



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation
Minutes of the Board of Directors
Wednesday, November 19, 2025**

Present: Scott Bogle, Fred Butler (virtual), Sean Clancy, Sönke Dornblut, Jason Garnham, Emmy Ham, Denis Hebert (arrived 8:40am), Margaret Joyce, Colin Lentz, Dave Sandmann (virtual), David Tovey (virtual), and Kay Wright

Absent: Arthur Capello, Jillian Harris, Michael Mates, Joanne Neumann, Crystal Paradis-Catanzaro, Dennis Shanahan

Staff: Rad Nichols, Margot Doering, Heather Hesse-Stromberg, Joanne Muckenhoupt, Vanessa Polychronis, Michael Williams, Dan Sinks, Phil Smith

I. Call to Order

With Mr. Shanahan unavailable for today’s meeting, Mr. Bogle called the meeting to order at 8:35am and all present introduced themselves.

II. Approval of the minutes

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

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Abstain
Mr. Tovey	Abstain
Ms. Wright	Yes

The motion passed.

III. Public Comment

Mr. Nichols recognized two staff members for reaching milestone anniversaries. Mr. Sinks has worked as a Mechanic for COAST for 20 years & Ms. Doering has worked as the Director of Finance for COAST for 5 years.

Mr. Sinks was present at the meeting and Mr. Smith, Manager of Fleet and Facility Maintenance, spoke about what a great person Mr. Sinks is and how his advanced skills have allowed COAST to achieve great things. Mr. Smith, Mr. Williams, and Mr. Nichols all thanked him for his great work

and expressed their deep appreciation for him being such a vital part of the team. Mr. Sinks was provided a plaque to recognize this achievement.

Ms. Doering, COAST's Director of Finance, has reached 5 years at COAST. Mr. Nichols noted that she has been a great addition and has really elevated the finance function at COAST. Over the past year she has transitioned COAST to a whole new accounting system which has been a big success. He thanked Ms. Doering for her service to the organization over the past 5 years.

IV. Financial Report

In revenues Ms. Doering noted that fares were down (there was a Fare Free Saturday for which we received sponsorship). She drew attention to a 5-month CD that recently matured, bumping up interest earned. She reported that the blank line for state billing exists because it is early in the month so not all billing has been done. Coordination is also behind in billing due to the meeting being earlier in the month.

On the expense side, wages and fringes are higher than usual. Ms. Doering has suggested that for budgeting and forecasting, PTO and IRA contributions should be grouped with wages versus fringe benefits. She pointed out an increase in overtime in October due to more service days and a lot of absences. Overtime hours were significant among Dispatchers and Supervisors.

Ms. Doering noted that the available funds balance on the balance sheet does not include current investments due to a formula error. We have \$1.6M at Piscataqua Savings at a 3.25% interest rate which we can access at any time. Mr. Hebert suggested looking at his bank, which has an interest rate of 5%. Ms. Doering indicated that Chase and Kennebunk Savings are good rates for us and noted that the interest rates have dropped over the past 6 months.

V. Old Business

Staffing

Mr. Nichols reported that, after a rocky September and October with record levels of staff out on medical leaves, we now have only two operating staff members out and one administrative staff member out. We are fully staffed for Operators with one new Operator currently in training. We have lost a couple of Vehicle Cleaners (who fuel and clean the buses at night), so we are very lean there right now. We are interviewing to fill open positions.

CommuteSMART Seacoast

We have put off advertising and hiring for the new full-time staff member until after the new year.

GACIT Hearings

COAST staff attended and presented at multiple GACIT hearings across the region in September and October. Our written comments were also submitted by the November 6 deadline. Of the five Executive Councilors, we made direct contact with four. We advocated for further investment in our transportation network including increases in the following: turnpike tolls, gas tax, and the local option fee. Mr. Nichols noted that there are very reasonable solutions available to fund the 10-Year Plan and strong arguments were made to support them at the meetings.

Facility Update

We continue to address loose ends as we work towards completion of final design. We have been pushing hard for delivery of an energy consumption study which came yesterday. We currently pay electricity and gas at 42 Sumner and electricity, gas, and rent at 6. Based on the consumption study, we will save \$33K a year in the new building, which does not consider the benefits of the solar array and includes the bus storage building being heated to 40 degrees. These approaches will lead to significant savings.

Development

Ms. Muckenhoupt noted that we are entering an exciting time of year in Development with Giving Tuesday coming up on December 2nd and building momentum for our annual operating fund that will go forward beyond the capital campaign funds raised. She reported that the capital campaign marketing materials are almost done and include a call to action and clear explanation of what we're doing. She explained that we are building a micro-website for development that will engage potential donors on a consistent basis. Ms. Muckenhoupt noted we have made a connection with a potential large donor (who has already donated on a small scale) and will be looking to increase our funding request.

She noted that on December 17th there will be a Board Appreciation event, in lieu of a meeting, at Stella's to thank Board Members for their commitment to COAST.

VI. New Business

Action Items

Action Item #1: Nominating Committee Recommendation of Officer & Executive Committee Slate

The departure of Mr. Scala from the COAST Board has left the Vice Chair position vacant. The Nominating Committee met in early November to discuss the four officer roles and fifth Chair's Appointee seat on the Executive Committee. The Nominating Committee consists of Mr. Lentz, Ms. Joyce, and Mr. Bogle.

Following extensive discussion and consultation with candidates and Mr. Nichols, the Committee proposes one shift in existing officer positions, one new officer candidate, and a new Chair's Appointee in the fifth seat.

Proposed Updated Slate of Board Officers for FY2026

Chair: Dennis Shanahan, Dover – continuing in current role
Vice Chair: Margaret Joyce, Dover Chamber of Commerce – shifting from Secretary role
Treasurer: Scott Bogle, Rockingham Planning Commission – continuing in current role
Secretary: Emmy Ham, Workforce Housing Coalition of the Greater Seacoast – new role

The Bylaws provide that the Executive Committee be composed of the officers and one appointee at the discretion of the Chair. Board Member Sean Clancy of Portsmouth has agreed to serve in the Chair's Appointee role.

Proposed Executive Committee, Including Chair's Appointee, for FY2026

Chair: Dennis Shanahan, City of Dover

Vice Chair: Margaret Joyce, Dover Chamber of Commerce
Treasurer: Scott Bogle, Rockingham Planning Commission
Secretary: Emmy Ham, Workforce Housing Coalition of the Greater Seacoast
Chair's Appointee: Sean Clancy, City of Portsmouth

The Committee thanked Mr. Sandmann for his many years of service on the Executive Committee as an Officer, and most recently as the Chair's Appointee.

Action Requested: *That the board of directors elect the proposed slate of Officers and Executive Committee, which includes changes in individuals filling the Vice Chair, Secretary, and Chair's Appointee roles.*

Mr. Hebert made a motion to elect the proposed slate of Officers and Executive Committee members which was seconded by Mr. Dornblut. The vote was taken by roll call.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The vote passed unanimously.

Action Item #2: New Demand Response Cutaway Purchase (price update)

This procurement was approved by the board in May for \$133,481. We did not order the vehicle because of uncertainty over need with service levels not yet determined. Now, with more clarification on our needs and service levels going forward, we would like to move ahead with this procurement, however the delay means a new chassis year (and a higher cost). The cost is now \$136,731 for the same vehicle.

Action Requested: *The COAST Board of Directors authorize the procurement of an additional new demand response cutaway bus for the updated price of \$136,731.*

Mr. Dornblut made a motion to authorize the procurement at the updated price and Mr. Clancy seconded. The vote was taken by roll call.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes

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

The vote passed unanimously.

Action Item #3 was tabled due to not getting feedback from corporate attorney yet.

Unaccompanied Rider Age Limit for COAST Connector (Newmarket-Exeter) & General DR Services

Action Item #4: Authorization to Submit a CY26 Funding Application to Strafford County

For approximately 13 years, Strafford County has contributed financially to COAST for Route 33 and associated ADA operations in Dover. This year the request in support of these operations was \$92,778. For the 6th year now, consideration for support of ACT/TripLink operations is also included in the funding application (\$8,000).

The County operates on a calendar year (CY) cycle. The two amounts identified above add up to COAST's total request of \$100,778 of financial support in the upcoming CY26 cycle. A requirement for submission is that the request be reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors. The terms and conditions of the Strafford County "Contract for Services" are agreeable.

Action Requested: *The COAST Board of Directors approve the submission of COAST's CY26 funding request of Strafford County and authorize the Executive Director, Mr. Nichols, to act on behalf of the organization, in submitting the application.*

Mr. Sandmann made motion to approve the submission and Mr. Lentz seconded the motion. The vote was taken by role call.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Clancy	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Garnham	Yes
Ms. Ham	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Sandmann	Yes
Mr. Tovey	Yes
Ms. Wright	Yes

The vote passed unanimously.

VII. Discussion Items

Discussion Item #1: 5-Year Operating & Capital Projections

Mr. Nichols made a presentation that included projections on our 5-year operating and capital revenues and expenses. These projections are made at this time of year in order to help determine municipal asks for the coming year (FT27 starting next October of 2026). SB2 Cities and Towns will consider last year's requests in their upcoming budget.

Assumptions were presented regarding service levels, projected ridership, inflationary rates, and funding sources and amounts. Not included were operating costs of the new facility and non-federal grants not already received.

Projections are that we will rely heavily on 5339(a) and (b) grant programs, will have a small operating budget gains each year, and will continue to utilize 5307 funding at a much higher rate than it is being allocated to us annually.

Realities we face are that we must continue to grow municipal matching funds at higher than projected inflationary rates, must explore additional FTA funding and maintain and source new annual sources of non-USDOT matching funds, must continue to grow our non-federal grant revenues, must reduce expenses, and likely make service adjustments to meet the available resources we have.

The 5-Year operating budget projections show we are in the black; a result of the changes we have already made. Additional information regarding revenue and expense growth, federal and municipal/partner operating revenue and usage projections, and 5 Year Capital Spending Projections were presented.

Mr. Hebert asked if we have secured the money we need for the facility. Mr. Nichols indicated that we have not and that we will need to have a combination of additional FTA funds and up to about \$4M in non-USDOT funds. It was noted that addressing the funding gap is a main reason we hired a Director of Development.

Ms. Ham asked what the FTA funding landscape looks like right now. Mr. Nichols noted we are not aware of any major claw backs through FTA at this time. He reported that we'll apply for FFY25 allocated funds next spring/summer and spend them next fall so we are in a good position to not have to rely on the timeliness of annual appropriations. He noted that we have tied up as much funding as we can in our grants, so available funds are obligated, and all our grants are active. There are some allocated/awarded funds that are not yet obligated on grants, but as a general rule we are trying to stay a year to the good.

Mr. Nichols noted a recent article put out by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) on a letter to Congress regarding the Administration talking about eliminating public transit funding out of the highway trust fund and not allowing FHWA transfers to public transit. Mr. Nichols noted that it would be very difficult for the Administration's approach to gain support given the large number of states that already rely on that funding for public transit. He shared that it has been a period of waiting 'for the other shoe to drop' from the Administration, but he is feeling more confident than he was in the past. Mr. Bogle noted he had heard that the goal of the Administration would be to go after large urban systems versus rural or small urban systems.

In reviewing the 5 Year schedule of federal funds, Mr. Nichols noted a burn rate of FTA 5307 funds that exceeds our annual allocation, and that, at this rate, we would run out of 5307 funds in mid-2030. We prefer to remain a year ahead of our funding, so we'll need to address this at the latest in 2029. Other federal funds supporting our operations and capital program, funding buses, commuteSMART, and coordination efforts were noted. The 5307 operating funds are the main issue.

The 5 Year breakdown of how FTA 5307 and 5311 funds used for operations costs and a visualization of our use of reserves were presented. It is projected that by 2030 our reserve balance will equal our reserve balance goal.

Mr. Nichols summarized that we need to raise revenues by continuing to diversify our funding streams and will continue to rely upon 5339, 5310, and CMAQ programs to sustain our capital program, regional coordination efforts, and commuteSMART Seacoast. In addition, we will likely need to consider further service adjustments in FY2027. Mr. Hebert asked if service adjustments involve decreasing services or cutting routes? Mr. Nichols noted we're talking about a potentially dramatically different system.

Ms. Joyce asked if we have had any feedback on the service cuts we've recently implemented. Mr. Nichols shared that, despite cutting service, we had the highest ridership during October in the last 8 years, and it looks like riders are shifting their riding patterns in response to the cuts. Mr. Williams noted that the changes make it more challenging and tighter for some riders later in the day but that we really tried to target reductions to the least productive services when making these adjustments.

Mr. Nichols noted that there are ways we could change services that would help the burn rate. If we went after CMAQ funding to improve our frequency to 30 minutes on part of the system, we could meet the need and positively impact (lower) our use of 5307 funding. CMAQ funding will cover 80% of eligible expenses and, if the communities are willing to cover the other 20%, we could expand services to a 30-minute frequency which would make a huge difference for our riders. He noted that at a recent Portsmouth City Council meeting there were people expressing support for expanding our services.

Mr. Dornblut noted that, given the information presented, the system would look very different in the future. He asked if Mr. Nichols could describe a system he would like to see that would meet the needs and paint a positive picture that Board members could use to make the case for communities to financially support it. Mr. Nichols noted that we don't have that system fully designed yet but he is confident that we can get there. He restated that the picture is much rosier if we get CMAQ funding to get to 30 minute frequencies. Mr. Dornblut noted that in his town there is great motivation to make better transit options for residents a reality. He suggested that municipalities may need to be involved in conversations about the service changes. Mr. Nichols shared that Mr. Williams went to a conference recently focused on designing transit systems and that one of the main takeaways was that we need to engage communities in a different way so that we increase their commitment levels and their sense of ownership of their public transit system. They need to better understand what we do and what we *can* do with a certain level of financial and political commitment.

Mr. Nichols noted that the next CMAQ round opens next fall and we need to position ourselves to be competitive for those funds. He suggested we build a coalition to position ourselves to be very competitive.

Overall, with the service changes we made in October, we have pushed the red line out a little bit further.

Committee Reports

No Committee activities to report.

VII. Community Updates/Information Items

Information Items

COAST Website

Our website is now seven years old, becoming more expensive to maintain on the platform it was built, and the complexity of how our GTFS feed is used to display our schedules can now more easily be handled by other software platforms. A recent conversation with our website developers will likely have us going out to bid for a website redesign within the next 3-6 months. We are working on developing cost estimates for that work now.

Real-time Bus App

We currently are contracted with Passio for their Passio Go! App for accessing real-time bus information. We have been in discussion with Transit App about using their more widely accepted platform. Transit App has much better functionality and would be a significant improvement for our passengers in terms of ease of use and accessibility. We hope to move to that late Spring to early Summer.

Ford Safety Recall

A recent safety recall issued by Ford for windshield defrosting issues has our six recently built minibuses being held up from delivery by the manufacturer. We will continue to operate the vehicles they are replacing until the new minibuses arrive.

Vintage Christmas Trolley

We will once again be providing this service for the City of Portsmouth between Thanksgiving and Christmas. The city is reimbursing COAST for the full cost of the service.

Willand Pond Warming Center Shuttle

We will be operating a morning shuttle connecting the Willand Pond Warming Center with downtown Dover in the mornings after the shelter was activated for the evening.

Big Empty Buses

There have recently been some questions raised about concerns of big empty public transit buses operating in our state. Mr. Nichols presented some talking points if anyone is asked about this issue.

Transit Network Design Course Takeaways

Mr. Williams recently attended a two-day course on transit network design held by Jarrett Walker's firm in Portland, OR. It was a very informative and engaging session with some great takeaways.

October Service Adjustment Impacts

The recent changes impacted all routes but Routes 1 and 6, and we have seen large percentage gains in ridership/revenue miles of service.

Ridership

Overall ridership in October totaled 38,845. This was up 9.8% from September, and up 1.7% over October 2024. This was the highest ridership we have achieved in a single month since October 2017! Demand response ridership saw record or near-record levels of ridership for the month and saw the highest ridership yet in a single month.

Community Updates

Mr. Hebert noted that the Fox Run Mall is about to be demolished and two box stores will be put in its place. While there will be no housing there, housing will be built where the Christmas Tree Shop and Bed, Bath & Beyond were located.

Ms. Ham noted that at the recent 8th Annual Greater Seacoast Housing Summit there was a presentation on affordability by Phil Sletten from NH Fiscal Policy Institute. She shared that the focus of the summit was creating housing solutions. She shared that employers are feeling the crunch and are now stepping up to figure out how to build housing options into what they offer candidates.

Ms. Wright asked if COAST surveys employers regarding how many employees use the service to get to work. She shared that at community development committee meetings people are interested in seeing economic impact and it would be important to know which employers would be impacted by service cuts.

Mr. Hebert noted that employer data is very helpful to have but difficult to get. Having that information, however, makes a big difference when advocating for funding. He shared that it is hard to advocate for funding when routes are getting cut and cited Route 43 as an example. Mr. Nichols shared that the part of Route 43 that was cut was a diversion that was never used. Mr. Hebert shared that it is a very difficult position when services are cut but there is a 17% increase in the ask of his community. Mr. Nichols stressed that the ask of communities to take on a larger portion of our overall budget is because we aren't getting FTA funds at the same rate anymore and there is a lack of adequate funding provided by the State. Until we can get greater diversity of funding revenue streams, we have to rely on our communities.

Mr. Bogle noted that it would be helpful to have a commitment from Torrington (the Fox Run Mall developer) that transit access to their new development is important to them. Mr. Williams shared that he asked them to talk to COAST when developing their site plans so we make sure that it is accessible. Mr. Garnham shared that PNSY has data on employee use of transit and he has data on where employees live. Mr. Lentz stressed that SRPC hears from the hospitality industry that they would not be able to be in business without COAST.

Mr. Bogle asked if there are any good stats on the share of small urban systems around the country where the combination of local and state contribution is more than just matching the available federal funds. He noted that it would be useful information to have to talk about that in the broader

national setting. Mr. Nichols suggested that it is often state funding in those cases or systems that are run by county governments. Mr. Garnham pointed out that it may be difficult to compare because of the way different states and counties collect tax revenue and distribute it.

Ms. Ham noted that she asked about FTA funding because, while they are feeling safe on the HUD side of things, they just learned of proposed cuts that would significantly reduce support for formerly unhoused individuals. She stressed that we're going to need to do some strong advocacy around that as it will impact many people, though we don't yet know what the number looks like in our region. It will be an all hands on deck situation.

Mr. Bogle asked about whether there is any perceived threat to shifting of CDBG or CMAQ funds at this point. Mr. Lentz shared that he hasn't heard any concerns about it and that the focus seems to be on smaller, individual projects.

VIII. Adjournment

Mr. Hebert made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:18pm.

Respectfully submitted by Ms. Emily Ham, Secretary