



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation  
Minutes of the Board of Directors  
Wednesday, March 26, 2014**

**Members Present:** Scott Bogle – Chairman, Kenn Ortmann – Vice Chairman, Cynthia Copeland (arr. 8:40 AM), Jen Decker, Tom Morgan (arr. 9:10 AM), Martin Pepin, Sylvia von Aulock, Juliet Walker

**COAST Staff Present:** Rad Nichols, Jeff Donald, Jenn Hastings, Heather Hesse-Stromberg

**Others Present:** Amy Vento

**I. Call to Order**

Mr. Bogle began the meeting at 8:39 AM. There was a round of introductions.

**II. Approval of Minutes**

(Delayed until quorum)

**III. Public Comment**

Mr. Ortmann reflected on his recent use of COAST. He said that he discovered a silver lining to missing the bus: sometimes the destination is so close, you can actually walk to it instead and get some exercise. He said he was shocked at how often the Route 2 bus is already full when it picks him up in the southern end of Rochester.

**II. Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Ortmann made the motion to approve the minutes of February 26. Ms. Walker seconded. Ms. vonAulock corrected a typographical error (“tears” instead of “years”). Ms. Walker said that she thought the snow-removal issue was on Hanover Street, not Market Street. Mr. Nichols said that we had problems on both streets. Once Market Street became impassable with a bus, we had to avoid Hanover Street as well (because Hanover Street does not lead anywhere else). The motion passed unanimously with Mr. Pepin’s abstention.

**IV. Financial Report**

## January 2014 Income Statement and Balance Sheets

Mr. Nichols remarked that January was another good month for COAST financially. Our farebox and advertising revenues continue to be strong. Some of the increase in ad revenue is due to the fact that we were finally able to collect money owed to us from an advertiser who had been behind. On the expense side, wages were up in January because the FY14 pay increases for operating staff took effect. Fringe benefits were higher than normal year-to-date due to the PTO sellback. Our balance sheet shows that we are in a good position with no cash flow issues.

Ms. Walker asked about the slow growth in the regional coordination program. Mr. Nichols said that our two biggest hurdles are getting our partners to get on board and getting the software fully functional. We are working on a back-up solution to the software that we can use in the meantime if necessary. We hope to make significant progress in the next month or two. Mr. Donald added that Ready Rides began tracking mileage for reimbursement in January, and we will receive an invoice at the end of the quarter. TASC is still working through some concerns about accessible transportation. Mr. Nichols added that our anticipated future funding will not support a program as large as the one we had planned.

Mr. Nichols discussed a recently hired mechanic that had come on board straight out of training school. Mr. Ortmann asked if we had looked into the workforce development programs that would subsidize new hires' wages while they go through on-the-job training. Mr. Nichols said we have not traditionally been interested in mechanics that had so little experience, but we had gone without a third mechanic for many months and when he presented himself this individual had a great attitude.

Mr. Nichols discussed our fund balance, which is currently about \$860k. He discussed how he and our accountant, Bob Ruzinsky, were aiming for a fund balance equal to 1/6 of our annual operating budget, plus 3 years of capital program needs, and a small contingency equal to 1/12 of our operating budget. While our current balance is higher than it has ever been, it falls far short of meeting those goals. Mr. Ortmann said that people may wonder why we would sit on so much money and it is helpful to explain that we are planning for the future rather than running the organization hand-to-mouth. He wondered if our goals are consistent with best practices in the transit industry. Mr. Nichols said that our FTA funding comes as a reimbursement, and it is sometimes as much as 2 months after the money was spent. Keeping 2 months of reserves allows us to float the organization if necessary, and it is especially important given recent volatility at the federal level. Mr. Ortmann suggested that we find out what is typical in municipalities, because municipal officials will be the ones most likely to question our fund balance if it is dramatically different from the ones they are accustomed to. Mr. Nichols said that he would reach out to municipalities and

sister transit systems in New England. He added that COAST was significantly helped by ARRA.

## **V. Old Business**

*None*

## **VI. New Business**

### **Action Item #1: Fare Increase on the Clipper Connection**

Mr. Nichols explained that no public comment had been received via email, USPS or at either of the two public hearings held on the proposed increase. Mr. Ortmann made the motion to approve the fare increase as proposed, and Mr. Pepin seconded. Ms. Walker asked about the concerns raised on our Facebook page. Mr. Nichols said that these individuals were concerned that we would raise the price of the bus pass past the level of the federal benefit they were eligible to receive. We had followed up and explained that our intention was to raise the price to ride when and if the benefit value is raised. We hope to be able to implement the increase on June 1. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Action Item #2: Credit Card**

Mr. Ortmann made the motion to authorize the executive director to sign and execute credit card documents on behalf of COAST, and Ms. Copeland seconded. Mr. Nichols said that we had not been aware that this resolution was required. We have not changed the limits or the terms of the credit card at all. The motion passed unanimously.

## **Discussion Items**

### **Municipal Funding Update**

Mr. Nichols reviewed the decisions recently taken at town meetings regarding COAST funding according to the municipal funding formula. Greenland zeroed COAST out of the budget for the second consecutive year. Mr. Morgan said that the anti-COAST faction in Newington was active again this year. Our funding was zeroed out, but the voters reversed that during town meeting. Mr. Nichols noted that Stratham agreed to pay only \$5,000. The town had previously agreed that they would pay only \$6,000 until the employment figures in the funding formula were updated. Those figures were updated for FY 2014.

Mr. Nichols suggested to the Board that it may want to consider running service closed-door or on-call only through Greenland and Stratham, which would also streamline the route serving those two communities (Rte. 7). Stratham and Greenland have very few residents using the service; mostly, riders from other

communities are passing through. Stratham is a shopping destination for residents of Newmarket and Exeter. Ms. Walker said this is a conundrum, because limiting service would reduce our ability to improve ridership and build more support from those communities. Mr. Ortmann said that the communities that do fully fund COAST are subsidizing the communities that do not. He wondered if we could use the slack time to improve service in the communities that do fully support the request. Mr. Nichols said that we have added an extra run between Exeter and Newmarket in the evening (when we had previously deadheaded back to base on the same route). We have also discussed expanding service in Newmarket to more closely mirror Wildcat Transit's route through town.

It was suggested that discussions with both Stratham and Greenland be held to investigate these options further.

Mr. Morgan said that the discussion in Newington was much the same. The councilors feel that the service should go through the residential area. Mr. Nichols said that diverting Route 2 to go through downtown Newington would be infuriating for passengers who have already been on the bus for a long time. Mr. Morgan asked if on/ off counts could be published on the COAST website so that he could prove how many passengers use the bus to get to Newington.

Mr. Ortmann thanked Ms. Vento for attending the meeting. The City of Rochester appreciates the connection with Farmington, but it is important for Farmington to have input at this table. Mr. Nichols said that he met with the Board of Selectmen before the annual meeting. There had been a serious communication breakdown between the Town and COAST. We were very pleasantly surprised by the amount of support shown by residents at town meeting. Multiple passengers spoke in defense of COAST funding, including some of our ADA clients from that community. Ultimately, the vote was overwhelmingly in support of continued funding for COAST operations in Farmington.

Ms. Vento said that she lives in Farmington and takes the bus. She was attending as she is interested in representing Farmington on the COAST Board of Directors. Some residents told her that if the bus service was cut, they would have to move. These passengers need to go to pharmacies, Wal-Mart, and even dialysis. Route 2 does not go to the dialysis center. She wished that Farmington had more service, not less. It would be nice to have service on Saturdays, and an afternoon run between 12:55 and 4:20.

## **VII. Information Items**

### **CommuteSMART Seacoast**

Mr. Nichols said that commuteSMARTseacoast's official launch is April 24. There will be an event at RedHook. There will also be some safe bike commuting training events in preparation for Bike/ Walk to Work Day on May 16. We are making great progress on the commuteSMART website. Additionally, two marketing initiatives are being developed. One aims to increase ridership on the Clipper Connection, and the other is targeted at millennials commuting to Pease and Portsmouth. Mr. Bogle said that he has asked Ms. Rugg to speak at the planning commission's April 9<sup>th</sup> meeting. Mr. Nichols said that as a result of Ms. Rugg's work, COAST has received an increasing level of calls from businesses about our services and the potential for starting new services.

### **Federal Grant Opportunities – 5310 Purchase of Service and Mobility Management**

Mr. Nichols said that we have enough local match to apply for all \$228k in available mobility management funds, which support the administrative overhead for our coordination program. To access the purchase of service funding, we would need area partners to supply the match.

### **Route Re-Alignment**

The newly named Route 20 will debut on June 1, to coincide with the fare changes. We have taken out a full-page ad in the *Pease Quarterly*.

### **Ridership**

Mr. Nichols said that ridership is about even with FY 2013, despite the various service changes. We have seen notable growth on Routes 1, 100 and 103. After the fare increase, the drop in ridership on the trolley was not as large as expected. The ridership drop on Route 33 has been larger than expected. ADA ridership growth has moderated, which is good news from a budget perspective. We are working with Ms. Decker to update our operating practices and ADA service guide.

### **VIII. Adjournment**

Mr. Ortmann made the motion to adjourn, and Mr. Pepin seconded. The meeting ended at 10:17 AM.