



## **Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA) Advisory Board Meeting**

**Date:** Wednesday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020

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

Call in Number: 1-408-418-9388; Access Code: 132 681 6951; Password 774 925 73

**Purpose:** FY21 SRTA Advisory Board

### (1) Call to Order

**The Advisory Board Chair called the meeting to order at 2:05PM EST.**

### (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 Dartmouth (Cody Haddad)

Town of Mattapoisett (Michael Lorenzo)

Riders Representative (Dan Robillard)

**Absent:**

Town of Acushnet

Town of Swansea

Town of Freetown

Town of Westport

Town of Somerset

ADA Representative

**Additional Attendees:**

Erik Rousseau, SRTA

Arthur Frank, General Counsel (SRTA)

Kristen Sniezek, SRTA

Paul Mission, SRPEDD

John LeBert, SRTA

Lilia Cabral, SRPEDD

Shayne Trimbell, SRTA

Nancy Rezendes, SRTA

### (3) Approval of Minutes

**The motion was made (Riders Representative) and seconded (Fall River) to approve the minutes from the previous June (06/17/2020) SRTA Advisory Board Meeting. All in Favor. Abstain: Mattapoisett, New Bedford. So Voted.**

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#### (4) Citizen's Participation

No Citizen's Participation.

#### (5) Civil Rights Update

Title VI:

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):

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

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

The most recent semi-annual report was submitted and is under FTA review.

The next semi-annual report is due December 1, 2020.

Environmental Justice:

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

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.

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

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

Working with the Contract Operator – South Coast Transit Management (SCTM) – the Authority was able to closely examine service levels to determine if there were any opportunities to streamline service and free up a capital asset (i.e. bus) – with the intent of ensuring the capacity and availability to deploy extra buses to alleviate passengers load, when needed. As a result of this assessment, it was determined that areas of redundant service could be reduced on the New Bedford Route 5 (NB5), New Bedford Route 6

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(NB) and the Fall River 6 (FR6) – all of which would result in the freeing up of a bus in both New Bedford and Fall River.

The Riders Representative expressed concern over the service changes to the Fall River Route 6 (FR6) – emphasizing the consequential strain on the Fall River Route 10 (FR10) and the reduced service to Walmart. Due to these concerns, the Rider Representative shared with the Board the intent to advocate to restore the Fall River Route 6 (FR6) to prior service levels.

As stated by Mr. Erik Rousseau (Administrator), the Authority has held virtual public hearings for the proposed services changes and, unfortunately, has received minimal feedback. Due to the low participation, the Authority is prepared to continue the discussions regarding these service changes and ask that all feedback (comments, opinions, concerns) be directed back to the Authority so that they may be considered.

The City of New Bedford questioned the duration of these service changes as well as the metrics that will be used to measure the performance. Currently, the Authority anticipates that these changes will be in effect – at a minimum – through the Winter.

Consistent with past meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Rousseau shared some of the recent – and continuous – efforts that the Authority has undertaken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; such as the acquisition of Driver Barriers, the implementation of MERV-13 HVAC filter elements on vehicles, as well as ongoing discussions with the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) regarding air flow, air filtration, and air sanitization on board transit vehicles.

The Town of Fairhaven – echoed by the City of New Bedford – questioned if these efforts and procedures have been posted to the SRTA website. At this time, the COVID-19 Response landing page of the Authority website (URL below) is primarily focused on service-related initiatives, however, the additional efforts – such as the use of MERV-13 filters and electrostatic spraying – will be added.

The City of New Bedford questioned if the Authority has experienced any difficulties with mask compliance, of which Mr. Rousseau stated is an ongoing effort, however, the Authority was able to acquire a number of disposable masks that are available to be distributed to passengers in need.

All COVID-19 related news can be found on SRTA's website: <http://www.srtabus.com/covid19>

### (7) New Business

#### *FY20 Audit:*

Provided with the meeting materials, Mr. Rousseau presented the SRTA FY2020 Audit / Audited Financial Statements.

On Monday, October 26, the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority Audit and Finance Committee – which is now made up of Ari Sky (City of New Bedford), John Perry (City of Fall River), and Cody Haddad (Town of Dartmouth) – met with the Authority's Audit firm, Hague and Sahady, to discuss the SRTA FY2020 Audit. Audit Manager, Andrew Lima (Hague and Sahady), provided an overview of the engagement and, ultimately, informed the Committee of a clean audit. Other highlights from this meeting include:

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Net Position (Page 4):

The Authority's net position decreased between fiscal years ended June 30, 2020 and June 30, 2019 by \$654,979 on the GAAP basis. The largest contributing factors to this decrease in 2020 were depreciation and pension expense. Depreciation expense for fiscal year 2020 was \$2,974,963. Pension expense, which is recorded for GAAP only, totaled \$2,435,796. Total pension expense is the product of three plans, the New Bedford Contributory Retirement Plan, the Operator's Hourly Plan, and the Operator's Salaried Plan.

Financial Highlights (Page 3):

Total operating revenue decreased 24.1% from fiscal year 2019 to fiscal year 2020. The decrease is due to the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 17, 2020, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts issued a stay at home order, which effected 4th quarter ridership and fare collection for both fixed route and paratransit.

Total operating expenses increased 9.2% over Fiscal Year 2019, which was anticipated in the original budget, and confirmed in the budget adjustment presentation at May's Board meeting.

Operating assistance from the Commonwealth increased \$523,729 during fiscal year 2020 and federal operating assistance (including preventative maintenance) increased \$1,292,641 during fiscal year 2020 versus fiscal year 2019.

During fiscal year 2020, the Authority received Federal CARES Act operating assistance under section 5307 direct funding. The CARES Act 5307 funding expended by the Authority during fiscal 2020 totaled \$3,772,733 and was used to cover eligible operating expenses and costs incurred in response to COVID-19 beginning on January 20, 2020. Total CARES Act 5307 funding awarded was \$21,043,483.

Capital assistance from the Commonwealth increased \$332,129 during fiscal year 2020 and Federal capital assistance increased \$1,595,549 during fiscal year 2020 versus fiscal year 2019. This was due to a planned rolling stock purchase.

The committee voted to recommend that the full board accept the audit as presented.

**The motion was made (Riders Representative) and seconded (Fall River) to accept the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SR TA) Fiscal Year 2020 Audit. So Voted.**

*FY20 Ridership:*

Provided with the meeting materials, Mr. Shayne Trimbell (Director – Transit Planning) presented the FY20 Ridership Report, of which largely highlighted the performance pre-COVID – which happened to be one of the Authority's best periods of performance in recent history – as well as the impact of the pandemic, including performance during the COVID response and a look into what the future (i.e. post-COVID) might hold.

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Upon the eventual return to normal service, the Riders Representative asked that the addition of Night Service to the Fall River Route 8 (FR8) – of which serves Bristol Community College (BCC) – be considered. Both currently and previously, the service had not coincided with night classes at the College.

Additionally, the Riders Representative shared with the Board the intent to advocate for a Mandatory Mask directive, as it is felt that this would attract more riders and provide a heightened peace of mind. The Town of Fairhaven expressed agreement with this directive.

*Fare Discussion:*

Included with the meeting materials, Mr. Rousseau presented the Fixed Route Fare Policy, Demand Response Fare Policy, and the SRTA Fare Equity Analysis, the latter of which was prepared by the Authority's MPO – Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD).

At this time, the Authority has not restarted the enforcement of fare collection (discontinued on March 22) and is in the process of working with the Contract Operator (SCTM) as well as the Fare Collection System Vendor (Scheidt and Bachmann) on various fare initiatives.

The work with the Contract Operator (SCTM) has been focused on developing a further understanding of the cost – to the Authority – of collecting fares. Based on pre-pandemic service levels (approximately \$2.2 to \$2.3 million in fares collected), SCTM has tentatively identified the cost of collection fares at approximately \$550,000 annually.

The work with the Fare Collection System Vendor (Scheidt and Bachmann) has been focused on gauging the possibility of implementing a 6-month step-up fare, with the objective of easing back into full fare collection. This would mean a reduced fare for a 6-month period followed by a larger discussion.

The Town of Mattapoisett questioned the present timeline for the return of fare collection, of which the Authority has estimated that fare collection will be reinstated as of January 1, however, this timeline is largely dependent on the Fare Collection System Vendor's ability to meet the Authority's expectations.

As required by the FY2019 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SRTA – MassDOT, the Authority is obliged to review and revise the current SRTA's Fare Policy to include language stating that the Policy will be regularly evaluated and changes, as deemed necessary, will be made to fares. More extensive discussions regarding the SRTA Fares is scheduled to be part of the subsequent November and December Board Meetings.

The Town of Fairhaven questioned if the Authority has received any sort of additional Federal or State funding during the pandemic, of which the Authority has been fortunate enough to be the recipient of approximately 21 million dollars of Federal CARES Act (5307) funds.

The Riders Representative shared with the Board the support of fare collection – particularly if it were to avoid any additional service cuts.

The City of New Bedford inquired about the Board's role in this Fare Discussion, of which Mr. Rousseau reiterated the next step, at this point, is for the Authority to develop an updated Fare Policy with the goal of presenting and discussing at the December Advisory Board meeting.

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*Other Business:*

The City of New Bedford questioned if the opportunity for Board members to freely address the Board will be added back to the Agenda, of which Mr. Rousseau acknowledged will be included.

(7) Logistics for the Next Advisory Board Meeting

The next Advisory Board Meeting for the SRTA is tentatively scheduled for November 20, 2020 at 10:30AM. Consistent with past meetings, confirmation – as well as meeting materials – will be circulated prior to the meeting via email.

Note: At this time, the Board was made aware that a December meeting will be necessary.

(8) Adjournment

**The motion was made (Riders Representative) and seconded (Fall River) to adjourn the meeting at 2:55PM EST.**

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