



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation  
DRAFT Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors  
Wednesday, April 27, 2022**

**PRESENT:** Scott Bogle, Adam Causey, Sönke Dornblut (virtually), Ben Fletcher (virtually), Lauren Haley (virtually), Denis Hebert, Margaret Joyce, Colin Lentz, Joann Neumann (virtually), Michael Scala, Dennis Shanahan, Maria Stowell (virtually)

**ABSENT:** Martin Dumont Sr., Dave Sharples, Thomas Wright

**STAFF:** Rad Nichols, Michael Williams, Margot Doering (virtually)

**I. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The meeting was called to order at 8:33am by Mr. Shanahan.

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Shanahan asked if a motion could be made to approve the minutes of the March 23, 2022 meeting. Mr. Hebert made the motion to accept the minutes as drafted, and Ms. Joyce seconded the motion. There was no discussion and Mr. Shanahan undertook a roll call vote.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Causey	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Ms. Haley	Yes
Ms. Stowell	Abstain
Mr. Dornblut	Abstain
Mr. Fletcher	Yes

The motion passed.

**III. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Nichols noted that there was no public comment that he had for the Board. He did invite Ms. Neumann to speak as a new alternate member for Ms. Haley and the seat representing a regional community health center. Ms. Neumann expressed her interest in joining the board and noted the significant amount of industry jargon she would need help getting up to speed on.

No members of the public were in attendance to speak.

**IV. FINANCIAL REPORT**

Ms. Doering went over the year to date financials and balance sheet through March noting trends for the most part continued as they had previously. Fare revenues were up again, narrowing the amount that line is under budget. Advertising revenue was down compared to February, however there is a strong pipeline of advertising going up on the buses and shelters. Local match is coming in as expected. State funds remain over budget, due to the last quarter of CY21 payments made by the State of Maine.

On the expense side of the financials, wages continue under budget, however there was a large spike in March for the line (lower paid time off used in March and driver referral bonuses paid out). Benefits continue over budget, however that amount continues to align closer to the budgeted figure each month. Materials and supplies expenses were up notably in March due to significant increased costs for fuel. For utilities we are still waiting for our quarterly utilities bill for 6 Sumner. Other expense lines are all running under budget.

Ms. Joyce asked about the size of the jump in materials and expenses, and how much of that was a result of increased fuel costs. Ms. Doering responded that the overwhelming majority was related to increases in fuel costs. Mr. Nichols noted that we manage to the bottom line, and are running significantly underbudget, but expect that the materials and supplies line will likely be well over budget by year end.,

Mr. Scala asked whether an increase in the fares could help offset additional costs of the fuel. There was some discussion on whether this was the correct time to take such a step.

Mr. Hebert noted that it was likely time to relook our fare structure since it has been some time since we last had conducted that analysis. Mr. Nichols commented that we have a number of projects that will hopefully align soon, and we can relook the fare structure then.

On the balance sheet Ms. Doering noted the effects of the new Gillig buses at \$512K each. We continue to wait on a like-kind-exchange guidance from the FTA to complete our final draw for federal grant funds for one of the four buses, which impacts our cash on hand balance in the interim.

Mr. Shanahan asked if we expected our unrestricted funds balance will rebound back to near our goal in the end. Ms. Doering noted that it will get us much closer again once we can finish drawing funds for this bus purchase.

## **V. OLD BUSINESS**

### **Staffing**

Mr. Williams gave a brief update on staffing, noting that we continue to remain short by four (4) full time CDL operators and approximately four (4) part time CDL operators. We are fully staffed in non-CDL operators. We are also advertising for an Operations Supervisor opening that has been vacant for many months now after reassessing just what our needs for that position are.

### **Town Meeting Results/City Budget Approvals**

Mr. Nichols gave an update on Town meeting votes and City budget approvals to date. They have resulted in the following local funding results.

Farmington – level funded COAST at the same amount approved in CY22, \$28,000. This represents 92.3% of our request for FY22 which was \$30,321.

Newington – level funded COAST at the same amount approved in CY22, \$34,236. This represents 89.4% of our request for FY22, which was \$38,310.

Somerset – fully funded our FY23 request of \$96,995, which represented a 20.8%, or \$16,715, increase.

### **TSA Mask Mandate**

Mr. Nichols reported that after the court ruling came out that struck down the TSA mask mandate on April 18, COAST waited for further guidance from the FTA before making any decision to suspend the mask mandate on our vehicles. On Tuesday, April 19, after concurrence was received from the FTA that the TSA mask mandate had been suspended, COAST announced the suspension for our customers and employees. We are still encouraging individuals to follow CDC guidelines, however whether to wear a mask is now a personal choice and we are welcoming riders regardless of their mask use.

### **Marketing/Communications Framework**

Mr. Nichols related that the final touches are being put on the Framework. We have hit the ground running in the meantime.

Last month we discussed a new advertising campaign comparing a tank of gas to the cost of a monthly pass on COAST. That campaign is now in full swing, including on buses (exteriors) and bus shelters, as well as on social media.

We have prepared a 40th anniversary press release, updated our website, and made other preparations to make the announcement during the final week of April.

Our consultant has worked with staff to strengthen our language used in our hiring materials. It has been incorporated into current advertisements we have running for vehicle operators and an Operations Supervisor.

We are working on revamping our quarterly updates to elected officials, partners, and other constituencies. We will be transitioning to an email marketing tool like MailChimp to send COAST branded updates via email. We will also continue to produce a printed version for use when needed. We are also moving to a more consistent messaging template that will be repeated with each update.

Having skipped this step until now, we are in the process of developing a case statement for our new facility project, including a project timeline with milestones. We will be discussing some of the questions this raises with certain elements of the project later in the agenda. The case statement will be an important messaging tool when speaking about the project and soliciting local and private financial support to match our federal grants.

### **Free Transfer Pilot Program**

Mr. Nichols went over the Program results to date. Over the course of March, we collected 2,667 transfer tickets across the system on 22,123 total fixed route trips (excluding the Warming Center Shuttle). This equates to 9.9% of trips on the fixed route system being “paid for” with a transfer ticket during the month.

To date the Pilot has resulted in 5,403 transfer tickets being collected on 55,646 total fixed route trips (excluding the Warming Center Shuttle). This equate to 9.7% of trips on the fixed route system being

“paid for” with a transfer ticket to date. The impact on the average fare paid to date has been a 3.9% or \$0.05 reduction per passenger (\$1.06 vs. \$1.11) when compared to the 1st quarter of FY22.

### **Fixed Route Technologies RFP**

Mr. Williams gave an update on our desire to procure new fixed route technologies. We have released an RFP soliciting proposals from qualified firms to provide and implement intelligent technology systems for our fixed route fleet. For simplicity, this solicitation will treat these as four primary products:

1. CAD / AVL with Public Facing App
2. Mobile Fare Payment System
3. Automatic Voice Announcements
4. Destination Sign Controls Integration

The goal is a single system for drivers controlling the technological aspects of their vehicle, and a single application for customers to find information about the service and pay for the service.

COAST must replace our existing CAD / AVL system with a go-live date no later than September 1, 2022.

Implementing all products by the September 1, 2022, date is preferred. However, COAST is open to a phased approach where Automatic Voice Announcements, Destination Sign Controls Integration, and Mobile Fare Payments are implemented in a later second phase if needed to make this timeline realistic.

Additionally, COAST would like the option to choose not to implement some of these products if the proposal or pricing is not favorable (for example, implement CAD/AVL and Mobile Fare Payment, but forgo Automatic Voice Announcements and the Destination Sign Integration entirely). Therefore, pricing should be separated out by product when applicable.

The RFP was sent out to 13 different firms. This is a dynamic space that has changed a lot since we first contracted with DoubleMap.

There was considerable discussion around potentially implementing a mobile fare payment system and the flexibilities that may provide COAST and riders, as well as fare system structures we could employ. Additionally, there was discussion around whether we could pick and choose from the offerings of multiple vendors, the position DoubleMap has put us in with the termination of their software solution.

Before moving on to the next discussion item Mr. Scala asked for ridership information on the Warming Shelter Shuttle over the winter. Mr. Nichols replied in general terms and committed to forwarding the specific information to board members after the meeting.

### **Facility Funding Update**

Mr. Nichols related that In April we submitted earmark applications to Senator Shaheen and Congressman Pappas for up to \$2M in HUD Economic Development Initiative (EDI) funding to match and leverage up to \$8M of FTA capital grant funds. Mr. Nichols also presented our project to Congressman Pappas' Community Advisory Board on April 25.

We also participated in a virtual site visit with the NH CDFA and provided additional supporting material to the grant managers after that meeting. An announcement on that application is expected in June.

There was discussion around expectations for community funding of the project. Mr. Nichols referred to the information presented to the board in their packets, and noted that there is the potential for the project to be fully funded without any additional asks from communities.

## **VI. New Business**

### **Action Items**

#### **Action Item #1: Approval and Support to Submit FFY22 FTA 5339(b) Grant Application**

Mr. Nichols explained that staff are preparing a request for FFY22 FTA 5339(b) capital bus and bus facility funds for our new facility project.

Our FFY21 grant application, while not successful, was rated “recommended”. With minor tweaks, outlined by the FFY21 Grant Manager for the program, COAST should very easily attain the highest rating of “Highly Recommended”.

The funding being applied for is the balance of FTA funding (80%) needed based on the current \$14.7M estimated cost.

The application is due by May 31.

**Action Requested:** That the Board of Directors express their support and authorize the Executive Director to apply for up to \$7,740,000 of FTA 5339(b) capital bus and bus facility funds in support of the construction of a new COAST administration, operations, and maintenance facility at 42 Sumner Drive in Dover, NH.

Mr. Scala made a motion that the Board of Directors express their support and authorize the Executive Director to submit applications for Congressionally Directed Spending to the offices of Senator Shaheen and Congressman Pappas in support of the construction of a new COAST administration, operations, and maintenance facility at 42 Sumner Drive in Dover, NH. Mr. Hebert seconded the motion. There was no further discussion and Mr. Shanahan undertook a roll call vote.

Mr. Bogle	Yes
Mr. Causey	Yes
Mr. Hebert	Yes
Ms. Joyce	Yes
Mr. Lentz	Yes
Mr. Scala	Yes
Mr. Shanahan	Yes
Ms. Haley	Yes
Ms. Stowell	Yes
Mr. Dornblut	Yes
Mr. Fletcher	Yes

### **Committee Reports**

Executive Committee – did not meet.

Finance Committee – did not meet in April prior to the board meeting (there were no questions raised based on the information presented).

Nominating Committee – did not meet.

Board Development Committee – did not meet.

Policy Committee – two members were present (although not all in-person and constituting a quorum) on April 20 to discuss our Advertising Policy, proposed edits to incorporate ACT's service area into our Title VI Program, and a proposed Outline for Providing General Public Demand Response Service. The new proposed Title VI Program and Outline for Providing General Public Demand Response Service will be brought to the board for potential adoption in May. The Committee also anticipates meeting in May to review proposed revisions to the Safety Plan brought on by new language in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The proposed Safety Plan would also likely be brought to the board for potential adoption in May.

Legislative Committee – three members were present (although not all in-person and constituting a quorum) on March 29 to discuss the progress of favorable legislation this session (all voted ITL), as well as the NHMA biennial legislative process. A Policy Proposal was submitted to the NHMA.

### **Discussion Items**

#### **New FTA Planning Emphasis Areas**

Mr. Bogle of RPC, along with Mr. Lentz of SRPC, made a presentation on the new FTA Planning Emphasis Areas that are being incorporated into the work of the MPOs and how they related to work involving COAST and public transit.

The specific new planning emphasis areas include:

- Tackling the climate crisis
- Equity and Justice<sup>40</sup> in Transportation Planning
- Complete Streets
- Public Involvement
- Strategic Highway Network/USDOD Coordination
- Federal Land Management Agency Coordination (Not applicable in our region)
- Planning & Environmental Linkages
- Data in Transportation Planning

There was a brief discussion around the potential transition to electric buses and the challenges of transitioning in the near term at COAST.

#### **New Facility Timeline and Milestones**

Mr. Nichols gave a quick update on this discussion topic as the meeting was running long.

We are currently in the process of developing a case statement for our new facility project, including a project timeline with milestones. We are still working on how to best portray this information visually.

Some important questions that have been raised because of this process and that need to be discussed and resolved include the following:

- When do we need funds secured to move to the next step (i.e., Final Design / Phase 1 Construction / Phase 2 Construction)?
- When do we need match to federal grants secured by?
- How much we need 'in hand' or committed before we proceed with construction?
- When do we consider approaching banks for loans?

These may also be issues for the Executive Committee to workshop and come back to the board with recommendations.

There was general support for the case statement, and Mr. Nichols asked members to follow-up after the meeting if they had more to share.

This document with some additional styling will be used to make our case for the new facility.

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

### **NHTA Letter to Commissioner Sheehan**

In April, the NHTA sent a letter to Commissioner Sheehan after members were informed of the Department's position on the use of state capital match funds for non-passenger facilities and equipment. The letter requested equal consideration of all potential transportation projects serving a clear public benefit. Minimally, if other sources of state funding become available within the Department, the Commissioner was requested to consider if those funds could be used to relieve pressure on state capital match funds so that public transit non-passenger facility and equipment match needs could be funded.

### **Ridership**

Overall ridership in March totaled 24,376, the highest of any month since March 2020.

- Fixed route ridership, after a winter dip, equaled the highest level since March of 2020. Average weekday fixed route ridership was the second highest in any month since the pandemic began, only behind December in 2021.
- After having lagged during the winter COVID-19 case spike in the region, demand response service riders increased their frequency of riding in March, as expected. Ridership equaled the highest level since February of 2020. Average weekday demand response ridership was also the highest in any month since February of 2020.

## **VIII. Adjournment**

Mr. Hebert made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Bogle seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 10:26am.