

# Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority

## Board of Directors Meeting

February 27, 2025

- 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, February 27, 2025.

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

Gail Carr Williams, Chair	Amanda Vandegrift, DCEO of Finance & Admin
Jessica Dauphin, Member	Andy Burke, Chief Operating Officer
Aron Thompson, Member	Vince Malone, Chief of Staff & Administration
Kathryn Sasser, Member	Nick Oldham, Chief Safety & Security Officer
Margaret Behm, Board Secretary	Felix Castrodad, Dir. Of Planning & Grants
Stephen Bland CEO	Carl Rokos, Director of Maintenance
Debbie Frank, DCEO of Growth & Dev	Katie Freudberg, Scheduling & Service Manager
Monica Howse, Sr. Exec. Asst. & Bd. Liaison	

A quorum was established, and Board Chair Carr Williams called the meeting to order at 2:35 p.m.

- III. **Approval of Minutes:** Ms. Jessica Dauphin made a motion to approve the January 23<sup>rd</sup>. Nashville MTA Board minutes. Mr. Thompson seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved the minutes.

- IV. **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:

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|----------------------|---------------------|
| • Peter O'Connor     | • Jennifer Sheets   |
| • Emily Grevel       | • Allison Schachler |
| • Ben Tran           | • Darius Knight     |
| • Stephanie Levinson |                     |

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

- **Monthly Financial Report Compared to Budget (M-I-25-006)** – Mr. Thompson inquired about key trends to monitor as we approach the new fiscal year. Ms. Vandegrift responded that she would provide further details during the NICE Committee segment of the meeting. She also noted that she plans to return to the board in the coming months with a deeper analysis of the impacts on operating revenue, particularly those resulting from board-approved policy decisions.
- **Monthly Operating Statistics (M-I-25-007)** – Ms. Dauphin requested additional information regarding the \$2 million SMART grant referenced in the report. Mr. Burke explained that the funding will support technology initiatives aimed at easing corridor congestion along Murfreesboro Road and Charlotte Avenue. Specifically, it will enhance Transit Signal Priority systems, improving the handling of video feeds and enabling buses to navigate traffic better. The grant will also contribute to more effective headway management.
- **Upcoming Procurement Projects List (M-I-25-008)** – No questions

- VI. **Consent Agenda Items:** This month's agenda did not include any consent items.

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

- a. Forty Foot (40') Transit bus Purchase (M-A-25-006):** Director of Maintenance Carl Rokos presented the following for action:

In August 2023, the board approved a 5-year contract with Gillig LLC for the purchase of 40-foot clean diesel transit buses. Staff is now requesting approval to purchase twelve (12) additional 40-foot buses from this contract, which will support service increases related to the Choose How You Move program approved by Davidson County voters in November 2024. The buses are expected to be delivered in Q2 of FY2026, ahead of the usual production schedule due to a gap in Gillig's timeline, despite current industry supply chain delays.

These buses are part of a balanced approach to capital spending and fleet replacement. The purchase is aligned with WeGo's capital plans, and the third-party inspector, Transit Resources (AmeriTran), has confirmed compliance with federal Buy America requirements. Funding for this purchase has been requested through the Choose How You Move program and is part of the first capital project package to be submitted to the Metropolitan Council. While there is a minor risk of the Council not approving the funding, staff considers this risk negligible compared to the benefits of early bus delivery. Alternative funding options will be pursued if needed.

The Operations & Finance Committee motioned to approve the Forty Foot Transit Bus Purchase action item; Ms. Hays Sasser seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved it.

- b. Safety Plan Amendments (M-A-25-007):** Chief Safety & Security Officer Nick Oldham presented the following item for action:

Under the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) Final Rule, WeGo Public Transit is required to update its Agency Safety Plan annually, which includes safety performance targets. These targets are shared with the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the State Department of Transportation.

The targets were agreed upon by both union and management members of the joint labor-management Safety Committee after reviewing and normalizing data from the previous year. The updated plan includes the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law requirements and aims to enhance transit safety by identifying deficiencies and promoting improvements. Once approved by the Board, the plan will be publicly available on the agency's website.

Staff requested the Board give the Chief Executive Officer the authority to execute the Agency Safety Plan to comply with FTA's Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan Final Rule and the updated Bipartisan Infrastructure Law requirements.

The Operations & Finance Committee motioned to approve the Safety Plan Amendments action item; Ms. Sasser seconded the motion, which the Board unanimously approved.

- c. Quarterly Route Performance Report (OF-D-25-002):** Scheduling and Service Manager Katie Freudberg presented the following:

The Quarterly Route Performance Report for October, November, and December 2024 shows a 2% decrease in ridership compared to the previous quarter, partly due to holidays and seasonal variations, but a 6% increase compared to the same period last year. Growth in ridership was primarily driven by improvements and restructuring linked to the North Nashville Transit Center opening, as well as increased ridership on Routes 4 Shelby and 56 Gallatin

Pike. Some of this gain was impacted by our Community Impact Partnership with the Tennessee Titans, with game-day ridership up by 30% on those routes.

Starting in October 2024, a data issue affected the accuracy of on-time performance reporting, particularly at the route level. The software vendor is addressing the issue.

Approximately 8% of WeGo's ridership comes from Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) through the StrIDe program, which provides free rides for MNPS students, teachers, and staff. In 2024, MNPS students took over 700,000 trips, with staff taking an additional 14,600 trips. Student ridership has not fully rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, but StrIDe program use grew by 15% from 2023 to 2024. Extra buses and security are deployed around school bell times to accommodate the large number of students.

**VIII. New Initiative & Community Engagement Committee Report:** Committee Chair Aron Thompson presented the following items for discussion and action:

**a. WeGo Link Pilot Zones & Title VI Analysis (M-A-25-008):** Director of Planning and Grants Felix Castrodad presented the following item for action:

WeGo Link service, launched in fall 2021 in partnership with Uber and Mobility Solutions, addresses first/last mile connectivity to fixed-route service in lower-demand areas. It started with a pilot in Antioch and has expanded to 16 zones throughout Davidson County. In July 2024, three new pilot zones were added based on public requests: Opry Mills, Adventure Science Center, and Bell Road. These zones have generated over 400 trips and are expected to grow.

Before these zones can be permanently added, a Title VI Equity Analysis is required to ensure no disproportionate impact on low-income or minority populations. The analysis compares the proposed service changes to current service levels and evaluates the potential effects on different populations.

The proposed new zones (Opry Mills, Adventure Science Center, and Bell Road) show a slight decrease in minority and low-income populations compared to the overall Davidson County population. After reviewing the data, staff concluded that the changes do not create a disparate impact or disproportionate burden on minority or low-income communities, as the changes fall well within the 20% threshold defined by Title VI policy.

Based on the Title VI Analysis presented, the staff requests the Board of Directors' approval to make the Opry Mills, Adventure Science Center, and Bell Road WeGo Link Zones permanent.

The NICE Committee motioned to approve the WeGo Link Pilot Zones & Title VI Analysis action item; Ms. Kathryn Sasser seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved it.

**b. Security Assessment Overview & Findings (NICE-D-25-002):** Chief Safety & Security Officer Nick Oldham presented the following item for discussion:

In August 2023, the Agency contracted Marine Tiger Technologies to conduct a comprehensive security system assessment. The goal was to enhance security operations, improve customer and employee experiences, and strengthen coordination with supporting service agencies. Marine Tiger's evaluation focused on risk assessment, identifying strengths and weaknesses in security procedures, communication systems, technology integration, staffing levels, and coordination with external agencies. Mr. Oldham introduced Mr. Michael

Steinle, the Project Manager from Marine Tiger Technologies to present findings of this effort. Mr. Steinle reported the following:

Key objectives included:

- Assessing security risks using international standards
- Evaluating communication protocols for routine and emergency situations
- Recommending technological improvements for monitoring and incident response
- Enhancing collaboration with supportive agencies
- Reviewing staffing levels for contracted security and police functions

Ms. Hays Sasser expressed support for the heightened security presence, noting that it acts as a strong deterrent. She emphasized the importance of encouraging MNPd to maintain and strengthen its partnership with WeGo. Additionally, Ms. Hays Sasser proposed exploring the possibility of increased penalties for assaults occurring in specific locations against transit staff. She also encouraged staff to consider using signage and messaging as part of this effort.

Ms. Dauphin inquired whether Marine Tiger had established a timeline. Mr. Steinle responded that their initial focus over the next 12 months is on planning, followed by developing procedures and conducting staff training.

Mr. Thompson asked Mr. Steinle to elaborate on the lighting audit. Mr. Steinle explained that it involves assessing whether lighting at designated locations meets required standards. Oldham added that Echo lights have also been installed.

Ms. Carr Williams praised the report, stating she found it meaningful and reflective of the humanity they strive to center in their work. She echoed the appreciation shared by fellow board members for Nick Oldham, his team, and the strong collaboration with the Mayor and Chief Drake.

CEO Bland noted that while policy changes may take some time, the mayor's recent announcement that Captain Brian Williams has been appointed as MNPd's first-ever transit liaison is a promising step in the right direction.

- c. **Contracted Security Contract Award (M-A-25-009)**: Chief Safety & Security Officer Nick Oldham presented the following item for action:

Marine Tiger Technologies completed an assessment of WeGo Public Transit's security systems. The company identified that while current security coverage has been adequate, it needs to evolve to support the city and transit system's growth. Marine Tiger benchmarked WeGo's facilities and operations against similar transit agencies and recommended expanded coverage.

In August 2024, a Request for Proposal (RFP) was published, receiving eight responses. After evaluation, three companies were shortlisted, and Archangel Protective Services was selected as the highest-rated proposal. Archangel provided three cost options: baseline coverage, expanded coverage (recommended by Marine Tiger), and armed officers (not recommended).

WeGo's pending operating budget request includes funding for expanded coverage. The base contract with Archangel for year 1 is \$2.65 million, with increases in years 2 and 3. If expanded coverage is approved, the cost would rise to \$4.57 million in year 1. This expanded coverage would include increased security at key facilities and the creation of a mobile security unit.

Archangel will provide Tennessee-licensed security officers with annual training in security techniques, de-escalation, and self-defense. The contract is for an initial 3 years, with two optional 1-year extensions.

No Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) goal was set for the project.

Staff recommended that the Board provide the Chief Executive Officer authority to sign into an agreement with Archangel Protective Services to provide security services for all WeGo Public Transit operations and properties at a not to exceed cost of \$8,172,170.88 for baseline services and \$14,112,905.28 for expanded services if funding can be made available beginning in the FY2025-2026 Metro Budget process. The contract period will be from April 1, 2025, through March 31, 2028. Two (2) additional one (1) year options are available to be presented to the Board prior to the initial contract expiration date in 2028.

Ms. Carr Williams asked if MNPd could potentially fill the staffing shortages at WeGo, which could help fill those gaps. Oldham responded that while they cannot control MNPd's staffing levels, he is confident in the strength of their relationship and believes it's reasonable to make that request.

Mr. Thompson inquired about the choice of a 3-year contract instead of a 5-year term. Mr. Oldham explained that a shorter contract allows for more flexibility and the ability to make changes sooner if necessary. CEO Bland added that a 3-year term aligns with standard procurement practices for professional service contracts.

Mr. Thompson also asked whether reporting requirements are included in the contract, and Mr. Oldham confirmed that they are.

Ms. Dauphin then asked if the security officers would be armed. Mr. Oldham responded that they would not be, at least at this time.

The NICE Committee motioned to approve the Contracted Security Contract Award action item, Ms. Dauphin seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved it.

- d. **Amendment to Existing Security Contract (M-A-25-010):** Chief Safety & Security Officer Nick Oldham presented the following item for action:

In November 2023, the board approved an 18-month extension to Allied Universal Security's contract for \$1,936,272 to allow Marine Tiger to conduct a system security assessment before issuing a new solicitation for security services. However, the initial cost estimate was based on 12 months, resulting in a shortfall. Staff is now requesting an increase of \$540,000 to cover the additional 6 months needed for a smooth transition between security contractors.

Staff recommended that the Board provide the Chief Executive Officer with the authority to increase the not-to-exceed amount for our existing contract with Allied Universal Security by \$540,000 to cover the remaining costs of security services from Allied Universal Security until this contract can be transitioned to Archangel Security.

The NICE Committee motioned to approve the Amendment to Existing Security Contract action item; Ms. Dauphin seconded the motion, which the Board unanimously approved.

- e. **MTA Reserve Fund Policy Discussion (NICE-D-25-003):** Deputy CEO of Finance & Administration Amanda Vandegrift provided the following background, peer examples, and recommendations:

The MTA currently lacks a reserve fund to address unexpected revenue losses or cost increases. However, Nashville's Choose How You Move Transit Improvement Program (TIP), approved by voters, includes funding for a new reserve fund starting in 2025. This fund is supported by a 0.5% sales surcharge that began collection in February 2025. The reserve is expected to hold at least 30% of the MTA's annual operating budget, or approximately \$47.2 million, by FY2026.

In response to the Board's request, MTA reviewed national transit agency reserve policies, finding that many agencies use reserves to manage operations, emergencies, debt, and expansions. The TIP's proposed reserve approach, based on a percentage of annual operating expenses, aligns with common practices in cities like Denver and San Antonio. The benefits of reserve funds include:

- Maintaining adequate cash reserves (GFOA best practice)
- Avoiding service disruptions from unexpected revenue shortfalls or expenses
- Better resource management
- Increased competitiveness for federal grants

Based on this review, MTA has drafted a reserve fund policy and recommends establishing a board reserve policy before creating the reserve account and transferring initial funds in late spring or summer 2025.

There was a general discussion on the draft policy. Staff will return to a future Board meeting for formal adoption of the reserve policy.

- f. **FY2025 – 2026 MTA Budget Submission to Metro (NICE-D-25-004):** Deputy CEO of Finance and Administration Amanda Vandegrift provided a brief presentation on the budget request submissions.

On February 7, 2025, WeGo Public Transit submitted MTA's FY2025 -26 operating budget requests as part of Metro's annual process. This marked the first submission for dedicated transit funding through the Choose How You Move Transit Improvement Program. The submission included:

- \$88.8 million in baseline operating funding for MTA, an increase of \$11.4 million over FY2024- 25 levels, covering:
  - \$4.0 million for full-year operation of services initiated during the middle of FY2024-25.
  - \$5.0 million for inflation.
  - \$2.4 million to offset revenue impacts from customer-focused programs, such as the free transit passes provided to Metro for Homeless services.
- \$77.7 million in investment requests, including:
  - \$47.2 million for a new MTA reserve fund.
  - \$10.5 million to reduce reliance on federal 5307 funds for operations.
  - \$20 million for service and safety expansions:
    - \$7.8 million for direct service expansion (new routes, expanded service).
    - \$6.3 million for safety and security (security coverage, transit policing, etc.).
    - \$4.5 million for service quality and reliability improvements.
    - \$1.4 million for capital program readiness.

Additionally, a supplemental request could advance some initiatives in FY2024- 25, potentially accelerating \$2.5 million in funding for specific expansions and improvements. Final decisions will be made as the mayor's budget is filed in late April, with further discussions leading to the adoption of the FY2025-26 budget in June.

Ms. Hays Sasser referenced the recent executive orders related to DEI and emphasized the importance of ensuring that we are meeting all compliance requirements, particularly those related to federal funding.

- IX. Election of Vice Chair (M-A-25-011):** Board Secretary and General Counsel Margaret Behm conducted the election of a new Vice Chair to the MTA Board of Directors.

In accordance with the Metropolitan Charter, the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (Nashville MTA) Board shall elect a Chair and Vice-Chair annually. At its July 2024 meeting, the Board elected Gail Carr-Williams as Chair and Janet Miller as Vice Chair for the Board. After this election, Ms. Miller submitted her resignation from the Board to Mayor O'Connell, necessitating the election of a new vice chair.

Ms. Dauphin nominated Mr. Thompson for the role of Vice Chair, and Ms. Hays Sasser seconded it. Mr. Thompson enthusiastically accepted the nomination, which was unanimously approved by the board.

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

Due to the length of the meeting, Mr. Bland deferred his remarks and board report until next month.

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

Chair Carr Williams expressed her gratitude to everyone for a productive meeting, noting that WeGo is clearly a growing transit agency. She emphasized that the team is actively responding to that growth and is committed to ensuring Nashville has the best and safest transit system in the country. She also shared her excitement about WeGo's future.

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

- XIII. Adjournment:** With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:32 p.m.

**Attested:**

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**Gail Carr Williams**  
Chair

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**Margaret L. Behm**  
Secretary