



Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA) Advisory Board Meeting

Date: Thursday, October 27th, 2022

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

Call in Number: 1-408-418-9388; Access Code: 2632 748 8567; Password 33976486

Purpose: SRTA Advisory Board Meeting

(1) Call to Order

The Advisory Board Chair called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM EST.

(2) Roll Call

Present:

City of New Bedford (Jennifer Clarke)

City of Fall River (Seth T. Aitken)

Town of Fairhaven (Leon Correy)

Town of Westport (Richard Brewer)

Riders Representative (Dan Robillard)

Absent:

Town of Acushnet

Town of Dartmouth

Town of Freetown

Town of Mattapoisett

Town of Somerset

Town of Swansea

ADA Representative

Additional Attendees:

Erik Rousseau, SRTA

Arthur Frank, General Counsel (SRTA)

Kristen Sniezek, SRTA

John LeBert, SRTA

Shayne Trimbell, SRTA

Corey Hebert, SRTA

Michelle Tavares, SRTA

Paul Foley (Town of Fairhaven)

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(3) Approval of Minutes

Motion: The motion was made (Riders Representative) and seconded (City of Fall River) to approve the minutes from the previous SRTA Advisory Board Meeting held on September 29th, 2022.

Discussion: N/A

Vote:

For: Town of Fairhaven, City of Fall River, 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 June 1st and is under FTA review. The next semi-annual report is due December 1st, 2022.

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.

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(6) Old Business

Discussion of NB Route 2 Whaler's Cove Deviation

The New Bedford Route 2 – Lund's Corner (NB2) operates between the SRTA New Bedford Terminal and Lund's Corner at the intersection of Tarkiln Hill Road and Acushnet Avenue. The NB2 primary alignment operates on Purchase Street, Sawyer Street, serves New Bedford Market Basket, and Acushnet Avenue. There are 3 deviations from the primary alignment: an early morning trip that does not serve Market Basket, a morning and afternoon trip that serve the manufacturing sites on Belleville Ave, and four mid-day deviations to serve Whaler's Cove on Riverside Ave. Saturday service has no deviations.

Whaler's Cove is an assisted living facility for adults over 55 years of age. The NB2 serves Whaler's Cove with 2 weekday outbound trips at 1:30 PM and 3:30 PM, and 2 weekday inbound trips at 9:30 AM and 11:30 AM. These trips follow the primary alignment for both outbound and inbound but deviate from Acushnet Ave at Phillips Ave and travels east to Riverside Ave, then travels north to Collette St, turns south on Belleville Ave, turns west on Phillips Ave and returns to the primary alignment at Acushnet Ave. The deviation adds 7 minutes to the outbound trips and 2 minutes to the inbound trips.

The stop at Whaler's Cove is rarely used by passengers for boarding or alighting. Automatic passenger count (APC) data collected by SRTA vehicles at the stop indicated that there were 0 boardings and 22 alightings for the entire FY22 year (July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022). This equates to a single passenger alighting once every 2 weeks, or once for every 40 trips past the stop. The stop at Whaler's Cove is the only stop on the deviation. The proposed change to the NB2 is to eliminate the Whaler's Cove deviation and operate the primary alignment for the trips that served the deviation.

In accordance with SRTA Title VI Program dated February 24, 2022, service changes that increase or decrease a route mileage or revenue mileage by more than 25% require a service equity analysis. The proposal to eliminate the Whaler's Cove deviation only affects weekday service. Current weekday service on the NB2 operates a total of 418.2 revenue miles per day. This proposal would reduce the weekday revenue miles by 3.9 miles, which would represent a 0.93% reduction in miles. The change does not require a service equity analysis.

The Whaler's Cove deviation provides access to a senior assisted living facility in New Bedford. The intent of the deviation was to give residents an option for travel and their visitors a way to travel to the facility. The APC data collected in FY22 indicates that neither the residents nor visitors are using the SRTA with any regularity. In addition to low ridership at the stop, the deviation is incongruous with the schedule times for the NB2 and complicates service scheduling. The SRTA schedules the NB2 to connect with the New Bedford Route 1 – Fort Rodman (NB1) at the New Bedford SRTA Terminal so that riders can remain on the inbound NB2 bus and ride outbound on the NB1. The time needed to perform the Whaler's Cove deviation is having a down-stream effect on the NB1 by causing regular late departures. The late departures have a cascading effect on subsequent trips and can be difficult to get back on schedule.

The low ridership combined with the impacts to route schedules down stream suggest that the deviation to Whaler's Cove should be eliminated. This change will affect very few SRTA customers negatively, however has the potential to effect hundreds of customers daily by improving schedule predictability and on-time performance of the NB2 and NB1.

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The Whaler's Cove Deviation is recommended to be removed from service with the next schedule change, tentatively scheduled for December 18, 2022.

The Advisory Board Chair commented that service to this area could always be assessed in the future if need be. Mr. Robillard asked for clarification on the demographic of Whaler's Cove and subsequently agreed that service to this area could be assessed in the future if the needs of the community change.

Motion: The motion was made (Riders Representative) and seconded (Town of Westport) to eliminate the Whaler's Cove Deviation.

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

Discussion: N/A

Status: Motion Passes

(7) New Business

FY23 State Discretionary Pilot Program

Mr. Rousseau presented the discretionary pilot program that is being funded by the state of Massachusetts legislature. \$2,500,000.00 has been allotted for 15 regional transit authorities (RTA's) to run a fare free pilot program. The 15 RTA's have collectively decided to run the fare free pilot service from Thanksgiving to the end of the 2022 calendar year. The program has not yet been officially approved by the state legislature. The Advisory Board Chair asked about what metric would be used to determine the success of the program. Mr. Rousseau replied that although there is no definitive metric yet, it most likely will be a comparison of ridership during the program to ridership during the same period of the prior year. The Advisory Board Chair also asked how the program would be advertised. Mr. Rousseau replied that although advertising hasn't been decided on yet, the 15 RTA's would most likely have the same advertisement which would be posted to social media and at the bus terminals.

FY22 SRTA Ridership Report

Mr. Trimbell shared a presentation on the analysis of ridership in fiscal year 2022. SRTA ridership rebounded in FY22 from the declines experienced in FY20 and FY21 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Systemwide ridership was 2,015,769 trips, a 21.6% increase from FY21. Despite this increase, FY22 was 10% below the five-year annual average of 2,241,774 trips. Prior to FY20, average annual ridership was 2,676,236 trips.

Mr. Trimbell further shared on ridership broken down by service. FY22 had 311 service days total. There were 250 Weekdays, 51 Saturdays, and 10 Holidays. Weekday average ridership increased 25% in FY22

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to 7,242 daily trips, Saturday ridership declined 4% to 3,371 trips, and holiday ridership increased 2% to 3,326 trips.

Significant changes in ridership were identified based on the average change in ridership for all routes using the standard deviation from that average. Any route where the change was greater than 1.65 standard deviations from the average was identified as a significant change. The average change in ridership across all routes was 8,935 more trips than the FY21 average. Routes with an increase of more than 28,484 represented 1.65 standard deviation above the average, where as a decrease of more than 10,613 represented 1.65 standard deviation below the average. Two routes experienced a significant change in ridership compared with FY21: The New Bedford Route 1 – Fort Rodman (NB1) and the Fall River Route 5 – Stafford Road (FR5).

On October 1, 2021, a new fare set was established which lowered prices on multi-use passes and stored-value fare. Stored-value trips also include a 2-hour transfer that allows for a trip on inbound buses in addition to the outbound transfer offered with a cash fare. Historically, cash has been the predominant method of fare payment, however the share of cash trips is declining with more multi-ride passes in use. This shift began in October with the reduction in multi-ride pass pricing. This shift in fare payment is advantageous to the SRTA because when people purchase multi-ride passes, they tend to ride more often which makes the pass a better value and increases system ridership.

The SRTA provides an invaluable service to the communities of southeastern Massachusetts. Reliable transportation to the region's schools, shopping centers, and employment centers is crucial to growing the economy. SRTA serves a clientele with few options for transportation and remains a lifeline for many people. Funding outlooks for the coming years suggest that operating costs will exceed available funds to support operations. The SRTA is undergoing a comprehensive analysis of all routes in preparation to align operating costs with operating funds with service reductions a very likely outcome.

As the region recovers from COVID-19, customers are returning to the SRTA system and using it for shopping, attending school, and commuting to work. Transit is at a tipping point and can either continue to grow its user base and expand travel options or slip into a decline that will isolate the most vulnerable members of our community for a lack of transportation options.

The Advisory Board Chair asked if top takeaways from the ridership report could be provided. Mr. Rousseau said the two best takeaways would be that ridership continues to recover, and that the actions with fare changes have made a significant difference in reducing cash transactions and increasing efficiency. Mr. Robillard also suggested that evening service added to every route would give a better picture of ridership trends but admitted that, at the moment, that would probably not be feasible given budgetary constraints. Mr. Correy also commented that based on ridership data, it would make sense to have evening service to the bus stop located at the Fairhaven Walmart. Mr. Rousseau responded that although the SRTA did not want to discontinue evening service to this stop, the program that funded this service is not currently available to us.

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Highlights of ongoing studies

Mr. Trimbell presented the studies being done by the planning department at the SRTA:

Bus Stop Consolidation and Design Guidelines

- Comprehensive review of existing stops evaluating stop use and amenities
- Identify and recommend stops for consolidation
- Define stop types and appropriate improvements
- Provides a planning scale and capital program costs

South Coast Station Service Plan

- Identify service scenarios to provide bus service to South Coast Rail Stations in Fall River, Freetown, and New Bedford

Fall River and New Bedford Comprehensive Operations Assessment

- Identify the preferences of riders and determine alternative service scenarios
- Scenarios are being designed to do the least harm should we need to reduce service levels and coverage

Mr. Robillard asked if routes 6,7, and 10 in Fall River are in consideration of the Comprehensive Operations Assessment study. Mr. Trimbell replied that he has not met with the consultant yet, but that all routes will be taken into consideration. Mr. Robillard shared some of his opinions on some routes that could be shorter or changed in other ways.

Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan – BIL update

Mr. Rousseau presented a few updates to the safety plan which the board will vote to accept at the next advisory board meeting. One of the updates to the plan is driver safety in regard to barriers. All of the SRTA busses have been equipped with driver barriers, so the SRTA is already in compliance with this specific update in the safety plan. The Advisory Board Chair asked if there would be a definitions section in the plan, and Mr. LeBert confirmed that a definitions section is included in this plan.

(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 on Thursday, December 15th, 2022, at 2:00 PM.

(9) Adjournment

The Advisory Board Chair called the meeting to adjourn at 2:47 PM EST.

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