

**Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation
Minutes of the Board of Directors
Wednesday, April 22, 2009**

Members Present: Jim Wiggin – Chairman, Jon Frederick – Vice Chair, Cynthia Copeland – Secretary/Treasurer, Scott Bogle, Carol Gulla, Dan Merhalski, Kenn Ortmann, Chris Sterndale, Sylvia vonAulock

COAST Staff Present: Rad Nichols, Jeremy LaRose, Jenn Knox

Proxy: Richard Hayes, Maria Stowell

I. Call to Order

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

II. Public Comment

Mr. Nichols congratulated Ms. vonAulock on her recent award for her workforce housing efforts. He then read a letter from Brentwood resident Elaine Smoody advocating for summer service to Hampton Beach this year. Ms. vonAulock received a copy of this letter as well, and stated that she has wanted the Beach Bus service on the agenda. Mr. Nichols stated that the staff has put off discussion of the service because it expects no municipal support from Exeter, Hampton, and Epping, and does not expect to be able to generate private funding to continue the service. Mr. Wiggin asked that Mr. Nichols send a letter to Ms. Smoody confirming that her letter was read to the Board. He would like this service to be added to the May agenda.

Ms. Copeland asked whether COAST was still planning to start a service between Exeter and Epping. Mr. Nichols replied that there may be some interest in an express bus from the Epping Park and Ride to the Tradeport. Ms. vonAulock stated that Exeter's new transportation committee might be a good venue for discussion of the Beach Bus and a possible reworking of Route 7. Mr. Nichols added that the only way to attract riders on Route 7 is to offer more frequent service, and to do that for a similar cost the service would need to be limited to Newmarket, Stratham and Exeter.

III. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Frederick made the motion to approve the minutes of the March 25, 2009 meeting, and Mr. Ortmann seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

IV. Financial Report

There was no financial report to present. Mr. Nichols stated that he had received a letter from the United Way of the Greater Seacoast informing COAST that we can expect a 45% to 60% reduction in our grant this year. Mr. Wiggin stated that he would like to skip the discussion item for now, and proceed directly to the action and information items.

VI. Action Items

- **Portable Storage Containers**

- Mr. Nichols presented a summary of the desire to procure two (2) used 40'

portable storage containers using funds received under ARRA. Mr. Frederick made the motion to authorize the purchase of these containers and Ms. Gulla seconded. Ms. Copeland asked whether this fell under ARRA as a green project. Mr. Nichols stated that it is in support of COAST's preventative maintenance effort as the containers would be used to store parts. Mr. Ortmann stated that staff should make sure that we have any necessary permits. Ms. VonAulock asked to make a friendly amendment that the Board's authorization be contingent on the City of Dover's approval. The friendly amendment was accepted. The motion to authorize the funds to purchase the containers passed unanimously.

- **Bus Shelters**

Mr. Nichols presented a summary of the desire to procure 12 new bus shelters using funds received under ARRA. The new shelters would be the same design as has recently been procured. There was some discussion about the possibility of adding solar lighting to backlight advertising or to increase visibility inside the shelters. Staff noted that solar backlighting for the advertising would cost an additional \$3,750 per shelter. COAST did not have a quote for the solar overhead lighting inside the shelter. Ms. vonAulock asked whether there are any locations where overhead lighting would be particularly useful. Mr. LaRose responded that COAST has not determined where the new shelters are going yet. Mr. Nichols added that the shelters will not arrive for approximately 12 weeks after the order is placed, so we have plenty of time to decide on locations. Mr. LaRose added that the lighting can be added later. Mr. Bogle asked whether Alternate Transit Advertising (ATA) knows how much additional revenues could be generated by selling backlit ads. Mr. Nichols stated that he did not know, nor did he know if communities would allow it. He added that if the purchase of the shelters was put off until the next meeting, COAST risked missing the construction season for installation. Mr. Merhalski suggested that since COAST can use stimulus money to purchase the lighting, we should add the lighting separately later. The motion passed unanimously.

- **Shop Equipment**

Mr. Nichols presented a summary of the desire to procure shop equipment using funds received under ARRA. Ms. vonAulock made the motion to authorize the procurement of the shop equipment, and Mr. Ortmann seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

- **Interior Lighting Upgrade and Efficiencies**

Mr. Nichols asked the Board of Directors if they would entertain another action item now or under new business. He had just received a quote from the PSNH contractor for lighting upgrades to the facility. Mr. Wiggin allowed Mr. Nichols to proceed. Mr. Nichols presented a summary of the quote received, noting that it was from a PSNH contractor and that it was for a lighting retrofit of the entire interior of the facility. The quote received was lower than the 3 estimates COAST had previously received for a lighting retrofit in just the shop part of the facility. Ms. Copeland made the motion to proceed with the upgrade, and Ms. vonAulock seconded. Mr. Frederick added that he has dealt with these contractors before and they have been outstanding. Ms. Copeland stated that she would like to see new diffusers to make the light less obtrusive for office workers. If such diffusers are not part of the upgrade, she would like to make a friendly amendment to add them if the payback were still under two years. Ms. vonAulock made the motion

to approve the amendment and Ms. Gulla seconded. Mr. Sterndale suggested adding a price limit. Mr. Nichols stated that he generally has authority to spend up to \$2,500 at his discretion. The Board agreed that he could spend up to \$2,500 additional on upgraded light diffusers. The motion passed unanimously.

VII. Information Items

- **FTA ARRA Grant**

Mr. Nichols stated that COAST would likely be the first transit property in Region 1 to receive an ARRA grant. He added that while COAST does have pre-award authority, spending too much money before we receive the grant could create cash flow problems.

- **Ridership Update**

Mr. Nichols informed the Board that ridership had dropped in January and February, but appeared to be slowly climbing back to FY08 levels. He noted that Strafford County has been the hardest hit per capita in terms of layoffs, and drivers had been citing lay-offs as one reason that ridership has been declining.

V. Discussion Item

- **Town of Newington**

Mr. Nichols presented two ways that COAST could begin serving Newington Town Hall, in accordance with the selectmen's request. One involved diverting Route 2, and one involved a feeder service. He noted that COAST does not currently have enough time in the schedule or funding to offer either of these as a near term solution.

Ms. von Aulock asked Mr. Morgan what happened in 1996-1997 to cause Newington to stop funding COAST. Mr. Morgan explained that one of the selectmen had a personal dispute with COAST's Executive Director at the time. Mr Nichols noted that at the time the town and the mall each contributed equally to COAST to make up Newington's local match contribution. About the same time that the town stopped funding COAST, the mall came under new management, and it decided to stop funding COAST too.

Mr. Morgan mentioned that the person in authority with regard to the mall, Mr. Shupp, is in Atlanta, so it can be difficult to arrange a meeting. Mr. Morgan said he would try to find out when Mr. Shupp will be in New Hampshire next.

Mr. Ortmann asked Mr. Morgan if he expected to see any ridership from Newington's town center, and Mr. Morgan said he did not.

Mr. Wiggin suggested that COAST re-establish contact with the mall, and suggested that one option is not serving the mall at all. Mr. vonAulock said that this was not a good solution since so many of our riders get off at the mall. Mr.

Frederick said that many of the residents going to Newington are Portsmouth residents, and even though Portsmouth does not agree with Newington's position on funding COAST, Portsmouth does not want to hurt its own residents by pushing for cutting service to the mall. Mr. Merhaski suggested a cost-benefit analysis to see what cutting service to Newington would mean for our riders.

Mr. LaRose said he is strongly against cutting service to Newington or imposing surcharges on riders in Newington. The vast majority of the riders going to Newington by bus do not have access to a vehicle, and they depend on the service to get them to their jobs. A surcharge would do nothing to affect the people who are making this decision in Newington.

Mr. Merhalski stated that right now, all the other communities are subsidizing service in Newington. He asked why Farmington should face cuts due to the state's budget cuts when Newington isn't paying at all. Ms. Gulla said that COAST should keep in mind that we really serve the people in the Seacoast, not the specific towns.

Mr. Bogle mentioned a study he had heard about that showed that every passenger who got off the bus at a particular Wal-Mart spent an average of \$10 in Wal-Mart. Perhaps COAST could work with the Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce on a similar study here, to show the commercial value of bus service. He also suggested getting a few involved Newington residents to go to the meetings and rally others to support COAST. Mr. Ortmann voiced strong support for a grassroots approach.

Mr. Nichols stated that 13% to 15% of all COAST boardings are at the Malls. COAST has very few leverage points, and must wait for a shift in mindset relative to COAST within the town leadership. Mr. Morgan stated that he had managed to bring the Planning Board to his way of thinking about COAST, but they will not talk it up in public because they have other priorities.

Mr. Merhalski stated that we should present the proposed service options for downtown Newington, which the selectmen have asked for. He said even if Newington was willing to spend the \$3,000 they contributed before, that would be a good start.

Ms. Copeland stated that this issue with Newington highlights the larger problem with the local match funding for COAST. Newer services like the Spaulding Express would not directly serve the residents of any particular town, either. Mr. Nichols stated that Stratham has also been under-funding COAST. Ms. Gulla stated that she knows only two Stratham residents who actually use the system. Ms. vonAulock said that the same objection could be made in Exeter. The bus serves the downtown commercial areas, not the areas where most residents actually live. She did not feel that this was a valid argument against funding COAST however.

Mr. LaRose stated that this is a major issue statewide. COAST is not a transit authority, so we cannot require funding from anyone, and the state does nothing to encourage or require funding. Mr. Nichols mentioned Senate Bill 186, which would establish transportation policy in New Hampshire. The bill is currently in committee in the House.

Mr. Wiggin asked that Newington be made discussion item #2 for the next meeting.

VIII. Old Business

Mr. Nichols had no old business to discuss.

IX. New Business

Mr. Nichols mentioned that Green Commute Week was coming up in May. Friday, May 15th would be Bike to Work Day, and Wednesday May 13th would be Ride Public Transit Over the Hump Day. Mr. Nichols stated that COAST would like to donate the fares collected on Ride Over the Hump Day to the New Hampshire Food Pantry. For other events in the past, COAST has asked riders to donate a canned good in exchange for a free ride, but we did not collect much quality food in response, and the food we did collect was difficult to store on the buses. Mr. Nichols estimated that a day's worth of fares would likely come to \$600-\$700. Ms. vonAulock made the motion to authorize the donation of this day's fares, and Ms. Gulla seconded. Mr. Ortmann suggested that staff also ask grocery stores within the region to match COAST's donation. The motion was approved unanimously.

Mr. Nichols stated that COAST would be surveying riders between May 19th and May 21st, and welcomed volunteers to help hand out the surveys.

Ms. Copeland reminded the Board that the forms for the prioritization of projects for the Ten Year Plan are due by Friday. She additionally noted that the number one priority to date had been regional transit. Mr. Nichols stated that COAST's form would be done and submitted by the end of the week.

X. Adjournment

Mr. Ortmann made the motion to adjourn the meeting, and Ms. Gulla seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 10:55 AM.