

Berkshire Regional Transit Authority  
Minutes of the Finance/Audit Committee

November 7, 2018 at 1 PM  
BRTA Intermodal Transportation Center  
One Columbus Avenue, Pittsfield, MA 01201

MINUTES

**Berkshire Regional Transit Authority Finance/Audit Committee Members present:**

Sandra Lamb, North Adams; Peter Gallant, Lanesborough; and Doug McNally, Windsor  
Also present: Robert Malnati and Sarah Vallieres, BRTA staff

1. **Approval of Minutes for September 27, 2018 -VOTE**

Committee members reviewed the minutes of September's meeting. Mr. McNally made the motion to accept the minutes, was seconded by Mr. Gallant, and approved by all.

2. **Labor Issue**

Mr. Malnati explained a notice was emailed on Monday to the Board and Legislative Delegation in regards to Paratransit Management of Berkshire (PMB) met on Sunday and voted to strike. He had a conference call with the GM and AGM, 1<sup>st</sup> Transit lawyer, and 1<sup>st</sup> Transit representative to work on strategy. The official notice from the Union came yesterday and would strike on or about 11/16/18.

Mr. Malnati discussed BRTA's year to date budget (operational). BRTA's budget reflects \$80.4M (collectively to all RTAs), but the Governor increased that amount to \$82M, so there is an increase of \$49,000 for BRTA. This money is currently helping with the decrease in both fare and ridership for fixed route and paratransit. Mr. Malnati asked the GM for assistance to figure out the cost if BRTA increased paratransit wages \$0.25 in January and used part of the additional \$49,000. Paratransit is asking for a 30% difference from last year, citing the State Minimum Wage increases. BRTA would need more funding from the State; they cannot just level fund.

Mr. Malnati is waiting for October's ridership numbers, but both high school and college student's ridership has increased. September's ridership dropped 6%; including 1000 from BCC. At the Mildred Elley presentation, they buy a lot of passes for their students.

Mr. Malnati will research the amount of money to divert to paratransit wages. Mr. McNally stated 2% increase is fine, but any higher, they would need to justify. He asked if a press release would be issued, to which Mr. Malnati said yes on Friday and include the same verbiage as last time. Mr. Malnati would be in contact with other vendors, in case of a strike, to take some of the paratransit trips. This may be at a higher cost. Mr. Malnati spoke of sending a letter to the union, in regards to the fixed route to prevent shutting down the whole system. Mr. Gallant asked if there are fill-in drivers and stated this could potentially shut down the entire system. He asked when were the contracts, to which Mr. Malnati said fixed route has a new 3 year contract and paratransit expired June 30<sup>th</sup>. Negotiations have been underway since May, but the union business agent has not always been present. Ms. Lamb asked if there was a big turnover of employment at PMB. Mr. Malnati shared that it is more stabilized with a better relationship with Eli and team. Mr. Malnati said he would research diverting some of the \$49,000 to para wages, dependent on the cost and PMB would need a 3 year contract. Ms. Lamb asked if PMB was willing to negotiate, to which Mr. Malnati replied there needs to be something new brought to the table. He has other vendors in line just in case a strike ensues. Mr. McNally stated that without more funding from Boston and a decrease in ridership; will BRTA need to cut some services to pay for this?

Mr. McNally made a motion to the Finance Committee to authorize Mr. Malnati to explore the use of the portion of state funds to impact PMB negotiations. This was seconded by Ms. Lamb, and approved by all, with Mr. Gallant stating only to explore.

3. **Task Force Update**

Mr. Malnati has attended 3 RTA Task Force meetings in Boston and he has been asked to go to tomorrow's meeting to discuss HST. There are many vendors across the State with different costs and Sharna Small-Borsellino presented well. After the meeting, there was a discussion on 25 mile limits for transportation. Out of town trips are usually due to continuity of care. This raises more questions about the amount of HST spending on transportation. What about riding the bus and HST purchases the bus pass for the consumer? The cost of the bus pass cannot exceed the cost of one trip. The other issue was that Fixed Route does not run 7 days a week. Mr. Malnati asked if BRTA could be a vendor for HST and if they would fund that? HST would investigate.

BRTA innovations over the past year was the Route 1 and the Route 34 split leading to higher ridership, including more wheelchair ridership and is more timely. Also the McMahon study will be discussed at the Advisory Board meeting. Over 100 people responded to the survey and 13-14 businesses provided information for an express route or TMA.

The final report for the RTA Task Force is due in February. The Governor's budget will be released in January. The Senate President spoke with Mr. Malnati and impressed that she understands the needs of transit within a community, as she helped create MetroWest RTA in Framingham. Her opinion of next year's budget is \$88M with incremental increases.

Mr. McNally asked if the Western Mass RTAs have met with the Lt. Governor. If these RTAs banded together and had a conversation with her, she identifies with issues within small communities. She has come to all towns within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Mr. Malnati said he would speak to the Administrator of PVRTA and Jeanette from MARTA.

4. **Pension Payment**

Mr. Malnati stated BRTA made the pension payment. He will look at the budget to see if BRTA could make another incremental increase.

5. **Old Business**

Mr. Malnati shared information on the new survey BRTA has released to see where the public would want to see routes expanded if BRTA received additional funding. There has been 39 responses. Route 21X currently has the most responses for increasing hours. Mr. McNally's take away from the survey is that Sunday service would be nice, but extended hours are more important. Mr. Malnati explained that MassDOT's grant application can be for 2 projects with a \$500,000 maximum each. The projects have to be self-sustaining and can expend the funds through June 2020. Mr. McNally asked which route would be extended, to which Mr. Malnati said possibly the Route 21X and the shopping loop, dependent on the data from the survey. Mr. McNally asked if we should change the survey now with at Route 12 and 21X focus. Mr. Malnati will research more and plot the route with the costs. This will show both anticipated ridership and demographics. Mr. McNally suggested exploring Routes 34, 21 X, and shopping loops and could fund 2 as pilots.

6. **New Business**

No new business.

7. **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for January 24 at 2:30 PM. On Friday, November 9, 2018, Mr. Malnati will send an email to the Finance Committee with more information on using the funds for PMB.