

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY
MEETING OF THE ADVISORY BOARD

January 21, 2021

4:00 PM

BRTA Intermodal Transportation Center

One Columbus Avenue Pittsfield, MA 01201

ZOOM BOARD MINUTES

Berkshire Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board Members Present:

Bruce Bernstein, Egremont; Tate Coleman, Great Barrington; James Sullivan, Hinsdale; Andrea Wadsworth, Lee; Marybeth Mitts, Lenox; Sherry Youngkin, New Ashford; Caleb Mitchell, Peru; Sheila Irvin, Pittsfield; Jamie Minacci, Stockbridge; Brian O’Grady, Williamstown; and Douglas McNally, Windsor.

Berkshire Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board Members Absent:

Christine Hoyt, Adams; Peggy Rae Henden-Wilson, Alford; William Elovirta, Becket; Edmund St. John IV, Cheshire; Ronald Boucher, Clarksburg; John Boyle, Dalton; Neil Olson, Florida; Gordon Hubbard, Lanesborough; Don Coburn, Monterey; Jim Lovejoy, Mt. Washington; Sandra Lamb, North Adams; William Hiller, Otis; Alan Hanson, Richmond; John Tynan, Savoy; Rene Wood, Sheffield; and Rose Borgins, Washington.

Also present: Robert Malnati, Sarah Vallieres, and Barbara White- BRTA staff; Rauley Caine and Ron Andronaco- BTM/PMB staff; and Clete Kus-BRPC

	Voting Shares	Present	
Adams	2.20	0.00	
Alford	1.00	0.00	
Becket	1.00	0.00	
Cheshire	2.08	0.00	
Clarksburg	1.00	0.00	33.00
Dalton	2.20	0.00	needed for
Egremont	1.00	1.00	quorum
Florida	1.00	0.00	
Great Barrington	4.10	4.10	41.09 present via
Hinsdale	1.27	1.27	ZOOM
Lanesborough	2.89	0.00	
Lee	3.71	3.71	
Lenox	3.27	3.27	
Monterey	1.00	0.00	
Mt. Washington	1.00	0.00	
New Ashford	1.12	1.12	
North Adams	4.49	0.00	
Otis	1.00	0.00	
Peru	1.00	1.00	
Pittsfield	19.49	19.49	
Richmond	1.00	0.00	
Sheffield	1.04	0.00	
Stockbridge	2.82	2.82	
Washington	1.00	0.00	
Williamstown	2.31	2.31	
Windsor	1.00	1.00	
Disability Community	1.00	0.00	

1) **ROLL CALL**

Ms. Irvin called the ZOOM meeting to order at 4:00 PM. Ms. Vallieres performed a roll call of the Advisory Board Members who were present on ZOOM.

2) **MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 19, 2020 MEETING-VOTE**

Mr. Coleman made a motion to accept the minutes of the November 19, 2020 meeting. Ms. Youngkin seconded the motion. Towns were individually called, all stated aye, and the minutes were passed unanimously with Ms. Mitts abstaining.

Town	2) Minutes	5) Cash Reports
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Egremont	Yes	
Great Barrington	Yes	
Hinsdale	Yes	
Lee	Yes	
Lenox	Abstained	
<u>New Ashford</u>	<u>Yes</u>	
Peru	Yes	
Pittsfield	Yes	
Stockbridge	Yes	
Williamstown	Yes	
Windsor	Yes	

3) **ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT**

ZOOM Board Meeting

Mr. Malnati stated the Board packet is sent via email asking each Advisory Board member to respond with their intentions to attend this virtual meeting, then they will receive the meeting link. This 2-part process allows us to know if the quorum requirement will be met and who to expect on the call.

COVID-19

Mr. Malnati shared that the BRTA continues to clean and perform nightly disinfecting of vehicles and facilities. The Administrative staff and Brokerage Call Center continues to partially work remotely, whereas he continues to primarily work in the office. Comparing FY 20 ridership to ridership through December, fixed route ridership is down 36%. Ridership is trending higher month to month with fixed route better than Paratransit, which is down 52.5% from FY20.

STATE

Mr. Malnati explained how the state contract assistance usually works, but this year is different due to the State Budget. BRTA has been receiving 1/12th of the annual contracted amount each month. BRTA has received the payment for November. The Governor signed the budget with the RTA collective funding at the \$94 million level. The next payment, which we should receive next week, will bring us up to that \$2.8 million amount. The outstanding final quarterly payment, which I presume will be sent in March. MassDOT provided the RTA Performance report that was attached to the Board Packet email. Mr. Malnati discussed BRTA's Performance Matrix that contained a lot of green

numbers, which is favorable and a little red which is unfavorable. He asked the Board to review the report and let him know if there are any questions.

BRTA was awarded through MassDOT's Community Transit Grant Program, eight vehicles: Egremont, Adams, Cheshire, Dalton, and the paratransit fleet are recipients of these vehicles.

Mr. Malnati stated the BRTA received word recently that the HST contract for the current brokerage system will not be renewed on July 1, 2021. The State released a solicitation last year, to which BRTA sent a letter of objection to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Berkshire Legislative Delegation, and Attorney General requesting the solicitation be halted, reviewed, and reissued. The procurement proceeded with the award starting on July 1, 2021. The Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) will become the HST broker for Area 1 and 2, covering a service area from the Berkshires to the North Shore. The only area MART did not receive was the South Shore, Cape Cod, and the Islands. He reached out to MART about subcontracting opportunities for the current BRTA HST staff. BRTA also sent to MART and HST a power point presentation about what we do best and how we can assist in this transition. BRTA will be informing the current vendors of the change in Brokers scheduled for July 1, 2021. They will also be sending letters to our constituents and the other agencies regarding who they should contact. MART will also send out letters to the clients and vendors.

FEDERAL

Mr. Malnati stated the BRTA submitted the follow up information for the Triennial Review audit and have not heard back from them yet. At the Advisory Board meeting on November 19, 2020, the Board voted to accept the Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) which was sent to the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for review. The MPO endorsed the plan at their November meeting.

ANNUAL REPORT

Due to COVID-19, the BRTA FY 20 Annual Report will not be printed, but is available via link or the website. The electronic report is a flipbook link and showcases what we have done this past fiscal year including, economic development, the pandemic, the new website, and financial reports. Mr. Malnati asked to pass along the flipbook weblink to anyone that might be interested in reviewing it.

Mr. Coleman asked what area MART services now. Mr. Malnati replied they had Springfield and Fitchburg area to Boston.

4) MASSDOT FINAL REPORT ON RTA'S

Discussed during the Administrator's Report.

5) CASH REPORTS FOR OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2020 - VOTE

Mr. Coleman made a motion to accept the cash reports for October and November 2020. Mr. Sullivan seconded the motion. Towns were individually called, all stated aye, and the cash reports for October and November 2020 passed unanimously.

Mr. Malnati remarked the report shows who we paid and how much money we received. There were questions on the number of staff for Administration and the HST Brokerage.

Town	2) Minutes	5) Cash Reports
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Egremont		Yes
Great Barrington		Yes
Hinsdale		Yes
Lee		Yes
Lenox		Yes
New Ashford		Yes
Peru		Yes
Pittsfield		Yes
Stockbridge		Yes
Williamstown		Yes
Windsor		Yes

6) BUDGET YTD

Mr. Malnati reviewed the budget through November 2020. Fixed route, paratransit, and non-transportation revenue are under budget, combined with and the over reimbursements for maintenance, shows income \$19,000 under budget. The Administrative fringe benefit is showing a large below budget variance, that is an allocation adjustment. They budgeted benefits into the Administrative department and the actual allocation was a different percentage. The variance will have offsetting variances in other departments. When looking at the interest expense, the BRTA is down \$23,000 because the interest rate was budgeted over 2% and the BRTA received the annual borrowing rate for about 1%. We will see a continued savings throughout the year. Fixed Route showed \$10,000 under budget. It is a line item for the professional services which is due to a couple of our software providers. Paratransit is over budget because of the benefits allocation. With Administrative expenses under budget \$23,000 and income under budget \$19,000, BRTA is still doing OK through November. HST is down \$1.8 million in income and down \$1.8 million in expenses. This is all tied to COVID and some of the programs not operating.

There was discussion and questions on employee benefits and the Transit Management Service solicitation that is still in the procurement process.

7) RIDERSHIP YTD

Mr. Malnati stated through November, for fixed route we are down 86,000 riders from the previous year, which is down almost 39%. Some of the MBTA lines and commuter rail are lucky if they are at 10% as most people are telecommuting. BRTA has durable riders and use this service because they do not have any other means. Ridership is starting to trend back up to over 60% of pre-pandemic levels.

Both Paratransit and COA ridership is down 50% from last year. Wheelchair ridership on the bus is 750 transports for 5 months and the number one route is Route 34 in North Adams, as it was last year. It is a big circulator, and it proves our bus routes go where our customers need to go. Fixed route transportation is more cost effective than Paratransit.

Mr. McNally asked where the bus drivers fall in the COVID vaccine timeline. Mr. Malnati remarked we are Phase two in the 2nd group, possibly February or March.

Mr. Coleman asked were there any routes, year to date, that maintain decent ridership or any that dropped off a lot. Mr. Malnati replied a lot dropped off, particularly the smaller routes. Routes 12, 14, and 1 always have people on it. Mr. Coleman replied that he was thinking about the 11N. Mr. Malnati replied that the 11N goes to BCC but most of the riders are on the Berkshire Crossing section of the route. BRTA is looking at this route to see where the bus could turn around before the college.

HST brokerage ridership is down 46%. Wheelchair and bicycle transports are down 32%.

8) **OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Coleman discussed having a larger vehicle when the Simon's Rock courses are in session, especially on a Friday and Saturday. On Saturday there is a four-hour gap between 11:00 AM and 3:00 PM without bus service to the school. There are at least twenty people on the smaller bus.

Mr. Malnati replied he discussed this with Operations and if we were to use a larger bus on this route, the bus would bottom out on sections of that route and other logistics issues. There are a couple demand stops that we do a three-point turn with the minibus and there is no way we can do that with the larger bus. Adding a different vehicle is probably not a good idea right now. This should be discussed at a different time. If we add another Simon's Rock stop on Saturday, the route's on-time performance would drop off because every time it would go to the school, the schedule times degrade. Some other stops would need to be cut out to provide additional service to Simons Rock.

Ms. Mitts asked about adding another smaller bus at an additional time to take the pressure off so many people getting on the bus at 11 and 3. Mr. Malnati stated that he does not know if we have another vehicle and driver. Plus, the other communities would have to agree to these additional costs. Ms. Mitts stated that on Saturdays, she thought that would be a positive thing. It would generate a lot more circulation through these retail areas as there are more visitors in the area. She stated the other towns would not be averse to having more people come to their town. Mr. Malnati stated that they would certainly look at it. Ms. Mitts asked how long it takes to make that decision. Mr. Malnati replied it would have to go before the board and to public comments. Also, are the other communities willing to pay that differential? The big question is, can we physically do that? Mr. Caine and I can certainly investigate this. Ms. Mitts asked if we have vehicles sitting somewhere to do the route. Mr. Malnati remarked that is usually not the case. Mr. Sullivan stated the issue is about capacity because of social distancing due to the pandemic. For the time being, there is no real reason to be visiting this because it is a temporary issue as social distancing will eventually dissolve. Mr. Coleman stated he understands, but students will be back on campus from February through May. If we cannot use the larger vehicles, then just adding the 1:00 service would be the solution. Mr. Malnati asked Mr. Caine how late is that bus running? Mr. Caine stated that's when the driver is on break and goes the bathroom. So, if we were to add one extra trip, the driver would not be able to go the bathroom for 5 hours. Mr. Coleman states he understands but if there is no one at the Senior Center that uses the 1:30 trip, then cut out the Senior Center to give them that break. Mr. Caine remarked that adding service is easy but removing service is much harder.

Mr. McNally suggested that this be discussed another time. Mr. Coleman stated that he and the school is concerned. Mr. McNally remarked that you made the point and that you, Mr. Caine, and Mr. Malnati investigate options and get back to the Board. Nothing is

going to be solved today. Mr. Coleman said he would be happy to meet with them. Ms. Mitts stated she would be happy to join the discussion. Ms. Irvin remarked that it is beyond our ability at this meeting to work this out and suggested a meeting to work it out. Mr. Coleman thanked everyone for their time.

9) NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Malnati stated he received notice today that Secretary of Transportation, Stephanie Pollock is joining President Biden's Administration as Deputy Administrator of Federal Highways. The interim Secretary of Transportation for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will be the current head of the RMV.

Mr. Malnati shared the new community weighted votes, which is based on service of fixed route and paratransit. This process is certified by the auditors. The voting weights also changed with the addition of Savoy. These weights will be used for the future Board Meetings.

10) NEXT MEETING DATE/TIME

Mr. Malnati set a date for the next board meeting for March 25, 2021 at 4 PM.

11) ADJOURNMENT

Mr. O'Grady made a motion to adjourn the ZOOM Advisory Board meeting. Mr. Coleman seconded the motion which passed unanimously.