



Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA) Advisory Board Meeting

Date: Thursday, May 26th, 2022

Location: Virtual Meeting via SRTA Cisco WebEx (2:00 PM)

Call in Number: 1-408-418-9388; Access Code: 2631 636 1387; Password 36933888

Purpose: SRTA Advisory Board Meeting

(1) Call to Order

The Advisory Board Chair called the meeting to order at 2:06 PM EST.

(2) Roll Call

Present:

City of New Bedford (Jennifer Clarke)	City of Fall River (Mayor Paul Coogan)
Town of Fairhaven (Leon Correy)	Town of Westport (Richard Brewer)
Riders Representative (Dan Robillard)	Town of Mattapoisett (Michael Lorenzo)

Absent:

Town of Acushnet	Town of Swansea
Town of Freetown	ADA Representative
Town of Somerset	

Additional Attendees:

Erik Rousseau, SRTA	Arthur Frank, General Counsel (SRTA)
Kristen Sniezek, SRTA	Lilia Cabral-Bernard, SRPEDD
John LeBert, SRTA	Corey Hebert, SRTA
Shayne Trimbell, SRTA	Paul Foley, Town of Fairhaven

(3) Approval of Minutes

Motion: The motion was made (Riders Representative) and seconded (Town of Dartmouth) to approve the minutes from the previous SRTA Advisory Board Meeting held on March 31st, 2022.

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Discussion: N/A

Vote:

For: Town of Dartmouth, Town of Fairhaven, City of Fall River, Town of Mattapoisett, City of New Bedford, Town of Westport, Riders Representative

Status: Motion Passes

(4) Citizen's Participation

No Citizen's Participation.

(5) Civil Rights Update

Title VI:

The SRTA's current 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 current DBE Goal Plan has been submitted and is under FTA review and awaiting concurrence.

The most recent semi-annual report was submitted on December 1st and is under FTA review. The next semi-annual report is due June 1st.

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

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.

(6) Old Business

FY23 Budget

The following budget narrative was provided along with the meeting materials:

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OPERATING REVENUE:

Farebox Revenues (Fixed Route/Demand Response) increase of 2%. This is a conservative estimate, as ridership recovery has improved significantly over the past year, but not quite returned to pre-pandemic levels.

AUXILIARY REVENUE:

FY'22 was a record year for Advertising Revenues, which represents 62% of the non- farebox related revenues collected by the Authority. Other line items, such as Parking Fees at the terminals are reaching maximum capacity and are currently budgeted with modest increases.

PILOT SERVICE:

SR TA's partnership with GATRA, which provides a flag stop service connection to Cranberry Plaza in Wareham is anticipated to continue in FY'23. As of the date of this meeting, no other discretionary grants to provide pilot service are anticipated in FY'23.

TRANSIT OPERATIONS: *(see South Coast Transit Management Budget Assumptions Worksheet)*

ADDITIONAL COSTS OF SERVICE:

Fuel costs are estimates based upon the usage rates vs. futures market. Given the current market volatility, this line item will continue to be monitored closely. SR TA is working on options to procure short term arrangement with qualified vendors in an effort to help stabilize some of the current pricing fluctuations. Commercial Insurance rates are secured through January 31st. SR TA has estimated a cumulative renewal at 5% in February 2023, using past experience rating and renewal history as a guide. Management Fees have been negotiated with First Transit for the next five years, as part of their TMS Contract with the Authority.

SR TA ADMINISTRATION:

SR TA is currently staffed with 7 full time employees. There are no plans to add any new positions in FY'23. SR TA's health insurance will increase 3% for fiscal year 2023, of which the cost is shared at a 75% ER/25%EE split. SR TA is a member of the New Bedford Contributory Pension, and costs are actuarially determined. Normal Office Expenses, such as supplies, rent, utilities, printing, postage, and consultants are expected to be flat with FY'22. SR TA's Revenue Anticipation Note will renew in August of 2023. SR TA anticipates that the interest rate for the RAN renewal will increase.

ANTICIPATED FEDERAL, STATE, & LOCAL ASSISTANCE:

As of the date of this document, State Contract Assistance is budgeted flat with FY'22. Local Assessments increase 2.5%. SR TA will utilize nearly \$1.9 million of allocated ARPA Funds in the upcoming year, in addition to Sect. 5307 Operating Assistance.

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Mr. Rousseau highlighted additional items throughout the budget presentation. While the operator health insurance was favorable with a 1.95% increase in premium, the employee census shows an approximate 12% increase in employees opting for coverage. Next, the discretionary funding that supports the Intercity Express and Fairhaven service between 6 pm – 9 pm is expiring, and there is no new support available from the Commonwealth to fund that service. There is a large increase in the fuel budget, and it has been challenging to secure a fuel contract to lock in pricing given the fluctuating markets. To stabilize the budget in FY23, SRTA will utilize all of the ARPA funding, approximately \$1.9 million. The remaining CAREs funding, which is nearly \$2 million, will be used to stabilize the FY24 budget. Lastly, since the March draft budget presentation, the Commonwealth has moved from cutting the state operating assistance to level funding the RTAs.

The Westport representative asked if further detail was available regarding the change or increase in employees opting for insurance. Mr. Rousseau indicated that the operator stated anecdotally that two things were happening at the same time. First, new hires tend to take the insurance, replacing employees who were not on the insurance. Additionally, some of the workforce has needed to shift from spouse coverage to coverage from the operator.

The Fairhaven representative asked where things stand with the night service in Fairhaven and if there was still an opportunity to retain that service. Mr. Rousseau explained that at this time, there are many challenges with continuing the service, but the primary issue is funding. The Commonwealth does not have a future discretionary grant program in place and has not increased the State Operating Assistance from the previous fiscal year. The reduction in resources and increased costs across the board have placed great strain on the budget, making it difficult to continue the service. The most recent census may show some changes in Fairhaven's census tracts, and it is something the Authority will look into further. The Fairhaven representative suggested he would still like to see more information about the service.

Mr. Rousseau further highlighted ongoing contract negotiations across the Commonwealth and the challenges that have been brought to the budget process this year for many authorities. There are five open contracts, and SCTM's current CBA expires on June 30th, 2022.

The Chair asked about other RTA pilot or discretionary funding that might be available. Mr. Rousseau explained that there is a possibility of \$2.5 million for low-income or fare-free services at the moment. That language is not finalized and has not gone to the budget conference committee.

Motion: The motion was made (Riders Representative) and seconded (Town of Westport) to adopt the FY23 budget as presented in the amount of \$23,697,457.

Vote:

For: Town of Dartmouth, Town of Fairhaven, City of Fall River, Town of Mattapoisett, City of New Bedford, Town of Westport, Riders Representative

Status: Motion Passes

After the motion, the Chair recognized the hard work of the staff in creating the budget and thanked all involved.

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

Mr. Rousseau stated the mask mandate was lifted shortly after the last meeting. Additionally, Mr. Rousseau suggested that Covid-19 protocol updates were less frequent and asked the Board if the standing agenda item should be removed. By general consensus, the Board agreed that it could be removed and added back as needed.

(7) New Business

Transit Technology Update

Mr. Rousseau highlighted the rollout of SRTA's technology, including real-time signage at each terminal along with a new app that is now available in the app stores for our fixed-route service. Additionally, Mr. Rousseau asked for the Rider's Representative to share his experience with the improvements to Demand Response Service. Mr. Robillard explained how the IVR (Interactive Voice Response) had changed the riding experience. The system sends confirmation calls about booked trips and alerts the rider to the imminent arrival of the vehicle for the trip. These alerts save passengers from extended wait times in potentially uncomfortable weather conditions. Mr. Rousseau thanked Mr. Robillard for sharing his valuable experience using this new technology with the Advisory Board.

(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 tentatively scheduled to be held remotely on Thursday, June 24th at 2:00 PM.

(9) Adjournment

The Advisory Board Chair called the meeting to adjourn at 2:43 PM EST.