

Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority

Board of Directors Meeting

October 24, 2024

I. **Call to Order:** The regular meeting of the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (Nashville MTA) Board of Directors was held at the Tennessee Bankers Association located at 211 Athens Way, Nashville, TN 37228, on Thursday, October 24, 2024.

II. **Roll Call of Persons Present:**

Gail Carr Williams, Chair

Janet Miller, Vice Chair

Jessica Dauphin, Member

Aron Thompson, Member

Kathryn Sasser, Member

Margaret Behm, Board Secretary

Stephen Bland CEO

Monica Howse, Sr. Exec. Asst. & Bd. Liaison

Debbie Frank, Deputy CEO of Growth & Dev

Amanda Vandegrift, Deputy CEO of Finance & Admin

Nick Oldham, CSSO

Vince Malone, COSA

Lydia Benda, Dir. of Eng., Construction & Proj. Mgmt.

Kym Tucker, Director of Training & Administration

A quorum was established, and Board Chair Carr Williams called the meeting to order at 2:32 p.m.

III. **WeGo Public Transit Training Center presents Mechanic Apprenticeship Program Graduation, Apprenticeship Signing Day, and WeGo Driver Academy Graduation:** Kym Tucker began the program by introducing Deputy Commissioner DeWayne Scott from the Department of Workforce and Labor Development, who offered remarks to the audience. Following his address, Kym introduced Ms. Felicia Ransom to conduct and present the Operator Graduates, Apprenticeship Graduates, and Drivers & Academy Graduates, all of whom had completed their respective programs.

In recognition of their hard work and achievements, the audience gave the graduates a heartfelt round of applause and a standing ovation. Photos of the graduates were taken with the board members and the graduates to commemorate the special occasion.

IV. **Approval of Minutes:** Vice Chair Miller made a motion to approve the September 26 Nashville MTA Board minutes. Ms. Dauphin seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved the minutes.

V. **Public Comments:** Chair Carr Williams opened the floor for public comments. The public was reminded that comments were limited to two minutes. The following members of the public gave public remarks:

- John Bull

VI. **Informational Items:** The following items were presented for the board members' review:

- **Monthly Financial Report Compared to Budget** – Ms. Dauphin asked Ms. Vandegrift to clarify the overtime details presented in the report. Ms. Vandegrift explained that the overtime increase was due to a 10% rise over two months, primarily driven by the need to hire more drivers. In essence, the agency had to pay out more overtime than initially budgeted.
- **Monthly Operating Statistics** – Ms. Dauphin inquired about the percentage of operator shortage reflected in the operations report. In the absence of Mr. Burke, Mr. Malone acknowledged the retention challenges affecting staffing levels but mentioned that there would be a meeting soon to address those issues.

Ms. Dauphin also inquired about the increase in WeGo Link usage. In response, CEO Bland explained that the growth in ridership was primarily due to the introduction of new zones, which has significantly expanded the service area. This expansion has likely made WeGo Link more accessible to a broader user base, contributing to the increase in ridership.

To provide a more detailed analysis, CEO Bland suggested having Hannah Schaeffer present to the Board a comprehensive report on the trends in WeGo Link usage. This would offer further insights into how the new zones are influencing service demand and user experience.

- **Upcoming Procurement Projects List** – No questions

VII. **Consent Agenda Items:** There were no consent agenda items this month.

VIII. **Operations & Finance Committee Report:** Committee Chair Jessica Dauphin presented the following items for discussion and action:

- a. **Acquisition Threshold & Manager Approval Increase Recommendations (M-A-24-029):** Vince Malone, Chief of Staff & Administration, provided the following item for action:

To accommodate recent cost increases and support future growth, it is recommended that WeGo Public Transit raise the acquisition thresholds and manager approval levels within its procurement policy. This adjustment will align the agency's policies with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) standards and provide several key benefits:

Streamlined Processes: Reduces administrative burden and accelerates decision-making for faster procurement.

Cost Efficiency: Reflects recent cost increases, enabling quicker and more cost-effective purchases.

FTA Compliance: Ensures alignment with federal guidelines for improved regulatory compliance.

Market Responsiveness: Helps WeGo remain competitive by adapting to market changes.

Improved Resource Allocation: Frees up resources to focus on larger, more strategic procurements.

This approach will enhance operational efficiency, reduce delays, and better position the agency for future needs. A comparison of the current and proposed thresholds, along with FTA guidelines, is provided below.

Staff recommended that the Board approve increasing the threshold for micro-procurements to \$10,000, small procurements to \$250,000, and raising the manager's approval authority to \$25,000.

There was a general discussion and clarification regarding the proposed changes to the procurement policy.

Ms. Dauphin made a motion to approve the Acquisition Threshold and Manager Approval Increase Recommendations action item; Ms. Hays Sasser seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved the minutes.

- b. **Fairgrounds Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Inbound Transit Stop Construction Cost-sharing (M-A-24-030):** Lydia Benda, Director of Engineering, Construction & Project Management, provided the following item for action:

In collaboration with the Fairgrounds' plans for a new entrance on Wingrove Street, NDOT and WeGo identified an opportunity to coordinate improvements. The Fairgrounds design team agreed to incorporate both intersection upgrades and the inbound transit stop into a single plan set. This collaboration streamlined the review and approval process, which is now nearing completion with Metro Water Services and TDOT.

The Fairgrounds design team has provided cost estimates for each project element. WeGo is responsible for covering the costs related to the bus stop island and the milling and paving of Nolensville Pike. Additionally, lowering the profile of Nolensville Pike to accommodate the floodway will also fulfill FEMA floodway requirements.

Estimated Costs:

Bus stop island and sidewalk replacement: \$57,161

Milling and paving Nolensville Pike: \$425,004 (necessary to meet Metro Water Services requirements for stormwater management at bus stop)

Total: \$482,165

This project focuses on enhancing accessibility, safety, and floodway compliance while also addressing the unique challenges of the location.

CEO Bland commended Ms. Benda for her outstanding leadership and dedication to ensuring the project's success. He indicated that she has been working on various creative approaches to this design challenge with our partner agencies for several years and that her hard work will benefit WeGo Public Transit customers for many years to come.

WeGo Staff recommended the WeGo Board authorize the Chief Executive Officer to enter a Memorandum of Understanding with the Fairgrounds, agreeing to a cost-sharing arrangement of \$482,165 for the construction of the bus stop island and the milling and paving of Nolensville Pike. The funding for the project will come from the funds WeGo receives from the Metro Capital Plan.

Ms. Dauphin made a motion to approve the Fairgrounds Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Inbound Transit Stop Construction Cost-sharing action item. Ms. Miller seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved the minutes.

IX. New Initiative & Community Engagement Committee Report: There were no NICE Committee items for discussion or action this month.

X. CEO's Report: CEO Bland provided the following report:

1. CEO Bland extended congratulations to Jessica Dauphin for hosting the Transit Alliance's inaugural "Breakfast for Better Mobility," a highly successful event that celebrated regional progress toward more multimodal transportation. WeGo was proud to receive the *Transit Development of the Year Award* for the Dr. Ernest Rip Patton Jr. North Nashville Transit Center, shared with our project partners.
2. This facility continues to garner attention. WeGo hosted an educational session led by the Nashville Chapter of the Urban Land Institute, highlighting the Dr. Ernest Rip Patton Jr. North Nashville Transit Center. The event included insights into the facility's design and construction, public engagement, and operational elements.
3. A heartfelt congratulations to Janet Miller, former Chair of Nashville's Agenda, for her leadership during Imagine Nashville, a community visioning process that engaged thousands of Nashvillians to establish the city's future direction. The initiative identified key priorities for the city's future, including improving transit to ensure safe and efficient movement across Nashville.

4. CEO Bland thanked the WeGo team, Andy Burke, and Stantec consultants for an excellent workshop on transitioning to a zero-emission fleet. The session provided valuable insights on how WeGo should move forward, with key community partners like NES, TVA, Metro Nashville, and Vanderbilt University playing a crucial role in the process.
5. With the Choose How You Move Ballot Measure approaching, many WeGo employees have been actively participating in speaking engagements and community events, explaining the transit aspects of the measure and answering questions from the public.
6. Earlier this week, WeGo had the honor of hosting the national Transit Labor Exchange conference. This annual event brings together labor relations professionals from transit agencies across the U.S. to discuss industry trends and collective bargaining. CEO Bland also reconnected with former colleagues from various markets. CEO Bland thanked Vince Malone, Kym Tucker, and Mark Fleming for their leadership in hosting the event and in their active participation.
7. Last week, the Tennessee Public Transportation Association held its annual conference in Franklin. WeG was delighted to have Mayor Moore of Franklin give the welcoming remarks, and Mayor O'Connell provided a keynote address. Part of the TPTA Annual Conference includes the Statewide Bus, Van, and Maintenance Rodeos. CEO Bland said that he was proud that WeGo performed exceptionally well during the competition.

At the TPTA Annual Conference in Franklin, WeGo earned multiple awards in the Statewide Bus, Van, and Maintenance Rodeos. Highlights include:

Big Wrench Awards:

- Bus Maintenance: Troy Willis (1st), Jeremy Hensley (2nd)
- Van Maintenance: Pedro Ochoa (1st)

Big Wheel Awards:

- Bus Operations: Kevin Sentes (1st), Mark Johnson (2nd), Jerome Horton (3rd)
- Van Operations: Scott Wallace (1st)

The only competition WeGo did not win was the van conversion division, which had no contestants. CEO Bland congratulated all of the mechanics and operators who participated. He said their dedication, skill, and teamwork truly stood out and made Nashville proud with their outstanding performance. WeGo was proud to take home multiple awards and to represent Nashville's dedication to excellence in transit operations.

8. On the RTA side:
 - a. At their meeting last week, The RTA Board approved a short-term strategy for enhancing the WeGo Star service. Once capital and operational improvements are completed, this strategy will include extending trips to Lebanon, adding more weekday and Saturday services, and initiating changes by 2028, pending necessary capital investments.
 - b. The *Titans Express* service continues to be a success, with trains selling out for every home game, carrying approximately 1,200 riders per game.
9. In partnership with Metro Nashville, WeGo will operate the MTA system fare-free on Election Day (November 5th). The Board approved this initiative to encourage voter turnout.
10. Finally, CEO Bland took a moment to recognize two individuals who, together, are approaching 60 years of dedication to ensuring that WeGo Public Transit remains the safe and reliable service it is today. First, he recognized Richard Kiefer, Lead Maintenance Supervisor at the Nestor Facility, who will soon retire after 28 years of dedicated service with WeGo. Richard

has worked his way up through the ranks, earning several promotions over the years, and has been a key figure in ensuring the safety and reliability of our fleet. Throughout his career, Richard has earned the respect of his colleagues thanks to his leadership, expertise, and steady hand under pressure. His calm and friendly demeanor is really misleading, given the constant pressure he's on to make the line. While we will certainly miss him, we are confident he will enjoy more time fishing in Middle Tennessee during his well-deserved retirement.

Next, CEO Bland recognized Kym Tucker, Director of Administration, for her remarkable 30 years of service. He shared that he had thoroughly enjoyed the earlier festivities celebrating the first graduates of WeGo's Maintenance Apprenticeship Program, the Apprentice Signing Day, and the most recent graduates of WeGo Academy. All of these programs, which have developed over the past four years, would not have been possible without Kym's strong leadership. Starting her career as a bus operator, she has played a pivotal role in the development of WeGo's Maintenance Apprenticeship Program and in strengthening staffing levels post-pandemic. In her capacity as Director of Administration, she has overseen both the Human Resources and Training Departments. Her calm, professional demeanor has served as a steadying hand throughout the years, especially during the challenging period of the pandemic. Not only did she sustain these critical programs, but she also improved them. CEO Bland emphasized that Kym's leadership has been crucial to WeGo's success, and he expressed deep gratitude for her unwavering dedication to both the community and her colleagues.

In conclusion, he wished them both the best as they entered this exciting new chapter.

XI. Chair's Report: Board Chair Carr Williams presented the following report:

Chair Carr Williams took the opportunity to celebrate some key milestones and express gratitude to several members of the WeGo family.

First, Chair Williams congratulated Ms. Tucker and Mr. Keifer on their upcoming retirements and thanked them for their years of dedication and service. She also acknowledged Ms. Tucker and the training department for their hard work in organizing the graduation and festivities that took place earlier, prior to the board meeting.

She congratulated all of the graduates and expressed her appreciation for Ms. Tucker's leadership in shaping and guiding the next generation of WeGo team members.

Chair Carr Williams also thanked Deputy Commissioner DeWayne Scott for his insightful remarks and continued partnership with WeGo.

In addition, Chair Carr Williams highlighted the success of the recent Zero Emissions Workshop, praising the efforts put into the event and expressing hope that WeGo can host more workshops focused on similar important topics.

Lastly, Chair Carr Williams welcomed WeGo's new employees, emphasizing how excited WeGo is to have each of them onboard and how much we look forward to their contributions. Mr. Malone proudly introduced Mr. DeAntwaine Moye, WeGo's new Business Diversity Manager. He said he was thrilled to have Mr. Moye join the team and looks forward to the expertise and perspective he brings to the role.

Mr. Dean also introduced Nick Pecenka as WeGo's new Director of Operations. Mr. Dean said Mr. Pecenka brings valuable experience and a fresh perspective to the team, and we're excited to see the impact he will have in his new position.

Ms. Hays Sasser thanked the WeGo staff and board for making November 5th a free fare day to encourage people to vote.

In conclusion, Chair Carr Williams reminded everyone to remember the Choose How You Move initiative that's on the ballot, and she hopes that everyone will exercise their right to vote.

XII. Other Business: There was no further business to come before this Board.

XIII. Adjournment: With no further business, Vice Chair Miller moved to adjourn the meeting, which adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

Attested:

Gail Carr Williams
Chair

Margaret L. Behm
Secretary