

RECORD OF EVENTS

Pursuant to written notice sent to Board Members and pursuant to notice posted at least forty-eight hours prior to the meeting, copies of said notice having been sent to the Secretary of the Commonwealth, William F. Galvin and the Secretary of the Executive Office of Administration and Finance, Kristen Lepore, the meeting of the Advisory Board of the Franklin Regional Transit Authority was held on November 30, 2016 at the John W. Olver Transit Center, 12 Olive St., Greenfield, MA 01301.

1. INTRODUCTIONS:

Present were the following Advisory Board Members and/or Member Designees:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	26.29
Lance Fritz	Leyden	1.00
Jeff Singleton	Montague	13.37
Diana Schindler	Orange	3.85
Ruth Preston	Southwick	<u>2.74</u>
	Total	47.25

Also present were:

Tina M. Cote, FRTA Administrator, Michael Perreault, FRTA Assistant Administrator, Amy Rau, FRTA Administrative Assistant, Lisa Paquette, FTM Acting General Manager, George Touloumtzis, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee, Paul Dunphy, office of Representative Stephen Kulik, Jessie Cooley, office of Representative Paul Mark, Megan Rhodes, Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Lindsay Rowe, Town of Greenfield, and Russell Fisher, Transportation Justice.

Chairman Lance Fritz called the meeting to order at 10:30pm and it was noted that a quorum **was not** present to hold a meeting.

2. DISCUSSION ON PLANNING FOR FUTURE WEEKEND FIXED ROUTE BUS SERVICE:

Tina M. Cote began the discussion stating that as part of FRTA's completed Comprehensive Service Analysis, the need for weekend service was documented and suggested as an implementation in Phase 2 of the plan. FRTA had begun implementing pieces of Phase 1 from the plan through re-timing of fixed routes, re-structuring some fixed routes, and some costs savings within FRTA's existing budget. FRTA will need additional funding from the state level in order to implement the remainder of the Phases, including weekend service. It was stated that FRTA is the only Massachusetts regional transit authority that does not offer any type of weekend fixed route service. This discussion is intended to start shaping what the FRTA, the

Advisory Board, and other stakeholders think is the best direction for FRTA to take to implement some type of weekend fixed route transportation services.

Jeff Singleton commented that while he thinks it is important for FRTA to provide some type of weekend service, he thinks it's important, and realistic, to start with offering just service on Saturdays or at least partial service on Saturdays. FRTA needs a strategy to implement, and part of the strategy should not ask the state legislature for an unreasonably large amount of funding, and instead start on a smaller scale.

Tina M. Cote added that the CSA estimated that the cost for a full day of Saturday service would be approximately \$420,000 per year. Other peripherals that need to be considered in this discussion are the costs associated with having the transit center opened and staffed, and costs for staffing on-duty managers, dispatchers and vehicle maintenance staff. Michael Perreault clarified that the entire Phase 2 would cost approximately \$420,000 and while the bulk of that cost would come from Saturday service, other parts of the Phase 2 plan included implementing an express bus service between Greenfield and Northampton, and increasing route frequencies in Greenfield.

George Touloumtzis suggested that FRTA look at any existing data and route schedules from the GMTA when they provided fixed route service years ago. This may help to give a starting point as to what services could be offered in terms of routes, times, etc. Michael Perreault stated that there is little, if any, historical ridership data from GMTA as they were not forthcoming with information at the time GMTA stopped transportation and FRTA was consolidating their services. There is some existing schedules from when GMTA was offering weekend services that could be useful in analyzing.

Russell Fisher suggested that FRTA stick to the CSA approach and complete all Phase 1 projects to help increase ridership prior to starting on Phase 2 projects. Russell Fisher also commented that other positives that came out of the Phase 1 plan was to reduce and eliminate redundant transportation by better aligning routes and trip times.

Tina M. Cote stated that there are a lot of requests for additional transportation but that weekend service seems to be the number one priority. With any type of new service or additional service, the local towns need to be on board in terms of accepting a piece of the costs through an increase in their local assessments.

George Touloumtzis stated he heard that ridership for FRTA was trending downward. Tina M. Cote explained that since the last round of fixed route changes, the FRTA has seen a decrease in ridership and fares overall have gone down. Some of the decrease in fare collections was anticipated with the last round of fare revisions, as all fares were moved to \$1.25. The downward ridership could be partly due to such things as student enrollment in our area decreasing, the senior population is increasing and moving from fixed route to demand response transportation, or homeless families living in local hotels have all been relocated to other more long term, stable housing. Lisa Paquette also suggested that low fuel prices not only benefit transit operating costs but also could make car ownership and operation easier and more attractive.

There was some discussion on recent public outreach plans to promote public transportation in hopes of increasing ridership. Tina M. Cote highlighted the upcoming Ride the Bus with the Mayor campaign in December and the recent 'Free Friday' campaign on Black Friday.

Jeff Singleton suggested that we meet with MassDOT in Boston. The meeting should help us understand formulas for funding FRTA, along with criteria and expectations for getting additional funding. The meeting should also help us better understand why FRTA is the only regional transit authority in Massachusetts without weekend service. Tina M. Cote stated that she can send a letter to MassDOT requesting the meeting.

Jeff Singleton also asked to see some cost estimate information to help to better understand the amount of money FRTA is looking for. It would be helpful to see an estimate for a whole day of service versus a half day of service.

Michael Perreault asked about the best way of injecting our local legislative delegation into the conversation, and the right way to advocate for funding for weekend service. Paul Dunphy emphasized the importance of meeting with Representative Kulik, Representative Mark, and Senator Rosenberg at the beginning of the budget season, before January or February, as the hard numbers will start going in the budget around March and April.

George Touloumtzis suggested that discussions with state officials should be framed differently explaining that Franklin County is looking to get service back that was cut years ago. George Touloumtzis suggested gathering information on when GMTA ran weekend service and what the service looked like at the time.

Russell Fisher stated that Senator Downing was trying to introduce legislation last session about giving local communities more local control over transportation, such as sales tax initiatives. It is important that communities get behind us and support public transportation.

Megan Rhodes reiterated the need to build up the argument for FRTA and the need for increased funding and re-instating weekend service. FRTA has done a lot of public outreach and have collected public input data that document the need and request for weekend service. The FRTA's Comprehensive Service Analysis has a lot of good information about the list of transit service priorities and costs, but it would be helpful to have those broken down a little bit more to show more accurate costs estimates for weekend service.

Jessie Cooley asked if the \$420,000 called for in the Phase 2 of the CSA represented the total amount needed for weekend service. Tina M. Cote explained that the Phase II also included some other transportation improvements, but that the bulk of that amount would be a good estimate for weekend service operating costs. Megan Rhodes clarified that other improvements for that Phase also included an express run to Northampton, splitting the Greenfield run into two separate routes, and for service on minor holidays. Jessie Cooley also added that Massachusetts is looking to put on the upcoming ballot a 'millionaire's tax', which the legislators will then need to take up at some point to decide on how that funding will be allocated. The initial thought behind the tax would have the funds go towards education and transportation projects.

Megan Rhodes asked about MARTA's (Massachusetts Association of Regional Transit Authorities) role in the legislative process and budget. Tina M. Cote stated that MARTA is an advocate and voice of support for all of the regional transit authorities. Tina M. Cote suggested that we should look to hold a meeting in Greenfield for this group to meet with MassDOT, along with inviting the local legislators and MARTA's executive director.

Lindsay Rowe asked if FRTA has reached out to other local non-profit social service-type organizations, such as Community Action, to help get them on board advocating the need for weekend service and highlight issues their clients face with a lack of transportation options on the weekends. Megan Rhodes stated that she has heard from a group of local social service agencies that have been looking to run their own van and from employers that can fill positions. There was discussion to have organizations and employers send letters of support to FRTA for weekend service. There was further discussion about the potential to challenge social service agencies and local employers to have them ride the FRTA and get them to better understand the services we do have and to advocate for those that we don't.

George Touloumtzis spoke about his experience at Clinical Support Options and working with clients that have been hospitalized and the need to adjust discharge dates on the weekends because he FRTA doesn't have service on the weekends. Lindsay Rowe suggested that stories like those that should be brought to everyone's attention and sees the potential to have someone like the Greenfield Recorder run articles detailing peoples stories and struggles with transportation gaps such as no weekend service.

Tina M. Cote stated that for the next steps she will work on setting up a meeting with MassDOT, local legislators, and MARTA, and in the meantime reach out to social service agencies to get letters of support.

Diana Schindler suggested that we need to focus our message on being the only regional transit authority without any weekend service and that public transportation needs to be reliable for working class families, for employers, and economic development of the community.

Jeff Singleton asked to meet with FRTA after this meeting to discuss cost estimates for a full day of service for all six routes, a full day of service for some routes, and a half day of service for all routes. Tina M. Cote agreed that we could meet offline afterwards to do that.

Diana Schindler asked about the status of the earmark for the Athol/Orange shuttle and if those funds could somehow come over to FRTA. Tina M. Cote explained that the earmark is going away and, that separate from this discussion, FRTA and MART are working on a long term plan once that funding ends in FY18. This discussion will also need to involve the local communities.

Lastly, Russell Fisher stated that we should all have the expectation that the service needs to be in place before we start seeing an uptick in ridership, and not the other way around.

The meeting adjourned at 11:30am.