



Approved October 25, 2023

**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation
Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors
Wednesday, September 27, 2023**

PRESENT: Donna Benton, Ben Fletcher, Denis Hebert, Margaret Joyce, Colin Lentz, Kristen Murphy, Joann Neumann, Mike Scala, Dennis Shanahan, Nick Taylor

ABSENT: Kendra Amaral, Scott Bogle, Fred Butler, Sönke Dornblut, Robert Gibson, Michael Mates, David Sandmann, Thomas Wright

GUEST: Margaret Baldwin (NHDOT)

STAFF: Margot Doering, Rad Nichols, Vanessa Polychronis, Phil Smith, Don Spencer, Michael Williams

I. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was called to order at 9:03am by Mr. Shanahan.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Shanahan asked if a motion could be made to approve the minutes of the August 23, 2023 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 took the vote which passed unanimously with one abstention.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Nichols recognized two employees that have reached milestone anniversaries.

- Don Spencer, Operations Supervisor 15 years
- Angela Paolilli, Non-CDL Operator 10 years

Both were recognized for their dedication to our customers, fellow employees, and organization, as well as their professionalism in their roles every day. Both are relied on heavily in the daily operation.

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 due to less services being operated and the maintenance departments work to save expenses when maintaining the fleet.

We are benefiting from higher interest rates and laddering out CDs with some of our held funds.

In preparation for a potential government shutdown, we have drawn down funds a little more aggressively than we would have otherwise.

There were no other questions for Ms. Doering.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Nichols went over the numerous old business items.

Service Suspensions & Staffing

While COAST has been slowly reintroducing suspended services in the winter and spring with staffing improvements, a recent wave of unavailability among current staff forced new temporary service suspensions, effective Friday, September 1. They can be found at <https://coastbus.org/upcomingservicechanges>.

The primary reason COAST is suspending these services now is due to several current staff being out for a variety of reasons and are therefore not available to drive. The goal is to get back to full operations as soon as possible.

Since the Labor Day weekend we have started training four new staff members and hired another who should start training soon. We hope to begin removing suspensions again soon, as staff are released from training and our new fixed route low floor cutaway buses are placed into service.

New Frontrunner Low-floor Cutaway Minibuses

These vehicles are being delivered today. The buses will still need to be fitted with our radios and the Passio GO! Hardware before being put into service. We have no estimate on when that may be at this time. They will unfortunately not have bicycle racks due to new safety features into the bumpers.

Facility Project Update

The Dover Planning Board approved our conditional use permitting, with subsequent conditions, during their meeting on Tuesday, September 26. Our alteration of terrain permit will go into the state very soon.

We expect to hear from the FTA on our NEPA submittal any day now.

NH Public Transportation Coalition

A core leadership team has been meeting to discuss ongoing efforts of the Coalition. They have helped share information and potential speaking points for the upcoming GACIT Hearings as well as consider next legislative steps (onboard audio recording exception and a local option fee increase). Work to begin preparing for the state FY26-27 budget is also being planned, to include meeting with other similarly aligned groups who also share concerns over funding for public and community transportation.

2023 Q3 Update (Email Blast)

Was sent out on September 22. We hope you enjoyed the update and shared it within your sphere of influence. We continue to experience a strong open rate amongst the over 200 individuals who typically receive these updates.

Property & Liability Insurance Renewals

We have submitted renewal applications to all our current carriers for the coming year. We hope to be able to report out on pricing for the upcoming November renewals at the October meeting of the Board.

Fiscal Year End

As Fiscal Year 2023 ends in September, staff is in the process of getting ready to close the current fiscal year and open a new fiscal year.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

Action Item #1: Election of Officers & Executive Committee for FY24

Mr. Lentz gave an update on the Nominating Committee's work. They met on July 7th and included Colin Lentz, Margaret Joyce, and Scott Bogle. Executive Director Rad Nichols participated in the meeting as well.

Committee members contacted each of the existing officers and all four (Dennis Shanahan, Michael Scala, Margaret Joyce, Scott Bogle) were amenable to serving another term in the same or a different officer role. Considering funding discussions that will be happening with municipalities, the state and other funding partners in the coming year, the committee saw value in maintaining the current lineup of officers.

Proposed Slate of Board Officers

Chair: Dennis Shanahan, Dover

Vice Chair: Michael Scala, Rochester

Treasurer: Scott Bogle, Rockingham Planning Commission

Secretary: Margaret Joyce, Seacoast Chamber Alliance

The Bylaws provide that the Executive Committee be composed of the officers and one appointee at the discretion of the Chair.

Proposed Exec Committee Including Chair's Appointee

Chair: Dennis Shanahan, Dover

Vice Chair: Michael Scala, Rochester

Treasurer: Scott Bogle, Rockingham Planning Commission

Secretary: Margaret Joyce, Seacoast Chamber Alliance

At Large: TBD

Action Requested: *That the Board of Directors elect the FY2024 Board Officers as presented. That the Board of Directors approve the proposed Executive Committee.*

Mr. Hebert made a motion to approve the requested action to elect the slate of officers for FY2024. Mr. Taylor seconded the motion. There was no discussion and Mr. Shanahan undertook the vote which passed unanimously.

Mr. Hebert also made a motion to approve the proposed Executive Committee. Mr. Taylor seconded the motion. There was no discussion and Mr. Shanahan took the vote which passed unanimously.

Action Item #2: FY24 Board Meeting Calendar

The draft FY2024 COAST Board meeting schedule can be found to follow. With a few exceptions (noted with an '*'), the schedule follows the previously agreed upon schedule of the fourth Wednesday of every month at 8:30 am.

October 2023	November 2023	December 2023
Wed., October 25	Wed., November 15 *	Wed., December 13 *
January 2024	February 2024	March 2024
Wed., January 24	Wed., February 28	Wed., March 27
April 2024	May 2024	June 2024
Wed., April 24	Wed., May 22	Wed., June 26
July 2024	August 2024	September 2024
Wed., July 24	Wed., August 28	Wed., September 25

Locations will be announced in advance of the meeting and if a quorum is physically able to be present a hybrid meeting option is also intended to be available.

Action Requested: *That the Board of Directors review and approve the proposed FY2024 meeting calendar.*

Ms. Joyce made a motion to approve the requested action. Ms. Neumann seconded the motion. There was no discussion and Mr. Shanahan took the vote which passed unanimously.

Action Item #3: Customer Code of Conduct Update

Mr. Williams presented the recommended customer code of conduct update.

We have been experiencing an increase in the issues of needles being left on the buses and thefts. Our current Customer Code of Conduct, revised just last fall, does not directly address these.

Staff is proposing to add the following bullet points to the following lists:

Safety and Cleanliness

- Use or leave behind hypodermic needles.

Other

- Engage in any illegal activity.

Action Requested: *That the Board of Directors approve the updated Customer Code of Conduct as outlined.*

Mr. Scala made a motion to approve the requested action. Mr. Lentz seconded the motion. There was no discussion and Mr. Shanahan undertook the vote which passed unanimously.

Action Item #4: 2024-2025 State Operating Match Grant Agreement

Mr. Nichols gave the overview on this item.

COAST must enter into a grant agreement with the NHDOT for state operating match funds awarded to COAST and managed by the NHDOT.

The state operating match funds are distributed by formula and total \$421,127. These funds are to be used to provide a portion of the non-federal funds required to match FTA operating funds for public transit service provided by COAST between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2025.

Action Required: *That the Board of Directors adopt the attached Corporate Resolution to enable the Executive Director to enter a grant agreement for said funds with the NHDOT.*

Mr. Taylor made a motion to approve the requested action. Mr. Lentz seconded the motion. There was no discussion and Mr. Shanahan took the vote which passed unanimously.

Action Item #5: FY2024 Operating Budget

Mr. Nichols presented this item.

He noted changes in the presentation since the August 23 board meeting include the following:

- Refinements were made to better account for step increases in operating staff wages, resulting in an additional \$21,615 increase in budgeted wages for operations staff.

Although discussed at the August meeting, analysis of an option to further reduce operating pay steps, from 4 to 3, was found to be neither affordable nor equitable at this time.

He detailed the goals associated with the budget which include resuming most currently suspended services, meeting increased demand response demand, continuing free transfers, and maintaining competitive, or even attractive, pay rates for our most challenging to fill positions.

He further went on to give a high-level overview of the budget, drawing comparisons between FY23 & 24 service hours and expenses, and gave a breakdown of additional FY24 expenses over the projected FY23 actuals at year end. Service level and ridership assumptions were detailed.

The FY2024 proposed operating budget contains revenues totaling \$7,808,592 and expenses totaling \$7,601,277, resulting in a net gain of \$207,315.

Action Requested: *That the Board of Directors approve the FY2024 Operating Budget.*

Mr. Lentz made a motion to approve the requested action. Ms. Joyce seconded the motion.

Ms. Joyce asked why the state operating match funding increase was happening in the second year of the biennium for us. Mr. Nichols said that was based on when we had told NHDOT we would run out of emergency relief funds from the FTA.

Mr. Hebert asked whether we were doing enough to get out of the situation we have been in relative to driver shortages. Mr. Williams explained how we staff and have stand-by operators to help maintain our reliability, as well as attempt to over hire in general to cover for expected and unexpected absences. We are also very flexible with our part-time staff, which are often retirees. He explained that while more money would be helpful, it would only increase our fiscal cliff starting in FY25. The most recent service suspensions were a result of 6 operators having emergency (unexpected) health issues arise.

Mr. Shanahan suggested we relook at our staffing and pay levels on a more regular basis so we can try to stay ahead of staffing shortfalls.

Ms. Baldwin raised how the state is using referral and retention bonuses. Mr. Nichols noted that we have a very successful referral bonus program in place.

There was no further discussion and Mr. Shanahan took the vote which passed unanimously.

Committee Reports

Executive Committee – did not meet.

Nominating Committee – did not meet.

Board Development Committee – outreach to fill open positions on the board is ongoing.

Policy Committee – did not meet.

Legislative Committee – did not meet. A leadership group of the NH Public Transportation Coalition has been meeting to discuss potential upcoming legislation to pursue.

Finance Committee – was not scheduled to meet in September.

VII. Community Updates/Information Items

Ridership

Mr. Nichols went over the ridership report for August.

- Overall ridership in August totaled 30,917. This was up 15% from July, partially due to more operating days in the month, and 35.6% over August 2022. We are now predicting ridership gains at year end of around +11% over last FY.
- Fixed route ridership totaled 28,733, up 14.6% from July, and by 36.4% over August 2022. About half of the gains can be attributed to returning nearly all Saturday services this summer. The other half of the gains are a result of individuals riding the buses more

often, as well as more new riders overall. As has been the case in each of the last four months, average weekday ridership in August was the highest since the pandemic began.

- Demand response ridership in August totaled 2,184 for the month. This represented a 20.3% increase over July, and a 25.8% increase over ridership in August 2022. Like on the fixed routes, ridership is being positively affected by the return of service on Saturdays.

Mr. Taylor gave an update on the upcoming Housing Summit

Mr. Scala inquired about our involvement in the Rochester-Dover Complete Streets Project along NH 108. Mr. Williams commented that we were in support of all the proposed changes except for maybe one stop located in Dover.

Ms. Joyce thanked COAST for once again providing shuttle service for the upcoming Apple Harvest Festival.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Shanahan adjourned the meeting, without objection, at 10:08am.

Respectfully submitted by Margaret Joyce, Secretary