



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation
DRAFT Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors
Wednesday, March 22, 2023**

PRESENT: Kendra Amaral (virtual), Fred Butler (virtual), Ben Fletcher (virtual), Robert Gibson, Lauren Haley (virtual), Margaret Joyce, Colin Lentz, Kristen Murphy, David Sandmann (virtual), Mike Scala, Dennis Shanahan, Nick Taylor

ABSENT: Scott Bogle, Sönke Dornblut, Benjamin Fletcher, Denis Hebert, Michael Mates, Thomas Wright

STAFF: Rad Nichols, Margot Doering, Michael Williams

I. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Shanahan asked if a motion could be made to approve the minutes of the January 25, 2022 meeting. Mr. Lentz made the motion to accept the minutes as drafted, and Mr. Gibson seconded the motion. There was no discussion and Mr. Shanahan undertook the vote by roll call.

Ms. Amaral	Yes
Mr. Gibson	Yes
Ms. Haley	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Ms. Murphy	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Taylor	Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Nichols recognized two employees for reaching milestone anniversaries and two employees reaching safety records that we recognize.

- Ms. Goodwin, CDL Operator - 10 years
- Mr. Lefavour, Vehicle Cleaner (Detailer) - 15 years
- Ms. Outhuse, Administrative Assistant/Non-CDL Operator – 5 Yrs. Preventable Collision Free
- Mr. Calhoun, Vehicle Cleaner – 5 Yrs. Preventable Collision Free

Mr. Williams also added comments on each employee and their valuable contributions to the operation and COAST.

VI. FINANCIALS

Ms. Doering noted the typical trends we have been experiencing continue for revenue lines. She highlighted the very strong advertising revenues year to date, but variability from month to month. Ms. Doering and Mr. Nichols answered a couple of board member questions around advertising capacity and reasoning for the month to month variability of collections.

Ms. Doering noted a correction to the wage expense line since the Finance Committee meeting on Monday. Mr. Scala asked if that meant wages were in line with the budget now. Ms. Doering explained that with the correction, we are on track with our budgeted spending on wages.

Overall revenues are under budget due to lower expenses.

Nothing was noted on the balance sheet.

Ms. Doering also gave a brief update on progress setting up our new banking relationship with Chase Bank.

There were no further questions for Ms. Doering.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Upcoming Removal of Service Suspensions

Mr. Nichols provided an update that in January we continued the trend of removing service suspensions, both during the week and on Saturdays. Bus routes which saw service suspensions removed at least partially included Weekday Routes 40 and 43, and Saturday Routes 1, 33, and 34. We are now back up to operating 72% of our fixed route system, 79% on weekdays and 30% of Saturdays. This is up from a low of only 60% last summer.

He added that we are working now to remove a significant amount of Saturday service suspensions on May 20. This will also include returning Saturday service on Route 7 On Demand (eliminating temporarily established service on Tuesdays in exchange). At that point we will be back to operating 78% of our full fixed route system, 79% on weekdays and 70% on Saturdays.

Mr. Shanahan asked for a quick update on staffing. Mr. Williams responded that ideally we would hire one additional FT CDL and non-CDL Operator going into the May schedule and summer with planned vacation absences.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

ACTION ITEMS

Action Item #1: Policy on Prohibited Drug Use and Alcohol Misuse Revision

Mr. Williams explained that the last update of our current Policy was in 2020, and we had found minor updates were needed based on latest practices and other changes that have subsequently occurred.

- Added a new section 6.11 to bring greater clarity to how pay is handled for employees who are out of work awaiting the results of post-accident and reasonable suspicion tests (developed in conjunction with Heather and Vanessa).
- In some cases, changed the word “immediately” to “as soon as reasonably possible” where there is not a legal need for immediacy. This better fits the reality. For example,

negative dilute tests require a retest not immediately, but as soon as it can be schedule.

- Clarified in the FMCSA Clearinghouse that the checks are only run for CDL Operators (non-CDL operators are not in the system and cannot be run).
- Updated contact information for current MRO, SAP, etc.
- Updated list of job titles that are safety sensitive, to reflect current titles.
- Added the threshold for a positive alcohol result to section 3.1 (it's elsewhere in the policy, but in training this is often the point where it comes up, so it helps with training flow to have it listed here).

Action Required: *That the Board of Directors approve the revised Policy on Prohibited Drug Use and Alcohol Misuse*

Mr. Shanahan asked if a motion could be made to approve the revised Policy. Mr. Lentz moved the action as requested, and Ms. Joyce seconded the motion.

Ms. Joyce asked if we contract outside for the Medical Officer. Mr. Williams explained that we do contract for those services and others through a third party administrator.

There was no further discussion and Mr. Shanahan undertook the vote by roll call.

Ms. Amaral	Yes
Mr. Gibson	Yes
Ms. Haley	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Ms. Murphy	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Taylor	Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Executive Committee – did not meet.

Board Development Committee – no report.

Policy Committee – did not meet.

Legislative Committee – more information to be provided in the discussion item on the Statewide Public Transportation Coalition update

Finance Committee – met on Monday, March 20 (2:30pm, Rochester City Hall Annex, 2nd floor Conference Room).

Discussion Items

Discussion Item #1: Spring Rider Survey

Mr. Williams explained that historically we have attempted to complete a comprehensive rider survey on a biennial cycle. Due to the timing of data collection efforts around our Comprehensive Operations Analysis and fixed route system redesign and then the pandemic, we have not completed a rider survey since 2019.

This spring we are prepared to survey our passengers once again, which provides a wealth of information we can utilize to compare against past surveys, use for future decision making, as well as to develop a clearer picture of who is currently using our services and for what reasons.

While we plan on repeating many of the questions, we will be updating and modifying some in order to make sure they stay relevant and are focused on the information we do not otherwise have available or can easily gather. A couple of new questions have been added to help us better understand how to improve or market the services to improve ridership.

We ask each rider to complete the survey just once.

The survey is currently scheduled to be conducted during the week of April 3-7. Staff will likely not be able to cover all the times when we may need individuals riding to help distribute and collect the surveys (on busier routes). Volunteers to help are needed and welcomed. Signage and social media outreach are up or scheduled.

Ms. Joyce asked about our response rates. Mr. Williams shared the results from the last survey effort, however that was not focused just on riders. Mr. Nichols believed the results in prior surveys have ranged between 25-30%.

Mr. Scala asked whether we had thought about incentivizing the taking of the survey by riders. Mr. Williams noted that the challenge there is that we are only looking for riders to complete the survey once.

Mr. Taylor asked about how the survey was distributed (paper, onboard the buses) vs. an app. Mr. Williams acknowledged the benefit of a relative low cost by conducting the survey in this manner as well as the known higher rate of our riders who do not have access to a smartphone app or computer to otherwise complete the survey.

Mr. Fletcher entered the meeting virtually at 8:57am.

Discussion Item #2: Review of Fares & Potential New Fare Options with Electronic Fare Payment

Mr. Williams noted that the concept of a fare increase had come up in many previous board meetings and given the length of time any such analysis/process on such a change would take, we decided to bring this item to the board for discussion well in advance of a potential FY24 implementation.

The biggest challenge to this discussion currently is that there simply are no recent empirical grounds for making any ridership projections based on potential fare changes. A 1991 American Public Transit Association (APTA) study is the most current available to project impacts of fare increases on ridership and is now highly suspect given the current environment. He noted in conversations with the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) they agreed that this data, and any other studies that are known, are not valid in the changed dynamics of a post-COVID world. Additionally, they have put out a

question on our behalf to their membership, asking about any ridership impacts from systems that have recently raised their fares. Unfortunately, that question has not resulted in any responses being shared with us at this point.

All this being said, staff ran four scenarios using the 1991 study and assumptions contained within that study, having no other empirical data to rely upon. The four scenarios included: no change, \$1.00 base fare, \$1.65 base fare, and a \$2.00 base fare. In each case estimated ridership impacts were calculated, as well as estimated revenue impacts.

Base Fixed Route Fare	Estimated Ridership Impact vs. FY 23 Projected	Estimated Revenue Impact
\$1.50	9.9%	Neutral
\$1.00	15.0%	Loss of \$102,870
\$2.00	- 12.9%	Gain of \$29,510
\$1.65*	- 4.3%	Loss of \$8,710

* represents a 10% fare increase and 1991 study’s projected impacts to ridership.

Mr. Lentz inquired whether the experience we gained when we applied a surcharge on riders in Somersworth provided empirical data we could rely upon. Mr. Williams responded that it helped to support the expectation that an increase in ridership would negatively impact ridership, but because of the conditions and limitations of the data collection at the time it was only indicative vs. providing a methodology for extrapolating that across the system post-COVID.

Mr. Lentz also asked about the value of increased ridership vs. decreased fare revenue and whether they were proportionally equal in terms of benefits. Mr. Williams stated that ridership has typically been viewed as more important to us. Ultimately, we expect higher ridership levels to come from higher levels of service vs. a slightly cheaper fare. We are really not entirely comfortable with the projections of a 5.5% ridership increase associated with a \$0.50 reduction in the fare.

Mr. Gibson inquired about measuring ridership by stop in each community on a regular and ongoing basis. Mr. Williams noted that we have that data now, and actually began collecting it in 2019, but did not have it when the surcharge was last put into effect in Somersworth.

Mr. Sandmann noted that when we implemented our last fare increase we did experience a dip in ridership, but then saw it come back relatively quickly. Mr. Nichols agreed that had happened, however we also had several service additions that also happened in that time frame. He noted that the real issue in today’s environment is that no one can predict or has completed a study that can tell us how fare elasticities have changed in the post-COVID world. Mr. Sandmann commented that a fare increase would not be beyond expectations given cost increases nearly everywhere else.

Mr. Lentz asked why we are discussing fare changes if we are still trying to dig out from under the pandemic. Mr. Williams noted that this is being discussed as a result of having

come up multiple times over the past year or so in board discussions. The timing of the discussion is important if we want a fare increase to be considered in FY24 budgeting.

Mr. Williams noted that the survey we are in the process of completing could help us understand more about the fare elasticities of our riders. We also know that it is possible we may have to make some service adjustments due to the financial picture we have been looking at, and the timing of those relative to a fare change may be important to consider.

Ms. Doering also highlighted the options that COAST may have using a fare payment app, and how that may change rider behavior.

Mr. Williams introduced information on the fare payment app that had been quoted to us as part of the bid that Passio had provided us as a part of that procurement.

Mr. Fletcher related the City of Portsmouth's experience with app-based payment for parking. He noted the costs related to what Mr. Williams had explained seemed reasonable.

Mr. Shanahan noted after the discussion that the implementation of a fare change in the near term appeared to now be where we want to head at this time. Secondly, moving ahead with an app-based fare payment system does seem to be a direction we do want to head toward. Mr. Williams noted that we are awaiting two main things to help us on the decision on an app-based fare payment system. The first is our contractor Passio continuing to make improvements with their technology implementation at COAST. Secondly, we are awaiting survey results to understand how many of our passengers may take advantage of such an app.

Mr. Sandmann asked if we should postpone this discussion until after the survey has been completed. Mr. Shanahan suggested that this will be an ongoing discussion and that we recognize we need more data before making decisions.

Discussion around bringing back the discussion on integrating an app-based fare payment system in May or June, after the results of the survey had been entered and analyzed.

Ms. Haley added as a social worker that the clients she works with would be quite sensitive to a fare increase and tend to not have as much access to technology or even bank accounts as we might otherwise assume, and these were all important considerations in the discussion that had been taking place.

Mr. Shanahan asked that as we move forward we consider this perspective and also keep a fare reduction on the table as well.

Discussion Item #3: New Facility Update

Mr. Nichols went over with the writeup he had provided.

Mr. Taylor asked about the latest cost estimate. Mr. Nichols noted that the cost estimate was now over \$20M, however those costs were being reviewed again to see where they may be able to tighten up the estimate, or otherwise drive down the projected cost of the project.

Design/Permitting/Approvals

- Architect and MEP engineers are at 60% design; however, we are still owed answers to many questions/points we made at the end of 2022. Waiting to proceed further with design until we contract for final design.
- We received an updated cost estimate on Thursday 3/16. We have submitted several questions to better understand the new figures, which have escalated notably.
- CMA is working on our Categorical Exclusion Application from NEPA and will forward to FTA for their consultation very soon. We need this approval to be able to apply for grant funds to proceed to final design/construction.
- CMA submitted our application for Dover Technical Review Committee consideration on Thursday 3/16 for the 3/30 meeting. Ideally submit to Planning Board in early May for the May 23 mtg. Also need to go through the Conservation Commission.

Funding

- Discussions on potential state capital funding with the NHDOT are ongoing. Another discussion is expected early next week.
- We were just notified that some of the 5339(a) funds awarded to us through the NHDOT need to be put on a grant before the end of this Fiscal Year or they may lapse.
- We are working on getting our summertime 5339(b) and end of year CDS award into the TIP/STIP as part of the amendment that is now working its way through the process. Ideally these funds will get on a grant before discussions on the debt ceiling get underway in earnest.
- We continue to wait to hear on new IRA grant opportunities for the green elements of the project.
- We are investigating other private fundraising opportunities.
- Additional board member assistance is going to be needed with the ongoing marketing of our tax credits.
- Rebates available for some elements of the project (up to 30%) may be helpful.

Project Management

- Finding staff need additional help with this project and we are now pursuing contracting for a Project Manager to work on our behalf with the engineers on final design and other contractors when we move into construction.

Ms. Amaral offered to forward their project management RFP that they had recently utilized.

Discussion Item #4: Statewide Public Transportation Coalition Update

Mr. Nichols noted that it had been another busy month for activities around the growing coalition.

Meetings have continued to take place statewide with key legislators on committees that will be considering the DOT's portion of the state budget. Conversations have been productive, and legislators have appreciated the information we have been able to share, including the impacts of our work, the strong leveraging power of state funds, and overall human impact the funding could have.

On Friday, March 10 word was passed on to us that the additional \$1.883M of operating funds included within the NHDOT additional needs request (which would equate to \$602,495 in SFY24 and \$1,680,794 in SFY25) was included in the budget. It may be

affected in Committee when updated revenue projections come out or could be affected in the joint House Finance Committee, or House floor votes, but it remained in as of Friday 3/17. The first step (of many yet to come) has been achieved!

Outreach to Senators has also been initiated on many fronts.

We have an upcoming meeting with the Governor's Office on March 24.

We are striving to generate additional publicity and news coverage as word continues to spread about the coalition. This should help to elevate the discussion in the Legislative Office Building and State House in Concord.

Ms. Joyce encouraged Mr. Nichols to make a connection with Seacoast Economic Development Stakeholders and potentially make a presentation on the Coalition.

VII. Community Updates/Information Items

Ridership

Mr. Nichols went over ridership in February.

- Overall ridership in February totaled 19,987. This was up 2.6% from January. Ridership was 4.3% higher than in February 2022.
- Fixed route ridership totalled 18,392, up 3.3% from January. Ridership was 3.2% higher than in February 2022.
- Demand response ridership in February totalled 1,595, another lower ridership month again like January. While representing a 4.8% decrease in ridership from January, it still was a 19.9% increase over February 2022.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Shanahan adjourned the meeting, without objection, at 9:56am.

Respectfully submitted by Ms. Joyce, Secretary