



Southeastern Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board Meeting

Date: Wednesday, December 16th, 2020
Location: Virtual Meeting via SRTA Cisco WebEx (2:00PM)
Call in Number: 1-408-418-9388; Access Code: 132 585 4158; Password: 936 49 637
Purpose: FY21 SRTA Advisory Board

(1) Call to Order

The Advisory Board Chair called the meeting to order at 2:04PM EST.

(2) Roll Call

Present:

City of New Bedford (Jennifer Clarke)	City of Fall River (Mayor Paul Coogan)
Town of Dartmouth (Cody Haddad)	City of Fall River (John Perry)
	Riders Representative (Dan Robillard)

Absent:

Town of Acushnet	Town of Somerset
Town of Fairhaven	Town of Swansea
Town of Freetown	Town of Westport
Town of Mattapoisett	ADA Representative

Additional Attendees:

Erik Rousseau, SRTA	Arthur Frank, General Counsel (SRTA)
Kristen Sniezek, SRTA	
John LeBert, SRTA	Emily Ann Doors, SRPEDD
Shayne Trimbell, SRTA	
Nancy Rezendes, SRTA	

(3) Approval of Minutes

Motion: The motion was made (Riders Representative) and seconded (Town of Dartmouth) to approve the minutes from the previous November (11/16/2020) SRTA Advisory Board Meeting.

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Discussion: N/A

Vote:

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

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.

EEO:

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

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 has been submitted and is under FTA review and awaiting 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.

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.

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(6) Old Business

Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan:

Note: In addition to the draft SRTA Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) – which was provided with the November 2020 SRTA Advisory Board meeting materials – documentation containing the SRTA’s responses to various questions and comments was distributed with the December 2020 SRTA Advisory Board meeting materials.

Motion: The motion was made (Riders Representative) and seconded (Town of Dartmouth) to approve the SRTA Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan, as presented.

Discussion: N/A

Vote:

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

Status: Motion Passes.

Fare Discussion:

As reiterated by Mr. Erik Rousseau (Administrator), the SRTA suspended the enforcement of fare collection on March 22 in order to increase safety for both the workforce and passengers. The Authority has used this time of suspended fare enforcement to analyze several data points – particularly as it relates to the internal cost of collecting fares as well as the impact of fare collection on boarding (i.e. dwell times).

Additionally, the Authority has diligently worked to strengthen the understanding of the current fare structure / pricing – with consideration to the 60-65% of passengers that utilize a cash fare and a paper transfer.

The Authority is presently working toward reinstating the enforcement of fare collection by the (approximate) date of March 1, 2020. As mentioned in previous meetings, the Authority is seeking to implement a 6-month step-up fare in an effort to ease back into fare enforcement as well as possibly retrain passengers to utilize Smart Cards (Charlie Card). The proposed step-up fare would reduce the full cash fare from \$1.50 to \$1.00 and – in conjunction with the effort to retrain passengers to utilize Smart Cards (Charlie Card) – is ultimately geared toward speeding up boarding time at the farebox.

Should the proposed step-up fare plan be approved, the Authority is prepared to utilize the 6-month period to develop a revised fare policy – which would be proposed to the Board during the Spring/Summer of 2021.

Note: As one (1) of the four (4) Massachusetts Regional Transit Authority’s (RTA) that has not reinstated the enforcement of fare collection, the SRTA has received insistence from MassDOT to resume enforcement.

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As questioned by the City of New Bedford, the FY21 fare collection budget has been significantly diminished by the prolonged suspension of fare enforcement. As stated by Mr. Rousseau, the purpose and focus of this initiative would be for FY22 and beyond.

The Riders Representative shared with the Board the future intent to not support a fare policy that would set fares at levels that would be higher than pre-pandemic levels.

In response to a question by the Riders Representative regarding additional protective measures – such as air ventilation or purification systems – that the Authority has undertaken to increase safety inside of buses, Mr. Rousseau shared that the implementation of MERV13 filters is progressing, with the next shipment of materials set to arrive in January 2021. Additionally, the Authority has released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Acquisition and Installation of Driver Protective and Safety Barriers – of which proposals are due Friday, December 18th at 2:00PM (EST).

As followed up by the Riders Representative, the timing of these installations / implementation is dependent on the proposals as well as the availability of materials, however, the Board will be updated as these measures progress.

Motion: The motion was made (Riders Representative) and seconded (Town of Dartmouth) to adopt the 6-month step-up fare policy, as presented.

Discussion: N/A

Vote:

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

Status: Motion Passes.

Mask Policy:

As discussed at the previous Advisory Board Meeting, the SRTA's Legal Counsel provided a written opinion – included with the meeting materials – to maintain the current Mask Policy (Mask Required) as opposed to implementing a further Mask Policy such as “No Mask, No Ride.” As stated by the SRTA's Legal Counsel, this stance is largely due to the potential ramifications including, but not limited to, increased driver risk as well as the opportunity for Title VI / ADA implications.

In addition, the Board was made aware that both MassDOT and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) have stated that written guidance on this topic will not be provided, and because of this, Mr. Rousseau is recommending that the Board maintain the current Mask Policy (Mask Required), of which was last updated on November 6 in accordance with Governor Baker's COVID-19 Executive Order No. 55.

As a result of the recent information and opinions shared by the SRTA's Legal Counsel, Insurance Carrier, and Administrator, the City of New Bedford communicated the change in position to stay consistent with the opinion of Legal Counsel.

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The Riders Representative shared with the Board the opinion to move forward with a further Mask Policy, such as “No Mask, No Ride,” as discussed at the previous Advisory Board Meeting.

Motion: The motion was made (Town of Dartmouth) and seconded (City of Fall River) to maintain the current Mask Policy – last updated on November 6 in accordance with Governor Baker’s COVID-19 Executive Order No. 55 – for the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority.

Discussion: N/A

Vote:

For: Town of Dartmouth, City of Fall River, City of New Bedford

Against: Riders Representative

Status: Motion Passes.

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

As suggested by the Board in previous meetings, the COVID-19 landing page on the Authority website has been updated to include the various cleaning procedures that are currently in place with regards to Authority-owned Vehicles, Terminals, and Maintenance/Administrative Facilities.

The City of New Bedford recommended to the Board that members ought to follow the SRTA social media accounts – such as Twitter – for other up-to-date information.

(7) Logistics for the Next Advisory Board Meeting

Mr. Rousseau expressed gratitude to the Board for the commitment to and undertakings of three (3) consecutive Board meetings between the short period of October 28 and December 16.

Currently, the next milestone for the Board would be the approval of the draft FY2022 budget – which is needed by April 1 – followed by the approval of the final FY2022 budget – which is needed by June 1. Given this information, the next Advisory Board Meeting for the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority would, at the latest, need to take place in March 2021, however, more information will be forthcoming after the Holidays.

The City of New Bedford shared support of a February (2021) “check-in” type meeting – particularly given the current pandemic – should time and bandwidth allow for.

The Riders Representative asked that the next Board meeting agenda include a discussion regarding the public hearings for the service adjustments to the New Bedford Route 5 (NB5), New Bedford Route 6 (NB6), and Fall River Route 6 (FR6).

(8) Adjournment

The Advisory Board Chair called the meeting to adjournment at 2:32PM EST.

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