



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation  
Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors  
Wednesday, November 16, 2022**

PRESENT: Scott Bogle, Fred Butler (virtual), Denis Hebert, Margaret Joyce, Colin Lentz, Michael Mates, Mike Scala, Dennis Shanahan, Peter Stith (virtual), Nick Taylor (virtual)

ABSENT: Kendra Amaral, Sönke Dornblut, Benjamin Fletcher, Robert Gibson, Lauren Haley, Kristen Murphy, David Sandmann, Thomas Wright

STAFF: Rad Nichols, Margot Doering (virtual), Kathy Bean

**I. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The meeting was called to order at 8:34am by Mr. Shanahan.

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Shanahan asked if a motion could be made to approve the minutes of the October 26, 2022 meeting. Mr. Hebert made the motion to accept the minutes as drafted, and Mr. Bogle seconded the motion. There was no discussion and Mr. Shanahan undertook the vote by roll call.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Mates	Abstain
Mr. Scala	Yes
Mr. Stith	Abstain
Mr. Taylor	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes

The motion passed unanimously with abstentions.

**III. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Shanahan asked for any public comment and Mr. Nichols introduced Ms. Bean, a COAST CDL Operator, who has been a CDL Operator for the organization since 2012 and has reached the 10 year milestone as an employee. Kathy started at COAST in a full time capacity and has since moved to part time, but a major contributor. She has been a very reliable employee, particularly in times when staffing has been lean, and has done what she can to help ensure we maintain as much service as possible. Ms. Bean thanked the board for the recognition. Mr. Shanahan thanked Ms. Bean for her service to the organization and our customers. Mr. Nichols commented how much she and her passengers get along.

## **V. OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Nichols gave brief updates on several old business items.

### **Staffing**

To be fully staffed, COAST needs an additional:

- 3 full time and 2 part time CDL Operators
- 3 part time Non-CDL Operators

Mr. Williams was not able to make it to the meeting due to training new staff that have just come on board. Trainees include one full time CDL Operator and one part time CDL Operator in training.

With unexpected changes in the status of a few current staff in the last few weeks, we are now stretched very thin and are challenged to meet our current daily schedules.

### **Fixed Route Technology Transition**

We have ended all service on the DoubleMap app, and now solely provide real-time information through the new Passio Go! app. The real time location data is accurate. Passio has continued to make progress on the technical issues, though they are not gone. We are testing the voice announcement feature and are preparing to start testing the destination sign integration.

Mr. Shanahan asked if Passio was acknowledging the identified issues and working on them. Mr. Nichols responded positively that Passio was.

Mr. Butler inquired about the ongoing costs associated with Passio. Mr. Nichols could not recall in the moment but committed to getting that information to Mr. Butler.

## **VI. NEW BUSINESS**

### **ACTION ITEMS**

Mr. Nichols noted that there were no action items on the agenda this month.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Mr. Nichols gave a quick update on Committee activities.

- Executive Committee – did not meet.
- Board Development Committee – outreach to fill open positions on the board is ongoing.
- Policy Committee – did not meet.
- Legislative Committee – met on October 28th to discuss the formation of a new statewide public transit coalition and potential legislation for the upcoming session.
- Finance Committee – met on Monday, November 14 at 2:30pm in the Rochester City Hall Annex, 2nd floor Conference Room.

### **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**Discussion Item #1: Building a Statewide Public Transit Coalition**

Mr. Nichols introduced the concept for discussion.

We at COAST are interested in starting a meaningful statewide dialogue on increasing state operating support in New Hampshire. We need to get beyond the “good start to the conversation” phase and put something in action. This also is meant to follow through on a legislative strategy Commissioner Sheehan has repeatedly asked the NH Transit Association (NHTA) and its members to take on to advocate for ourselves and our financial needs.

We are hoping, through a coalition of public transit and community-based transportation providers, and the communities we serve, we can begin to build momentum on this topic.

It is our understanding that sometime in 2024 or 2025, some or all the state’s public transit operators may run out of emergency COVID relief funds. When this happens, we will all likely face some form of shortfall in our budgets. At COAST the impact is estimated to be north of \$1.2M in FY25.

Ultimately, our goal is to influence positive legislation to financially support our ongoing operating needs, particularly in light of rapidly increasing costs, newly available Federal funds we can use in New Hampshire if we had the matching funds available, and to simply maintain or ideally even grow our systems.

Some questions to be asked:

- How important would additional state funds be for each operation?
- Why does public and community-based transit need more money with all the emergency funding and IIJA funding that has come through in the past 2+ years?
- Projecting out, are operators facing funding shortfalls in the next few years?
- What would the impact of additional state funds be for each system (i.e., how they maintain services, be used for expansion, etc.)?
- Is this something that systems/operations could actively get behind and support?
- Would leadership in the communities served be supportive and actively engage in such an effort?

We have been reaching out to providers to discuss this and how their system/operation could benefit. The next step is for those operators to discuss this concept with their community leaders, before potentially preparing for a statewide transit summit. The summit would be an opportunity for us to all gel and find common ground to work together on with our community leaders, discuss how we best join forces, and approach the legislature to affect the change we hope to see.

The Legislative Committee had a long discussion on this at their October 28 meeting.

Mr. Nichols asked members to reach out to their leaders and champions in their sphere to begin discussing the formation of the coalition on its goals.

Mr. Nichols added that the NHDOT had submitted a supplemental request for an increase in funding for public transit operations in both SFY24 for rural providers and SFY25 for urban and rural providers. It was noted the request may not make it out of the governor's budget, but that doesn't mean things are over, and a steady beating of the drum will be necessary. We need to focus on the long game.

Mr. Shanahan explained that the discussion at the Legislative Committee was that we want to really leverage the work that the NHTA is doing, but really enhance it to. For example, when there is a hearing, we have something presented for COAST and statewide on a consistent near and long term message about sustainability. We need to coalesce the individual providers around the state on that consistent message, which is more than just dollar and cents.

Mr. Nichols noted that we have to agree on that messaging and what additional funding will mean. It may be more challenging because what we will be able to do with the funding being discussed is sustain vs. grow operations.

Mr. Bogle noted that this round sustaining operations should be the target, but that long term we should be shooting for funding levels that allow us to expand and grow our reach and impact. He highlighted how far behind our peers NH is in funding of public transit.

Mr. Nichols stressed that the discussion he wanted to have at the meeting was how COAST as a board and organization works together to reach out to our community leaders in the region to begin to have conversations around this topic and begin to develop interest in the coalition, including communities, businesses, and organizations.

Mr. Shanahan added that the goal is to have the parties get together around the same table to really begin to develop a plan going forward that recognizes the future needs, which hopefully can be done sometime in early 2023.

Telling data points, simple and few, relative to our neighbors and how paltry NH's contribution is will be key to identify. Along with what is currently happening with costs and the perception that we are all fine with the millions of dollars in emergency relief funds we have received.

## **Discussion Item #2: Facility Project Update**

Mr. Nichols explained that we had received our 30-60% plans from the engineering firm, which had been shared via a OneDrive folder online. There was some discussion around how members are having issues accessing the files.

Mr. Nichols then proceeded to go through the phasing plan for the project. Total project length is estimated at around 28 months. The first phase would include the construction of the new offices (administration/operations) and maintenance garage and was designed to allow us to continue to operate on-site. Phase 2 would include the demolition of the current buildings to allow for the construction of the new parking area and sitework necessary for the new bus storage facility. During phase 2, we will likely not be able to continue to house the fleet on the site.

Next Mr. Nichols presented the drawings of the administrative and operations office part of the new facility as well as the maintenance garage, walking through the various aspects of the design.

Ms. Joyce inquired whether there was equipment that would be moving over to the new facility. Mr. Nichols responded that some equipment would be moving over, however new equipment (lifts, bus wash system, etc.) would need to be purchased.

Finally, Mr. Nichols presented the drawings of the bus storage facility, including the layout of a solar array on the south facing roof of the building.

Mr. Shanahan asked if it was our intention to purchase all the necessary solar equipment up front. Mr. Nichols said that was the intention, but we need to have more discussions around that.

There is a meeting scheduled for interested board members and our engineering firm on Friday, November 18.

An updated high confidence cost estimate remains a concern. We continue to discuss and work through how we might be able to obtain this.

Mr. Nichols discussed shifting of the timeline to be ready to go out to bid in the fall of 2023, hoping that there might be a contraction in the economy and settling out of the supply chain issues that are currently affecting construction.

Mr. Hebert asked what the contract with CMA said about their providing an updated cost estimate. Mr. Nichols responded that should be a discussion point on Friday with CMA and board members. Mr. Hebert also suggested that additive bidding be utilized when we go out to bid, so we have options and not look at this as all or nothing. Mr. Nichols responded that was our thinking.

#### **IV. Financial Report**

Ms. Doering gave the financial report. Because the meeting is happening so early in the month the figures provided are truly preliminary so far. Farebox and advertising revenues are true numbers that won't change. Interest and other income is showing a loss due to the sale of a vehicle for more than \$5,000, which under the BIL means we have to return funds to the FTA.

We have new rates effective in our budget for wages and insurance, but those will not take effect until either January or November. When making year to date comparisons, we have

historically simply divided the budget by 12 months to make our comparisons, however we might put a little more refinement behind that analysis going forward to more closely reflect what is actually happening.

On the balance sheet there are a couple of items of note. The inventory level and accrued paid time off are adjusted once a year at the end of the fiscal year. Once those numbers have been solidified, they will stay where they are for the next 11 months. The receivables are a little high as we haven't finished drawing September funds, nor October, from the FTA. The local funding earned, \$544,000, represents local funds received from towns and cities and are put in this account on the balance sheet, until it is brought onto the income statement in 12 increments. Just a little nuance of accrual accounting.

Ms. Joyce asked about what other held funds represent. Ms. Doering responded they represent other sorts of minor accruals and also funds provided for coordination.

Ms. Joyce asked whether COAST has taken advantage of the employee retention tax credits. Ms. Doering responded that in previous conversations with our auditor it was determined that we were not eligible, if we are talking about the same program.

There was a quick discussion on the ongoing costs for our real-time bus information system.

## **VI. COMMUNITY UPDATES/INFORMATION ITEMS**

### 2021 National Transit Database

Mr. Nichols explained that on November 1, FTA released the 2021 National Transit Database (NTD) annual data products. The full set of files includes data from transit providers nationwide, such as:

- Ridership
- Operating expenses
- Safety and security events

A high-level overview of the data for the 2021 report year is included in the 2021 National Transit Summaries and Trends, also available now. Mr. Nichols presented COAST's agency profile as well as some comparative charts of COAST data up against the National Transit Summaries and Trends data. COAST compared favorably for the most part.

Mr. Shanahan asked about the level of effort to complete the annual report. Mr. Nichols responded that it largely represented the minimal effort required to effectively manage an operation.

Ms. Joyce asked if this reporting was a requirement of receiving federal funds. Mr. Nichols replied that it was.

### Ridership

- Overall ridership in October totaled 23,075. This was up 4% from September, partially due to more operating days in the month. Ridership was also 3.3% above ridership achieved in October 2021. Ridership in October was the third highest of any month since the pandemic began.

- Fixed route ridership totalled 21,059, up 3.7% from September. That said, ridership was up by 1.2% from October 2021. A reminder, we are currently providing significantly less fixed route service when making comparisons to the same months of the previous year. Average weekday ridership in October was the third highest since the pandemic began, only eclipsed by July and September 2022. We did reinstate most Route 1 and 33 afternoon service that had been temporarily suspended mid-month.
- After previously peaking at 1,862 in September, demand response ridership in October set a new high for the month since the pandemic began, totalling 2,016. This also represented an 8.3% increase over ridership in September and a 31.8% increase over October 2021.

#### Community/Member Updates

Ms. Joyce asked to recognize Ms. Polychronis of the staff for her participation in the Chamber's smart business series. The focus of the series was employee recruitment and retention. She did a tremendous job and COAST is a perfect case study on this topic.

#### **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Shanahan adjourned the meeting, without objection, at 10:07am.

Respectfully submitted by Margaret Joyce, Secretary