



**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation
Minutes of the Board of Directors
Wednesday, April 28, 2010**

Members Present: Jon Frederick – Chairman, Kenn Ortmann – Secretary/ Treasurer, Karen Anderson, Barbara Broderick, Cynthia Copeland, Leif Gerjuoy, Tom Morgan, Sylvia vonAulock, Michael Watman, Ed Wojnowski

COAST Staff Present: Rad Nichols, Jeremy LaRose, Jenn Knox, Dianne Smith, Joe Schlenker

I. Call to Order

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

II. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Ortmann made the motion to approve the minutes of the March 24, 2010 meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Public Comment

Mr. Nichols had included a letter from Greenland resident Mary Maddock in the board packet. Ms. Maddock was requesting service to Hampton and Seabrook. He said that COAST's response had not yet gone out. He is planning to forward the letter to the towns along Route 1. He said when COAST receives any letters or emails advocating for expanded service in the future, staff will forward those letters to the communities involved so they have a sense for the demand.

Mr. Frederick said that Mr. Nichols and Mr. LaRose went to a sustainability forum in Portsmouth on Monday night to discuss bus service and the extremely low level of public transit funding in this state compared with our neighbors. Mr. Gerjuoy commented that an employee of the Shipyard had asked why COAST didn't provide service there, not realizing that the people who control service levels are actually the elected officials of each community. Mr. LaRose said he would look into service options that would serve commuters to the Shipyard.

IV. Employee Introduction

Mr. Nichols introduced Joe Schlenker, a bus operator who has been with COAST for about six months. Mr. Schlenker said it was refreshing to see a Board of Directors take an interest in bus operators and the day to day operations. He explained his long background in public transit, starting in 1977 in New Jersey. He said it is fun to come to work at COAST, and appreciates management's

open door policy. Mr. Ortmann asked about the different technology Mr. Schlenker has seen in buses over the years. Mr. Schlenker said he thinks the GPS-enabled radio system and on-board cameras are very good advancements, as tools for both operators and management. He also said that the new 2008 buses are great to drive. When asked which areas he likes driving in the most, Mr. Schlenker said he likes driving the Portsmouth trolley. Mr. Gerjuoy asked whether he had any preference regarding lifts versus ramps for accessibility. Mr. Schlenker said that the ramps on low-floor buses are much easier to use than the lifts. Over time, the salt and corrosion from being left outside cause the micro switches in the lifts to fail. Mr. Schlenker invited all the Board members to try a trip on the bus. The Board thanked him for his comments, and Mr. Schlenker left the meeting.

V. Financial Report

Mr. Nichols presented the February financials, and said that Bob Ruzinsky is working on March. We continue to trend to the positive with revenues up 2.8% over projected, and expenses under budget projections by 2.3%. Some of that is due to one-time gains, such as the sale of old equipment. Mr. Nichols stated that we may need to do an adjustment later, to account for the FastTrans service and the extra coordination expenses that were not included in the budget.

Mr. Nichols also presented COAST's 1512 report, one of the reports the organization is required to submit for ARRA. After the close of the first quarter on March 31st, COAST had ten days to submit the report. Then, the FTA has a period of around 10-12 days for review, after which COAST will have a few days to respond before the report is posted on federalreporting.gov for the general public to view. Mr. Nichols added that COAST also has an ARRA page on its website that is continually updated. Mr. Frederick asked whether the 1.78 jobs figure was a result of a federal formula. Mr. Nichols replied that it was, and clarified that those jobs were sustained, not created, as a result of ARRA funds.

Ms. Copeland asked about the plans for installing new bus shelters. Mr. Nichols said he has spoken with Somersworth, Rochester, Newmarket, and Portsmouth about new bus shelter locations, and plans to speak with Dover as well. The locations will be chosen based on ridership levels and visibility. Mr. Ortmann asked that the issue of bus shelter advertising be put on the agenda at a future meeting.

VI. Old Business

- **Route 7**

Mr. LaRose presented the history of what is now Route 7, its challenges, and some potential solutions. The major concerns include the low frequency of trips and the 3 hours the route takes to make a round trip. The route is not useful for most commuters, people running quick errands, etc. Because the route has low ridership, the towns are reluctant to

increase funding, but this is a Catch-22: without more funding the route will never become convenient enough to attract more riders.

Mr. LaRose pointed out that some of the Route 7 communities are not fully funding COAST. In addition, COAST has reached the current ceiling for federal operating assistance, and no more will be available. Exeter is part of the Boston urbanized area, so if the link with Portsmouth is cut out, the remaining communities would be entirely responsible for the operating cost of the route (not just the local match).

Mr. LaRose presented two possible solutions. The first is to reschedule the existing service to focus on commuters on either end of the day, and eliminate many of the time-draining trips into shopping plazas along the way. He suggested that staff speak with the operators who drive Route 7 the most and try to find out the regular passengers' travel habits so we can more accurately gauge demand.

The second solution would be to re-approach UNH about a partnership. COAST could potentially contract with UNH to provide Wildcat's existing service between Durham and Newmarket, and extend it out to Exeter. This would establish a much-needed link for commuters trying to get from Exeter to their jobs at UNH. In addition, through this partnership, the UNH community may get improved service during the summer and other UNH vacation periods, when the existing service is low or nonexistent. This partnership would potentially allow for COAST to operate service between Portsmouth and Exeter and potentially Epping. There is a huge demand for human service transportation in Hampton and Seabrook, and COAST may be able to expand in that direction in the future if it can establish a good reputation and name recognition in Epping.

Ms. Copeland asked about the proposed service from Manchester to Portsmouth. Mr. Nichols said that this altered Route 7 service would feed that service, but that COAST would not be interested in providing the link to Manchester.

Ms. vonAulock said that this partnership made perfect sense conceptually, but it may be a challenge to convince the players. Mr. Morgan asked whether UNH had any objections other than the possible fear of takeover. Mr. LaRose responded that the idea had previously been presented as a casual concept, rather than a formal proposal, and he believes that the decision makers did not have all the advantages pointed out to them. In addition, the faculty union is against any expansion of any UNH service, since that would suggest that the University has the money for the raises the faculty are demanding, but is simply choosing to spend it elsewhere.

Ms. Hastings asked whether COAST would be required to run ADA

service along any route that it contracts out to UNH, and Mr. Nichols replied that it would.

Mr. Frederick asked about the timetable for this. Mr. LaRose stated that he will follow up with the Director of Transportation Services at UNH and see how best to re-approach this important discussion.

- **Employee Handbook Update**

Ms. Hastings explained that staff had been working on an employee handbook overhaul. Some of the existing policies were disorganized, incorrect, or outdated. In addition, COAST has hit the 50 employee threshold for FMLA, and developing our FMLA policies led to some proposed changes to related policies such as our Paid Time Off program. She said that staff hoped to have a draft ready by the end of the week to send to LGC's Human Resources consultant for review, and then on to employment law attorneys and our corporate attorneys. After any suggested edits are considered, COAST will present the draft revision to a committee of Board members. Mr. Wojnowski, Ms. Copeland, and Ms. Anderson agreed to be on the committee. Several Board members said that they had started with LGC's model policies too, and found that their attorneys had significant changes.

Ms. vonAulock asked how COAST planned to get staff review and buy-in of the new policies. Mr. LaRose commented that in most cases, the revisions are simply bringing the policies in line with current practice, so they should not be controversial. Mr. Ortmann commented that as frustrating as it is to have decisions overturned, it's even more frustrating to get into trouble for not following existing policies. He and Mr. Frederick suggested that the employee handbook be mentioned at the annual meeting, so that staff can confirm that it still represents current practice or suggest changes.

VII. New Business

Action Items

- **Summer Service Expansion Proposal**

Mr. Nichols reminded the Board that Phase 1 of service expansion, enacted 2005-2007, was a phenomenal success, but COAST has yet to implement Phase 2 due to funding concerns. Phase 2 involves more evening and Saturday service on Route 2 and the start of Saturday service on Route 1. COAST rider surveys indicate that there is a huge demand for these improvements among existing riders.

Since COAST does not have the funding to implement Phase 2 year-

round, staff is proposing trying it for a 10-week period this summer, at a projected cost of \$29,000. Ms.vonAulock made the motion to go forward with this project, and Mr. Gerjuoy seconded.

Mr. Nichols said that there was a trial of Saturday service on Route 1 around 2003, and the ridership had been stronger than the average weekday on Route 1. He added that Somersworth level-funded COAST this year, at a discrepancy of about \$5,000. Mr. Watman said that this expanded service might help highlight the demand for bus service, and in turn encourage the City to fully fund it. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Morgan and Ms. vonAulock left the meeting. Ms. vonAulock said on the way out that she supported the remaining action items.

- **Strafford MPO Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Appointments**
Mr. Ortmann made the motion to approve the appointment of Mr. Nichols to the SMPO TAC and Mr. LaRose as the alternate. Mr. Watman seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.
- **Green Commute Week**
Mr. Watman made the motion to approve the expenditure of money to promote Green Commute Week and the donation of fares collected on Try Transit Day. Mr. Ortmann suggested that the wording be changed to “not to exceed \$1200” so that the Board would not be relying on a potentially subjective definition of “approximately \$1,000.” Mr. Watman agreed to that amendment, and Mr. Ortmann seconded. Ms. Broderick asked how staff would choose which charities would receive the donated fares. Mr. LaRose stated that last year, the fares were split among food pantries in the service area. Staff had wanted to help the passengers who needed it the most. Mr. Nichols said the other option would be emergency shelters. Cross Roads is well funded now, but there are other shelters in Rochester and Dover that are struggling financially.

Mr. Anderson asked why the bus wasn't free on Try Transit Day. Mr. LaRose said the main goal of Try Transit Day was to encourage people who do not already ride the bus to try it. Free fares would only reward the people who ride the bus as a necessity, but the idea of a charitable donation might be more appealing to others. Mr. Nichols stated that last year, the food banks were very appreciative of the money. Mr. LaRose added that thousands of flyers advertising Green Commute Week were given to local grocery stores along the route to put in bags. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Ortmann stated that he is continually surprised by how many people watch local Rochester TV. If staff could identify the appropriate contacts, local TV stations and community websites would be a very low-cost way to

get the information out.

Mr. Nichols said that the transit association has not yet decided which day of the Commute Green period will be Try Transit Day.

Discussion Items

- **Regional Coordination Program Update**

Ms. Smith gave the Board an update on recent coordination efforts. She mentioned that the SCC usually meets in Concord, but would be meeting at the Portsmouth library on June 10th. ACT had a strategic planning summit on April 12th with a facilitator from Good Group Decisions. Over the course of the four-hour meeting, ACT coalesced around several goals: a phased-in approach, COAST as the lead agency, a brokerage not necessarily being the end result, and the decision to re-draft the work plan. Ms. Smith spoke with Kit Morgan about ACT's application for federal funds, and Mr. Morgan indicated that ACT would be successful. Ms. Smith reminded the Board of the things that this funding would support: travel training for the elderly and disabled, weekly demand-response service using volunteer drivers in rural areas that have no service currently, a full-time volunteer coordinator, and a vehicle to be driven by volunteers but owned by COAST. However, the funding for the vehicle is not certain.

Ms. Smith also mentioned that the SCC had discussed insurance issues regarding coordination. Mr. Ortmann whether this had been resolved as part of the legislation the Board had previously discussed. Mr. Nichols said that these insurance issues were related to the prospect of different agencies sharing drivers and vehicles.

Ms. Broderick asked whether this funding would change TASC's operations at all. Ms. Smith said that it would not. The full time volunteer coordinator would work on establishing volunteer networks in areas that are underserved or not served at all by other transportation services. In the long term, calls for TASC rides would come to COAST, and that would free up Carol Gulla to focus on more administrative matters and potential expansion of the TASC service area.

VIII. Information Items

Mr. Nichols stated that he had provided a lot of information, and would be happy to answer any questions.

Mr. Watman commented that the city manager puts the previous year's funding figures with the current year's funding requests. The amount that he recommends bears no relation to the amount actually approved.

Ms. Copeland stated that the Strafford Regional Planning Commission succeeded in getting federal funding to assume the management of the transportation management agency that runs Seacoast Commuter Options, which it hopes to reactivate. Seacoast Commuter Options is a ridesharing and carpooling organization.

Mr. Nichols commented that ridership remains high, and that COAST is on track to hit 400,000 rides by the end of the year.

Mr. Ortmann said that cuts can be proposed at the last minute, especially in communities with tax caps, and that COAST should develop a contingency plan for spreading the word so that passengers can respond. Mr. Gerjuoy expressed interest in helping to develop a transit advocacy group outside COAST.

XI. Adjournment

Mr. Ortmann made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Broderick seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 10:20 AM.