



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation  
Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting  
Wednesday, November 20, 2019**

**PRESENT:** Arthur Capello (arr. 8:45), Valerie Labrie, Colin Lentz, Marty Pepin, Dave Sandmann, Dennis Shanahan, Maria Stowell, Juliet Walker and Shelley Winters

**ABSENT:** Scott Bogle, Jim Campbell, Steve Fournier, Denis Hebert, Thomas Wright

**GUEST:** Liz Goldman, Dover resident

**STAFF:** Rad Nichols, Michael Williams, Heather Hesse-Stromberg

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Sandmann called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Pepin made a motion to accept the October minutes as presented and Ms. Labrie seconded. All voted in favor.

**III. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Nichols reported that COAST received a wonderful letter from the rider who was recognized as our 15 millionth passenger. He noted that he included the letter in his invitation to the Legislative Forum as a great example of how COAST impacts people's lives.

**IV. FINANCE REPORT**

The financials for FY 2019 were presented. Of note on the revenue side is that advertising revenue nearly doubled the last several months of the year over the beginning of the year and we similarly saw a 33% increase in fare/contract revenue during the same time frames. However, due to the very low advertising revenues for much of the year, we remain under budget by nearly 24% on advertising sales. Fare/contract revenues ended the year on budget.

Regarding expenses there are several things of note. First, even with a second adjustment to wages mid-year, we ended the year 11.6% under budget on wages. Fringe benefits ended the year 18% under budget. Contract services were lower than expected due to maintenance costs being very low, but it was an extraordinary year for legal fees, and we have spent a significant amount of money on training in response to some of the workplace issues brought to our attention over the past year. The Unrestricted Net Asset Ratio is at 14.3%, ending FY19 higher than FY18, but still well below the goal.

**V. OLD BUSINESS**

Fall All-Staff Meeting

The semi-annual all staff meeting was held Saturday, November 16 at the Frisbie Memorial Hospital Conference Center. Topics of discussion included an update on the COA Project, operational updates, information on various proposed policies and procedures, a training on workplace culture, information on wage increases and health benefit plan rates and open enrollment.

### GACIT Update

The NHDOT have been given information on the current condition of public transit in the State, as well as future projections of need so this information can update their current Draft Ten Year Plan. This will be important as the document moves through the process and on to the Governor and Legislature for approval. Mr. Nichols, Mr. Bogle and Mr. Chestnut worked to create a 3-page summary on public transit needs.

### Hanover Street Bus Stop Expansion in Portsmouth

Staff met with Portsmouth's Parking and Traffic Safety Committee to discuss the need for enough space for connecting the six different routes operating in the Portsmouth area conveniently. Staff asked for the consideration of removal of four parking spots along Hanover Street. After a site walk and presentation, the request was approved.

### Micro-Transit Proposal for Portsmouth

Earlier this year, Portsmouth solicited proposals for a micro-transit concept for downtown. The concept being that a real-time on-demand service, with smaller more maneuverable vehicles would offer additional services in the downtown area of the City that are in demand. The City recently had a firm named VIA present their proposal concept to a joint meeting of the Parking and Traffic Safety and the Economic Development Committees. Based on their proposal, there are many questions that will need to be answered relative to how their proposed micro-transit service would not compete with and cannibalize COAST services within the City.

## **VI. New Business**

### **Action Items**

#### **Action Item #1: Final COA Proposal for Public Hearings**

Mr. Nichols reminded the Board that the FTA requires that public hearings are held whenever a transit agency looks to make changes to their services. The following items will be presented to the public at a series of public forums/hearings to be held the first week of December.

### Service Design

To include the final system design as presented during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Round of public forums, with very minor tweaks to accommodate public input received. We hope to have full proposed timetables to present. Final bus stop locations in some communities in which we have realigned service remain to be approved.

### Fares & Fare Media

As previously presented (\$1.50 base cash fare, no free transfers except between Routes 13, 14 & 43, \$20 15-ride punch ticket and \$52 monthly pass).

Additionally, based on feedback during the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of public forums, staff would like to recommend the following:

- \$20 24-ride half fare punch ticket – eligibility to be limited to registered COAST half-fare pass holders.
- Designation of a free child – to be based on height (44") vs. age (under 5 yrs. old).

### Additional New No Service Holidays

Two additional proposed holidays, Christmas Eve and Martin Luther King Jr./Civil Rights Day.

### Temporary Extension of Current ADA Clients

Current ADA clients whose homes no longer fall within the service area (as a result of fixed route modifications), would be temporarily eligible to still receive service to/from their home residences through the end of 2020.

All these elements of the final COA proposal would be brought to the final round of public information meetings and hearings scheduled for the first week of December. A total of five meetings/hearings will be held, one each in Dover, Farmington, Portsmouth, Rochester and Somersworth.

**Action Required:** *The COAST Board of Directors approve the final COA proposal and associated recommended service changes for public hearings.*

Ms. Walker expressed strong disagreement with using 44" as the determining factor for children to ride free, noting that children grow at a variety of rates and the size of a child shouldn't be the determining factor. In addition, she noted that staff should not be debating a child's age with a parent and should depend on parents being honest. Mr. Shanahan expressed agreement with Ms. Walker and noted that it would be problematic if someone was wearing shoes with a heel or if an adult was of smaller stature. Ms. Walker noted that this could be seen as potentially discriminatory.

Mr. Capello made a motion to approve the final COA proposal and associated recommended service changes for the public hearing, except designating free fares for children based upon height versus age. Ms. Walker seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

### **Action Item #2: Amended and Restated Advertising Policy and Guidelines**

After meeting in mid-October to discuss and review recommended revisions to our Advertising Policy and Guidelines, the Committee's discussion was incorporated and forwarded to our corporate attorney for further review.

The majority of the Committee's incorporated input was in Sections 3 and 4 of the document. These sections cover how COAST will manage rejections or removals of advertising content.

Our corporate attorney has reviewed and concurred with the Committee's input.

The Policy Committee is recommending approval of the Amended and Restated Advertising Policy and Guidelines.

**Action Required:** *The COAST Board of Directors approve the amended and restated advertising policy and guidelines as recommended by the Policy Committee.*

Mr. Capello made a motion to approve the amended and restated advertising policy and guidelines as recommended by the Policy Committee. Mr. Lentz seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

### **Action Item #3: Drug & Alcohol and Rx & OTC Medication Policy Revisions**

Mr. Williams presented the policy revisions to the Drug & Alcohol Policy made to address new Federal rules that were recently announced to go into effect January 6, 2019 and to meet the new FMCSA testing clearinghouse requirements.

The Rx & OTC Medication Policy revisions are being recommended as a matter of practicality.

**Action Required:** *The COAST Board of Directors approve the revisions to the Drug & Alcohol and Rx and OTC Medical Policies.*

Mr. Pepin made a motion to approve the revisions presented to the Drug & Alcohol Policy and Mr. Shanahan seconded. All voted in favor.

Mr. Lentz made a motion to approve the revisions presented to the Rx & OTC Medication Policy and Mr. Pepin seconded. All voted in favor.

### **Action Item #4: Municipal Funding Formula Adjustment(s) for FY21**

As discussed at the last meeting, staff has been working on updating the MFF to recognize the systemwide changes we will be implementing.

The potential changes include:

- inclusion of all fixed route and ADA demand response services
- exclusion of other demand response services we operate (Route 7 On Demand) or contract for (Parking Shuttle, Portsmouth Senior Transportation, and ACT-related services)

- using different approaches to the data set that is used with each factor, particularly weekly fixed route service miles, which is changing dramatically based on the new service design and inclusion of all fixed route services

A presentation of the effects of using three different approaches to that data set that is used with each factor was made.

**Action Required:** *The COAST Board of Directors approve municipal funding formula adjustments for FY21.*

Mr. Capello expressed his favor of Option 3 because it would align best with the system that we were going to be operating next year. Ms. Walker agreed and expressed that Portsmouth has always been supportive of COAST and that, with new leadership, future budgeting is unclear. Mr. Shanahan noted that Rochester and Dover receive an increase in their request but understood that it is reflective of enhanced service levels in the new system. He urged staff to make sure communities understand the new system and all the enhancements as they advocate for the increased funding. Mr. Nichols agreed and indicated that COAST will provide that information. Mr. Nichols noted that Dover, Exeter, Farmington and Rochester all get a share of the net advertising sales revenue on their bus shelters which helps offset their funding requests.

Mr. Capello made a motion to approve the concept of Option 3 with the understanding that the actual numbers would be brought to the December Board meeting. Mr. Shanahan seconded, and all voted in favor.

#### **Action Item #5: Free Rides to Polls on Election Days**

Over the years COAST has offered free rides to polls on election days in certain communities, or on given election cycles, to encourage voter participation.

Currently, COAST offers free rides under the Portsmouth Senior Transportation program.

Staff would like to recommend formalizing a policy to provide free rides to polls on election days. The offer of a free ride will have to be based on the honor system as there is no way to tell definitively that a passenger went to the polls and voted.

Election days would include days upon which there is public voting for local, state and federal reasons (i.e., town meetings, primaries, general elections, etc.).

**Action Required:** *The COAST Board of Directors approve free rides to polls on election days.*

Ms. Winters asked how this would work for ADA. Mr. Nichols indicated the Policy would apply equally between fixed route and ADA paratransit operations, and that we would be relying on people to tell us they're going to vote to receive the free ride. We would have to trust they were being honest.

Mr. Capello asked if we reroute buses to go to polling places and Mr. Nichols stated we do not; riders would take the bus to the closest stop to polling places in their community.

Mr. Capello made a motion to approve free rides to polls on election days and Ms. Walker seconded. All voted in favor.

#### **Discussion Items**

##### **Discussion Item #1: Municipal Funding Contributions**

COAST is projecting a nearly 2 million-dollar annual funding gap that we will need to fill with a variety of different revenue sources starting in 2023.

As an organization, we will need to determine what portion of that gap we can reasonably expect our municipalities to take on.

Mr. Nichols noted that the Commissioner and NHDOT thinks communities should be contributing 50% of costs. Mr. Nichols inquired how to deal with this gap with regard to municipalities and asked whether the increase should be phased in? Ms. Walker appreciates spreading out the increase but notes that that means the gap will always be there and it feels like kicking the can down the road.

Ms. Stowell asked where the other 50% would come from and Mr. Nichols noted that there are a variety of possibilities. Mr. Nichols noted that a P3 proposal by C&J could pass along \$300K to \$400K a year to COAST. Additionally, the State of NH provided \$200K to public transit for the first time in many years and Mr. Nichols noted the importance of advocating for continued and increased contributions by the state. Finally, Mr. Nichols spoke about the potential of boarding fees for TNCs being used to support public transportation and noted the 10-year plan may be used to establish a study committee to look at TNC operations within the state.

Ms. Walker noted that it may be time to talk about a fare increase.

Discussion around the use of gas tax and tolls and the inequity between the FHA and FTA was discussed. Mr. Nichols noted that Congressman Pappas was helping to push for equity in this area, so transit could benefit from more from user fees (farebox revenues) and indicated this would take some of the pressure off of the municipalities.

Mr. Shanahan forecasted that a request for municipalities to fund 50% of COAST costs would be rejected and could negatively impact the funding we currently receive, so we need to identify the tipping point and there's a lot of data that needs to be analyzed to determine what that is.

Ms. Walker asked what percentage communities contribute to the overall budget currently. Mr. Nichols reported that in FY15-FY18 it was approximately 30%. Mr. Pepin expressed concern about asking communities for more because Somersworth doesn't pay the full request now and that is unlikely to change. He noted that he is very fearful they'll stop supporting COAST because they don't understand the tremendous positive impact it has on so many people's lives. Mr. Nichols noted that Option 3 of the Municipal Funding Formula approved earlier in the meeting would lead to a decrease in the ask of Somersworth. Mr. Shanahan asked if we ramped up the ask, how would we account for the money above what is required for the current year. He wondered if it would be put into a trust for 3 years from now. Ms. Walker noted it will be hard to convince communities to pay for future years when it's challenging to get them to pay for services they're receiving now.

Ms. Winters suggested that elongating CMAQ funds over 5 years might be helpful. Ms. Walker asked if staff could look at expanding CMAQ spending over 5 years to see the impact. At that point we could then work toward identifying the percentage of municipal funding that Board members can agree on as a guideline.

## **Committee Reports**

**Executive Committee** – Did not meet

**Board Development Committee** – Did not meet

**Policy Committee** – see action item #2

**Legislative Committee** – met on November 18 and agreed that we need to expand committee members to people outside the Board. The agreed-upon focus is to get the message out about COAST's current needs and that the current state funding is inadequate. Additionally, the importance of engaging our federal representatives was noted. The committee will meet again in early January and the focus will be to identify messaging, who to direct our message to, determine a timeline and explore whether through legislation, COAST could participate in pooled insurance program such as Primex.

## **VII. Community Updates/Information Items**

### **Annual Audit**

Our annual audit will take place during the second week of December.

### 2020 FTA Triennial Review

FY20 will be a triennial review year for COAST. Our first response to FTA's contractor is due December 20. Staff has begun preparing or response. It takes a significant effort to put together. Our review will occur next June 2 and 3.

### Surface Transportation Funding & Reauthorization

The latest information available indicates that the continuing resolution we are currently operating under and set to expire on November 22 will be extended to just before Christmas. At that point we may once again find ourselves in a Federal Government shutdown.

In terms of reauthorization, the latest projections are that reauthorization will be put off until 2021, possibly close to mid-year.

### Ridership

October 2019 was the single highest ridership month we have experienced at COAST since August 2017. Ridership in October totaled 39,832, representing a 4.22% increase over October 2018.

### commuteSMART Seacoast

Ms. Walker noted that commuteSMART is running out of funding and Anne Rugg is retiring in June. She commented that she would assist with bringing together a committee to explore the future of commuteSMART if there was interest. Ms. Winters suggested any group formed work with Mr. Tardiff of Commute Smart NH.

## **VIII. Adjournment**

Mr. Pepin made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Capello seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 10:06am.