



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation
Minutes of the Board of Directors
Wednesday, March 25, 2026**

Present: Scott Bogle, Fred Butler (virtual), Arthur Capello, Sean Clancy, Sönke Dornblut, Jessica Garlough, Jason Garnham, Emmy Ham (virtual), Denis Hebert, Colin Lentz, Dave Sandmann (virtual), Dennis Shanahan, David Tovey (virtual- left at 9:30), Kiersten Wright

Absent: Margaret Joyce, Michael Mates, and Crystal Paradis-Catanzaro

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

I. Call to Order

Chair Shanahan called the meeting to order at 8:34am. Mr. Shanahan expressed his thanks to Ms. Joyce who chaired the meeting last month when he was stranded in Florida.

II. Public Comment

No public comment.

III. Financial Report

Ms. Doering noted two lines on the monthly report. The first was the Supplies and Materials line which was quite low in February. She reported that the dip was due to February's fuel delivery coming at the beginning of March. She noted that this happens from time to time. This also impacts the federal assistance line which was lower.

Compared against the budget, we continue to see some of the same themes in the contract services line item. She noted that a second payment to the CPA went out so this line item shows quite a bit of front loading of contracts. These payments won't happen again until next year so this line will balance out as the expenses reduce and the budget catches up.

She reported that in February we took delivery of five of our 6 cutaways and the accounts payable line shows the impact of that. Normally that number is much lower, but it is significantly higher for February with the cost of those vehicles adding \$645,000 worth of payables. The receivables that would normally go along with that purchase for reimbursement from the FTA at 85%, around \$550,000, did not get booked in February. This results in our working capital looking smaller than it normally does but it's just a result of the points in time between when the receivable was booked.

Ms. Doering reported that she recently had a discussion with NTD about some of the changes in our accounting system and it looks like we will be able to fix a few numbers the way NTD wants them presented and then we'll be done with that report.

IV. Approval of the minutes

Mr. Capello made a motion to approve the minutes of the February Board of Directors meeting, seconded by Mr. Clancy.

A roll call vote was taken to approve the February minutes:

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Ms. Garlough	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Abstain
Ms. Wright	Yes

V. Old Business

Mr. Nichols presented the following updates:

CommuteSMART Seacoast

We are in the middle of interviewing candidates for the Program Coordinator position. We have very strong candidates to choose from. We expect that we will likely be able to bring the new person on by late April.

New Cutaways

All six of our newly manufactured cutaway buses have been delivered. They are all now in service.

5339(a) Award from NHDOT

We were notified on March 18 by the NHDOT that our 5339(a) grant application was successful. In the grant we had applied for two (2) 35+ foot heavy duty buses to replace aging fleet vehicles. The total amount of federal funding awarded was \$1,142,223, representing 85% of the total project cost of \$1,343,791. Local matching funds totaling another 7.5% (\$100,784) were awarded through the NHDOT as part of our SFY26-27 state capital match contract.

Dover State of the City

Mr. Nichols will be a panel speaker at the upcoming Dover State of the City event on April 15 hosted by the Dover Chamber of Commerce. The theme of the event is "Getting from Here to There". Mr. Nichols will be joined by Ms. Donna Benton of the City of Dover and Ms. Patricia Quinn of NNEPRA.

Facility Phasing Options Workshop

We are working with CMA Engineers and the project architect to hold a board workshop on options of how we can phase our new facility construction (if necessary). We hope to hold the workshop in early to mid-April.

Development

Ms. Muckenhoupt presented the following updates:

April 16th Event:

This is COAST's jumping off point for the Capital Campaign, and it will be an event at which we can introduce potential funders to COAST as a nonprofit organization. Invitations have been sent out. Board Members were asked to let Ms. Muckenhaupt and Mr. Nichols know of any community members that should be invited. The event will be held at North Country Hard Cider and will feature appetizers and cocktails by Maeve's Mobile Bar and hard cider from North Country Hard Cider, live music by The New England Bluegrass Band, and a dinner buffet by Mr. Sippy BBQ.

Father's Day Road Race:

Registration for runners is open, and we are working to secure sponsors, donations, and prizes for the runners. Lighthouse Credit Union Foundation has offered to sponsor and staff the food table. We are looking to possibly partner with Margaritas, WDH at 10 Members Way, and the Equine Center.

Connections

Ms. Muckenhaupt and Mr. Nichols had a great meeting with Johanna Corcoran, the new Executive Director for Lighthouse Credit Union Foundation. Both were surprised to learn their foundation is not funded through the bank but through their own fundraising.

They also met with the Chief of Staff at Lonza who was very engaged and is interested in continuing the conversation. Lonza does not generally accept meetings with nonprofits, so this was a unique connection.

Ms. Muckenhaupt expressed her thanks to Mr. Clancy, Ms. Joyce, and Ms. Ham for their support in getting the word out about COAST and our capital campaign.

Ms. Wright wanted to make sure we have connected with Matt Wyatt to get the word out through the Rochester Post and Mr. Nichols confirmed that we have. Mr. Clancy shared that he was able to reach out to all businesses in the Portsmouth area to share information about COAST.

Mr. Williams shared that one of our drivers made a three-dimensional model of the new building that is on display at our facility. Mr. Nichols noted that the same employee made a smaller version for his office that is on display at our administrative building. Ms. Muckenhaupt confirmed that the large model will be on display at the April 16th event.

VI. New Business

Action Items

Action Item #1: Certificate of Authority for Rockingham Couty Funding Application

Mr. Nichols shared that, as part of our application for funds through the County of Rockingham, we must submit a Certificate of Authority. He noted that the funding we are applying for (\$4,000) supports ACT and their regional transportation coordination work. We have been awarded these funds for multiple years now.

Action Recommended: *That the COAST Board of Directors approve the Chairman's execution of the Certificate of Authority required by Rockingham County.*

Mr. Sandmann made the motion to approve the Chairman’s execution of the Certificate of Authority required by Rockingham County and Mr. Bogle seconded the motion.

Mr. Hebert asked if there are any requirements when we get these grants and if we must perform them in a certain way, or if there are strings attached. Mr. Nichols noted that there are always requirements associated with a grant like this but that we will use these funds for their intended purpose, as we always do, and the requirements are no more onerous than what we already do.

Mr. Shanahan took a roll call vote on the motion.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Ms. Garlough	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Action Item #2: Fare Increase Proposal

Mr. Williams began by noting that in January staff introduced the option of a fare increase, providing historical background material, data around industry trends for fares around New England, and a framework for a future fare structure within the organization.

In the months since, we have continued to explore if there are any new industry indicators we could use to project the impacts of a base cash fare increase to \$2.00. Information was sought from several other transit systems, though several never responded. The results were varied (e.g., no loss of ridership, a small dip in fares but an increase in monthly pass sales). Mr. Williams noted that the fare at Green Mountain Transit (GMT), Portland Metro, and Manchester is currently \$2.00 and Nashua is moving to a \$2.00 fare.

Based on these data points, staff recommend that COAST move forward with a fare increase proposed as outlined below. Mr. Williams noted that part of the proposal was the consideration of offering a Monthly Pass for Half-Fare.

Fare Type	Fixed Routes	ADA Paratransit	Newmarket-Exeter Connector	Portsmouth Senior Transportation
Base Cash Fare (one way)	\$2.00	\$4.00	\$4.00	Varies by service (Free up to \$4.00)
Half-Fare	\$1.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ticket Bundles	11 tickets for \$20	N/A	N/A	N/A

DR Punch Ticket	N/A	\$40.00 (40 \$1.00 punches)	\$40.00 (40 \$1.00 punches)	\$40.00 (40 \$1.00 punches)
Monthly Pass	\$60.00	N/A	N/A	N/A

He shared that in recent conversations with Wildcat Transit, they indicated they would be willing to match our fares and monthly pass rates (which are currently lower than COAST's). We expect additional conversations on this issue to work out the details.

Mr. Williams reported that a separate, but adjacent discussion, is the integration of a mobile application for fare payments, and potentially in-bus validators. This would not only ease fare payments for passengers but also allow for monthly fare capping to not exceed the value of a monthly pass.

Mr. Williams shared that two common vendors with apps that can integrate with the Transit App we are transitioning to were investigated. Using FY25 data, staff projected the costs for integrating this technology for our passengers, which were presented in the Board packet.

Mr. Williams opened the topic for discussion. Mr. Hebert asked why we have a Half-Fare and Mr. Williams explained that it is a federal requirement that we offer Half-Fare to persons 65 and older, and those on Medicare. Mr. Williams noted that a significant percentage of riders pay Half-Fare, possibly as high as 30% of riders.

Mr. Dornblut stated that he thinks a \$2.00 fare makes perfect sense and may, in fact, be low. He suggested implementing a regular review of our fares, so we don't fall behind the industry. He asked Mr. Williams if we know how many Wildcat riders use a Wildcat ticket on the COAST system. Mr. Williams indicated that we do not because they would display a pass to board so there's nothing collected in the farebox and drivers don't track that. Mr. Williams shared that, in his experience when driving, it is a small number of people. Mr. Dornblut asked if we could consider doing what is often done in other countries, which is an in-town fare or zone-based fare rather than a blanket fare to acknowledge that going two bus stops away is not the same as traveling from Rochester to Portsmouth. Mr. Williams shared that the major concern would be the lack of capacity to track that to ensure compliance. Mr. Hebert asked about having an All-Day fare that allows you to pay once and ride all day.

Mr. Williams noted that having electronic fares would allow us to monitor and track these variations in fares in a much better way. However, due to the associated up-front and ongoing costs, and relatively small savings in staff time, staff does not recommend moving forward with the integration of an electronic fare payment system at this time.

Mr. Capello asked if there has ever been an analysis of communities using electronic fare payment systems to see the impact on fares collected and ridership? Mr. Williams noted in general this doesn't increase fares in any palpable way and systems might see a small increase in ridership. Ms. Doering noted that even though we might collect more in fares, that doesn't mean that we receive the same amount in additional funds because fares reduce the amount of FTA reimbursement.

Concerns about going to all electronic fares were raised and Mr. Williams stressed that we would have to keep cash payment as an option. Mr. Garnham shared a concern that COAST trying to do both a fare increase and going to electronic fares at the same time might be viewed negatively.

Mr. Dornblut asked about the different fares. Mr. Williams shared that the Base Fare is the anchor and ADA can't be more than two times the base fare so the maximum base ADA fare under this proposal would be \$4.00. The Newmarket-Exeter Connector is anchored to the base ADA fare. Portsmouth Senior Transportation fares are set by a contract with the City, and the fares are based on the trip purpose. Mr. Williams indicated that we would not change any PST fares until the next contract renewal this July.

Action Requested: *The COAST Board of Directors approve going out to public comment for a fare increase as outlined.*

Mr. Lentz made the motion that COAST go out to public comment for the fare increase without consideration of electronic fare payment and Mr. Bogle seconded the motion.

Ms. Ham asked Mr. Nichols to explain the public comment process for the Board. Mr. Nichols shared that we normally hold 4-6 opportunities throughout the region on various days and at various times of day. He noted that we are only required to hold one meeting, but we prefer to offer multiple opportunities and hold meetings for Public Comment because Public Hearings do not give an opportunity for feedback and conversation. The Public Comment period is usually 45 or 60 days.

Mr. Hebert stressed that it is our responsibility to figure out an All-Day pass and suggested we could make it a different color each day or use a different stamp. Mr. Nichols noted that we have no way to distribute day passes and that we would not put the burden of that transaction on operators. Mr. Hebert suggested we use the public comment process to ask if the customers want an All-Day pass and a fare payment app.

Mr. Dornblut suggested we talk with Manchester and Nashua to make this transition statewide to possibly minimize costs. Mr. Williams noted that the Masabi purchase, one of the providers of this option, would be part of a collaborative and their costs are per vehicle so going in together with other transit systems would actually raise the cost. Mr. Bogle wondered if a statewide purchase could be part, and a good use, of rural health transportation funds. Mr. Sandmann expressed that he feels discussions about electronic fare payment and using an app are premature.

Mr. Williams shared that the Half Fare Monthly pass is not something we currently offer but that it would speed up the collection process and reduce the amount of cash we would have to count.

Mr. Hebert made a motion to amend the previous motion to go to public comment for the fare increase with the elimination of the monthly pass for half fare and to ask the question about an All-Day ticket at public comment sessions. Mr. Bogle seconded amending the motion.

Mr. Shanahan called for a vote to amend the motion:

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Ms. Garlough	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes

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

All voted in favor of amending the motion.

Mr. Shanahan then called for a vote on the amended motion to go to public comment on the fares proposed, except for the half fare monthly pass, and to ask the question about an All-Day ticket at the public comment sessions.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Capello	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Ms. Garlough	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion Items

Mr. Capello requested a cost-benefit analysis of the money saved through the app, including staff time. Mr. Williams said those were all considered in this analysis and that the primary source of savings would be no longer having to print fare media. He also noted that the only staff time saved would be salaried staff so it would not save money but would allow that staff to use that time for other things.

Mr. Dornblut stressed that he wants us to create a regular review of fares. Mr. Nichols noted that Senator Waters had used some great language about regular review of toll rates in a recent proposal, and he will find that language to move this forward.

Ms. Polychronis stressed that, from a customer's perspective, increases in fares should avoid amounts that include coins (for example an increase of \$0.25) because coins can be cumbersome to carry, and we can't make change if people overpay.

Committee Reports

There were no committee meetings.

VII. Community Updates/Information Items

Ridership

Overall ridership in February was down 1.5% from January and down 2.2% from February of 2025. Mr. Nichols noted that the winter weather resulting in service cancelations and late starts negatively impacted our ridership last month.

Mr. Nichols shared that they had great meetings with leadership in Portsmouth and Kittery and that he will be setting up a time to meet with Farmington's new Town Administrator Jason Henry. He noted that Farmington fully funded COAST again this year.

Mr. Nichols shared his excitement about the April event and reminded members to share the names of anyone that should be invited. He also noted that the Capital Campaign update included in the Board Packet will be a regular addition to the packet going forward.

Mr. Garnham shared that his meeting with Rad and the new Kittery Town Manager was helpful in getting the Town Manager up to speed. He shared that at a recent Joint Land Use Survey meeting, the Shipyard Commander announced they are hiring a new commuter coordinator, and that reducing traffic congestion is a top priority, especially because hiring appears to be ongoing.

VIII. Adjournment

Mr. Lentz made a motion to adjourn which was seconded by Mr. Hebert. The meeting was adjourned at 9:40am.