



Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA) Advisory Board Meeting

Date: Wednesday, March 31st, 2021
Location: Virtual Meeting via SRTA Cisco WebEx (10:30AM)
Call in Number: 1-408-418-9388; Access Code: 132 428 4725; Password: 734 88 254
Purpose: FY21 SRTA Advisory Board

(1) Call to Order

The Advisory Board Chair called the meeting to order at 10:34AM EST.

At the onset of the meeting, the Advisory Board Chair called for a brief moment of silence for Former City of New Bedford Mayor, Frederik M. Kalisz, to honor his work and contributions to the City.

(2) Roll Call

Present:

City of New Bedford (Jennifer Clarke)	City of Fall River (Mayor Paul Coogan)
Town of Fairhaven (Paul Foley)	City of Fall River (John Perry)
Town of Mattapoisett (Michael Lourenco)	

Absent:

Town of Acushnet	Town of Swansea
Town of Dartmouth	Town of Westport
Town of Freetown	ADA Representative
Town of Somerset	Riders Representative

Additional Attendees:

Erik Rousseau, SRTA	Arthur Frank, General Counsel (SRTA)
Kristen Sniezek, SRTA	Lilia Cabral-Bernard, SRPEDD
John LeBert, SRTA	
Shayne Trimbell, SRTA	
Maritza Aquino, SRTA	

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(3) Approval of Minutes

Motion: The motion was made (City of Fall River) and seconded (Town of Fairhaven) to approve the minutes from the previous February (02/25/2021) SRTA Advisory Board Meeting.

Discussion: The Town of Fairhaven requested that the definitions be added under the sub-sections for the Civil Rights Update (EEO, DBE).

Vote:

For: City of Fall River, Town of Fairhaven, City of New Bedford, Town of Mattapoissett

Status: Motion Passes

(4) Citizen's Participation

No Citizen's Participation.

(5) Civil Rights Update

Title VI:

The SRTA's Title VI Plan has been submitted and is under FTA review and awaiting concurrence.

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO):

The EEO Plan for South Coast Transit Management (SCTM) has been submitted and is under FTA review and awaiting concurrence.

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE):

The SRTA's DBE goals for FFY19-FFY21 has been submitted and is under FTA review and awaiting concurrence.

The SRTA's DBE Program Plan received concurrence in September 2017.

The most recent semi-annual report was submitted and has since received FTA approval. The next semi-annual report is due June 1, 2021.

Environmental Justice:

Environmental justice is a requirement that the SRTA must engage the public whenever there is a major project or route change.

The SRTA is constantly working to increase public participation, and if any public input is needed, it will be conveyed to the Board as part of this report.

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The Authority intends to schedule a public hearing regarding the service adjustments for the New Bedford Route 5 (NB5), New Bedford Route 6 (NB6), and Fall River Route 6 (FR6). This meeting is slated to take place in early 2021, however, more information will be forthcoming.

(6) Old Business

Fare Discussion:

As mentioned at previous Advisory Board Meetings, the Authority is currently on track to move forward with the reinstatement of fare enforcement effective April 1, 2021. As a result of this pending return, the Administrative staff has been working closely with several Community Partners / Agencies – including, but not limited to, Public School Departments, Social Service, etc. – to fulfil larger ticket or pass orders in order to ease into the paying of fares.

As questioned by the City of New Bedford, fares will be reduced during the 6-month step up period to allow for a gradual acclimation for passengers and ultimately speed up boarding times by reducing dwell times. The full fare set – including both the 6-month step-up fare set and the pre-pandemic fare set – can be found in greater detail on the SRTA’s website: <https://www.srtabus.com/fares/>.

The Town of Fairhaven inquired about the recent ridership statistics, of which Mr. Rousseau shared that the Authority is currently experiencing approximately 57-60 percent of previous ridership – as compared to the same timeframe of a pre-COVID year) – with an expectation that ridership will increase during the Summer and Fall months.

COVID-19 Response (<http://www.srtabus.com/covid19>):

As stated, recent updates to the SRTA’s COVID-19 Response Page (www.srtabus.com/covid19) includes the addition of service area vaccination locations – obtained via the Massachusetts Vaccination page (www.vaxfinder.mass.gov/) – as well as the SRTA Routes (Fixed) serving said locations.

Additionally, the SRTA’s workforce is now able to schedule and receive vaccinations through the inclusion of the Frontline Essential Workers – Public Transit phase, of which Mr. Rousseau expressed gratitude to both the City of New Bedford and City of Fall River for their efforts to aide in the vaccination of the public transit workforce.

In response to the City of New Bedford’s inquiry concerning the SRTA’s experiences with regard to the appropriate use of facial coverings (masks), Mr. Rousseau shared that the Authority and Union partners have been satisfied with both the Workforce and the Passengers adherence to the Policy. As discussed at previous meetings, the destination signage was updated to reflect the spirit of the Policy – changing from “Please Wear a Mask” to “Masks Required.”

As a follow-up, the City of New Bedford mentioned that the City Council (City of New Bedford) had recently expressed interest in the prospect of transportation (i.e. public transit) for those getting to and from vaccination appointments. Mr. Rousseau confirmed that the City Council and other City Officials have been in touch and discussions about access have commenced.

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(7) New Business

FY22 Draft Budget:

Included with the meeting materials, Mr. Rousseau presented the FY22 Draft Budget packet as reviewed by the SRTA Audit and Finance Subcommittee. Highlights of this presentation include the increase in collectively-bargain operator (union) wages, unanticipated decrease in medical insurance, modest increase in pension obligation, as well as the adjustments in both the Maintenance and Information Technology (IT) lines – of which the latter can be attributed to new departmental leadership (Assistant General Manager of Maintenance, IT Generalist).

In response to the City of New Bedford's question regarding the shortfall in Net Cost of Service, Mr. Rousseau expanded that the revenue projections shown in the draft presentation are fairly conversative – including, but not limited to, passenger fares and State Contract Assistance (SCA). Further, it was noted that the State Contract Assistance (SCA) figure is based on effectively level-funding (per the Governor's Budget), however, the Regional Transit Authorities (RTA) collectively have been and will continue to push for increased levels.

The City of Fall River questioned the approach if the increased revenues (fares, State Contract Assistance, etc.) did not come through, of which the Authority would likely need to investigate minor service changes to close the gap. Additionally, it was noted that the Fall River Route 6 (FR6) is currently not operating due to asset availability for proper social distancing and managing crowding, however, this particular Route was included with the FY2022 budget.

The City of New Bedford inquired about the continued effect of previous CARES Act Funding and if the Authority was slated to receive additional funds with the recent stimulus package (American Rescue Plan 2021). In response, Mr. Rousseau shared that, at this time, the Authority is continuing to use CARES Act Funds as Federal Operating dollars while the recent stimulus package projects approximately \$280,000 from the New Bedford UZA and, at the moment, an unknown amount from the Providence UZA.

Note: More information regarding the American Rescue Plan 2021 approximate funds from the Providence UZA will be forthcoming.

The Town of Mattapoisett questioned the fluctuations in fuel costs, of which can be attributed to the varying service levels throughout the current fiscal year (FY2021) and the outlook for the upcoming fiscal year (FY2022).

As a brief reminder – and as requested by the City of New Bedford – the next steps in the budget process will be for the Authority to provide and present the penultimate FY2022 budget for approval by June 1.

Other Business:

The Town of Fairhaven briefed the board on a recent Town initiative, the Complete Streets Policy, of which has revealed some overlap with the Authority – particularly during the prioritization segment. As a result of this, it was stated that any outreach or opportunities for input should be directed through Shayne Trimbell, Director – Transit Planning.

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Additionally, the Town of Fairhaven inquired about the connection between the SRTA and the South Coast Rail (SCR), of which Mr. Rousseau acknowledged that the relationship has been established and discussions are slow but ongoing.

The City of Fall River questioned the status of the Fall River Terminal Concrete Decking project, of which has been pushed back from the original April 1 start date. The new start date is still to be determined; however, it is now anticipated to be around the end of April.

(8) Logistics for the Next Advisory Board Meeting

As indicated on the agenda, the next Advisory Board Meeting for the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority is proposed to be held on Thursday, April 29th at 10:30AM, however, an email questionnaire will be circulated in order to confirm.

(9) Adjournment

The Advisory Board Chair called the meeting to adjournment at 11:04AM EST.

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