



Approved May 27, 2020

**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation
Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, April 22, 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, Jim Campbell, Arthur Capello, Denis Hebert, Margaret Joyce, Valerie Labrie, Colin Lentz, Marty Pepin, Dave Sandmann, Dennis Shanahan, Dave Sharples and Juliet Walker

ABSENT: Steve Fournier, Maria Stowell, Shelley Winters and Thomas Wright

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

I. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was called to order at 8:32am. Each member identified themselves, their location and whether anyone was in the room with them and listening contemporaneously.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Capello made a motion to accept the minutes as presented and Mr. Bogle seconded. All voted in favor.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Nichols noted that there was an Emergency Executive Committee meeting on 3/31/20 at which the decision was made to cease fixed route operations at the end of business that day. Mr. Nichols stated that he received several messages of support from community members. Mr. Sandmann noted that it was a difficult decision to make but the response has been wonderful and supportive.

COAST continues to operate its demand response operations; ADA, Portsmouth Senior Transportation, and Community Rides (ACT) programs.

Ridership is at 40% of what it normally would be for those services as we are serving 17-19 individuals currently each day. Mr. Nichols noted that the highest daily ridership in April was in the mid-50s and that we have had no issues maintaining that level of service with staff that continues to come in and work.

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT

Mr. Nichols noted that Farebox and Contract revenues are down by 7% as a result of reduced ridership in March. He reported that the first 2 weeks of March reflected higher than usual ridership, but that as Coronavirus concerns increased, ridership dropped off dramatically. Mr. Nichols reported that Advertising revenues were the lowest they have been this fiscal year and that we anticipate those to remain low due to changing expectations for collections and advertiser requests to pause/non-renewals/cancellations of contracts.

Mr. Nichols noted that wages were higher than average as a result of increased training and the increased costs associated with sanitizing the fleet. In addition, he noted that many staff stepped away because of their concerns over exposure to COVID-19, so overtime was high. Mr. Nichols reported that fringe benefits and contract services were lower than average, and materials and supplies continued on trend but were lower than their average month. Mr. Nichols reported that we ended the month of March ahead by nearly \$12,300 for the period.

Mr. Nichols noted that looking at the Income Statement Year-to-Date, one can see how COVID 19 is impacting us. Ms. Labrie asked if we anticipate that we will see an increase in materials in April related to COVID-19 and Mr. Nichols indicated that we will definitely see an increase in that line. He noted that COAST has already spent nearly \$60,000 in supplies to have enough personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitizing products. He reported that COAST has purchased three new fogging machines to sterilize the insides of the buses. He noted that the second highest cost was for the purchase of face masks.

Mr. Capello asked if we are tracking these expenses and Mr. Nichols assure the Board that we are and that we will be reimbursed for those expenses by either CARES Act or FTA 5307 Emergency Relief funds.

Mr. Nichols noted that the Balance Sheet shows that COAST continues to be in a fairly strong position and that our available funds grew by almost \$19,000 in March.

Initial Revenue Impact Assessment – From COVID-19

Mr. Nichols presented figures that are a very initial assessment of the revenue impacts to COAST of the COVID-19 pandemic. The figures assume no fixed route operations for up to two months (April and May), 40% of typical ridership for two months, the latest projections for advertising sales and no Portsmouth Parking Shuttle operations this year.

	<u>Change vs. Budget YTD</u>
Farebox/Contract Revenue	(\$220,400) / -37%
Advertising Revenue	(\$ 75,500) / -37%
Interest/Other Income	\$ 7,250 / +54% (sold vehicles)
Federal Assistance	<i>Based on expenses</i>
Local Match Contributions *	\$ 850 / 0%
Other State/Local Assistance	<u>(\$126,825) / -22%</u>
Total Est. Revenue Impact Thru June	(\$422,725)

Mr. Nichols noted that some communities have asked about a credit given the savings to fuel and maintenance that may be realized by the suspension of operations. Mr. Nichols noted that we are a couple of months out from being able to answer that question.

Mr. Nichols reported that with CARES Act funds, the organization could continue to pay employees while they were furloughed due to the suspension of service. Mr. Sandmann noted that if we did not pay employees, they would look for a job elsewhere and we've had a hard enough time finding qualified candidates. Mr. Capello stated that we should look at all options to offset that revenue short fall. Mr. Nichols stated that the CARES funding through FTA is intended for this specific purpose. Mr. Capello asked if we have applied for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and noted we should apply, and we would qualify.

Ms. Labrie noted that we should look at whether we are eligible for the Employee Retention Credit through the CARES Act.

CARES ACT FUNDING

Mr. Nichols reported that he had just participated in a phone call prior to the Board meeting with Ms. Winters and Mr. Herlihy of NHDOT. He noted that the funds coming to the Rochester, Portsmouth, and Dover UZA amount to approximately \$5.7 million. Mr. Nichols reported that the State only wants to allocate 50% of the CARES Act funding for small urban operators across the State at this point.

V. Old Business

Fixed Route Service Suspension

On March 31, the COAST Executive Committee voted to suspend COAST fixed route and Route 7 On Demand services effective the end of business. This decision was made to protect passengers and staff from unsafe exposures to community transmission of COVID-19. COAST continues to operate all demand response services for seniors and persons with disabilities (ADA paratransit, Portsmouth Senior Transportation, Community Rides and accessible rides for Ready Rides). The average daily ridership on demand response services through the first half of April was down 60% from the previous FYTD average through February.

Turnpike Match for LBB Mitigation Project

With the suspension of fixed route services related to this project, and the award of CARES Act funding to COAST, we have mutually agreed with NHDOT to not pursue additional matching funds from the Turnpike Authority to finish out this project through June. NHDOT will no longer provide match to support the operation through June.

Heavy Duty Gillig Bus Procurement

Staff have two options for pursuing this procurement for which we have been awarded approximately \$1.9M in FTA funds for up to four (4) buses. Both would use options on procurements that were undertaken in either Vermont or Ohio and that are available to us. Staff are assessing which would be most advantageous to utilize. Our anticipated delivery of these vehicles would be in the first quarter of FY23.

VI. New Business

Action Items

Action Item #1: Additional Protective Measures and Decision Points for Resuming Fixed Route Service

It has become readily apparent through the publicized experiences of many public transit personnel across the country that personal protective equipment (PPE) is critically important for operators and other frontline staff.

Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have put out a number of fact sheets on ways for public transit employees to protect themselves from exposure to COVID-19, as well as employer guidelines to help frontline employees reduce their exposure.

When COAST suspended operations at the end of March, it was due to the inability, lack of understanding, or a brazen disregard by many individuals on the buses to practice appropriate physical distancing. At the time, some of our staff had begun wearing protective face masks (not

the N95 variety), and all had been issued gloves and sanitizing wipes for use. We had also offered ways in which they could reduce their handling of fare media while we were still collecting fares. Additionally, we had increased the frequency of our sanitization of vehicles.

Since that time, the following have become typically issued personal protective equipment and supplies of public transit agencies for their frontline employees and other staff:

- face masks, the highest quality reasonably available,
- face shields, for when working closely with passengers who need to be secured in vehicles,
- gloves,
- driver area barriers,
- much more thorough sanitizing or sterilizing of vehicles and at a higher frequency,
- sanitizing wipes for during the day,
- a personal supply of hand sanitizer, and
- a strategy for keeping up regular sanitization of facilities (6 & 42 Sumner Dr.).

It would be our goal to secure a reasonable supply, and install such PPE, prior to resuming service. At this point we have a workable driver barrier, have ordered face masks, have face shields, hand sanitizer and are finalizing the procurement of a vehicle sanitizing/sterilization solution, but we have not been able to procure gloves and sanitizing wipes at levels that would not require immediate resupply within a few weeks or less of resumed operations. The costs for PPE and sanitizing/sterilizing solutions will be expensive for initial purchase costs, including a 4 to 6-month supply of consumables.

Beyond being able to adequately secure an ongoing supply of PPE, installing a physical operator barrier and procuring a vehicle sanitizing/sterilizing solution, there are any number of other community-based determinants that must also be considered before a decision could be made to resume fixed route operations. These potentially include:

- a sustained (≥ 14 -day) reduction in COVID-19 cases in the state/region,
- the capacity at local hospitals to safely treat all patients requiring hospitalization with resorting to crisis standards of care,
- the capacity to safely test all people with COVID-19 symptoms,
- the capacity to conduct active monitoring of all confirmed cases and their contacts,
- the continuation of the Governor's emergency and social distancing orders, and
- the regional appetite for resuming economic activity.

Transit is different because it is considered an essential service, so the expectation is that we would be up and running sooner than later. The main consideration is our employees. We have started reaching out to front line staff to have a conversation with them about their comfort level in returning given the PPE we will have in place.

There are also potential considerations of whether a resumption of service be full or incremental over a set time period. There are pros and cons for each, and staff has begun working on some initial scenarios for this possibility. A challenge would be launching a notably modified schedule that would be tough to conceptualize and communicate to the public, and just before the launch of our new system at the end of June. At the same time, we would need to operate enough service to minimize overcrowding on the buses.

It is important that the Board agree, or provide guidance to staff, on what PPE standards and decision points must be met prior to the decision to resume operations is made. It is assumed

that restarting operations will not be able to occur immediately, and staff will need one to two weeks from the date of decision before operations are relaunched.

Currently, here is where we stand:

- We are waiting for a delivery date for masks from local supplier in Rochester.
- We have face shields in hand.
- We have sourced 20 gallons of hand sanitizer from a local winery in Lee. We have ordered another 40 gallons .
- We will make hand sanitizer available to passengers, in addition to staff.
- We are installing sheer plastic shower curtains as a driver barrier in our fixed route fleet.
- We are having a hard time sourcing gloves.
- We do not have a good source for sanitizing wipes (Clorox). We have a good supply on hand now, but we would go through those fairly quickly.
- Foggers that sterilize (vs. sanitize) the inside of the buses will be on site in 2 weeks. It takes about an hour to sterilize a 40' bus.
- We are working on a strategy for regular sanitization at our facilities and we are making sure we sanitize touchpoints regularly.

Action Required: *Undefined*

Mr. Lentz asked if we have been advised by FTA to invest in any of these long-term, for example requiring a move to pass cards versus accepting cash to avoid touch points. Mr. Nichols indicated that it would be highly unusual for FTA to mandate such an approach. Mr. Nichols noted that there are payment options that use smart phone apps, but we know we have a significant number of riders who do not have or do not use smartphones. Mr. Nichols continued and commented that the foggers are a long-term investment by us as they cost \$14,500 each and the solution for use in them will likely cost \$30-40K/year.

Mr. Williams noted that the only form of fare payment that involves us touching something a passenger has touched is our pink punch tickets. He noted that near the end of when we were running service in March we stopped selling them and we wouldn't punch the ticket and instead asked people to use the honor system in only showing it for as many times as were left. He reported that Operators have been clear that they do not want to touch anything the passengers have touched.

Mr. Nichols stated that some public transit agencies are requiring masks when you ride and are stressing that rides be for essential purposes only (versus just hopping on the bus and riding around because you are bored).

Mr. Hebert indicated that it's good that we're looking at protecting our employees but that we need to protect the general public from each other and asked if we're going to install hand sanitizer on the buses so passengers have to use it when they get on the bus or if we're going to offer face masks to riders. Mr. Nichols noted that we can offer hand sanitizer to passengers because we have sourced an adequate supply from the local winery, but that we would not be able to supply face masks for passengers. Mr. Nichols stressed that there are other options for passengers that would be suitable and could be a COAST expectation of passengers. Mr. Sandmann agreed that we cannot supply face masks to riders. Mr. Walker agreed with the direction we are heading and acknowledged that, at some point, we are just going to have to resume service. She stressed that we are an essential service and we should get up and running as soon as we feel we can.

Ms. Joyce asked whether we will be following any timeline the state puts into place or whether we'll go ahead of the date the Governor says. Mr. Nichols noted that we would resume service as soon as we have the protections we need to have in place for our staff and passengers and that we would resume service independent of the Governor's date. Ms. Joyce asked about our staff's potential for touching cash and Mr. Nichols noted we have implemented strategies to significantly reduce those exposures. Mr. Williams indicated that the farebox is a common touchpoint that passengers will touch but drivers can wipe down the farebox to minimize exposure.

Mr. Capello asked if we can require masks. Mr. Hebert wondered how we can require people to purchase masks when we wouldn't consider raising the fare because we were concerned people couldn't afford a higher fare. Mr. Capello challenged whether we can require masks and Ms. Walker indicated that she believes we can require passengers wear a mask. Mr. Nichols was asked to verify if we have the authority to require passengers to wear masks. Mr. Williams expressed his concern about requiring masks and expecting our operators to enforce these rules. In addition, Mr. Williams wondered how we would handle non-compliance. Mr. Sandmann stated that he suggests we strongly encourage people to wear masks.

Generally speaking, Board members encouraged COAST to move toward opening as soon as it is safely possible to do so. A starting date would be based on having appropriate PPE in place and having surveyed employees to determine their willingness to come in and fill shifts. It was agreed that COAST will give a week's notice between the announcement and when we resume service.

Mr. Capello noted that we need to have someone SHOW staff how to use protective equipment rather than just telling them to wear one.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee – emergency meeting on March 31, 2020.

Board Development Committee – did not meet.

Policy Committee – did not meet.

Legislative Committee – did not meet. Will be meeting soon.

Discussion Items

Discussion Item #1: New System Launch Progress

Schedule Brochures

We have completed design of our new route brochures. Mr. Nichols showed an example of the new brochures. We had several staff, riders and others review the new design and layout for understandability and ease of use and the feedback was very positive. We will produce a similar brochure for each route. Additionally, a systemwide brochure will also be produced with additional information.

Website Update

Design of the needed schedule updates continues to be a very real hurdle. There is significantly more data, the GTFS feed specifications by Google keep changing and the import process into the website is still being troubleshot.

All other aspects of the website update should be smooth in comparison.

Destination Signs/Announcements

We await the return of the reprogrammed data card so we can update the destination signs and annunciation system when it is time.

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 been initiated yet.

Training

This has been postponed with the social distancing order in place by the Governor.

New Bus Stop Locations

All finalized and approved at this point.

Bus Stops

Bus stop sign design for all bus stop locations is complete. Unfortunately, due to the predominant signpost style in place, we had to give up on double-sided signs.

At transfer stations (DTC & Hanover Station) we will be producing specific posters about all of the connecting services and systemwide information for mounting at the stations.

We are currently soliciting quotes for production of the bus stop signs.

6 Sumner

Our landlords have given us the go ahead on redesigning the entryway area. We will also need to begin work on approvals from Dover for the installation of a new bus shelter on the edge of the property.

The biggest challenge continues to be keeping all projects that rely on outside design and input moving along on the timelines we must meet in order to be ready for a June 29 launch. Mr. Capello asked if we are putting remodeling on hold until we figure out where we are financially, and Mr. Nichols commented that funding for this project was currently all in place.

VII. Community Updates/Information Items

42 Sumner

We have developed a draft scope of work for our A&E firm to review prior to providing a cost estimate and timeline for completion.

The scope of work is to evaluate either pursuing major renovations to our existing facility, or the design and construction of a completely new facility. Deliverables will allow us to accurately estimate the cost and value of each, and then decide how to move forward. The scope was put together based on guidance for preparing such work scopes made available through the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).

One of the features of the scope of work involves the establishment of a Design Team and/or a Building Committee consisting of key members of COAST staff and up to two board members. Mr. Nichols asked board members interested in serving on that committee to email him.

Ridership

Over the first half of March we did not see any notable impacts on ridership due to the coronavirus pandemic. In fact, on many bus routes ridership was up. As the reach of COVID-19 spread in New Hampshire and our region, the impacts on ridership were dramatic, and grew worse each week.

By the end of the month fixed route ridership was down 24.5% from the previous FYTD monthly average. In the last full week of the month weekday fixed route ridership was down 57% from the first two weeks average. Saturday ridership was similarly down by 59%.

Demand response ridership was also dramatically impacted by the end of the month. For the month, demand response ridership was down 30.8% from the previous FYTD monthly average. In the last full week of the month weekday demand response ridership was down 40-65% from the first two weeks average (depending on the service). Saturday ridership was similarly impacted. Available monthly ridership figures for March were presented with the Board Packet.

Ms. Walker noted that she is excited for Ms. Rugg's last commuter challenge starting on May 1. Mr. Campbell reported that Mr. Michael Scala will join the Legislative Committee. Mr. Pepin reported that the council voted on the proposed budget and that had level funded COAST from the previous year.

VIII. Adjournment

Mr. Campbell made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Pepin seconded. All voted in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 9:55am.