

Approved 11/20/25

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 September 18, 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>
Karen Kelly	Bernardston	1.47
Andrew Alward	Chester	1.28
Emily Thurber	Colrain	1.19
Veronique Blanchard	Conway	1.03
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.43
Scott Bergeron	Granville	1.00
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	33.81
Jeff Singleton	Montague	12.06
Emily Hill	New Salem	1.00
Michael Bates	Orange	5.02
Susan Dougherty	Petersham	1.00
Rick LaPierre	Shelburne	2.62
Paul Doud	Wendell	1.14
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	1.04
Peter Kane	Whately	1.97
Total		70.06

Also present were:

Tina M. Cote; FRTA Administrator, Michael Perreault; FRTA Deputy Administrator, Wayne Waldron, FTM General Manager, and Catherine Connolly; FTM Safety and Training Manager.

Chairman Eric Twarog called the meeting to order at 4:07 pm and it was noted that a quorum was present to hold a meeting.

2. Review and Vote to Accept Minutes from March 20, 2025 and May 29, 2025:

Jeff Singleton made a **motion** to accept the meeting minutes from March 20, 2025, Susan Bronstein seconded, and the vote was as follows:

Name	Town	Weighted Vote	Vote
Karen Kelly	Bernardston	1.47	Abstain

Andrew Alward	Chester	1.28	Abstain
Emily Thurber	Colrain	1.19	Yes
Veronique Blanchard	Conway	1.03	Abstain
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.43	Yes
Scott Bergeron	Granville	1.00	Abstain
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	33.81	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	12.06	Yes
Emily Hill	New Salem	1.00	Abstain
Michael Bates	Orange	5.02	Not Present
Susan Dougherty	Petersham	1.00	Abstain
Rick LaPierre	Shelburne	2.62	Yes
Paul Doud	Wendell	1.14	Abstain
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	1.04	Yes
Peter Kane	Whately	<u>1.97</u>	Yes
		Total	70.06

Yes – 55.15

No – 0.00

Abstain – 9.89

Not Present – 5.02

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

Rick LaPierre made a **motion** to accept the meeting minutes from May 29, 2025, Susan Bronstein seconded, and the vote was as follows:

Name	Town	Weighted Vote	Vote
Karen Kelly	Bernardston	1.47	Abstain
Andrew Alward	Chester	1.28	Abstain
Emily Thurber	Colrain	1.19	Yes
Veronique Blanchard	Conway	1.03	Abstain
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.43	Yes
Scott Bergeron	Granville	1.00	Abstain
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	33.81	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	12.06	Yes
Emily Hill	New Salem	1.00	Abstain
Michael Bates	Orange	5.02	Not Present
Susan Dougherty	Petersham	1.00	Abstain
Rick LaPierre	Shelburne	2.62	Yes
Paul Doud	Wendell	1.14	Abstain
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	1.04	Yes
Peter Kane	Whately	<u>1.97</u>	Yes
		Total	70.06

Yes – 55.15

No – 0.00

Abstain – 9.89

Not Present – 5.02

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

3. Update on Try Transit Funding with Discussion and Vote to Suspend D/R Fares through June 30, 2026:

Tina M. Cote states that we voted at one of the last meetings to indefinitely suspend fares for the fixed route, and this vote is now for the Demand Response, for anyone who is over 60. We had the funding, we still have a little bit left, we haven't gotten the actual contract for FY26 yet, but hears that it is on its way. We are 90% sure that we are going to get what we got last year and maybe a little bit more, but even if we got a little bit less than we did last year, we're still in a good position to suspend the fares for Demand Response transportation through June 30th for all of our Demand Response towns that we provide service to, and that includes Med Ride.

Tina M. Cote requests a discussion and perhaps vote on whether to extend the suspension of fares for Demand Response through June of 2026, or where that leaves us.

Jeff Singleton states that he is in favor of this since there is the impression that the money is probably going to be there. Jeff Singleton also requests a reminder description of the Med Ride program.

Tina M. Cote states that the Med Ride program is our volunteer program where we match volunteers. We are waiving the fee we usually collect for the milage stipend. We usually collect \$0.40 per mile from the individuals that we transport, and that would be waived as well.

Rick LaPierre made a **motion** to suspend demand response fares through June 30, 2026, Scott Bergeron seconded, and the vote was as follows:

Name	Town	Weighted Vote	Vote
Karen Kelly	Bernardston	1.47	Yes
Andrew Alward	Chester	1.28	Yes
Emily Thurber	Colrain	1.19	Yes
Veronique Blanchard	Conway	1.03	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.43	Yes
Scott Bergeron	Granville	1.00	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	33.81	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	12.06	Yes
Emily Hill	New Salem	1.00	Yes
Michael Bates	Orange	5.02	Not Present
Susan Dougherty	Petersham	1.00	Yes
Rick LaPierre	Shelburne	2.62	Yes
Paul Doud	Wendell	1.14	Yes
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	1.04	Yes
Peter Kane	Whately	<u>1.97</u>	Yes
		Total	70.06

Yes – 65.04

No – 0.00
Abstain – 0.00
Not Present – 5.02

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

4. Discussion and Vote on Employer Health Insurance Contributions:

Tina M. Cote states that we are part of the Hampshire Group Insurance Trust. There was an increase from last year to the beginning of July of about 18%, and then October 1st there was another increase of about 20%. We have nine individuals that we employ now at the FRTA. A little bit more than one-third of them are on the insurance. Right now, FRTA is contributing 75% of the cost. Tina M. Cote proposes that we increase this to 80% to make up the difference in the increase. It's about \$3,015 for FY26 if we are to do that. It would be an added incentive to help our employees out who are already dealing with, as everyone knows, the increase in costs in everything, and already taking the first hit in July, and now the second one. Tina wonders if this is something we could table for discussion, whether we want to do this now until the end of June to see if costs go down or if things change. Tina M. Cote does not believe it would be worth it for us to go through GIC or MIIA because we're too small so we aren't going to get competitive pricing. Everyone on FRTA insurance now has been here for 15 years or more. Tina M. Cote does not anticipate having any new hires who this would apply to, but she is curious as to what everyone's thoughts are on this, if this is something we want to do from now going forward or if it is something we can do for this year until we can figure out how things are going to work out with the insurance trust going forward into FY27.

Robert J. Decker asks for clarification, confirming that we are currently covering 75%, and asks about when there will be an 18% increase.

Tina M. Cote clarifies that the 18% increase has already happened, that the employees saw the 18% increase come out of their checks in June for the July increase, and they saw the additional increase come out of their checks in September for the October increase.

Robert J. Decker states that this would then mean an increase of 18% over what was already budgeted.

Tina M. Cote clarifies further that this would amount to a \$3,015 increase in the budget because only four of our employees are on our insurance, and the others are covered by other health care coverage.

Robert J. Decker voices concerns that if money gets tight, we will be very squeezed.

Tina M. Cote confirms that's why she suggests we only make this for until June, and address this again later when we have more clarity about where costs will be. We have room in the budget for this cost, which she will go over later with some more awards that we got, so it's not going to have a huge impact. We are going to have to move a line item away from it, but it's about \$3K.

Jeff Singleton states that he agrees with Robert J. Decker that he would go along with the increase through June 30th, but would want other options reviewed in the meantime, including the GIC,

Scott Bergeron asks how many employees are on the insurance.

Tina M. Cote responds that there are four on the health insurance out of the nine employees.

Veronique Blanchard wants to check if we can legally change the percentage for just a short time and then go back again, and clarifies that she's not sure that she could do that in a town, so that's why she is asking.

Eric Twarog asks Tina M. Cote if she has an answer to that.

Tina M. Cote states that she does not, but that she spoke with FRCOG, which processes our payroll, and asked if there was going to be an issue if we did that, and she said it would not be.

Veronique Blanchard states that this would be payroll, and wants to know if there would be a different legal way to compensate the employees rather than change the whole policy going from 75 to 80.

Tina M. Cote states that we could pay the employees the difference between now and then directly; that it would be more work for the bookkeeper, but we could do that. We are pre-taxing our health benefit, so Tina M. Cote would have to see how that works if the bookkeeper would have them pay the monthly difference, but this is something we could do from now until the end of June and then revisit it.

Tina M. Cote reiterates that nobody knows what's going to happen in 2027; we're still in meetings, looking at other options, exploring things, but that could be an option as well, where we give the difference to employees separately every month rather than increase it to 80% for that short period of time.

Robert J. Decker notes that these people are not union employees at present, and that if you had a union, you would never do this, because you would be bound, going forward. You could give them a \$50/mo bonus if that was the difference, and do that for the 10 months from Oct. 1st through June, do it as a bonus, and obviously it would be taxable, but we don't want to get ourselves into a situation where we're bound going forward if these people file for a union and it's an existing part of the contract and we would be stuck with it forever.

Tina M. Cote states that she does not see any position in which we would unionize, we are not transit operators, this is administrative staff.

Rick LaPierre states that this is pretty straight-forward that this is a temporary vote of the Advisory Board, with an end date, that we don't have to worry about setting up new accounting and new pay, and that we can go ahead with good conscience and increase it from 75 to 80, which everyone expected because we had that 18% advance warning for the beginning of July.

The surprise is the extra 20% on top of that starting October 1st, so Robert J. Decker believes that we should just proceed and make a motion on that on a temporary basis, which can always be undone at a future meeting, and would expire on a specific date in the motion.

Susan Bronstein asks what is the guarantee that the health insurance trust is not going to raise their rates again before June, and proposes that there isn't one.

Michael Perrault confirms that there is not a guarantee.

Susan Bronstein continues that 80% is a big percentage, and this is a fragile thing, what is going on with insurance right now, but she is in favor of helping people out, and that if there is money in the account that we should do it, and it could be more by the end of June.

Jeff Singleton states that they have been going through this in Montague, including with unionized employees, and everyone is in that trust, and the trust itself is a fragile thing right now, in bad shape, so we aren't going to know much, so it's good to do this for now.

Tina M. Cote agrees with Susan Bronstein that the 80% could be very scary if this goes up even more, but either way, whether we compensate employees directly or go to 80%, this would only be on a temporary basis until Tina M. Cote has a chance to go through things more and determine what our next step is in terms of whether we stay with the trust or go elsewhere.

Robert J. Decker III made a **motion** to temporarily adjust the employer health insurance contribution from 75% to 80% through June 30, 2026, and that in between, prior to any further conditions of going forward, we need to come back and revisit it in a meeting in the spring as to what we are going to do going forward, and that would include looking at the GIC. Jeff Singleton seconded, and the vote was as follows:

Name	Town	Weighted Vote	Vote
Karen Kelly	Bernardston	1.47	Yes
Andrew Alward	Chester	1.28	Yes
Emily Thurber	Colrain	1.19	Yes
Veronique Blanchard	Conway	1.03	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.43	Yes
Scott Bergeron	Granville	1.00	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	33.81	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	12.06	Yes
Emily Hill	New Salem	1.00	Yes
Michael Bates	Orange	5.02	Yes
Susan Dougherty	Petersham	1.00	Abstain
Rick LaPierre	Shelburne	2.62	Yes
Paul Doud	Wendell	1.14	Yes
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	1.04	Yes
Peter Kane	Whately	<u>1.97</u>	Yes
		Total	70.06

Yes – 69.06

No – 0.00
Abstain – 1.00

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

5. Update on Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan (CRTP):

Tina M. Cote notes that we are starting our Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan, which is our 5-year plan with an outlook as to where we would like to see transportation in 5 years. So far we have had two meetings with stakeholders, and Tina M. Cote would like to say thank you to those here who have participated in that; it is much appreciated. We have also done some tabling at GCC, we went to the Mohawk Community Resource Event last night, we're meeting with the Sheriff's Triad event next week, we've reached out to the South County Senior Center, and we're also going to be going to the Greenfield COA later this month. They are keeping our surveys open through the end of this month. At this point, FRTA is leading all of the other RTAs in terms of the amounts of surveys that we have collected so far, so we have gotten a lot of good feedback. Tina M. Cote wants to make sure that those here are able to participate in that if you haven't already, or at least take the survey if you can.

Tina M. Cote reiterates that the surveys will close at the end of the month, and asks Michael Perrault if we have an idea of when the actual transit plan will be completed.

Michael Perrault does not recall offhand, but offers that we have one consultant that is working with the entire state of 15 RTAs on updating our transit plans. Michael Perrault knows that there is a deadline of when to get all the plans finalized and sent to MassDOT, and believes it is early 2026, but is not 100% sure. Michael Perrault offers that he can make a note and talk to the consultants the next time that we meet with them.

Jeff Singleton asks who is the consultant.

Michael Perrault answers it is AECOM.

Scott Bergernon, Granville, asks if he can get the survey sent to him as a new member.

Eric Twarog asks Tina M. Cote if she can resend that to the who group, and Tina M. Cote agrees that we can send it to all of the Advisory Board members again, and Michael Perrault volunteers that he will send this out again.

Robert J. Decker asks if this plan will come back to our Board for approval, or if the consultant is going to take all of the information, compile it, and pass it along.

Tina M. Cote confirms that it doesn't need Board approval, everyone will get a copy of it, and that basically it's just recommendations on how they think we are doing and how we can improve on services. We had one done back in 2020, and it's basically a running document based on everybody's inputs that they have been collecting.

Michael further clarifies that the Board is not bound to anything. It gives us a sense of where we could be over the next five years, so as we are looking for grant opportunities, and we look to target additional transit services, we'll look at that plan to see what people are looking for, and then we would look for a grant source or that type of thing to see if we can roll out. Obviously at the end of it, much like what we did with the Access program, we would have to come back and get a vote to make it, whatever we do, on a permanent basis.

Jeff Singleton notes that legally, the Board doesn't approve these things, but it bothers him because it is stated as the FRTA's plan, and the Board doesn't vote on it, so that makes it more of a recommendation.

Tina M. Cote affirms that this is exactly what it is; a recommendation of what we would like to see in the next five years, but we are not adding any service, because if we do that, we have to get the Board approval. For example, if it comes back saying that Greenfield needs more service, then we bring that to the Advisory Board so that we can vote on it. If there's a recommendation that we need to do something else in a different town and we have the funding to do it, again, we bring that back to the Advisory Board.

So, we aren't bound to anything, it is just a lot of data that they are collecting to see where the gaps may be in our service areas.

6. Transit Advisory Committee Updates:

Tabled until the next meeting because Megan is not in attendance.

7. FRTA Updates:

Tina M. Cote reports that we now have a new assistant general manager, Joseph Jacobs. He started, Tina M. Cote believes on September 8th, so that position is now filled.

Tina M. Cote's second update is that we are waiting on the supplemental capital budget to proceed with our bid on the solar panels at the maintenance facility in Turners; we may know more at the November meeting.

Tina M. Cote's third update is that the Link 413 is slated to be operational, hopefully by mid-November. That is connecting routes between PVRTA, FRTA, and BRTA. With that will come some increased runs on the Charlemont run, the Northampton run, the Sunderland run, and Rt 20 in Greenfield, so we will have some additional services there as well. This is grant-funded, so nothing is coming off cherry sheets for the towns, so we don't need to vote on it right away; it's just something that we applied for and we were able to get funding for, and we're going to see how it operates.

Tina M. Cote continues, we have several grant opportunities that we are working on with the Town of Bernardston and Northfield, and that we are also looking to hopefully open up Hilltown

CDC so it can include the general public; right now they're just providing trips for Demand Response individuals over 60. This would open it up to the general public.

Starting back in mid-August, we included the towns of Tolland and Granfield within the Southwick contract that is currently being operated by Hulmes, so now those two towns have access to services through those programs as well.

We are pretty much complete with our audit. There is an audit committee/ finance committee meeting next week to confirm all of that, so we will be meeting our deadlines there.

Finally, we were just awarded another \$400K to continue weekend service, so we have that funding for another year as well. Hopefully, now that we're staffed and haven't had any interruption in service in the past few months, we're going to have to go out to the public and see what's working, what's not working how we can make improvements and then we can come back to the Board, and ask what their opinions are, and whether they want to continue this service, and then we can explain what the costs will be to each town that's involved in that.

Rick LaPierre asks where the \$400K came from.

Tina M. Cote responds that it is a state-funded grant, and it came from The Governor's Office.

8. Discussion of any subject not anticipated prior to the notice being sent to the Advisory Board Members pursuant to Article II, section 4 of the by-laws or anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting pursuant to the Open Meeting Law or a subject which cannot be delayed until the next Advisory Board meeting, including the need for an executive session.

Jeff Singleton states he is also on the Parks and Recreation Board, and he notes that there is a proposal for a bus stop on First Street in Montague, and no one had told Jeff Singleton about it.

Tina M. Cote states that we just got emails from them as well, from a bunch of different towns as well, so it wasn't anything that FRTA put in, it's probably something that they are developing through the construction process. FRTA did not notify Jeff Singleton because FRTA just heard about it as well, and Tina M. Cote believes they are working through the process of it all. Tina M. Cote knows that the Town was included as well, because she saw some of the comments, and suggests that Jeff Singleton follow up with the Town of Montague to make sure that he is included in this discussion going forward.

Robert J. Decker III made a **motion** to adjourn, Michael Bates seconded, and the vote was as follows:

Name	Town	Weighted Vote	Vote
Karen Kelly	Bernardston	1.47	Yes
Andrew Alward	Chester	1.28	Yes
Emily Thurber	Colrain	1.19	Yes
Veronique Blanchard	Conway	1.03	Yes
Robert J. Decker III	Deerfield	4.43	Yes

Scott Bergeron	Granville	1.00	Yes
Eric Twarog	Greenfield	33.81	Yes
Jeff Singleton	Montague	12.06	Yes
Emily Hill	New Salem	1.00	Yes
Michael Bates	Orange	5.02	Yes
Susan Dougherty	Petersham	1.00	Yes
Rick LaPierre	Shelburne	2.62	Yes
Paul Doud	Wendell	1.14	Yes
Susan Bronstein	Westhampton	1.04	Yes
Peter Kane	Whately	<u>1.97</u>	Yes
Total		70.06	

Yes – 70.06

No – 0.00

Abstain – 0.00

Not Present – 0.00

The vote passed, the **motion** carried, and the meeting adjourned at 4:51pm.