

Approved 9/18/25

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, Matthew Gorzkowicz, the meeting of the Advisory Board of the Franklin Regional Transit Authority was held on March 20, 2025 virtually on the Zoom.us platform by computer and by phone.

1. INTRODUCTIONS:

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

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>
Paul McLatchy	Ashfield	1.20
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.55
Emily Thurber	Colrain	1.19
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.43
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	33.81
Jeff Singleton	Montague	12.06
Michael Bates	Orange	5.02
Rick LaPierre	Shelburne	2.62
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	1.04
Total		62.92

Also present were:

Tina M. Cote; FRTA Administrator, Michael Perreault; FRTA Deputy Administrator, Wayne Waldron, FTM General Manager, Catherine Connolly, FTM Safety and Training Manager, Elizabeth Sallee, FTM Transportation Supervisor, and Megan Rhodes, FRTA Transit Advisory Committee Chair.

Chairman Eric Twarog called the meeting to order at 4:03 pm and it was noted that a quorum **was** present to hold a meeting.

2. REVIEW AND VOTE TO ACCEPT MINUTES FROM NOVEMBER 21, 2024 MEETING:

Robert J. Decker III made a **motion** to accept the meeting minutes from November 21, 2024, and Susan Bronstein seconded. Jeff Singleton asked if a minor edit could be made on page 10 replacing the word “governor’s” with the word “governance”. There was no objection from anyone to this change and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Paul McLatchy	Ashfield	1.20	Abstain

Peter Otten	Buckland	1.55	Yes
Emily Thurber	Colrain	1.19	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.43	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	33.81	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	12.06	Yes
Michael Bates	Orange	5.02	Yes
Rick LaPierre	Shelburne	2.62	Yes
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	<u>1.04</u>	Yes
Total		62.92	

Yes – 61.72

No – 0.00

Abstain – 1.20

The vote passed and the **motion** carried.

OLD BUSINESS:

3. UPDATE ON WEEKEND FIXED ROUTE SERVICE:

Tina M. Cote reports that since January, we have been running both weekend days consistently, meaning that we have had enough drivers to operate Saturday and Sunday service. We would like to continue operating that for at least six months to make sure we have six months of steady data, then seek feedback from individuals using the service regarding time or stop changes, then weigh that against what funding allows us to do.

We're seeing a lot of ridership on the fixed route on both days, even with the Access program also running. Hiring more drivers took time but it doesn't look like it interfered with what the potential ridership will be. With warmer weather, we anticipate that ridership numbers will continue to go up.

Wayne Waldron adds that people love the weekend service. He didn't think there would be much ridership on Sunday, but it has been surprisingly good.

Jeff Singleton asks about how the weekend service is working with the driver bids.

Tina M. Cote responds that the new drivers being hired are being told that this is part of what they would be doing, people are getting used to the idea, and some drivers who weren't operating weekends are stepping up if there is a shortage.

Jeff Singleton asks about the funding from the "Millionaire's Tax" (Fair Share funds) and other funding sources we have been using, once this stabilizes, that there will be some conversation about how this fits into assessments of the member towns.

Since service has been pretty consistent since January, the six month period would bring us to about July. We're hoping that we can start the process of public participation prior to this date to learn more about the needs and wants to be considered. Once we establish the FY26 budget, we can try to map out costs for the member communities. The Advisory Board will have to vote to continue with weekend service.

4. UPDATE ON FAIR SHARE AMENDMENT:

Tina M. Cote states that we got a little over \$218K this year from the Fair Share Amendment, which was a portion of the \$30M that 13 of the 15 Transit Authorities received. This is a great improvement compared to the year before when we got about \$15K. This has allowed us to continue to be fare-free on fixed-route and suspend fares for Demand Response. Fare-free fixed-route was done with CARES funding, but now we're choosing to use the Fair Share funds.

We should have enough to continue fare-free Demand Response service through October. If we don't get additional Fair Share funds beyond that point, there is the possibility of using other funding sources (CARES, ARPA etc.) to continue both programs fare-free. Tina M. Cote confirms that the Board voted to suspend fixed-route fares through June of 2025. The Board will have to vote whether to extend that for a short period of time, extend it through the following year or suspend them indefinitely.

The RTAs are asking for \$40M in FY26.

NEW BUSINESS:

5. NOMINATION/ELECTION OF VACANT CLERK POSITION THROUGH FY 27:

Tina M. Cote reviewed the responsibilities of the Clerk position: In the absence of the Chair or the Vice-Chair, the Clerk would take over their responsibilities to review the Meeting Minutes for accuracy before we submit them to the Advisory Board for approval, sign our annual resolution of the Advisory Board and all other Authorities that are privy to them under the Clerk position.

For instance, we're voting a little bit later to accept some new buses that requires the Clerk's signature. It doesn't take any additional time in comparison to what everybody's doing with these Board meetings, it's just vacant, and we need somebody to fill that position for us.

Robert J. Decker III made a **motion** to nominate Jeff Singleton as Clerk. Peter Otten seconded, Robert J. Decker III moved to close nominations, and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Paul McLatchy	Ashfield	1.20	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.55	Yes

Emily Thurber	Colrain	1.19	Yes	
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.43	Yes	
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	33.81	Yes	
Jeff Singleton	Montague	12.06	Yes	
Michael Perreault Bates	Orange	5.02		Yes
Rick LaPierre	Shelburne	2.62	Yes	
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	<u>1.04</u>	Yes	
	Total	62.92		

Yes – 62.92

No – 0.00

Abstain – 0.00

The vote passed and the **motion** carried.

6. UPDATE ON SOLAR PANEL PROJECT AT MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS FACILITY:

Tina M. Cote reports that this project is out to bid, the bids are due by March 27 at 2pm, hopefully we can start the project by early summer. If we don't get bids back by March 27th, we will have to get them back out, which would cause a delay. Since we are not the direct recipient of the funds and MassDOT has to review the bid documents first, which can cause delays.

Robert J. Decker III asks who is providing the funds for this project: federal or state and is there any potential of it being cancelled the way a bunch of other things are being cancelled? Tina M. Cote responds that they are MassDOT funds. Michael Perreault adds that they were originally federal highway funds that were slated for FRCOG through the TIP, and they were flexed over to Federal Transit, and then obligated to MassDOT, who will be passing them on to us.

Robert J. Decker III asks if they can be clawed back by the federal. Tina M. Cote states that she does not think that they can because MassDOT has already obligated the funds.

Robert J. Decker III wants clarification before we sign a contract, if it can be cancelled.

Michael Perreault states that we do not have an answer.

7. UPDATE ON MASSCEC GRANT AWARD PROJECT:

Tina M. Cote reminds us that this is another project we had talked about at the last meeting and it is now underway. The Massachusetts Clean Energy and Technology Center awarded us \$932,850. It is going to be used to create, implement, and prioritize a plan to electrify a fleet of buses. It is also going to allow us to purchase 2-3 electric transit vehicles to use on our fixed route. They are going to monitor the usage and findings, create a report, provide some training to staff on how to utilize the vehicles and maintain them. We had our kickoff meeting and this is expected to go through August of 2027 unless we need to extend that timeframe.

It was with help from Megan and FRCOG that we were able to plan for these funds and it was a good surprise that we got these were awarded to us. MassDOT was helping us with a similar project, so this is going to help jump-start that for us. Robert J. Decker III asks also in regards to these funds, if they can be crawled back, Tina M. Cote responds that they can't.

8. UPDATE ON COMMUNITY TRANSIT GRANT PROJECTS:

Tina M. Cote states we just got an extension on our MedRide project. Originally that was a project that we were getting funds so that we could create a new Demand Response volunteer program with the Town of Conway. We didn't get any applications for individuals and received one application for a volunteer driver. It didn't pan out the way we expected it to, so they did give us an extension on that contract. Michael Perreault, Tina M. Cote, and Megan have some ideas utilizing the minivans that we have in our fleet to get individuals who are having mobility issues with wheelchairs/walkers to their doctors' appointments outside of Franklin County. We will figure out how to best serve this underserved population.

We have five vehicles that we are going to be receiving at the end of this month that are replacing vehicles that should have been retired a couple of years ago. COVID created issues that we are now just getting caught up on. There will be other vehicles getting delivered in April and again in June.

We also received an extension on our contract for our Travel Trainer, extending funds through 2026. The program is still developing and is still ongoing. This is an additional person who can do some oversight and outreach for us during the times that Michael Perreault and Tina M. Cote are not available.

Robert J. Decker III asks about the MedRide program, if someone were a patient at Mary Hitchcock in Hanover, or West Lebanon, New Hampshire, we don't do med rides up there? Tina M. Cote responds that usually we do med ride within the state. If there is an exceptional emergency and someone can't find anything and it's in Brattleboro, then we would take that on a case-by-case basis, but basically, the med ride is for doctor's appointments outside Franklin County but within the state. Right now we only have two volunteers so that is part of our problem: we don't have enough drivers who can use their own car to be able to make a very successful program. We have reached out to some of the Councils on Aging to see if we can get some volunteers that way and have them operate through the COA's. Tina M. Cote has also reached out to the VA clinic in Leeds to see if there are any unmet needs there.

Eric Twarog asks about how much time we have with the extension date. Tina M. Cote responds it was extended through FY26.

9. DISCUSSION ON JOINT MASSDOT INNOVATION GRANT PROJECT AND VOTE TO ACCEPT ROLLING STOCK TRANSFER:

Tina M. Cote states we have two projects under the Innovation Grant; one of them is the additional service that we are partnering with PVRTA for Shutesbury and Sunderland. We are getting two additional vans for that project; they should be delivered sometime in April. We have

the Demand Response service for that area already taking place. Once we get those two additional vehicles in our fleet and we have enough drivers, we're going to open up these areas to the general public under the ACCESS program as well. Shutesbury has been asking for service, but there have only been two applications from residents from Shutesbury.

The other Innovation Grant Project we have is a collaboration between FRTA, PVRTA, and Berkshire RTA. Our portion of funding for this project is \$1.3M. The buses will be operating commuter service between Greenfield and North Adams along Rte 2 and Rte 116, Northampton and Pittsfield and along Rte 9. The FRTA's portion of service will be running between Greenfield and North Adams. We will also be able to increase service into Northampton on the hour.

We will be inheriting two motorcoach buses to utilize for these routes. Originally, we were supposed to get buses from MassDOT along with funding to refurbish them but through complications, we ended up finding buses that were in Pennsylvania through another Transit Agency. We will be inheriting another bus or two from the MassDOT grant, while Berkshire and PVRTA are also getting two buses.

We need a resolution passed to accept these two vehicles. There are two 2014 motorcoaches, their value (looking at how many miles are left and how much useful life is left) is between \$33K-\$37K. There is no cost to the FRTA other than having to insure them, register them and maintain them in good working order. We don't have an exact timeframe but we are hopeful that we can start this service sometime in July. We are still working with several towns to establish bus stops. The State is very excited about this collaboration and it is the first of its kind.

Robert J. Decker III notes that both buses have over 400K miles on them, and asks if any mechanic has had a look at them. Tina M. Cote states that Rauley, who used to work for us (then for BRTA and now for PVRTA) has looked at the buses himself in Pennsylvania. He had access to the maintenance records and even though they will probably need some work, we budgeted funds to overhaul those previous buses so we should be covered.

Michael Bates made a **motion** to accept the transfer of the two buses as described in the Resolution. Peter Otten seconded, and the vote was as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Weighted Vote</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Paul McLatchy	Ashfield	1.20	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.55	Yes
Emily Thurber	Colrain	1.19	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.43	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	33.81	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	12.06	Yes
Michael Bates	Orange	5.02	Yes
Rick LaPierre	Shelburne	2.62	Yes
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	1.04	Yes
		Total	62.92

Yes – 62.92

No – 0.00
Abstain – 0.00

The vote passed and the **motion** carried.

10. TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Megan Rhodes gave the following updates from the March 13, 2025, meeting:

The Transit Advisory Committee (TAC) met last week. For those who may not know, this is a committee composed of riders and those who represent riders. We get together to discuss any issues that people are having with the bus system, any feedback, ways to make it better, making sure there is a dialogue between riders, FRTA, and FTM. We have been looking at ways to increase our participation and membership and have been advertising in different ways to get the word out. We had some success with new people attending the meeting and there are also some high school students who are interested in attending as bus riders.

One of the items we discussed was a grant that FRCOG has from a federal agency to better understand barriers to transportation in our unserved areas here in Franklin County, particularly targeting older adults and people with disabilities. FRCOG has been holding focus groups and sending out surveys, Tina M. Cote has attended some focus groups, to try to better understand, particularly with older adults and people with disabilities, what is keeping them from getting rides, and what type of rides do they need in areas where there currently are no services.

As Tina M. Cote mentioned, one of the main needs we found is for medical rides outside of Franklin County, so we are working on solutions such as the minivans. We are compiling the results of these focus groups and surveys and working with Tina M. Cote and Michael Perreault for solutions. Even if they are very conceptual at this point, at least we will have an idea and can start when funding becomes available.

It was mentioned at TAC that a new Riders Guide brochure has been developed, helping riders understand what they can and can't do on the bus.

FRTA has funding to improve signage at bus stops, so TAC discussed what would be more useful to see on signs where there are stops. One thing Elizabeth Sallee mentioned was having a QR code on signs linking to the latest information on the website.

The next Advisory Board meeting will be our Annual meeting on May 15, 2025.

Robert J. Decker III made a motion to adjourn. Paul McLatchy seconded, and the vote was as follows:

Name	Town	Weighted Vote	Vote
Paul McLatchy	Ashfield	1.20	Yes
Peter Otten	Buckland	1.55	Yes
Emily Thurber	Colrain	1.19	Yes

Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.43	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	33.81	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	12.06	Yes
Michael Bates	Orange	5.02	Yes
Rick LaPierre	Shelburne	2.62	Yes
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	1.04	Yes
	Total	62.92	

Yes – 62.92

No – 0.00

Abstain – 0.00

The meeting concluded at 4:45pm.