



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation  
DRAFT Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors  
Wednesday, August 23, 2023**

**PRESENT:** Scott Bogle, Robert Gibson, Denis Hebert, Margaret Joyce, Colin Lentz, Kristen Murphy, David Sandmann, Dennis Shanahan, Nick Taylor

**ABSENT:** Kendra Amaral, Fred Butler, Sönke Dornblut, Ben Fletcher, Michael Mates, Michael Scala, Thomas Wright

**STAFF:** Margot Doering (via cell phone), Rad Nichols, Michael Williams

**I. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The meeting was called to order at 8:32am by Mr. Shanahan.

*Technical difficulties with internet service on site unfortunately precluded virtual participation for some members who were waiting to join. It was not an issue that could be resolved. Furthermore, the temporary solution for recording the meeting also ended up being unusable.*

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Shanahan asked if a motion could be made to approve the minutes of the July 26, 2023 meeting. Mr. Sandmann made the motion to accept the minutes as drafted, and Mr. Lentz seconded the motion. There was no discussion and Mr. Shanahan undertook the vote. The motion passed unanimously.

**III. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Nichols recognized Ronny Reebe for reaching the 10-year milestone at COAST. Ronny is currently an Operations Supervisor. He first came to COAST from Wildcat Transit and has worked his way up from where he started as a CDL Operator, to fill-in dispatching, and now supervision. He is a valuable member of the team and works very hard to support the operators and operation. He unfortunately could not make the meeting as he worked until late in the night the day previous.

**IV. FINANCIALS**

Ms. Doering noted the typical trends we have been experiencing continue for revenue lines. Overall revenues are underbudget. This is largely due to lower expenses, which reduces the amount of funding we are drawing under our federal grants and other contractual agreements. Expenses continue to run behind budget. One question was asked about a particular potential advertiser. There were no other questions for Ms. Doering.

**V. OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Nichols gave quick updates on the following items.

New Facility Progress

The Dover Technical Review Committee has approved our project and our engineering firm is now preparing for concurrent submittals of the project to the Planning Board and Conservation Commission on September 5.

During the TRC's review, questions were raised about the location of the outdoor, above ground diesel fuel tank. The questions revolved around clearances from both the building and the property line, as well as a fence around the tank area itself. Options were reviewed, to include a below ground vault (which would have been much more expensive both initially and long term). Ultimately, it appears as if an above ground tank is approvable, however we are still working out potential fencing details.

Upcoming likely next meetings will be with the Conservation Commission on 9/11 and Planning Board on 9/26.

We are still waiting for a final NEPA determination from the FTA Region I office so we can submit our grants for the CDS and 5339(a) and (b) awards we need to obligate. Hopefully we will be able to do that this federal fiscal year.

We received a donation of \$10,000 of NH CDFA tax credits from Leone, McDonnell & Roberts, Professional Association. This is their second purchase of tax credits from us. We now have \$272,000 of tax credits remaining. These must be purchased before March 30, 2024.

#### FY25 & Beyond

After presenting on this topic at our last meeting, we hosted a community stakeholder meeting in the Dover High School Library on August 2. Most communities, representatives of our Federal delegation, area Chambers of Commerce, the NHDOT, Pease Development Authority, and the board of directors were present and well represented. The meeting went well with a short Q&A session afterwards as those in attendance took in the information that had been shared with them.

After the meeting updated presentation materials were sent out to attendees and our board members. Contact, and offers to present locally, have also been made with all invitees who were not able to attend. Meetings are being scheduled.

Invitations for staff to present at City Council, Selectboard, and Budget Committee workshops and meetings have also been extended and are being scheduled.

#### New Low Floor Frontrunner Minibuses

These vehicles are currently going through final exterior painting. There were issues with the caulking on the exteriors of the buses accepting paint, and so the caulking had to be removed and replaced. The plan now is to paint the vehicles, deliver them to the final assembly point, and then apply our wave pattern in vinyl there. Our staff will also go down to the final assembly point in MA to inspect the vehicles before they are delivered. We expect to take delivery in the last week of August (2 buses) and first week of September (2 buses).

#### Staffing Issues

With multiple ongoing bus operators being on leave due to health-related issues, as well as recent departures of staff for professional advancement, we currently find ourselves in a situation where we will very likely have to reimplement short-term service suspensions.

We have made 5 offers to individuals that we hope to start after the Labor Day long weekend or mid-September. Most of these individuals are non-CDL operators, and while we had needed more individuals for those positions, we have now flipped to needing more CDL operators to maintain our services.

## **VI. NEW BUSINESS**

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**Executive Committee** – nothing to report.

**Finance Committee** –met on August 21 (2:30pm, COAST Administrative Office, Conference Room).

**Legislative Committee** – nothing to report.

**Board Development Committee** – nothing to report.

**Policy Committee** – nothing to report.

### **Discussion Items**

#### **Discussion Item #1: FY24 Draft Operating Budget**

Mr. Nichols gave a presentation on the Draft FY24 operating budget.

#### **Overall Goals**

- Resume all currently suspended services except for on Routes 14 & 34
- Meet increasing demand (+15%) for our demand response services within the region
- Continue Free Transfers (Connections) beyond September 31, 2023

#### **Summary**

- Most FY24 projections are based on FY23 actuals through June, annualized, with service level and other anticipated adjustments then accounted for. We have been operating significantly under budget YTD in FY23.
- The total FY24 draft operating budget is \$7,579,662. This compares to the FY23 approved budget of \$7,307,304 and represents an overall budget increase of \$272,318 (+3.7%).
- As budgeted, there is a projected gain of \$214,122 in FY24.
- Inflation was adjusted down to 2.2% as a baseline, which matches the CPI-U for New England in June 2023.
- FY24 adjustments include:
  - Just under \$3,000 associated with a new ADP module for recruitment and onboarding.
  - Just over \$33,250 for the annual service agreement for Passio (our real-time bus information system).
  - \$50,000 for anticipated engine and transmission work over and above the FY23 experience.
- Added costs associated with removing service suspensions and growing demand response service total just under \$719,000 as total service hours and miles and our peak vehicle count will grow by 16%, 15%, and 11% respectively.
- Ridership is projected to grow by 12% overall (over our FY23 projections through June).

- An option to further reduce pay steps, from 4 to 3, for operations staff was discussed. The implications would be higher wage expenses. Mr. Nichols was not able to have this ready prior to the meeting but will have it as an option for the next meeting.

Questions were raised about:

- Whether the costs associated with the additional services included demand response service growth as well. Mr. Nichols responded that they were.
- Why there had been such a significant decrease in materials and supplies expenses YTD in FY23. Mr. Williams explained how we were able to save expenses in this area and how fleet replacements were also helping.
- Whether we had received updated estimates for the operation of the new facility. Mr. Nichols explained that we were still awaiting this information.
- Whether pay for those at the top tiers of their pay scale were adjusted. Mr. Nichols explained that they were adjusted annually.

### **Schedule for Budget Adoption**

- Budget Workshop Mtg. (week of 9/11) – possible workshop to further discuss the draft operating budget. There was no need for this expressed by attendees.
- September Board Meeting (9/27) – vote to adopt final FY24 operating budget

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

### Ridership

Mr. Nichols went over ridership in July.

- Total ridership for the month of July was 26,893, which was down 5.2% from the previous month and up 29.7% from July 2022.
- While our total fixed route ridership was down from June (-5%), it was up 31% from last July. That said, average weekday and Saturday ridership were up 3.5% and 20% over June. Both set records as the highest averages since the pandemic hit. As we continue to do better staffing wise and remove service suspensions, we are seeing the positive impacts in terms of growing ridership. Year-to-date in FY23 we are averaging a 6% ridership increase over FY22 and are now averaging 75% of our pre-pandemic ridership per revenue hour of fixed route operations.
- On the demand response service side, ridership was down (-8%) from June, but up 15% from last July. YTD we are averaging a 15% ridership increase over FY22, 91% of our total pre-pandemic ridership, and are now averaging 112.4% of our pre-pandemic ridership per revenue hour of demand response operations. Thanks to the work of the TripLink staff, and our dispatchers, we have become more efficient delivering these trips!

There was discussion around the Annual Meeting in September. A location has not been selected, however staff are looking in Portsmouth

## **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Shanahan adjourned the meeting, without objection, at 9:43am.

Respectfully submitted by Margaret Joyce, Secretary