello seconded. All voted in favor. Ms. Labrie noted a correction needed to the January minutes, changing the amount on the letter of credit in Action Item 2 from \$500,000 to \$250,000.

**III. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Nichols reported that ridership was down 35% on Monday and that yesterday was another significant drop in ridership.

**IV. FINANCIAL REPORT**

Financials were presented for December, January and February. Mr. Nichols reported that COAST is in a fairly strong position having had some gains. He noted that the NH Turnpike funding has run out but that he has asked for an additional \$100K to get us through June, when the project will end. Mr. Nichols noted that fare revenue is doing okay, but that advertising revenues continue to fluctuate, with a drop in January but slight growth again in February. Mr. Nichols warned that we anticipate significant losses in advertising revenue due to COVID-19. Other income is up due to the sale of retired vehicles earlier in the year. Mr. Nichols noted that January expenses show the implementation of the new hourly wages and health related insurance rate changes. February's utilities saw a significant increase as the landlord finally billed for the utilities for 6 Sumner from October, 2019 – January, 2020.

February income statements show that income is down year-to-date, and we know that COVID-19 will likely make that worse. Mr. Nichols noted that, while we are very under budget in materials and supplies, we anticipate that to tighten up over the next couple of months with increases in major vehicle related maintenance.

Mr. Capello asked whether we have looked at freezing the budget or cutting back on expenses to prepare for impacts of COVID-19. Mr. Nichols noted that we are in a good financial position, but

that we would need to cut back if we lost a significant number of operators or if we were asked to cutback or curtail operations by government. Mr. Nichols stated that the US Department of Homeland Security views transportation as an essential service, so we are trying to maintain our service levels to the greatest degree possible.

Mr. Capello stressed that we should develop a plan so we can make sure we're not in a terrible position when we get out of this. Mr. Nichols is having a call this afternoon to see how potential stimulus funding will impact COAST. He noted that if they don't relax the match requirements, it is unclear how much this will benefit us.

Mr. Hebert stated that we need a plan that includes reducing the number of runs, or where we go if we are forced to make cutbacks. Mr. Nichols stressed that this could not be worse timing for COAST because we're looking at launching our new system at the end of June. Mr. Nichols shared his concern that, if we scale back operations, we'll lose employees, and if we lose employees, we won't be able to run new system. He reminded all that a major advantage of the new system is that it is a way for COAST to save money.

Mr. Hebert suggested we should look at things we can do to save money. Mr. Capello noted that we should just have a plan to deal with what might be coming. Mr. Williams stressed that we have been looking at all sorts of scenarios and that we have a plan in place to cut back and slowly shut down. He stated that the plan could be implemented quickly if we needed to.

Mr. Nichols shared that, in addition to the health and safety of our employees, a major concern is that, under FTA rules, we cannot pay our employees if they are not working. He stressed that this would quickly become a hardship for many of our employees. Mr. Capello asked if we can find other work for our drivers to do and Mr. Williams indicated that other opportunities have been made available as we increase the cleaning and disinfecting of our vehicles.

Mr. Bogle noted that advertisers would likely expect their contract to be paused, extended, or would want free advertising down the road because the buses aren't running. Mr. Nichols concurred with this assessment.

Mr. Shanahan asked that, if we get a directive from Governor Sununu to stay at home, are we 100% sure that that would not apply to COAST? Mr. Nichols indicated that it is our understanding that we are essential because we get people to essential services and essential jobs. Mr. Williams noted that the federal government had released a recommended list of essential workers and public transit operations are on the list. Mr. Nichols stated he would send the list out to Board members.

## **V. Old Business**

### **Staffing**

Mr. Nichols noted that we are currently in a good position relative to our overall staffing. With recent hiring successes we are effectively fully staffed with operators (CDL & non-CDL). This has significantly reduced the stress felt by our dispatchers and supervisors that try to fill open work shifts.

Mr. Nichols stated that we hope to soon advertise for a Director of Finance (or down fill the position with a Finance Manager) and are in the process of finalizing the job description for that position. This will likely be postponed due to COVID-19.

Mr. Nichols noted that the Coronavirus pandemic is having a significant impact on our workforce. We currently have roughly 16% of our total workforce that is no longer coming in to work because of a compromised immune system themselves, a family member with a compromised immune system, or they must take care of a dependent at home. We expect this number could grow to over 20%. Those who can work remotely are now doing so much more frequently.

### **Turnpike Match for LBB Mitigation Project**

Ms. Nichols noted that, as anticipated, the match necessary to extend the LBB mitigation project (expanded Route 2 & Trolley peak period service) will not be enough to extend the project through June 28, 2020. As such, a request for additional matching funds has been submitted to the NHDOT for their review. The total request amounts to \$100k.

### **P3 Commission Public Hearing**

Mr. Nichols attended and spoke at the P3 Commission hearing in early February at City Hall in Portsmouth. Written testimony was subsequently submitted that supported our verbal testimony. Copies of the written testimony were distributed to member communities and organizations to potentially incorporate COAST's points of testimony into their own written testimony, should they be submitting any.

### **10-Year Transportation Plan**

Mr. Nichols was one of the few attendees, and even fewer speakers, at the House Public Works and Highways Committee hearing on the 10-Year Transportation Plan. The hearing was left open at the end of the meeting, as there are expectations for further amendments. Written testimony was subsequently submitted that supported our verbal testimony. Mr. Lentz noted that he attended the subsequent hearing and that several people testified in support of COAST's requests.

### **Potential CMAQ to FTA-Funded Programs Transfer**

Mr. Nichols attended two meetings hosted by the NHTA and facilitated by Transport NH to provide input to the NHDOT on a methodology for how to distribute these funds should they be approved as part of the 10-Year Transportation Plan. The final shaping of the input is now being finalized prior to submittal to the NHDOT for their consideration. The NHDOT had proactively requested this level of input through the NHTA. This has the potential of a significant amount of funding coming to COAST.

### **New Bus Shelters and Bus Shelter Lighting Upgrades**

Mr. Nichols noted that two new bus shelters have been ordered, one for installation at the new senior center in Portsmouth, and one for installation at the new expanded bus stop at Hanover Station in Portsmouth. Additionally, solar lighting kits for all COAST Daytech brand bus shelters (13) have been ordered for installation across the system. Improved lighting at bus stops was one of the top desired amenities upgrades expressed by our passengers during the COA. Unfortunately, the manufacturing plant is closing down due to COVID-19 so delivery will be delayed.

## **VI. New Business**

### **Action Items**

#### **Action Item #1: Human Trafficking Pledge**

The FTA is requesting transit systems pledge their commitment to strive toward the goal of eliminating human trafficking. The pledge involves working together with the USDOT and our industry to raise awareness of human trafficking with the traveling public, educate employees on recognizing and reporting potential signs of human trafficking and measure the collective impact by tracking and sharing key data points. Documents explaining the pledge were distributed as part of the Board packet materials.

**Action Required:** *That the Board of Directors authorize the Executive Director to sign the Pledge and make this voluntary commitment of behalf of COAST.*

Mr. Capello made a motion that the Board of Directors authorize the Executive Director to sign the Pledge and make this voluntary commitment on behalf of COAST and Mr. Bogle seconded. All voted in favor.

**Action Item #2: Approval of COAST's Draft Public Transit Agency Safety Plan (PTASP)**

The Federal Transit Administration released new requirements for all grant recipients to implement an Agency Safety Plan meeting certain requirements by July 20, 2020. To comply with these requirements, COAST has developed the attached Safety Plan. It has been developed following FTA guidance, has been reviewed internally by our Joint Loss Management Committee to get input from all levels of the organization, and has gone through a voluntary review by FTA's Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan Technical Assistance Center. Feedback from these reviews has been incorporated as appropriate.

The plan includes a policy statement of COAST's commitment to safety, outlines steps taken to identify safety hazards, identifies a process to address safety hazards, outlines safety performance measures and targets, and identifies ways all employees can report safety hazards.

COAST has always been committed to safety, and the principles outlined in this plan are not new at COAST. However, they are being restructured and formalized in a format that complies with FTA's latest regulations.

**Action Required:** *That the Board of Directors approve COAST's Public Transit Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) to become effective April 1, 2020. REVISED to June 1, 2020 effective date.*

Mr. Sharples made a motion that the Board of Directors approve COAST's Public Transit Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) to become effective June 1, 2020 and Ms. Joyce seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

**Action Item #3: Update of COAST's Drug & Alcohol Policy**

Last fall COAST updated our Drug and Alcohol Policy to reflect changed regulations regarding the FMCSA Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse.

Since that update, FTA has given us further guidance that changed how we are to interact with the FMCSA Clearinghouse, and we need to update our policy to comply with the latest guidance.

The changes are all in section 8.2 and includes the elimination of any information reported to the FMCSA Clearinghouse and an adjustment to how Clearinghouse records are checked.

Board approved an updated Drug & Alcohol policy effective January 1<sup>st</sup> to comply with clearinghouse. FTA has given us new guidance, so we need to change one section to comply with the new guidance. We can query the database but can't report results.

**Action Required:** *The COAST Board of Directors approve the updated Drug and Alcohol Policy as revised.*

Mr. Shanahan made a motion that the COAST Board of Directors approve the updated Drug and Alcohol policy as revised and Mr. Bogle seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

### **Committee Reports**

**Executive Committee** – did not meet.

**Board Development Committee** – did not meet.

**Policy Committee** – did not meet.

**Legislative Committee** – met on February 14, 2020. An update on Action Items was presented at the meeting. Mr. Bogle briefly discussed the University of Georgia analysis with Board and noted that it looks good for COAST but bad for others as Concord and Manchester would merge and lose funding.

### **Discussion Items**

#### **Discussion Item #1: New System Launch Progress & Associated Cost Estimates**

##### **Schedule Brochures**

Mr. Nichols reminded everyone that we are planning on producing a separate printed piece for each bus route (or combination of bus routes in the case of Routes 12, 13 & 14). One side of the printed piece (likely a folded piece) will contain specific route information (map, schedule (days, span of service each day and timepoint schedule after the hour), fares, any unique features of that route), the other side will contain systemwide information. The brochures are still currently in design.

##### **Website Update**

After beginning to work with our website design firm on identifying a scope of work and responsibilities, it was found that there are some underlying issues with our current website engineering that are not working and need to be updated going forward. We also need to resolve how we can display current and future routes on the website at the same time. It will require some re-engineering. We will need to update all maps that are used on the website and various other updates will be necessary. At this point, it is unclear how much of the website updates will be able to be done by staff vs. our design firm.

##### **Destination Signs/Announcements**

We have sent off all the information that needs to be reprogrammed for the bus exterior head/side/rear signs, interior signs, and voice announcements.

##### **Fleet Makeup vs. Needs**

We need to design the re-branding of the trolleys that we will need to operate in locations other than on Routes 40 & 41. This has not yet been initiated.

Training

We will begin training our staff in April on the new routes, route alignments, connection points and work blocks. Initial feedback from staff indicates that there may not need to be a tremendous amount of route familiarization for most of the new routes and route realignments.

New Bus Stop Locations

All finalized and approved at this point.

Bus Stops

In preparation for implementing the new system, COAST staff are working to redesign our bus stop signage to display the new service information. We hope to have markups of final designs for you at the meeting.

6 Sumner

We are working with our landlords relative to our desired changes and with our A&E firm on designs for those changes. We are looking at the potential to add a bus shelter at 6 Sumner Drive and will need to get approval for locating it (ideally near the current mailbox).

Cost Estimates

Schedule Brochures	
Design	\$ 6,500
Printing	YTBD
GTFS Feed Update/Issues Resolution	YTBD
Website Update	YTBD
Destination Signs/Announcements	\$ 8,230
Trolley Rebranding	YTBD
Staff Training	YTBD
New Bus Stop Signs ( <i>capitalized</i> )	
Design	\$ 2,000
Production (440+, double-sided)	\$39,000
New Mounting Hardware	YTBD
Installation	YTBD
Admin. Office Lobby ( <i>capitalized</i> )	
Design	\$ 3,500
Construction	YTBD

Mr. Nichols shared the new color palette for routes and the new potential bus stop sign designs with the Board.

Mr. Bogle asked about the mounting of the new bus signs. Mr. Williams noted that the designers are testing to see if the hardware can support a blade mounted sign as there are issues mounting the signs to a U-channel post. A circular post would be a better option.

Mr. Nichols stressed that the biggest challenge we may face given the pandemic, is keeping all projects that rely on outside design and input moving along on the timelines we need to meet in order to be ready for a June 29 launch.

**Discussion Item #2: Non-public session per NH RSA 91-A:3-II(e)**

In order to discuss a pending legal matter the Board will need to go into non-public session. The action to go into non-public session and come out of it will be done in accordance with NH RSA 91-A rules.

Mr. Capello made a motion to enter Nonpublic Session per NH RSA 91-A:3-II(e) and Mr. Bogle seconded. The motion passed unanimously in a roll-call vote at 9:30am.

The public meeting resumed at 9:35am. Mr. Capello made a motion to seal the minutes of the nonpublic session indefinitely. Mr. Shanahan seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously in a roll-call vote.

## **VII. Community Updates/Information Items**

### Ridership

Ridership information was presented for January and February. Mr. Nichols noted that there has been a decrease in ridership in early March. He reported that Nashua Transit closed their fixed route system last night in response to COVID-19, but they are allowing any resident in the city to book a ride using demand response to access essential services or essential jobs. Mr. Nichols expressed his concern about using smaller vehicles since that might require that people sit closer than is desired. He noted that Manchester Transit Authority is likely heading toward some form of curtailed operations too.

Mr. Nichols noted that some transit systems in the country have been employing rear door entry only. He expressed our concern that the extra inches to step up would be a hazard for many of our passengers who currently require the vehicle to be kneeled in order to board. Mr. Williams noted that about 50% of our passengers require the kneeler. In addition, that would mean we are fare free. Going fare free is an option for COAST and a way to limit physical interactions between the driver and passengers. Mr. Williams noted that biggest drop in ridership has been the demand for demand response.

To combat the concerns of COVID-19, Mr. Williams reported that we are bringing in an extra person every night to help with cleaning and disinfecting and have asked Demand Response drivers to sanitize all common touch points between riders. Since demand for rides is down, we have started having full-time demand response operators ride along on the busiest fixed route buses and sanitize in real time by wiping down handrails and other touchpoints and otherwise support our fixed route operators. Mr. Williams noted that the sanitizer we use all the time is on the EPA list for effective against Coronavirus. Mr. Nichols reported that he is working with the NHEOC and are on a waiting list to get more of those materials.

Mr. Hebert asked what we are doing to protect the bus drivers. Mr. Williams stated that we've given them guidance on how to limit contact with passengers and have provided gloves, sanitizing wipes and hand sanitizer for drivers. In the office we are sanitizing office spaces. Mr. Hebert asked about whether we are using positive ventilation in our buses and Mr. Williams indicated that drivers are cracking open the driver's window and the rear hatch to create an air flow from the front of the vehicle to the back and then out of the vehicle. Mr. Williams noted that we considered taping off seats to encourage people to spread out, but drivers have reported that people are doing that naturally at this point.

For our Demand Response operations, Mr. Williams noted that we are assigning the same driver to the same vehicle every day, which had been requested by drivers. In addition, we are using cutaways rather than minivans as much as possible.

Mr. Herbert asked how much it would cost us to be fare free and Mr. Nichols stated it would be upwards of 8,000 in cash fares in any given week but noted that if ridership is down 40%, we're already losing significant fare revenue.

Mr. Nichols asked for feedback regarding collecting fares. Mr. Capello, Ms. Joyce, and Mr. Shanahan indicated that we need to continue to collect fares but that we should keep going fare free as an option.

### **VIII. Adjournment**

Ms. Joyce made a motion to adjourn the meeting which was seconded by Mr. Sharples. All voted in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 9:53am.