



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation  
Minutes of the Board of Directors  
Wednesday, January 28, 2026**

**Present:** Scott Bogle (8:39a), Fred Butler (virtual), Arthur Capello, Sönke Dornblut (virtual), Jason Garnham (virtual), Emmy Ham (virtual), Jillian Harris (virtual), Denis Hebert, Margaret Joyce, Colin Lentz, Dave Sandmann (virtual), Dennis Shanahan, David Tovey (virtual), Kay Wright (8:52a)

**Absent:** Sean Clancy, Michael Mates, Crystal Paradis-Catanzaro

**Staff:** Margot Doering, Joanne Muckenhoupt, Rad Nichols, Vanessa Polychronis, Michael Williams

Without a quorum present, Mr. Shanahan, asked staff to begin with items on the agenda not requiring action.

**IV. Financial Report**

Ms. Doering went over the financial statements, balance sheet and trends through December 2025.

**V. Old Business**

Mr. Nichols gave updates on the old business items.

CommuteSMART Seacoast

Now we are through the holidays, we expect to advertise soon for the new full-time commuteSMART Seacoast staff person. This program is funded through CMAQ (80%), COAST, Dover and Portsmouth.

GACIT Update

On December 17 the members of GACIT submitted their recommendations to the Governor to consider for NH's next 10-Year Plan. The transmission letter and a minority report are posted on the NHDOT's website, as well as the Draft 2027-2036 10-Year Plan as submitted to the Governor. The Governor has subsequently submitted the Plan to the Legislature, without any recommended changes from her office. The first hearing on HB 2026 was held on January 20 and testimony was submitted through the House portal as staff could not make the hearing.

Ford Safety Recall

We currently have six newly manufactured cutaway buses sitting at the manufacturer due to a safety recall at Ford. The issue is with the defroster system. It is hoped that warranty parts will be available in February so the vehicles can be shipped to us. We had expected these vehicles would be delivered in the mid-late fall.

Vintage Christmas Trolley

We once again provided Vintage Christmas trolley service in Portsmouth over three weekends between Thanksgiving and Christmas. The city reimburses COAST fully for the incremental costs of providing these services. We carried 936 passengers over the six days of weekend service.

Willand Pond Warming Center Shuttle

We are once again also providing shuttle service for the Willand Pond Warming Center. Through mid-January we have carried 498 passengers on that service.

NHDOT Commission William Cass to Retire

Earlier this month it was announced that NHDOT Commissioner William Cass will be retiring in late February. Commissioner Cass has spent his whole career at the NHDOT. Once becoming Commissioner and having the opportunity to learn more about public transit operations in New Hampshire, he has become a real advocate for our work and encouraged our advocates to participate fully in promoting our work. Commissioner Cass has been wonderful to work with in his role at the top of NHDOT and will be missed. Luckily, the team he has built in the Commissioner's office has longevity with the Department and are all great people doing tremendous work in their roles.

Development

Ms. Muckenhoupt gave a detailed rundown on her recent activities and achievements as Development Director.

Ms. Muckenhoupt discussed the current Capital Campaign efforts. She is setting up meetings with selected high-level donors. Messaging to the community continues to focus on why the new building is essential and how people can get involved. The team is planning a launch/fundraising event in April. It will be located at North Country Hard Cider with Mr. Sippy BBQ catering for the event. There will be a few guest speakers, live music and cider, beer, wine and cocktails. Ms. Muckenhoupt announced that the new Capital Campaign website will be featured in the next newsletter scheduled for February. In other development news, the team is attending various chamber events and mixers. There will also be events hosted at COAST. The first is on February 18 with the Portsmouth Chamber with 25 expected guests. Catering provided by Gather and sponsored by Fury's Publick House. The team continues to work on the Father's Day 5K road race preparation. Ms. Muckenhoupt asked if anyone had any suggestions for sponsorships for any of the events, please contact her directly. She mentioned that she is still waiting to hear back from Hannaford regarding the grant that went out last month.

**I. Call to Order**

With a quorum now present Mr. Shanahan called the meeting to order at 9:00am and all present introduced themselves.

**II. Approval of the minutes**

Mr. Hebert made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 22, 2025 meeting and Mr. Capello seconded the motion. There was no discussion and Mr. Shanahan took the vote by roll call.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Abstain
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Harris	Abstain
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes

Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

### III. Public Comment

Mr. Nichols recognized two staff members for reaching milestone anniversaries. Mr. Odess has worked as a CDL Operator for COAST for 15 years & Mr. Ebersole has worked as a Mechanic for COAST for 10 years.

Mr. Sinks, who was recognized in November for reaching 20 years with COAST, was also recognized for 15 years without a collision or safety incident in the shop.

### VI. New Business

#### Action Items

#### **Action Item #1: New Member Appointment – Jessica Garlough, Greater Seacoast Community Health**

Mr. Nichols discussed how Ms. Neumann, representing Greater Seacoast Community Health (GSCH), retired at the end of 2025. The organization has subsequently recommended Ms. Garlough to fill their open seat on the board of directors. Ms. Garlough is the Director of Family and Social Services for GSCH and has been with the organization Goodwin Community Health since 2006.

As the Director of Family and Social Services Ms. Garlough directs and fully oversees multiple concurrent family support programs within the organization and across multiple sites.

Action Requested: The COAST Board of Directors approve nomination of Ms. Garlough to represent GSCH on the board.

Mr. Hebert made a motion to elect approve Ms. Garlough's nomination, which was seconded by Mr. Capello. The vote was taken by roll call.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Harris	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The vote passed unanimously.

**Action Item #2: FY27 Municipal & Partner Funding Requests**

Mr. Nichols led the presentation.

A little over two years ago, COAST shared with our member communities how the sunset of several one-time federal grants, combined with inflation, was impacting COAST's budgets.

As part of these conversations, COAST asked the communities we serve to increase their annual contributions to our operations to ensure that we can maintain as much of our service as possible. Ultimately, we need our member communities to step up where the Federal government is no longer a source of adequate revenues.

In the first and second years of an anticipated multi-year transition period nearly all municipalities and other partners have recognized the value that COAST brings to their residents and the local economy and have responded by meeting our increased requests.

In the third year of our projected transition period, we are currently projecting a 6% or \$480,000 increase in total FY27 expenses over our current FY26 operating budget. This is based on some select expenses continuing to trend at higher than anticipated inflationary rates, or we simply anticipate additional costs due to the current economic environment we are operating in.

On the revenue side, funding included within the State's biennial operating budget is lower than in FY25. FTA 5311 funding has replaced FTA 5307 funding used for our services which no longer fall into an "urbanized area" (Newmarket-Exeter Connector). Barring any dramatic shifts coming from the administration in Washington, we are fairly confident about our relatively conservative estimates of all other revenue projections.

Given our latest operating projections, we have calculated our municipal and partner funding requests in the following charts. These contributions will allow us to continue to operate at our current service levels through FY27, but we will be doing so only because of the carryover FTA funding still available to us because of COVID emergency relief funds.

In FY27 we are projecting a local municipal and partner bottom line financial need of \$3,059,106. Of that amount, \$2,010,000 is determined through the municipal funding formula, which as a bottom line is 8.69% higher than the request in FY26. The formula results in municipal request increases of 2.7% to 15.7% based on the metrics used in our municipal funding formula. The minimum financial participation level of a community under the formula is also being increased to \$40,224 (from \$37,007) as part of this proposal.

Partner request increases vary based on specific agreements and/or expectations based on the services being provided and escalating costs to provide those services.

Action Requested: The COAST Board of Directors approve municipal and other partner funding requests for FY27.

Mr. Hebert made a motion to table until we first discussed the potential impacts of a fare increase which is later on the agenda. Mr. Capello seconded the motion. There was some discussion before Mr. Shanahan took a roll call vote on the motion.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes

Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Harris	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The vote passed unanimously.

Mr. Shanahan asked staff to next move to the discussion item

**Discussion Item #1: Potential Fare Increase Introduction**

Mr. Nichols gave a presentation to provide a high-level overview of fares at COAST and how we compare to other public transit systems in New England.

- COAST's last systemwide fare increase was in 2009
- At the time the base cash fare increased 50% from \$1.00 to \$1.50
- Since 2009, fare increases have been considered and analyzed, however no systemwide fare increase has been implemented
- Some fare increases, on specific services, have been implemented in the interim
- In recent years, free transfers and a considerable expansion of free ticket programs have also taken effect
- In our 2025 customer survey the importance of COAST's affordability for our customers increased significantly (from 25% of respondents to 75%)
- A review of COAST's fare structure, potential for mobile fare payment and the options for fare capping that can come with such a tool, is timely

Four of the seven systems in NH are charging a fare (or are proposing to charge a fare) of \$2.00 or greater. Many systems in Maine, Vermont, and Rhode Island are charging at least a \$2.00 fare.

COAST & Wildcat fares, with mutually recognized fare media, need to either be equal to or disconnected from each other.

Mr. Nichols then also went over a number of current fare structures at systems across New England. These included base cash fares, half fares, monthly passes, and other ticket options. He also shared some structures used when systems have deployed electronic fare payment tools.

He then went over the past three-year history of average fares at COAST, before going over a potential upcoming fare change proposal that will need more investigation prior to being something the board might consider.

There was significant discussion around the desire to increase fares to relieve upward pressure on community requests. Unfortunately, staff at this point have very little concrete data to rely

upon to understand how our passengers are likely to react to a fare increase, and thus the resulting impact on our fare revenues.

Mr. Shanahan asked for a motion to untable the action item on FY 27 Municipal and Partner Funding Requests. Mr. Hebert made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 22, 2025 meeting and Mr. Capello seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, and Mr. Shanahan took the vote by roll call.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Harris	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The vote passed unanimously.

### **Action Item #2: FY27 Municipal & Partner Funding Requests**

Mr. Nichols once again introduced the FY27 municipal and partner requests he had presented earlier.

After some discussion Mr. Shanahan asked for a motion on the action item. Mr. Hebert made the motion and Mr. Capello seconded it. Without further discussion Mr. Shanahan took a roll call vote on the motion.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Harris	Yes
Mr. Hebert	No
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The vote passed.

### **Action Item #3: Free Ticket Program Expansion – Safe Harbor Recovery Center**

Mr. Nichols introduced that the Safe Harbor Recovery Center has requested consideration for being included in our Free Ticket Program for area nonprofit organizations.

This nonprofit organization is located within COAST's service area and shares our commitment to supporting individuals experiencing housing insecurity and substance use disorder.

Safe Harbor provides comprehensive services that includes helping individuals transition out of homelessness and move from active addiction into recovery. Through recovery coaching, employment services, system navigation, and peer support we help empower people to rebuild their lives and achieve long-term stability.

Their Impact:

- In their last year, their clients increased stable housing by 50% and increased employment rate by 35.7%
- Transportation remains one of the most significant barriers for their clients. Access to reliable transit is essential for attending medical appointments, job interviews, recovery meetings, and housing-related appointments.

By partnering with COAST through our free ticket program, they can remove a critical barrier for those working to overcome homelessness, unemployment and addiction.

Action Requested: The COAST Board of Directors include Safe Harbor Recovery Center in our Free Ticket Program.

Ms. Joyce made the motion to include Safe Harbor Recovery Center in our Free Ticket program, and Mr. Lentz seconded the motion. With no further discussion Mr. Shanahan took a roll call vote.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Harris	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The vote passed unanimously.

**Action Item #4: SFY2026 NHDOT 5339(a) Grant Application Approval**

Mr. Nichols shared that on December 12 the NHDOT had announced the SFY26 5339(a) grant round. Grant applications are due by January 29.

COAST intends to apply for the following capital equipment in line with our latest five-year capital spending plan.

- Two (2) fixed route 35' low floor HD transit buses (CDL replacements) at a total estimated cost of \$1,343,792, 85% of which would be grant funded. Expected delivery within 18-24 months of ordering. These vehicles are in our Capital Spending Schedule for FY28.

It is expected that the non-Federal match will be comprised of a mix of state capital match funds (7.5%) and COAST held reserves (7.5%).

Total grant funds being applied for are \$1,142,223, with an expected state capital match of \$100,784 and a commitment to COAST provided match of \$100,784.

Action Requested: The COAST Board of Directors approve the submission of COAST's SFY2026 funding request of the NHDOT under the FTA 5339(a) Program and authorize the Executive Director, Mr. Nichols, to act on behalf of the organization, in submitting the application.

Mr. Lentz made the motion to approve the submission of COAST's SFY2026 funding request of the NHDOT under the FTA 5339(a) Program and authorize the Executive Director, Mr. Nichols, to act on behalf of the organization, in submitting the application, and Ms. Joyce seconded the motion. With no further discussion Mr. Shanahan took a roll call vote.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Harris	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The vote passed unanimously.

**Action Item #5: BUILD Grant Application Authorization**

Mr. Nichols reported that staff are in the process of preparing an FTA BUILD grant application due in late February. Because our project, new facility construction, will be completed in a geographic area with a population under 200,000 we will be considered rural for purposes of the grant, and are eligible to apply for 100% Federal funding (no required match).

Action Requested: The COAST Board of Directors approves the submission of a BUILD Grant to the FTA to round out their potential funding for our new facility at the current estimated cost of \$19,540,000.

Mr. Hebert made the motion to approve the submission of a BUILD grant to the FTA to round out potential funding for our new facility, and Mr. Bogle seconded the motion. With no further discussion Mr. Shanahan took a roll call vote.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Harris	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The vote passed unanimously.

**Action Item #6: Bus Stop Move – Somersworth Target**

Mr. Nichols explained Route 1 is our route connecting Dover, Somersworth, and Berwick. It has an on-call diversion at Target, which we only serve by request.

In the morning this route is able to handle this diversion and generally remain on time. It is struggling with on time performance in the afternoon, a problem which is getting worse. In the first quarters of FY24, 25, and 26, the route was on time 82% of the time, 78% of the time, and now 69% of the time—a downward trend.

One cause is the diversion into Target. It takes several minutes and the diversion to reduce walking distance for one customer can cause multiple other customers to miss their connections to other routes.

COAST is proposing no longer serving this diversion afternoon each day. We would continue to serve it during the morning runs when the route can stay on time, but in the afternoons, customers would have to travel to the nearest stop, which is 0.4 miles away.

COAST has shared this proposal with Crystal Paradis-Catanzaro and David Moore of Somersworth, who supported it.

Action Requested: The COAST Board of Directors approves the move of the on-call Somersworth Target bus stop to High Street in the afternoons.

Mr. Lentz made the motion to approve the move of the on-call Somersworth Target bus stop to high street in the afternoons, and Mr. Bogle seconded the motion. With no further discussion Mr. Shanahan took a roll call vote.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Harris	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes

Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The vote passed unanimously.

### **Committee Reports**

No Committee activities to report.

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

Mr. Nichols went over the following –

#### **NH Bills of Interest**

The legislative session is upon us, and we are specifically watching four bills as they proceed through the process.

- HB 1293 - this bill would tax the excess value of certain properties owned by charitable or nonprofit organizations.
- HB 1649 - this bill would prohibit towns, cities, and villages from donating tax dollars to certain nonprofit organizations.
- HB 1680 - this bill would require the department of transportation to take steps to improve Boston express bus service and to prepare a report regarding such service.
- HB 2026 - this bill would adopt the state 10-year transportation plan for 2027-2036.

#### **Ridership**

Overall ridership in December totaled 31,141. This was down 1.5% from November, and down 2.2% from December 2024. Fixed route ridership totaled 29,185, down 1.8% from November, and down by 3.1% from December 2024. We had to cancel one full day of service due to weather during the month, and December had several abnormally cold days. Still, average weekday ridership was 8% higher than in December 2024. Demand response ridership totaled 2,239 for the month. This represented a 1.9% increase from November, and an 11.3% increase over ridership in December 2024.

#### **Other Matters**

Mr. Hebert asked for an update on how we were doing relative to raising funds for the building. Staff gave a quick recap of what had been detailed in the Development report by Ms.Muckenhoupt.

Mr. Capello asked who had provided the latest cost estimate for the project. Mr. Nichols responded that it had been developed through our engineering firm. He noted that it would likely be low by a few million dollars then.

### **VIII. Adjournment**

Approved February 25, 2026

The meeting was adjourned without objection at 10:30am.

Respectfully submitted by Ms. Emily Ham, Secretary