



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation  
DRAFT Minutes of the Board of Directors  
Wednesday, July 23, 2025**

**Present:** Scott Bogle, Fred Butler (virtual), Sean Clancy, Emily Ham, Jillian Harris (virtual, arr. 9:14am), Margaret Joyce (arr. 8:41am), Colin Lentz, Michael Scala, Dennis Shanahan, David Tovey (virtual)

**Absent:** Arthur Capello, Sonke Dornblut, Jason Garnham, Denis Hebert, Michael Mates, Joann Neumann, Crystal Paradis-Catanzaro, Dave Sandmann

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

**8:34am Informational meeting began due to no quorum present.**

**I. FINANCIALS**

Ms. Doering reported that wages and benefits are on budget and maintenance is lower than budgeted, but engine rebuilds remain in our future. She noted that federal reimbursement and general revenues are 4% under budget but expenses are 7% under. On the Balance Sheet, there is money showing for frontrunners that had not yet been paid out but that have now been paid. We have been partially reimbursement for those by the federal government. One is tied up in a grant. We have three grants in the approval pipeline. Things at FTA are slowed a bit by end of the year grants clogging the system and resources cut. She noted that grants are now being reviewed by whomever is next available across the country. We are just waiting for those to go through, and we will draw on the last vehicle. We were recently given \$110,000 more by NHDOT through the STBG program and we're looking to get those funds obligated.

**II. Old Business**

**Final Design Progress**

Mr. Nichols provided materials on the latest cost estimate for the new facility. The new cost totals approximately \$19,540,000. This is broken down as follows:

- \$8,692,850 for the Administrative, Operations, and Maintenance Facility (increase of 10.7%)
- \$5,859,500 for the Vehicle Storage Building (increase of 1.8%)
- \$2,997,741 for site work (increase of 1.3%)
- \$1,990,000 for various fees, inspections, furnishings, administration, and contingency

This estimate does not include items provided by others, such as the building security system.

We continue to consider ways of reducing this cost. These include:

- Not building the vehicle storage building or building it just as a shell
- Building the vehicle storage building as an uninsulated, unheated shed
- Elimination of some equipment (such as water recycling on the bus washer)

Mr. Bogle noted that the bus storage building is where most of the operational cost savings come from being able to keep the vehicles free from exposure to the elements. This also reduced wear and tear. Mr. Nichols noted that the bus storage building would also house the solar array that will help reduce ongoing operating costs for the whole site.

Mr. Nichols noted that we are also waiting for revised plans based on staff feedback already provided to CMA. Once received, these plans will undergo another detailed staff review. Interior design concepts are also being reviewed with staff and Office Interiors.

This project is behind schedule, but since we have postponed bidding due to the status of funding, a delay in completing final design will not hinder the project.

### **Recruitment Update**

#### Director of Development

Mr. Nichols reported that we have received over 20 applications at this point. We are at the stage of moving to second interviews with two strong candidates and hope to have a third interview next week where the candidates will make a pitch and lay out their first 90 days. The hope is to make an offer shortly thereafter and have them on board by the end of August or early September.

#### Transit Accessibility Specialist

Mr. Nichols reported that we have received 7 applications and are moving forward with interviews with at least four applicants. He noted that interviews are not yet complete, but so far, we are pleased with the quality of applications received. When Mr. Williams returns from vacation interviews will continue.

### **Ongoing Communications**

Mr. Nichols noted that the ongoing communications about how COAST connects people to places are ongoing and we have begun using the campaign in our social media, in the bus shelters, in our email blasts, and wherever else we could.

We are now flipping the script and creating a campaign to highlight how COAST delivers workers, customers, patients, students, and patrons to the doorsteps of businesses, organizations, and venues who benefit from and need to support our services.

### **Tri-Chambers State-of-the-State - Governor Ayotte**

Mr. Nichols reported that at the Tri-Chambers State-of-the-State event in Rochester on July 14, Mr. Shanahan inquired of the Governor whether she supported increases to public transit funding by the State of New Hampshire and her response gave us an opening to have a direct discussion with her. We fully intend to take advantage of this opportunity to invite the Governor to visit COAST and have a conversation to learn more about public transportation.

### **Property and Liability Insurance Renewal**

Mr. Nichols noted that it is time to prepare our applications for renewal on October 1. We have yet to receive any indication from our broker what we might expect this year for rates.

### **Federal Grants in Process**

We currently have three FTA grants in process that we hope can be approved in FFY25.

- NH-2024-004-01                      New Frontrunner bus (1)                      In initial review
- NH-2025-004-00                      Small Cutaway buses (6)                      Final Concurrence
- 5156-2025-1                          2026 Ops. & commuteSMART                      In-Progress
- Preparing an amendment for the new STBG funding we were just notified of.
- CMAQ funding (heavy duty Gillig buses) will apply in FFY26 after STIP Amendment #1 is processed.

### **Potential ICE Interaction Preparedness**

Mr. Nichols reported that on July 3 we became aware that ICE was active in Portsmouth. To help staff, should operators have an interaction with ICE, our dispatchers were instructed to provide the following guidance:

"If ICE or any other law enforcement wishes to board your bus, let them. Cooperate with their instructions and stay in touch with dispatch, especially if the interaction will interfere with your schedule."

We are working on an official policy, using guidance from an immigration lawyer at Jackson Lewis, who has suggested we clearly express that we do not consent to the search if they do not have a warrant or reasonable suspicion. The Policy would be clear that we don't get in the way of law enforcement doing their business. When we have a proposed Policy to present, we will bring it to the Board for consideration. We envision ICE potentially going on the buses to conduct their searches.

With Ms. Joyce's arrival, Mr. Shanahan called the meeting to order at 8:47am with a quorum present.

### **III. Approval of the minutes**

Mr. Bogle made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 25, 2025 meeting and Mr. Lentz seconded the motion. There were no updates or corrections and no discussion on the minutes.

A vote was taken by roll call.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Harris	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes

All voted in favor.

### **IV. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

### **V. New Business**

#### **Action Items**

#### **Action Item #1: Acceptance of Jason Garnham as new Kittery Representative to the Board of Directors**

Mr. Garnham, now the Town Planner in Kittery, has recently been appointed by the Town to serve as their representative to the COAST board of directors because of Ms. Amaral's departure.

**Action Requested:** *The COAST board of directors accept Mr. Garnham's appointment to the Board of Directors.*

Mr. Clancy made a motion to accept Mr. Garnham's appointment to the Board of Directors and Mr. Lentz seconded the motion.

A vote was taken by roll call:

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes

All voted in favor.

Mr. Nichols noted that Mr. Garnham has been very active in discussions about service adjustments and is a big supporter of public transit.

**Action Item #2: Slate of Officers for the Board of Directors**

Mr. Shanahan asked for a motion to accept the slate of officers proposed by the Nominating Committee, which was made by Mr. Lentz and seconded by Ms. Ham.

Chairperson	Mr. Dennis Shanahan
Vice-Chairperson	Mr. Michael Scala
Treasurer	Mr. Scott Bogle
Secretary	Ms. Margaret Joyce

Executive Committee:

Mr. Dennis Shanahan  
Mr. Michael Scala  
Mr. Scott Bogle  
Ms. Margaret Joyce  
Past Chair: Mr. David Sandmann  
Chairman's Appointee: intentionally vacant  
Rad Nichols (non-voting)

A vote was taken by roll call:

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes

*All voted in favor.*

**Action Item #3: Proposed FY26 Service Changes Update**

Mr. Nichols reported that staff hosted four public sessions—three in person and one online—to discuss the proposed changes with the public. We had between 4 and 7 people at each session with a variety of questions about how the changes would work and what could be done to prevent them. Several people expressed concern about how the changes would affect themselves and others who rely on some of those services. We had both customers and representatives from local agencies attend. In all, they were good meetings with good conversations and good suggestions.

In addition, there was a meeting with Berwick, S. Berwick, Eliot, Kittery and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard about the discontinuation of Route 100. Mr. Nichols noted that the representatives present expressed a desire to preserve, or even expand, the route and offered some ideas for some potential new revenue sources.

As a result, staff have revisited some of proposed adjustments to address questions that came up in those conversations. One example is Route 42 and whether we could continue to extend beyond GBCC on NH Avenue to the Pease International Airport. Mr. Nichols noted that we are working on timing it to make sure we can do that. Also on Route 42, the intersection of Cottage and Route 1 Bypass is possibly going to undergo some changes. This would result in our having to take a right onto Cottage then around the traffic circle to get on to the Bypass, which is incredibly challenging in a bus. We are looking at whether we can continue to serve the neighborhoods of Cate, Bartlett, and Woodbury with that intersection change. Mr. Clancy offered to help with making any connections for that meeting. This is CMAQ project, so not likely to happen this year.

Mr. Nichols noted that Route 42 and 44 are interlined (both routes served by 1 bus within an hour) but, with the proposed changes, we are looking at interlining Routes 43 and 44 instead. He noted that this will cause some additional waiting at Hanover Station in downtown Portsmouth for Route 43 riders looking to connect with other routes. We are looking at whether we create a whole new route (combining Routes 43 and 44) that runs between downtown Portsmouth, the Shipyard, the Malls in Newington, and back which would improve the connection for riders using the route.

Mr. Nichols noted we are continuing to meet with Maine representatives and will be meeting with ME DOT on Monday, July 28.

Given all of this, Mr. Nichols shared that we are not ready to move forward at this point and would like to explore some additional options. We would push out adjustments to November 1. He noted it would be an additional \$40,000 cost to run through October but that the additional time would allow us to ensure we run the best service possible.

Mr. Nichols noted one other change is to have Route 33 on Saturday mimic what it does on weekdays. Mr. Scala asked whether people take the bus for a night out in Portsmouth or Dover? Mr. Nichols stated that they do. He noted that early closures on Route 12, 13 and 41 causes COAST heartache. Some meeting attendees noted that losing the later runs limits their opportunities to socialize. It will also impact workers who need to leave work later in the evening.

Also, at the public meetings there were suggestions to raise the fare. Mr. Nichols noted there was discussion about the challenges of raising the fare but that we would likely be considering it again in the not-too-distant future.

**Action Requested:** None.

Mr. Shanahan noted that there was agreement to delay the service changes to November 1, hoping that some of these issues will be resolved.

### **Discussion Items**

#### **Discussion Item #1: FY26 Operating Budget Challenges and Considerations**

Mr. Nichols shared the challenges and considerations in our FY26 Operating Budget. He noted we are running significantly underbudget this year so far.

#### **Challenges**

1. FY25 FTA Allocation and Federal Spend Rate (BIGGEST CHALLENGE)– as we have discussed, we must reduce our spend rate of FTA funds, which has resulted in the proposed service adjustments we are discussing. Good news, the recently awarded FTA 5311 (rural) funding through the NHDOT for Route 7 On Demand will take some pressure off the 5307 Program this year.
2. Projecting Demand Response Service Demand – Ridership on our demand response services continues to return faster than on our fixed route buses to pre-pandemic levels, although this year has been a bit of an anomaly in some respects. Given the size and impact of these services on our budget, this is a large variable that can have significant financial impact.

Revenues are less than projected this year and expenses are much lower than expected as well. If we delay engine rebuilds long enough, we will run into the timing to purchase new vehicles as a better use of our funds than rebuilding very old engines.

We did just have our first experience trying to order a product that had a 25% tariff attached to it so we did not purchase that product.

## Considerations

1. FY25 Actual Revenues – revenues that are not as closely tied to expenses are up and down. While interest and other income are up 433% due to multiple successful grants, fares are down by 4% and advertising revenue collected is down by 22%. Municipal, state and partner contributions are all down, but not unexpectedly. Year to date we are under budget by \$236K, or 4.0%.
2. FY24 Actual Expenses – overall we are under budget YTD by \$449K, or 7.3%. As mentioned above, ADA demand has not met our expectations, nor have some of our other lines such as contract services, materials and supplies, TMA activities, Coordination expenses and miscellaneous items.
3. Fixed-Route Service Levels – we are projecting service adjustments for FY26 as we must reduce the spend rate of our federal funds. We also hope to maintain a slower growth rate of our ADA paratransit services.
4. Expense Growth Rate – we had projected base expense growth rates of 2.8%, with some known exceptions for fringes, materials and supplies, and property and liability insurance. With more experience since January when that projection was made and using the latest available CPI data for the region (2.7% for the Northeast Region Cities <2.5M over the trailing 12 months in June 2025), we are working to see if we can refine these growth rates further.

Until such time as staff can begin building the budget against the FY25 actuals through June, and service adjustments are finalized, it is unclear what the overall impact will be on the proposed budget for FY26. The expectation is that this will be much clearer by the August Board meeting, at which point a baseline budget, along with any options, will be first presented.

## Schedule for Budget Adoption

- August Board Meeting (8/27) – present draft operating budget and options
- Budget Workshop Mtg. (week of 9/8) – possible workshop to further discuss the draft operating budget
- September Board Meeting (9/24) – vote to adopt the final FY26 operating budget

## Discussion Item #2: Annual Meeting Planning

Mr. Nichols noted that staff are investigating an opportunity to use this year's annual meeting as a soft roll out of our Connected by COAST Fundraising Campaign. At the event we would feature our new campaign video, as well as one or two in-person speakers who can share their lived experience working at COAST or riding our services as a customer. He noted the focus will be on first person accounts of riders or employees versus a formal guest speaker.

Attendees will include past supporters as well as several new supporters we hope to bring into our organization. We encourage board members to consider thinking about visionaries and/or philanthropists from their community that they might want to invite to attend. We will have more guidance on this soon.

We are hoping to hold the event at a desired venue that will attract attendees, and secure sponsors to help offset some portion, if not all, of the associated costs. We are working on a sponsorship package now.

Mr. Shanahan suggested that we send out a Save the Date. Mr. Nichols asked for members to advise him of who they are inviting so we don't double-invite people, and to send along suggestions of who should be added to the guest list. The goal is to have Save the Dates ready in early August.

We are looking at a headcount of 75-100. Once we have the guest list put together, we will invite all representatives as we have in the past.

### **Committee Reports**

Mr. Shanahan noted the Finance Committee met on Monday, July 21.

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

#### **Ridership**

Ridership in June was down 0.6% from May, and up 7.5% over June of 2024. Fixed Route ridership was up 0.4% from April, and 7.4% over June 2024. YTD fixed route ridership is now up 13% over FY24 and is 95% of our FY19 levels. Demand Response ridership saw a 13.9% decrease from May, and a 10% increase over ridership in June 2024. YTD ridership is 6.3% over FY24 and is 107% of our FY19 levels. July looks like it's another fairly strong month but the hot weather does not help ridership.

### **VII. Adjournment**

Mr. Shanahan asked for a motion to adjourn which was made by Mr. Lentz and seconded by Mr. Bogle. The meeting was adjourned at 9:17am.

Respectfully submitted by Ms. Joyce, Secretary