



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation
Approved Minutes of the Board of Directors
Wednesday, April 23, 2025**

Present: Scott Bogle, Fred Butler (virtual), Arthur Capello, Sean Clancy, Sönke Dornblut (virtual), Denis Hebert, Jillian Harris (virtual, arr. 9:13), Margaret Joyce, Colin Lentz, Joann Neumann (virtual), Dave Sandmann (virtual), and Michael Scala

Absent: Kendra Amaral, Emily Ham, Michael Mates, Crystal Paradis-Catanzaro, Dennis Shanahan, David Tovey

Staff: Rad Nichols, Michael Williams, Margot Doering, Vanessa Polychronis, Heather Hesse-Stromberg

Guest: David Lemay, Rochester resident

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Vice-Chair Scala at 8:35am with a quorum present.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Hebert made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 26, 2025 board meeting which was seconded by Mr. Bogle. There were no comments, questions, or revisions.

Mr. Scala took the vote by roll call:

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	<i>Not yet connected</i>
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Ms. Neumann	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes

The minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Nichols recognized Crystal Dumont, TripLink Supervisor, for reaching 15 years at COAST. He noted that Ms. Dumont started as Dispatcher and is now the Supervisor of TripLink Call Center. He acknowledged that she is great at what she does and we are lucky to have her working at COAST. We will put a plaque up, as we do for all employees reaching 10, 15, 20 and beyond year milestones.

Mr. Nichols noted that the Learn & Engage event in Portsmouth the previous night was a great success. There were many good conversations before and after the event, and we made some good connections. Prior to the event, Mr. Nichols and the consultants had a great lunch meeting with a potential supporter. Mr. Nichols reported feeling good about the momentum we are building.

IV. FINANCIALS

Ms. Doering reported that the higher level of accounts receivable in the report is because we are waiting for paperwork to complete a grant. When the grant finally goes through all its various stages of approval we will be able to draw down some of the money that's been held up in that process. She noted that we have taken delivery of two demand response cutaways. She shared that she had a good meeting about banking services with Kennebunk Savings Bank, who shared they have new products coming out this fall. We are potentially looking to move our coin-to-cash deposits there in the near term. These are currently at Chase.

V. Old Business

Board Member Giving

Mr. Nichols thanked board members who responded to his April 1 letter about the importance of achieving 100% board giving. Thus far we have received donations totaling \$550. Mr. Hebert expressed concern about not all board members being able to afford to participate in the process. Mr. Nichols noted that if a Board member is unable to contribute, there will be a donation in the name of the board so we can achieve 100% Board giving. Ms. Joyce asked if giving during NH Gives is okay or puts a wrench in the timeline. Mr. Nichols noted that is fine. Ms. Joyce noted that the goal is to say 100% Board giving versus a particular dollar amount; whatever people are comfortable giving is great.

Fare Free Saturdays

Mr. Nichols shared that our second sponsored Fare Free Saturday was held on April 19 and was sponsored by Piscataqua Savings Bank. We have a banking relationship with Piscataqua Savings Bank. There was an increase in ridership of 28% on our fixed routes and was an average Saturday on demand response services. The next Fare Free Saturday is scheduled for May 24 and will be sponsored by Breezeline. The staff is working on securing additional donors to cover future Fare Free Saturdays.

State Operating Investment Advocacy

Mr. Nichols reported that the House budget that was passed and moved over to the Senate has continued to include at least \$1.5M in the NHDOT budget for statewide public transit operations. This would represent approximately level funding to the current year.

Facility – Final Design Update

Mr. Nichols reported that the final design is progressing on schedule. We have weekly meetings scheduled to track progress. We have retained the expertise of an interior design firm via an available NH state contract. Office Interiors of Dover will assist us with these important aspects of the design. Our initial kickoff meeting was on April 17. We are looking to make the space energizing for employees and anyone on site.

Fundraising Update

Mr. Nichols shared that we worked with Kennebunk Savings Bank on a small event to accept a “big” check from their new CEO on the afternoon of March 26. You can watch the video on their YouTube page.

In addition, he reported that on April 1 we were notified by First Seacoast Bank that they were making a \$25,000 donation toward our new facility capital campaign.

In mid-April we were invited by the NH Charitable Foundation to submit a first-year grant for \$50,000 in general operating support that we could use to support the expansion of our development activities. We expect this will be a two-year opportunity.

Area banks that are considering requests for donations include Merrimack Village Savings Bank and Bangor Savings Bank. We are also trying to make connections with Service Credit Union, M&T Bank, Eastern Bank and Newburyport Savings Bank. In addition, we have a request at Chase Bank, as our primary bank that we do business with.

He noted that we continue to seek one-on-one meetings with select individuals and companies who can introduce us to other philanthropists and/or consider donations of their own. We will also be pursuing connections with the people with whom we engaged at the Learn & Engage event the previous night.

VI. New Business

Action Items

Action Item #1: Free Ticket Program Update

Mr. Nichols reported that at the February Board Meeting when we discussed the expansion of the Free Ticket Program there were some concerns expressed about needing to tighten up the language contained within the Policy and about the intent behind how we had expanded the eligibility. There was also a request for some additional context relating to how the Program was being utilized.

Staff reworked the policy to reflect the expanded intent behind the policy. Additional information was presented that lists the agencies that are part of the pre-approved list, the contacts we work with at the municipal level, and the order history with each this year. So far this year we have sent out 22,100 tickets.

In 2024 the numbers increased because we expanded the program. Also shared was COAST's exposure (\$71,928.06) due to loss of those sales. We do receive partial reimbursement from NHCF of \$15,000 a year for this year and next.

A draft of the new policy was shared which includes the terms and conditions for participating. Part of cleaning up the policy is to offer 3,000 free tickets annually to nonprofits in COAST's service area whose programming priorities are people transitioning out of homelessness and to

help people get out of active addiction and into recovery. Mr. Nichols noted that there has always been a focus on homelessness but that in the past it was by supporting emergency shelters. That has been expanded further to assist more people trying to transition out of homelessness.

Action Required: *To consider and approve the revised Free Ticket Program Policy.*

Mr. Sandmann made a motion to approve the revised Free Ticket Program Policy and Mr. Hebert seconded with one correction to the policy fixing a typo.

Mr. Scala thinks it's great that we have specified this because it is helpful for municipalities to be able to share that their support of COAST also supports these greater efforts.

Mr. Scala took the vote by roll call:

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Ms. Neumann	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes

The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Nichols thanked Ms. Polychronis for her efforts on the new policy and the program in general.

Action Item #2: SFY26-27 NHDOT FTA 5310 Grant Agreement

Mr. Nichols noted that COAST must enter into a grant agreement with the NHDOT for FTA 5310 RCC and Mobility Management funds being awarded to COAST. The FTA 5310 funds are formula funds totaling \$1,412,000 and are for the support of COAST mobility management activities, the regional mobility manager position, and the purchase of transportation services through vetted agencies performed on behalf of ACT between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2027.

Mr. Butler requested wiggle room of 5% in the dollar amount be added for the board vote because the final blessing has not yet been received by the Commissioner at NHDOT.

Action Required: *That the Board adopt the attached Corporate Resolution to enable the Executive Director to enter a grant agreement for approximately \$1.142M funds with the NHDOT.*

Mr. Capello made a motion that the Board adopt the Corporate Resolution to enable the Executive Director to enter an agreement for said funds with NHDOT for approximately \$1.142M which was seconded by Mr. Bogle.

Mr. Scala took the vote by roll call:

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Ms. Neumann	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes

The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Action Item #3: SFY26-27 NHDOT FTA 5311 Grant Agreement

COAST must enter into a grant agreement with the NHDOT for FTA 5311 funds being awarded to COAST and managed by NHDOT.

Mr. Nichols noted that this grant agreement is new for us and is for rural public transit funding. Route 7 On Demand in Exeter, Stratham, and Newmarket is now considered to fall entirely within a rural area, so NHDOT invited us to apply for these funds. This would be \$90,000 each year for the biennium, totaling approximately \$180,000.

Action Required: *That the Board adopt the attached Corporate Resolution to enable the Executive Director to enter into a grant agreement for said funds with the NHDOT.*

Mr. Lentz made the motion that the Board adopt the attached Corporate Resolution to enable the Executive Director to enter into a grant agreement for \$180,000 with the NHDOT and Ms. Joyce seconded. Mr. Hebert asked if this was based on the census and Mr. Nichols noted yes, that the communities that we serve with Route 7 On Demand all fall into the rural area. Mr. Lentz noted that if you serve any part of a rural area and connect it to an urban area, it is considered urban for grant purposes. Mr. Nichols agreed and noted that because Route 7 On Demand doesn't connect into any urban areas, we must use rural funds to support that service.

Mr. Nichols noted that this number is subject to a little more variability than the 5310 funding. He also noted that this is the first time COAST has received 5311 grant funds since the mid-1990s.

Mr. Scala noted that any motion should include the language "approximately."

Mr. Lentz amended his motion to say "approximately \$180,000" and Ms. Joyce amended her second.

Mr. Scala took the vote on amending the motion by roll call:

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Ms. Neumann	Yes

Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes

The amendment to the motion passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Dornblut asked how this will change the service as we know it today. Mr. Nichols stated that it would maintain service as it is today. He noted that he is in discussions with a local foundation that may contribute in a way that would allow us to adjust the service – possibly adding a 6th day of service or expanding the service area depending on how much funding we receive and if there are any restrictions on the funding. The decision on that additional funding will be made sometime over the summer. Mr. Dornblut asked if there would be a need for additional matching funds from the community and Mr. Nichols indicated it would not. Mr. Dornblut asked what would happen if the additional foundation funding went away and Mr. Nichols noted that we are currently piloting 5 days a week through this fiscal year and looking to see if we can get a 3-5 year commitment with the foundation to secure service going forward.

Mr. Scala then took a vote on the amended motion (that the Board adopt the attached Corporate Resolution to enable the Executive Director to enter into a grant agreement for approximately \$180,000 with the NHDOT):

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Ms. Neumann	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes

The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Discussion Items

Discussion Item #1: ADA Program Eligibility Determination Adjustments

Mr. Nichols gave an update on where we are regarding implementing a new screening process. He reached out to Able NH, Granite State Independent Living, and the Governor's Commission on Disability to invite them to a meeting to provide input. At least one of the groups indicated they will not be able to participate, and Mr. Nichols indicated we may have to have our meeting in Concord to make it easier for other groups to attend. In addition, we will likely add a couple of other organizations to the list in the hopes of gaining more input.

Mr. Nichols reported that he had a good conversation with Able NH about what we are looking to do, and they understood and seemed eager to have a conversation with the broader group.

Discussion Item #2: Potential Service Adjustments

Mr. Nichols noted that last month potential service adjustments were introduced though we did not get a lot of feedback from the Board. He shared that our idea is to have the Finance

Committee host a workshop on this, with all welcome to attend, and then we can report out for our May meeting. If we are looking to make changes for October 1st we need to start moving this forward quickly.

He reviewed the options which include ending the day earlier on Routes 12, 13, 40, 41 and 43 and altering or eliminating Route 42 which goes to the Tradeport. He and Mr. Williams will be meeting with Pease Development Authority this afternoon to talk about this. In addition, we would be eliminating Route 100 that goes between Somersworth, Berwick, Eliot and Kittery once in the morning and once in the afternoon and carries 10-15 riders.

Mr. Nichols reported that if these changes were made, Great Bay Community College (GBCC) would be reached through Route 40 being extended beyond C&J. All agree that the GBCC connection is important to maintain. Mr. Williams noted that Great Bay may prefer this as the connection because it will be on the same route as the hospital and they have many students that transfer between the two routes. These changes would eliminate service to the Visa Center, the Airport and a few businesses in that area. These traditionally have low ridership, and we could possibly service those riders with an on-demand service.

Mr. Hebert asked if cutting one hour will really save us enough and asked why we're not looking at cutting three hours? Mr. Williams noted that the last run is much less productive but cutting 3 hours would cut into times when there's greater ridership. He noted that people tend to focus on taking the second to last run so they don't get stranded and, as runs disappear, we should anticipate that people will continue that practice. Mr. Nichols stated that we could look at those deeper level cuts. Mr. Hebert stated that the Fox Run is going to be rebuilt so we want to make sure we keep the existing route for the people who are using it now.

Mr. Hebert commended Mr. Williams for providing suggestions because the Board needs that information.

Mr. Capello noted we want to be aware of our timing combined with town budget timing, so we don't increase our ask, and then cut service.

Mr. Scala asked what triggers us having to make this kind of decision. Mr. Nichols noted that the challenge is that we are spending our federal funding at a much greater clip than it's coming in. We are rapidly using up our available FTA funds and need to slow that down starting sooner than later to taper the impact and to allow us more time to raise revenue.

This conversation involves a bit of both federal and local funding. Mr. Nichols noted we'd be in a better situation if we'd been able to get more state funding. Mr. Capello asked that at the Workshop we get information about how much time this buys us at the other end for each scenario. An additional year? An additional 2 years? Mr. Nichols indicated we could get that information for the workshop and noted it would be less than a year. Mr. Nichols stressed that we are drawing down somewhere around \$1.3M more each year than is coming in on the federal side. Mr. Hebert asked when we hit bottom and Mr. Nichols said late 2027/early 2028.

Mr. Nichols noted that we have had a couple of things happen to help us. NHDOT transferred some large urban funding to us that we did not expect, we're transitioning Route 7 to rural versus urban funding. All of this helps but it will not be enough. Mr. Scala asked if this would include additional asks from municipalities and Mr. Nichols noted the asks would be what they have been projected to be going forward. Mr. Capello expressed significant concern that this will be an issue with many communities, that we are cutting service but asking for more funding. Mr.

Hebert shared his concern. Mr. Hebert said he would prefer completely cutting Route 43 to save money versus asking for additional money. Mr. Nichols noted that the Newington side may not have much ridership right now, but the Portsmouth side of the route does. Mr. Capello noted that once something is removed from the budget it is very challenging when it comes time to add it back in. Mr. Hebert noted the difficulties in building back ridership as well and stressed that the survival of COAST is what's most important.

Committee Reports

There were no Committee meetings held.

VII. Community Updates/Information Items

Ridership

- Overall ridership in March was up 19.9% from February, and up 19.2% over March 2024. March was our third highest ridership month since the pandemic. It looks like April will be another strong month.
- YTD fixed route ridership is now up 14.5% over FY24. YTD ridership is essentially even with FY24 (+1.0%).

Mr. Nichols noted that ridership on the first Fare Free Saturday was up 20% and was up 28% on the second Fare Free Saturday. Mr. Lentz notes how successful the Fare Free Saturday seems to be since it is advertising for the sponsors and gets people out to try the bus. He asked if there be any benefit to a fare free weekday as an opportunity to get more businesses to get their employees to work. Mr. Nichols noted that we started with Saturdays because it's a lower bar to reach and we didn't want to overwhelm the system to handle a possible increase on our demand response services. Mr. Hebert shared that he thought Fare Free Saturday was only for the buses. Mr. Nichols stressed that if the bus fare is free the ADA paratransit fare must be free as well.

Mr. Hebert suggested that there may be a real benefit to offering a mid-week free day to entice people to try to ride – would we possibly get new riders? Mr. Nichols shared that there are a lot of people working two to three jobs so we are capturing some of them on Fare Free Saturday. Mr. Hebert suggested we may want to offer a Fare Free Friday during the summer when traffic heading north is at its heaviest.

Ms. Doering suggested that once we have a commuteSMART coordinator, they can look at the possibility of doing a weekday fare free day. Mr. Nichols noted that the dollar amount for sponsorship would need to be higher during the week because it would need to cover a day of higher ridership. He thought it would be closer to \$4,000?

Ms. Joyce shared that COAST has agreed to provide a shuttle for Apple Harvest Day this year. She noted that it is sold out. She will be adding 1-2 more shuttles. Mr. Scala is not sure if they'll need shuttle service for Lilac Family Fun Festival. Mr. Williams noted ridership was very low and that, after the fireworks, the shuttle was stuck in the same traffic everyone else was stuck in.

Mr. Clancy commended Rad and staff on the success of the Learn & Engage event last night.

Ms. Polychronis shared that she has been recommending using Fare Free Saturday as a test run for Monday-Friday workers to get a sense of whether it might be useful as a commuting option.

Ms. Doering noted that she had a discussion with Novocure where they indicated that the cost of housing is pushing people to communities farther away from Portsmouth and they are having a major problem with lack of employee parking. She suggested they push their start time so people can take the bus and noted that they could offer Emergency Rides Home for those afraid to be stranded at work during an emergency. It was a very good discussion.

Mr. Bogle put in a plug for commuteSMART Seacoast's Business-to-Business (B2B) challenge happening during May. He noted they'd hoped to have a coordinator in place by this time but the Planning Commissions, COAST staff, and a member of the advisory committee who works at the UNH Library have been working on increasing participation for this year.

VIII. Adjournment

Mr. Scala adjourned the meeting at 9:42am.

Respectfully submitted by Ms. Joyce, Secretary