

NASHVILLE METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY
Board of Directors Meeting

February 22, 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, February 22, 2024.

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

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| Gail Carr Williams, Chair | Andy Burke, COO |
| Janet Miller, Vice Chair | Ed Oliphant, CFO |
| Jessica Dauphin, Member | Lydia Benda, Dir. of Eng, Const. & Proj. Mgmt. |
| Kathryn Hays Sasser, Member | Kia Lewis, Sr. Project Manager |
| Aron Thompson, Member | Carl Rokos, Dir. of Maintenance |
| Margaret Behm, Board Secretary | |
| Stephen Bland, CEO | |
| Monica Howse, Sr. Exec. Asst. & Board Liaison | |

A quorum was established, and Board Chair Carr Williams called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

III. **Approval of Minutes:** Ms. Janet Miller made a motion to approve the January 25, 2024, Nashville MTA Board minutes. Ms. Jessica Dauphin seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved the minutes.

IV. **Public Comments:** Board Chair Gail 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 comments:

- Manaen Hall

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

- **Monthly Financial Report Compared to Budget** – No questions
- **Monthly Operating Statistics** – No questions
- **Upcoming Procurement Projects List** – Ms. Hays Sasser asked if the board could hear more about the equipment purchase and installation of video surveillance and security and its technical capabilities. CEO Bland said that this could be addressed as a future Board agenda item, and that it may make sense to do so when we review the ongoing system security review undertaken by Marine Tiger Technologies. In addition to this, Board Chair Carr Williams suggested that Chief Safety and Security Officer Nick Oldham could provide her with a tour to give her a visual and better understanding of the equipment.
- **FY2024-2025 MTA Budget Proposal to Metro Finance** – Ms. Dauphin highlighted pages 16, 19, and 24 of the MTA Budget Proposal to Metro that was included in the printed materials for the meeting and thanked Mr. Oliphant for a thorough document.

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

a. **Quarterly Route Performance Report (OF-D-24-04):** Scheduling & Service Planning Manager Katie Freudberg presented the following item for discussion:

Ridership this quarter held steady from last quarter at over ninety-seven percent of pre-pandemic ridership, and ridership on almost every route was higher than the previous year. Eight routes had higher ridership than pre-pandemic this quarter, with Route 8 - 8th Avenue

South joining the list for the first time. Much of this growth was in response to added weekend frequency on Route 8 with fall service changes in October 2023.

In October, we added midday and Sunday service on Route 75 Midtown, which had previously been operating during peak times only on weekdays and Saturdays. As expected, productivity declined with the added service, but ridership did grow almost twenty-five percent in absolute terms from last quarter. As we plan to add more frequency on this route in Spring 2024, we will see how ridership responds to the improved crosstown service.

WeGo saw improvements to on-time performance this quarter relative to last quarter on almost all routes. We typically see an increase in on-time performance this quarter thanks to reduced traffic and school breaks around holidays. Routes 3 - West End and 7 - Hillsboro also benefitted from re-opening the Broadway bridge. We also saw improvements in on-time performance by re-timing several routes in October.

Beginning this quarter, we will be including the regional (RTA) service ridership in this report in addition to local (MTA) ridership. Regional services continue to recover much more slowly than local services, reflecting changes in post-pandemic work and travel patterns.

Ms. Miller asked Ms. Freudberg to explain why the regional ridership is only at 45%. Ms. Freudberg said that it is due to the regional service primarily serving a limited market of downtown office commuters. Many of these employees have seen radical shifts in their work schedules with remote work arrangements. Historically, State employees were also a significant percentage of RTA regional riders, and the State has been reducing its downtown workforce for several years.

Board Chair Carr Williams asked if the ridership numbers flattened throughout the day instead of the traditional peak ridership periods. Ms. Freudberg said that there is a little bit of flattening happening. She reported that we are starting to see the return of traditional peaks. However, peak ridership is still below pre-pandemic levels, and our ridership recovery primarily comes from midday, late night, and weekends.

Ms. Dauphin thanked Ms. Freudberg for including the WeGo Link zones in the report.

- b. Body on Chassis Cutaway Buses (M-A-24-002):** Director of Maintenance Carl Rokos presented the following items for discussion and action:

Staff requested Board approval for the Chief Executive Officer to enter a contract with Southern Bus and Mobility to purchase up to one hundred and twenty-five (125) body-on-chassis cutaway buses over a five-year period. The overall contract with Southern Bus and Mobility is not to exceed (\$30,000,000) for the contract term.

In addition, staff requested authorization to purchase nineteen (19) Bodies on Chassis "Cutaway Buses" immediately from this contract. These buses will replace buses currently used in WeGo Access and on low patronage Fixed Route service. They have exceeded their useful life and are eligible to retire. This purchase order is contingent upon completing a satisfactory Buy America pre-award audit.

The price per vehicle is (\$235,000), plus an additional (\$1,200) per vehicle for tools and training. The total project budget includes a 10% contingency for a total project cost not to exceed (\$4,936,580).

The overall contract with Southern Bus and Mobility is not to exceed (\$30,000,000) for the term of the 5-year contract.

Purchase of the vehicles will be funded utilizing approved Metro Capital Funds and 5307 Federal Formula Funds in accordance with the agency's ongoing fleet replacement plan and capital project plan.

Ms. Miller asked about the estimated delivery time. Mr. Rokos said March 2025.

The Operations and Finance Committee made a motion to approve the Body on Chassis Cutaway Buses action item. Mr. Thompson seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved this action item.

- c. **On-Call Contractor for Sidewalk and Bus Platform Construction (M-A-24-003)**: Director of Engineering, Construction, and Project Management Lydia Benda presented the following item for action:

Staff requested the Board to provide the Chief Executive Officer the authority to enter five years with two additional one (1) year terms task order-based contracts with BC Mason Group, Pavement Restorations, Roy T. Goodwin, and Walker Building Group to provide sidewalk and platform construction for a total contract budget of \$15,000,000.00. The work will be funded using the IMPROVE Act and Metro Capital Spending Plan funds in the capital plan for Transit Stop Improvements.

The Operations and Finance Committee made a motion to approve the On-Call Contractor for Sidewalk and Bus Platform Construction action item. Ms. Miller seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved this action item.

- VII. **New Initiative & Community Engagement Committee Report**: Committee Chair Miller introduced the following items for discussion:

- a. **Dr. Ernest Rip Patton, Jr. North Nashville Transit Center Update (NICE-D-24-001)**: Sr. Project Manager Kia Lewis, Don Hardin of The Hardin Group, and Dr. Learotha Williams, Jr. (Historian), a Professor at TSU, presented the following update that included art renderings and an overview of the historical context for the Dr. Ernest Rip Patton, Jr., North Nashville Transit Center.

Over a year ago, the agency contracted with Don Hardin Group to provide artistic oversight, historical context, and coordination of the four major art elements designed for the Dr. Ernest Rip Patton, Jr., North Nashville Transit Center. The concept of the North Nashville Transit Center is to serve as a place that reflects "The Voices of North Nashville: Past, Present, Future."

The Don Hardin Group met with Stakeholders, coordinated with the design team, and researched historical figures and events that are important to and represent the North Nashville community. The historically accurate information ensures that the final content selection for each art element is traditionally precise and acceptable to Stakeholders and the North Nashville community. In leading the historical review of materials, Dr. Williams provided the Board with an overall context for Dr. Patton's role in the Civil Rights movement and the importance of the North Nashville community in that movement.

Board Chair Carr Williams thanked Dr. Williams for his presentation and said he inspires everyone. She and the board members also thanked Mr. Hardin for coming to present at the meeting.

In closing, Chair Miller said she can't wait to see the unveiling and the opening of the Dr. Ernest Rip Patton Jr North Nashville Transit Center.

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

1. Staff continues to prepare for the Spring service changes.
2. CEO Bland participated in the Staff/Board workshop for Walk/Bike Nashville this month. During the session, he briefed their Board on some initiatives WeGo has underway, specifically

focusing on our stop improvement program and transit center projects. The exchange was extremely productive, and WeGo has a great working relationship with this group.

3. Following extensive research by WeGo staff and a review and approval by the Safety Committee, on March 1, WeGo will revise the bicycle policy to allow e-bikes in its bike racks, subject to the conditions approved in the new policy. Customers can visit the website to understand better what will be permitted with respect to E-Bikes within the Bike & Ride section.
4. The information-only section of the agenda included WeGo's budget submission to Metro for the FY2024-25 operating budget request. WeGo will meet with Metro Finance to review the request during the first week of March to support their preparation of the Mayor's FY2024-25 budget proposal.
5. Last month, CEO Bland reported that the mayor submitted a capital spending plan to the Council that allocated \$30.862 million to MTA for various transit projects, including grant matching funds, bus replacements, Access vehicle replacements, expansion buses, stop improvements, and transit center development. He was pleased to report that the Metro Council adopted the recommended plan earlier this week, so WeGo will now initiate contracting with Metro to initiate these projects.
6. Last week, WeGo announced its first community impact partnership with Nashville SC, just in time for the start of the new soccer season this week. Under the agreement, the team will support WeGo by providing free fares on Route 52 Nolensville Pike and Route 77 Thompson/Wedgewood all day on Saturdays and Sundays when the team has a home game. These two routes are closets to Geodis Park. In addition, WeGo will be providing direct service to the park on Route 84, Murfreesboro, with Park & Ride available at the regular lots in Murfreesboro and Antioch. The fare for this service will be \$2, and all QuickTicket products and other fare media will be accepted. Congratulations to Ms. Renuka Christoph and the Marketing Department for its first CIP!
7. CEO Bland was elected President of the Association at this month's Tennessee Public Transportation Association Board meeting and started a 2-year term.
8. The State Transit Association hosted its annual "Day on the Hill," where transit leaders from around the State descend on Nashville for meetings with State Legislators. The events included meetings with Senate Transportation and Safety Chair Becky Massey and House Transportation Chair Dan Howell and a legislative reception attended by several of our local state elected officials.
9. CEO Bland participated in a panel discussion on mobility with Michael Briggs, Director of Transportation Planning in Mayor O'Connell's Office, and Marty Sewell, Director of Planning for NDOT, at the Healthy Places Member Lunch for the Urban Land Institute Nashville Chapter. The focus of the lunch session was on overall mobility, with a specific emphasis on the Connect Downtown Project and transit's role in regional mobility.
10. On February 5, CEO Bland joined several MTA Board Members, Mayor O'Connell, State Representative Harold Love, and many other community leaders to celebrate Transit Equity Day. This nationwide event celebrates Rosa Parks's birthday and legacy in advancing the cause of social equity in public transportation. In Nashville, this event began several years ago under the leadership of Representative Love, and it's been incredibly heartwarming to see it grow each year. This year, dozens of folks joined us for a bus ride from Central to Fisk University, where the Mayor, Representative Love, Board Chair Gail Carr Williams, and others spoke from the heart of the legacy of Rosa Parks and the importance of public transportation in lifting communities.
11. On the RTA side:

- a. WeGo continues to advance land acquisition toward a permanent park-and-ride location in Murfreesboro. WeGo is waiting to receive word from the property owner to see if he accepts the offer and is engaging in the environmental assessment of the property.
- b. Hatch Consulting Group continues to advance the WeGo Star Future Vision Study. Yesterday, Hatch presented their initial findings to the RTA Board, and we were greenlighted to take two options – one short-term and one long-term through a more detailed operational and cost modeling process and to initiate the next phase of public engagement before presenting the final recommendations to the RTA Board later this year.
- c. WeGo continues to work with the development team of HG Hill and Southeast Venture on a joint development project at Donelson Station. Also, at yesterday's Board meeting, the RTA Board approved an agreement with real estate consulting firm Jones Long LaSalle to support the real estate negotiations with the development team and to provide support in developing necessary documentation for the FTA's joint development requirements. Simultaneously, WeGo's and developer's design teams are advancing site plan concepts to identify project boundaries. CEO Bland thanked Lydia Benda for her leadership in this effort.
- d. Most notably, the State General Assembly passed legislation extending the RTA through June 30, 2032. This legislation is awaiting the Governor's signature, which we expect shortly.

12. Finally, CEO Bland was pleased to join Board Chair Gail Carr Williams and other officials at Mayor O'Connell's announcement that he intends to pursue a transportation funding measure in November. WeGo Public Transit staff are working closely with NDOT and the Mayor's Office staff to provide a range of alternatives drawn from prior plans for the mayor to consider and advance through a public engagement process. He specifically thanked Felix Castrodad, Katie Freudberg, Lydia Benda, Dan Freudberg, and Hannah Schaeffer for supporting this effort and their considerable other daily responsibilities.

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

Board Chair Carr Williams said she was glad she had the opportunity to be invited to Mayor O'Connell's press conference and hear the referendum announcement. She said the board needs to be well-studied and well-taught and consider their role in the referendum. She proposed having a learning session with other transit stakeholders to learn about the referendum and transit in Nashville. She said there needs to be good governance around the referendum and collaborative discussions about what and how to prepare for it and be able to make the best decisions at the table. She said she would work with Ms. Monica Howse and CEO Bland to schedule this learning session in the coming weeks.

Board Chair Carr Williams said she had a great time on Transit Equity Day at Fisk University. She said you could feel the history in the room. She thanked Ms. Renuka Christoph and her team for organizing that event and the 92Q radio announcements. She said she is thankful for the bus passes that WeGo provides students at HBCUs.

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

IX. Adjournment: With no further business, Vice Chair Miller moved to adjourn the meeting, which adjourned at 3:44 p.m.

Attested:

Gail Carr Williams
Chair

Margaret L. Behm
Secretary