



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation
Minutes of the Board of Directors
Wednesday, May 27, 2026**

Present: Scott Bogle, Fred Butler (virtual), Sean Clancy, Sönke Dornblut, Jessica Garlough, Jason Garnham, Jillian Harris (virtual arr. 8:42), Margaret Joyce, Colin Lentz, Dave Sandmann, Dennis Shanahan, Kiersten Wright,

Absent: Arthur Capello, Denis Hebert, Michael Mates, Crystal Paradis-Catanzaro and David Tovey

Staff: Rad Nichols, Margot Doering (virtual), Joanne Muckenhaupt, Michael Williams, Vanessa Polychronis, Stacy Brown

I. Call to Order

Chair Shanahan called the meeting to order at 8:36 am.

II. Approval of the minutes

Ms. Wright made a motion to approve the minutes of the March Board of Directors meeting, seconded by Mr. Bogle. A spelling correction was requested (Nentwick to Nentwig).

The Board voted unanimously to approve the corrected April Minutes, with Mr. Garnham abstaining.

III. Public Comment

None

IV. Financial Report

Ms. Doering reported that fare revenue increased about \$3,000 and the \$10,000 of ad revenue is ATA's estimate for the month. Two retired buses were sold netting a gain of \$6,000. When added to \$6,800 of interest, this resulted in total Other Income of \$13,123 for the month. Federal reimbursement fell as management made a strategic decision to apply route specific local funding first to preserve Federal dollars as much as possible. This change was retroactive to the beginning of the fiscal year. Next month's Federal reimbursement will likely tick back up again.

Regarding expenses, wages jumped because of \$18,000 in driver training and bus ambassador expenses. When we have staff in training, this creates double driver expenses for the hours driven. The training is now complete and we expect the wage number will return to normal levels. Service expenses dropped since we completed audit payments. Supplies and materials jumped with the price of fuel, oil and parts. In addition, we had \$7,000 of fundraising expenses in this line which were completely covered by the sponsorships and fundraising.

In the year to date results, interest income of \$61,000 caused this line item to be the only one exceeding budget. The TMA revenue and expenses will start to come in line with budget now that the Ms. Brown is on board. While Materials expenses jumped in April, the line still runs slightly behind budget as some planned maintenance has not occurred (e.g. engine rebuilds). A new allocation of utility expenses with our co-tenant at #6 Sumner was negotiated which reduces our share of the bill from 75% to 60%.

Three items were noted on the balance sheet. Accounts receivable increased slightly from prior month as we await final approval of a grant amendment which will allow us to draw down pending funds. The Transit Equipment line reduced by \$500,000 with the sale of two buses. And the Local Funding Held increased with the payment of quarterly and semi-annual invoices.

V. Old Business

CommuteSMART Seacoast News

Over the past month, CommuteSMART Seacoast has made progress on several key first 30-day goals. We launched the 2026 B2B Challenge, began reviving our social media presence, and are currently evaluating costs and options for updating the CommuteSMART Seacoast website.

In recognition of National Bike to Work Day, CommuteSMART also participated in two community events sponsored by local organizations, including Seacoast Area Bicycle Riders in Kittery and an event in Dover. These events provided valuable opportunities to connect with community members and partner organizations.

In addition, we have established new relationships and scheduled follow-up meetings with several organizations to help guide the next phase of revitalizing the CommuteSMART Seacoast program beyond the B2B Challenge.

2026 B2B Commuter Challenge

At just over halfway through the 2026 B2B Commuter Challenge 31 teams from the Seacoast had logged an impressive 1,315 trips. Seacoast teams are also leading in all five size divisions in the statewide CommuteSMART NH challenge, which is running in parallel.

Congratulations to the division leaders as of May 18:

- XX-Large: Lonza - 263 trips
- X-Large: IAPP – 386 trips (well ahead of the competition in this category!)
- Large: UNH Library – 233 trips (City of Portsmouth-City Hall is currently second with 61 trips)
- Medium: NHDES Portsmouth – 94 trips
- Small: Placework – 46 trips

On Tuesday, June 9 the CommuteSMART Seacoast 2026 B2B Commuter Challenge Awards Celebration will take place with a happy hour from 5:00-6:30pm at Loaded Question Brewing Company, at 909 Islington Street in Portsmouth.

Demand Response Software

Staff have moved forward with the replacement of our demand response scheduling software. We expect to be able to implement the new solution by the end of August, when our current software vendor contract expires. Mr. Williams explained the implementation timeline.

We prepared and submitted a grant for \$94,747 to the DHHS Opioid Abatement Grants Program. These grant funds would potentially cover the incremental cost difference between our current demand response software costs and those for our new solution over SFY27 & 28.

Development Update

Father's Day 5K

After careful consideration, we have decided to change the road race to a virtual race. A factor in this decision was the lack of sponsors despite our outreach efforts. The race is costly (over \$6,000), and without adequate sponsorship, we would need to rely solely on registrations to make a profit. We also received insufficient support from the Dover Race Series. By moving to a virtual race, we can now count on registration revenue, which will be added to the \$2,888 already received from DRS pass holders. We did recently receive a \$1,000 dollar sponsorship from a new donor – Brady Sullivan Properties! They are the new owners of the old Liberty Mutual campus. Attendance at a virtual race will probably be less than an in-person event, but we will see.

NH Gives

This year, we are highlighting the capital campaign. This is a very popular day of giving and it will provide valuable exposure to the campaign across the state. The date is June 9-10.

Meeting with NH Charitable Foundation

We had an excellent meeting with two representatives from NHCF. One specializes in capital campaign funding, and the other focuses on programming and annual fund support. The conversation was incredibly productive, and we're excited about the strong funding potential this connection presents. The relationship is building into one where COAST could become a regular recipient of multi-year funding as opposed to applying for one-off grants.

Upcoming meeting with Foundation for Seacoast Health

Rad and I attended a meeting hosted by the Foundation for Seacoast Health to gather with fellow grant recipients. We all shared what we are doing and discussed successes and pain points. After the meeting, the Foundation's CEO asked if we could meet with her next month to learn more about how we are doing, what we need, and how the foundation could be of support.

VI. New Business

Action Items

Action Item #1: Website Design, Hosting and Maintenance Contract

On March 3 COAST released RFP 26-01 for website design, creation and maintenance. This RFP solicited proposals for the modernization of the organization's website. COAST's current website was created in 2018, has received regular maintenance since, and is hosted on the Drupal platform. The intent is to contract with one firm to provide all necessary redesign, migration to a new platform, and implementation for COAST. Additionally, COAST is looking to

enter a two (2) year contract with multiple optional one (1) year extensions for continuing maintenance, service, and hosting of the website.

In the interim, numerous questions were raised by potential bidders, and responses to those questions were posted to our website.

Ultimately, we received a total of 26 responses to our RFP. Of those, staff identified four (4) firms to engage in further discussions with. Those discussions happened during early May with three of the four proposers that responded to our outreach.

As a result of those discussions, and subsequent independent employees' scoring of their proposals, we are recommending entering a contract with DARCI Creative of Portsmouth, NH for a total of \$40,522 for design, hosting and maintenance for the next two (2) years.

Action Recommended: That the COAST Board of Directors approve entering a contract with DARCI Creative for \$40,522 for design, hosting and maintenance for the next two (2) years.

Mr. Sandmann made a motion to approve the proposed fare increase. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lentz.

Discussion: It was confirmed that the website will meet all ADA requirements.

The board voted unanimously to approve the contract with DARCI Creative

Action Item #2: Fare Increase Adoption

COAST has proposed fare increases for implementation later this calendar year.

As part of the proposal being considered, COAST's base cash fare would increase from \$1.50 to \$2.00 on all bus routes. This would also impact fares paid by passengers on COAST's advance reservation demand response services (ADA Paratransit, Newmarket-Exeter Connector & Portsmouth Senior Transportation). And there would be impacts on the cash half-fare, ticket bundles, DR punch tickets, and monthly passes.

Public meetings were held throughout COAST's service area to solicit public input on the proposed fare increases. Notices announcing the meetings appeared in area newspapers; were available on the COAST website, www.coastbus.org; and were posted on all COAST buses. Information on traveling to and from meetings via the COAST bus system could also be found on the website.

Public Meetings

Date	Location	Time	Attendees
Wednesday, 5/6	Exeter Public Library	10:00-11:00AM	1*
Wednesday, 5/6	Portsmouth Public Library	5:30-6:30PM	0
Thursday, 5/7	Rochester Public Library	9:30-10:30AM	1*
Thursday, 5/7	Dover CAPSC	12:00-1:00PM	3**
Friday, 5/8	Somersworth City Hall	8:15- 9:15AM	0
Monday, 5/18	Farmington Town Hall	4:30-5:30PM	3
Wednesday, 5/20	Portsmouth Public Library	10:30-11:30AM	1*

Thursday, 5/21

Newmarket Town Hall

3:00-4:00PM

0

* COAST board member or UNH staff member

** two (2) UNH staff members

For those who could not attend the meetings, COAST is accepting written comments/testimony through email, info@coastbus.org, and by mail at COAST, 42 Sumner Drive, Dover, NH 03820. All written comments/testimony submitted prior to May 29, 2026 will be made part of the hearing record.

The proposed fare increases at COAST would be consistent with similar increases taking place at public transit systems across the country in response to rising costs. The proposed change would mean COAST's base cash fares would equal the fares currently charged by other New England public transit systems like: Manchester Transit Authority (MTA), Nashua Transit System (NTS), Portland Metro and Biddeford-Saco-Old Orchard Beach in Maine, Green Mountain Transit in Vermont, and RIPTA in Rhode Island.

This is the first time since 2008 that COAST has proposed a systemwide fare increase. We have focused on keeping our fares very affordable to encourage maximum use. We continue to focus on this goal. However, we must reassess our fares to determine whether they are the most equitable to all parties involved (e.g., passengers, federal, state and local governments), including the communities that help fund our services.

COAST last changed its fare structure in 2008 when it increased base cash fares from \$1.00 to \$1.50.

Proposed Increase

The proposed fare increase would raise a one-way cash fare (the base fare) on COAST buses to \$2.00, a \$0.50 increase from the current \$1.50 to ride. Cash fares for older adults and individuals living with disabilities, set at half the base cash fare, would increase to \$1.00.

The comparable fares for COAST's one-way complementary ADA paratransit services would increase to start at \$4.00. Currently comparable one-way fares start at \$3.00.

Newmarket-Exeter Connector fares would increase to \$4.00. Currently comparable one-way fares are \$3.00.

The highest fare charged on Portsmouth Senior Transportation, for rides in which a fare is charged, would increase to \$4.00. Non-emergency medical trips and trips to Seacoast Mental Health Center will remain free. Group Shopping Trips would increase to \$3.00 each way. All other eligible trips would have a \$4.00 fare.

Ticket Bundles, currently sold as 15 tickets for \$20.00 would change to 11 tickets for \$20. This would maintain the equivalent discount rate for these tickets while also continuing to make purchases on the bus easy with the cash that typically comes from an ATM.

Demand Response Punch Tickets, recognized on any COAST demand response service (ADA, Newmarket-Exeter Connector or Portsmouth Senior Transportation), will be sold for \$40.00 and include 40 \$1.00 punches on them. Currently they are sold for \$30 and include 30 \$1.00 punches on them.

Monthly passes, good on all COAST and Wildcat Transit buses, would increase from \$52.00 to \$60.00. The monthly pass program discount rate would improve from the current 17.5% to 28.5%. This assumes the user takes 42 trips over the course of the month, or two trips a day over 21 days.

Public Comments

- (1) Madeline Niles via email - I am a citizen of Dover without a car, and so the COAST and Wildcat bus lines are important to helping me get around the Seacoast. However, recent line cuts, especially the recent cuts of later departures between Dover and Portsmouth, have been disappointing. Portsmouth has a night life Dover does not, and it has been sad not being able to visit as often post-cut. This, in addition to the lack of full-year service on Durham Road via the Wildcat system, has left me unable to viably use the COAST system as often as I would like to. If service were more reliable, I would almost certainly purchase the monthly pass, but instead settle on fewer trips instead. I am not fully opposed to a fare increase. Not needing coins would actually make getting fare easier in times I have no tickets on hand, and the amount of the proposed increase is not too bad. However, my concern is that an increase in fare may lead to a decrease in ridership that nullifies or even worsens the amount of fare revenue. In my opinion (as well as my own personal hope), expansion of routes and service times would be a better pursuit. If increased fare achieves this, so be it, but I do think other avenues and factors should be considered.
- (2) Carol Gulla, TASC at the Exeter public meeting - I understand the need for the increases and do not think they are unreasonable. Once you hit \$5.00, people start getting antsy. I anticipate you may get some pushback because even going to \$4.00 (for demand response trips) will be tough for some people and there will be some grumbling.
- (3) Kay Wright, City of Rochester at the Rochester public meeting - I think raising the fares is very reasonable both because it hasn't happened in so long and because the cost of everything is going up.
- (4) Kyle Lefavour, Edward Morris & AdamBates at the Farmington public meeting - Keep ticket bundles at 15 tickets and raise cost to \$25 or higher. I would rather still get the same number of tickets and pay more. Or keep cost at \$20 but only decrease to 12 tickets (vs. 11).
- (5) There have been no public comments on incorporating a day pass.

Action Recommended: That the COAST Board of Directors approve the proposed fare change increase to take effect on September 1, 2026, contingent upon no further subsequent public input being received by May 29.

Mr. Lentz made a motion to approve the proposed fare increase. The motion was seconded by Mr. Dornblut. The motion was amended making the approval contingent on COAST receiving no substantive objections to the increase during the remaining two days of public input.

Discussion: Mr. Shanahan noted that compared with inflation, the rate increase provides good value. And the public feedback has been mostly supportive.

The Board voted unanimously to approve the fare increase with the stated contingency.

Action Item #3: COAST Cares – Food Drive to Support Gather

This action item was withdrawn from the agenda

Action Item #4: July 3, 2026 – No Service for Federal Holiday

This action item was added to the agenda.

Since July 4th is on a Saturday and the observed Federal Holiday is on July 3rd, management is seeking approval to be closed on July 3rd.

Action Recommended: *That the COAST Board of Directors approve the proposed to close COAST for service on July 3, 2026.*

Mr. Lentz made a motion to approve the closure on July 3, 2026. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sandmann.

Discussion: Mr. Nichols noted a slight savings from being closed. Mr. Shanahan noted the many businesses that will be closed because of the Federal holiday and the 250th anniversary of the country.

The Board voted unanimously to approve making July 3, 2026 a holiday and not running service on July 3, 2026.

Discussion Items

Discussion Item #1: Federal Surface Transportation Reauthorization

From the CTAA on May 18 -

BUILD America 250 Act

The House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has released a bi-partisan surface transportation reauthorization bill to replace the expiring IIJA, called the BUILD America 250 Act. The transit title is 200+ pages and is Section III of the bill.

We have identified several items that CTAA and our members submitted to the committee for consideration that have been adopted, including:

- Outside of the transit title, NEPA has been updated for transit operators with substantive changes on categorical exclusions and allowance to purchase land first, and then perform NEPA
- Total contract authority will be \$87b over five years - \$16.8b per year

- 5311 funding crosses the \$1b/year threshold
- Increase Small Transit Intensive Cities set-aside to 5% (from 3%)
- All sales of buses to go back to the agency selling the bus
- Streamlining oversight and triennial review for smaller systems
- Spare ratio statutorily eliminated
- NTD streamlining -- Call for a GAO study
- For 5339, there will be a 62% formula/38% discretionary in Section 5339(a) - with a 5% rural set-aside
- Also in 5339, state set-aside increases from \$4 million per state to \$6 million, with the aim to improve smaller transit agencies gain access to more federal formula funding
- 5339 (a) and (b) will now be combined into a single competitive program with no Congressional discussion of propulsion types
- ALL NEW Section 5308 state block grant program which would all match at 80/20
- No changes to Section 5312 or Section 5314

We are tracking that no advanced appropriations are included in this bill, but it's our understanding is that overall increased transit investment will offset the potential hit to Sections 5310 and 5339. This process is far from over (more explanation below), but we are hopeful that this bill will serve CTAA members and their communities well.

Now that Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen have submitted this bill for consideration, the T&I committee will next move into markup, where debate and amendments are proposed for each section. After the committee markup, the bill will be reported to the House, where it can be voted to adopt when the House is in session. We understand that leadership of the House T&I committee believe this Act will be put into law (with currently unknown changes as proposed during the markup) ahead of IIJA expiration. Links with all of the details are below.

Funding Levels

- Section 5307 urban transit baseline authorization (\$7.0 billion in FY 2026) jumps about 10 percent to \$7.7 billion in 2027, then 1.5 to 2.0 percent annually thereafter. *This could result in \$240,000 of additional 5307 funding coming to COAST in FY27.*
- Section 5310 elderly/disabled mobility (\$407.0 million in 2026) also jumps about 10 percent to \$447.3 million in 2027, then 1 to 2 percent annually thereafter. *This could result in \$56,000 of additional 5310 funding coming to COAST & ACT in FY27.*
- Section 5311 rural transit baseline authorization (\$959.6 million in 2026) jumps about 5 percent to \$1.0 billion in 2027, then 1.5 to 2.0 percent annually thereafter. *This could result in \$4,500 of additional 5311 funding coming to COAST in FY27.*
- Section 5340 growing/high-density states authorizations, which are an important supplement to most urban and a few rural apportionments, jump about 7.5 percent to \$873.0 million in 2027, then just over 1 percent annually thereafter. *Our region does not typically qualify for these funds.*

Federal Share for Transit Projects

The bill creates a new feature, Section 5308, under which interested states and US DOT can agree to have their apportionments of state-managed FTA formula funds (parts of Sections 5307, 5310, 5339, and 5340, along with all of Section 5311) bundled up and delivered as annual block grants. All projects funded via these consolidated block grants come with an 80 percent federal share. This could extend the 80 percent match on operating funds to small urban operators, as well as rural and tribal agencies. Once in a state's hands, it seems like the state gets to decide how to distribute funds among its small-urban, specialized, rural and intercity projects, including any bus or bus facility projects for these subrecipients' benefits, irrespective of the line-item apportionment amounts.

The 5340 Small Transit Intensive Communities set aside will almost double in size. Funding awarded under this statute directly reduces the amount of 5307 funds available to COAST. COAST's system is not intense enough to ever meet the metrics that would make us eligible for funds under this program. Generally, only small communities located in states that heavily fund local transportation meet the necessary metrics.

It was asked what would have to occur for this service area to be a STIC. Miles would have to double, riders per revenue hour would have to increase by 40%. In addition, UNH would have to be a full reporting agency and we would need an additional \$2-3 million of annual funding.

The bill also contains proposals that will streamline of NTD reporting and tri-annual reviews for well rated agencies like COAST.

Quick links:

- Press release:
<https://transportation.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=409495>
- Section by section summary:
https://transportation.house.gov/uploadedfiles/build_america_250_act_section_by_section.pdf?utm_campaign=198664-345
- Bill text:
https://transportation.house.gov/uploadedfiles/build_america_250_act_bill_text.pdf?utm_campaign=198664-345

~ CTAA Legislative Staff

Scott Bogren, CTAA's Executive Director, will be providing an update on reauthorization at the Joint NHTA/SCC Annual Meeting on June 4.

Committee Reports

Nothing to report

VII. Community Updates/Information Items

Ridership

- Overall ridership in April totaled 34,887. This was up 2.6% from March, and down 2.9% from April 2025.
- Fixed route ridership totalled 32,274, up 2.6% from March, and down by 3.2% from April 2025. Average weekday ridership was 3.0% higher than in April 2025.
- Demand response ridership totaled 2,613 for the month. This represented a 2.1% increase from March, and a 1.8 % increase in ridership from April 2025.

VIII. Adjournment

Mr Lentz made the motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Bogle. The motion was approved and the meeting adjourned at 9:27 a.m.