



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation  
DRAFT Minutes of the Board of Directors  
Wednesday, December 18, 2024**

- PRESENT:** Scott Bogle (arrived at 8:40a), Fred Butler (virtual), Arthur Capello, Sean Clancy (virtual), Sönke Dornblut (virtual), Jillian Harris (virtual), Denis Hebert, Margaret Joyce, Colin Lentz (virtual), Crystal Paradis-Catanzaro (virtual), Dave Sandmann (virtual), Cortney Sawyer, Michael Scala, Dennis Shanahan, David Tovey (virtual), Joann Neumann
- ABSENT:** Michael Mates, Kendra Amaral
- STAFF:** Rad Nichols, Margot Doering (virtual)

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 8:33am with a quorum present.

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Ms. Neumann made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 20, 2024, meeting which was seconded by Mr. Capello. There was no discussion. Mr. Shanahan took the vote by roll call:

Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes
Ms. Sawyer	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Neumann	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Ms. Paradis-Catanzaro	Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

**III. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Nichols reported that COAST has two employees who have reached milestone anniversaries. Joe, a non-CDL Operator has reached five years at COAST, and Butch as a CDL Operator has reached five years in his second stint with COAST.

**IV. FINANCIALS**

Ms. Doering explained the numbers for November are not yet finalized due to the board meeting being held earlier in the month than normal.

Ms. Doering gave an update for October, where some additional insurance accruals were uncovered that needed to be brought onto the Profit & Loss report. After discussion with the auditors, it was determined those should be brought into October rather than reopening September's numbers.

Ms. Doering reported the audit seemed to go well. Nothing significant reported to date and nothing unusual to report.

## **V. OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Nichols shared old business items.

### **Greater Rochester Community Health Foundation Grant**

Greater Rochester Community Health Foundation awarded \$25,000 to support ACT and the Community Rides program. They have awarded \$10,000 in previous years. In response, COAST will increase the number of Community Rides that will be provided by about 48 additional rides a month. Operational capacity to provide those rides will be the challenge for COAST. Community Action Partnership of Strafford County and Meals on Wheels of Rockingham County will also be providing rides under this program.

### **New Hampshire Charitable Foundation Grant**

COAST received a \$30,000 grant over two years through the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation in support of COAST's expanded free ticket program. The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation has supported ACT in the past, but this is the first grant from them to COAST proper.

### **City of Somersworth**

On December 9 the City Council unanimously voted to fully support COAST's funding request for FY25 as a supplemental funding appropriation. Thank you to Crystal Paradis-Catanzaro and thanks to the finance committee for presenting our request to the council. This results in an infusion of \$70,000 for COAST's operating budget this year.

### **Town of Newington**

On December 11 Mr. Nichols attended a town budget committee meeting. The selectboard has recommended funding at \$25,000. COAST's ask is \$32,172, the minimum community participation level. The majority of the budget committee members seemed open to increase support to the full ask, but there was also some opposition from the selectboard member sitting on the Committee. A vote by the budget committee will happen in January. Mr. Nichols has subsequently responded to questions raised during the committee meeting.

Mr. Hebert expressed his advocacy to the town budget committee for COAST services, and also expressed the challenges the town is facing, including the impacts of changes at the Fox Run Mall. He expressed the hope that the businesses in the town which benefit the most from COAST services can take the burden off the residents who do not use the service. He also expressed that this is a service that benefits the region.

Mr. Bogle asked if there were no ADA riders in Newington. Mr. Nichols responded that there are ADA riders in Newington, but none are residents of the town.

### **Pease Development Authority**

On December 12 Mr. Nichols attended the Pease Development Authority's board meeting where COAST funding was discussed. COAST increased the ask from \$120,000 annually, where it had been for several years, to just under \$150,000. Their board approved this increase.

Mr. Scala asked about COAST ridership on Pease. Mr. Nichols noted it is not strong but is growing. He did provide ridership data to the PDA. The service is important to Great Bay Community College on the Tradeport. Mr. Shannahan noted that Pease has significant development growth in progress.

### **Town of Farmington**

On December 16 Mr. Nichols attended the Town of Farmington council meeting to present the FY 25 funding request. Farmington is on a calendar year budget and is just taking up the FY25 funding request, which the town will vote on at a town meeting in March. COAST asked for an almost \$14,000 increase, which is a 40% increase. It was not well received. Mr. Nichols is in the process of responding to the questions raised. The selectboard is expected to make their recommendation next week.

Mr. Hebert noted that it is not personal, but simply a matter of budget challenges. He noted the loss of State funding for schools that is also impacting the budget. Mr. Nichols noted he explained the municipal funding formula to the selectboard. Mr. Nichols noted the average cost per trip on Route 6 is \$11.00, which is reasonable for the service between Farmington and Rochester. The town is subsidizing each trip by about \$1.20.

Mr. Bogle noted that an analysis of the cost to the community to fund the same trips via taxi or wheelchair van was effective when Salem considered withdrawing from CART in the past. Mr. Hebert asked if towns are required to provide any accessible rides to anyone. Mr. Bogle responded they are not. Mr. Scala also said he hadn't heard of such a requirement. Mr. Nichols said one could argue that for some of those rides they may then utilize welfare or emergency medical services if they didn't have transportation.

### **Fundraising Update**

#### Learn & Engage Events

The third and fourth Learn & Engage events—in Somersworth and Portsmouth—are expected to be scheduled after the New Year, likely in early February. Follow up from the first two is continuing.

#### Staffing Support

Mr. Nichols noted the work from these fundraising events, and the follow-up required, is maxing out his time. COAST met with the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation regarding a capacity building grant to support a part time development staff employee. COAST was encouraged to submit an application for two years to support this position. Mr. Shanahan asked how competitive these grants are. Mr. Nichols said it appeared positive that our application would be successfully received.

#### commuteSMART Seacoast

A meeting on December 17 with the Federal Highway Administration was held. There will be follow-up communications based on the discussions. Mr. Nichols noted this gave him optimism

for the project moving forward. Mr. Hebert asked for the grant amount. Mr. Nichols responded it is for approximately \$560,000 of federal funds over five years.

Ms. Neumann asked if ridership was driving a big part of the increase for the City of Somersworth. Mr. Nichols explained the City of Somersworth had the largest increase based on the inputs into the municipal funding formula. It was just over a 50% increase in the ask. Additionally, because Somersworth did not fully fund COAST in the previous year, the effective increase was closer to 60%.

Mr. Hebert asked when the funding from the Spaulding Turnpike rebuild project would run out. Mr. Nichols responded that it is already gone. Mr. Hebert asked if next year was the start of the difficult years for COAST funding, and Mr. Nichols responded that this was the first difficult year, with a projected operating budget deficit of \$304,000. Mr. Shanahan noted the expired funding was CMAQ, then ARPA and CARES, and all that funding has been used.

## **VI. NEW BUSINESS**

### **Action Items**

#### **Action Item #1: Sponsored Fare Free Days**

Mr. Nichols noted that October's board meeting included a discussion of potential sponsored fare free days. Mr. Nichols then approached several vendors to see if they would sponsor a fare-free Saturday for \$2,500. A fare free weekday would be approximately \$3,500 - \$4,000. One vendor, Cross Insurance, agreed to sponsor a fare free Saturday. This is now in progress.

Free fares on fixed routes must be matched with free fares on ADA paratransit. Currently significant staff absences are creating capacity issues. Therefore, COAST has postponed the first sponsored fare-free Saturday. Mr. Capello stated he presumed COAST would only do fare free if there was a sponsor. Mr. Nichols agreed they would only happen if there were sponsors.

Mr. Shanahan asked if the ADA demand is lower on Saturdays than on weekdays. Mr. Nichols responded that it is, but a free day would induce additional demand.

**Action Requested:** *The COAST board of directors supports the concept of sponsored fare free days at COAST.*

Mr. Capello made the motion to support the concept of sponsored fare free days, and Mr. Hebert seconded the motion.

Mr. Hebert asked if the sponsorship covers all costs or if there is additional cost to COAST. Mr. Nichols replied that it would cover all costs, including marketing. Mr. Capello asked how it would be marketed. Mr. Nichols replied that COAST would do press releases, social media posts, and signage in vehicles.

Mr. Shanahan took the vote by roll call:

Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes
Ms. Sawyer	Yes

Mr. Hebert	Yes
Mr. Neumann	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Ms. Paradis-Catanzaro	Left the meeting prior to vote taking place.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **Action Item #2: CY25 Strafford County Application for Financial Support**

Mr. Nichols noted this application to Strafford County is for \$80,656. \$72,656 is for COAST Route 33 and associated ADA complementary paratransit services. \$8,000 is for ACT and TripLink services in the county. While this application has already been submitted, there is a requirement that the request be reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors.

**Action Requested:** *The COAST board of directors approves the submission of COAST's CY25 funding request of Strafford County and authorizes the Executive Director, Mr. Nichols, to act on behalf of the organization, in submitting the application.*

Mr. Shanahan called for a motion. Mr. Hebert made the motion and Ms. Joyce seconded. Mr. Scala asked if this was based just on the ridership to the courthouse. Mr. Nichols replied that the funding is primarily for Route 33. It is not based on a funding formula but on a rate that has been in place for some time plus annual increases. Mr. Scala asked if it is comparable to the municipal rate or below where it should be. Mr. Nichols replied that it is not below where it should be.

Mr. Shanahan took the vote by roll call:

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

The motion passed unanimously.

### **Discussion Items**

### **Discussion Item #1: Five-Year Plan Update**

Mr. Nichols made a presentation of the Five-Year Plan for operating and capital budget projections.

Mr. Capello asked how Mr. Nichols determined the ridership growth rate assumptions. Mr. Nichols noted they were based on historical trends.

Regarding the municipal funding contributions, Mr. Scala stated there had been discussion at the board about a limit to how far municipal funding requests could go. Mr. Scala stated the projected growth in municipal contributions used in the plan are aggressive numbers. Mr. Nichols noted the board can discuss the growth rate and agreed they are aggressive.

Mr. Shanahan asked if DOT was under the overall state budget reduction expectations. Mr. Nichols stated they were.

Mr. Bogle asked how discussions with DOT are going regarding COAST accessing 5311 rural funding associated with Route 7 On Demand. Mr. Nichols explained that discussions have revolved around how to provide COAST with 5311 funding without requiring additional oversight of COAST by DOT. This is because rural funding passes through the state, while urban funding comes directly from FTA, who provides oversight.

Mr. Shanahan asked if this plan could be presented with updated information in the coming months. Mr. Nichols agreed.

Mr. Scala asked when the State budget process would begin, and when advocacy should start. Mr. Nichols noted it would be early in 2025.

Mr. Dornblut asked what assistance municipalities who have been moved from urban to rural could provide with DOT and FTA. Mr. Nichols replied that advocacy at the time of grant submittal and advocacy with elected officials would be beneficial. Mr. Butler stated at this time DOT is waiting on FTA to determine if DOT can avoid taking on COAST as a subrecipient. He also stated that the 5311 funding is already earmarked for this service once the process is worked out. Therefore, Mr. Butler noted that advocacy on this issue is not needed, and the focus may be better spent on generating matching funds.

### **Discussion Item #2: FY26 Municipal & Partner Funding Update**

Mr. Nichols presented the latest projects for municipal and partner funding based on the municipal funding formula and explained how the formula works.

Mr. Scala asked if the total increase by 2029 was approximately 50%. Mr. Nichols replied that it was. Mr. Shanahan noted this assumed COAST had not found any new source of funding and that COAST maintained all services. Several board members expressed concern over that level of increases. Mr. Scala stated the optics of the number were poor. Mr. Nichols agreed it was not rosy. Mr. Scala also stated it was not surprising—this eventuality had been discussed for years.

Mr. Nichols stressed that pushing for larger funding from the State is critical. Mr. Shanahan noted the financial challenges the State is facing.

Mr. Hebert asked if COAST should start adjusting services now. Mr. Nichols noted that COAST did adjust services downward in 2020 as a result of the Comprehensive Operations Analysis. Mr. Capello suggested starting to make cuts over the next few years to soften the blow. Mr. Hebert said it would be better to reduce services now than to lose towns completely. Mr. Nichols stated that the dilemma we are in would mean scaling back services but still potentially asking for the same level of support or higher from communities.

The discussion focused on the poor reception of reduced services and high budget asks, as well as the impacts of property values and property tax rates on residents and businesses.

Mr. Nichols noted that the municipal funding figures presented are a draft and the January meeting needs to see a vote on final numbers. Discussion of any adjustments needs to happen before the January meeting.

Mr. Bogle noted the projections for municipal need are daunting, and the State is the clearest solution to reducing the aggressiveness of their growth. He noted that Mr. Nichols did most of the outreach to the State during the last round. He suggested broader outreach and involvement of the municipalities in advocating with the legislature.

Mr. Shanahan suggested a workshop on this topic in the New Year. Mr. Nichols concurred and suggested the week of the 13<sup>th</sup>. Plans were made to schedule a workshop. Mr. Shanahan noted the intent would be final review of municipal funding and strategizing on advocacy. Ms. Doering suggested private fundraising advocacy would be useful as well.

### **Committee Updates**

Mr. Shanahan shared the Executive Committee met to discuss the Executive Director's compensation. Mr. Nichols and Ms. Doering stepped out of the meeting for this part of the discussion. The Committee recommended a 4% increase in pay, consistent with the rest of the staff increases built into the budget, and within the bounds of the approved budget. Mr. Nichols' benefits would continue to be treated as they have. The pay increase would go back retroactively to Mr. Nichols' anniversary of September 29, 2024. Mr. Capello made the motion to approve the Executive Committee's recommendation. Ms. Neumann seconded the motion.

Seeing no more further discussion, Mr. Shanahan took the vote by roll call:

Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes
Ms. Sawyer	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Left the meeting prior to this vote.
Mr. Neumann	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes

Mr. Nichols re-entered the meeting and thanked the board members for their support upon hearing the results of the discussion.

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

### Ridership

Mr. Nichols presented ridership numbers for November. Ridership was down slightly compared to October due to the holiday and being a shorter month. December ridership so far has been similar to November.

Mr. Scala asked about COAST's holiday schedule. Mr. Nichols noted COAST is closed on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Years Day, and Martin Luther King Jr. / Civil Rights Day.

## **VIII. Adjournment**

The next Board Meeting will be on January 22, 2025 with an invitation to a board workshop coming before then. Mr. Shanahan adjourned the meeting, without objection, at 10:04 am.

Respectfully submitted by Ms. Joyce, Secretary