

NASHVILLE METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY
Board of Directors Meeting

November 18, 2021

- I. **Call to Order:** The regular meeting of the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (Nashville MTA) Board of Directors was held at the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department located at 5500 Charlotte Pike, Nashville, TN 37209 on Thursday, November 18, 2021.
- II. **Roll Call of Persons Present:** Gail Carr Williams, Chair; Janet Miller, Vice-Chair; Walter Searcy, Member; Jessica Dauphin, Member; Margaret Behm, Board Secretary; Chief Administrative Officer Rita Roberts-Turner; Chief Financial Officer Ed Oliphant; Chief Operating Officer Andy Burke; Chief Development Officer Trey Walker; Deputy Chief Operating Officer-Operations Systems Dan Freudberg; Director of Marketing & Communications Renuka Christoph; Director of Procurement & Business Diversity Amber Gooding; Director of Planning & Grants Felix Castrodad; and Sr. Executive Assistant & Board Liaison Monica Howse.

A quorum was established, and Chair Gail Carr Williams called the meeting to order at 2:33 p.m.

- III. **Approval of Minutes:** Vice-Chair Janet Miller made a motion to approve the October 28, 2021 minutes; the motion was seconded by Jessica Dauphin, and unanimously approved by the board.
- IV. **Public Comments:** Chair Gail Carr Williams opened the floor for public comments. The public was reminded that comments were limited to three minutes. The following members of the public had these comments:

John Bull

Mr. John Bull's public comments were as follows:

- Mr. Bull said that he continues to practice social distancing and wears a double mask while in public.
- Mr. Bull said that he's noticed increased ridership on #55 and #52.
- Mr. Bull said that he was impressed with the transportation plan for the cold weather response particularly the provisions that have been made for transporting dogs to and from the animal shelter.
- Mr. Bull said the bipartisan infrastructure bill, with a myriad of federal funding opportunities, combined with hearing the gospel legend Bobby Jones over the intercom, makes for a Happy Thanksgiving.

Darius Knight

Mr. Darius Knight's comments were as follows:

- Mr. Knight said that he has reported bus maintenance issues with the 700 series buses over the past three weeks, with the most recent being an exhaust smell coming from bus 717. He said this may cause breathing issues for customers and needs to be fixed.
- Mr. Knight said that we are still in a pandemic and he wants to make sure that both old and new buses are receiving the proper Covid-19 cleaning.
- Mr. Knight said that he has reached out to staff several times regarding safety issues at Central, and he hopes that these matters are resolved to prevent future accidents.
- Mr. Knight said Supervisor Rosetta Truss is to be commended and recognized for her hard work. Oftentimes she is running up and down the stairs getting buses in and out of Central and directing traffic on 4th Avenue, especially when there are downtown events.

- V. **Operations & Finance Committee Report:** Walter Searcy introduced the following items for discussion and action:

- a. **FY2021 Annual Audit Report (M-A-21-034):** CFO Ed Oliphant introduced Crosslin Accountant Erica Saeger to present the FY2021 Annual Audit report. Ms. Saeger provided the

Board with a summary of the audit outcomes and audited financial statements, highlighting that her firm was offering a clean audit opinion.

Staff requested the Board accept the Comprehensive Annual Audit Report for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2021.

The committee made a recommendation to approve the FY2021 Annual Audit Report and it was unanimously approved by the board.

- b. **Monthly Financial Report Compared to Budget (OF-D-21-031)**: CFO Ed Oliphant reported and reflected on the statement of operations for September 2021 compared to the budget and a balance sheet as of September 30, 2021. There was no further discussion at this time.
- c. **Annual Risk Assessment (OF-D-21-032)**: Chief Financial Officer Ed Oliphant and CEO Steve Bland led a discussion on the risk assessment at the meeting.

A list of each of the focus areas was previously identified in the financial area plus a description and discussion of some new areas for discussion. This list for finance still has a major focus and we continue to find ways to mitigate financial risk, but to ensure that we addressed all areas, we had to have open and productive discussions on all aspects of the company as we continue to try to improve the company by identifying and mitigating any risks and improve the customer/rider experience for those who utilize and depend on our services.

- d. **Monthly Operating Statistics (OF-D-21-033)**: Chief Operating Officer Andy Burke reported and reflected on the monthly operating statistics report through September 2021. There was no further discussion at this time.
- e. **Quarterly Performance Report (OF-D-21-034)**: Deputy Chief Operating Officer-Operations Systems Dan Freudberg reported the following:

System-wide, ridership continues to increase on nearly every route. Many of the trends discussed with the previous quarter's data continue to hold, with more robust recoveries in ridership seen on the most frequent transit routes. Trips oriented towards a more traditional commuter schedule (i.e., AM/PM peak period trips) have been slower to recover, with midday and weekend service demand showing stronger gains.

During this period, we could also see some effects of students returning to in-person classes and using WeGo services under the StrIDe program. Though StrIDe ridership is still less than half of pre-pandemic levels, this still equates to well over 2,000 rides on a typical school day. A few hundred of these daily school rides are on the #55 Murfreesboro Pike, which has notably taken over the number one spot in our network for overall ridership. It replaces the #56 Gallatin Pike, which had previously held this position for essentially the entire modern history of the Nashville MTA/WeGo.

On-time performance system-wide continues its anticipated decline as congestion returns to the region but remains at or above pre-pandemic levels on most routes and at most times of the day. Unfortunately, the routes with the highest ridership levels also tend to be those most impacted by the returning congestion, as these routes operate almost exclusively on major 'Pikes' that run roughly parallel to major highways and have highly directional peak-period traffic. Schedule adjustments that took effect with the October service change package will mitigate (but not reverse) these declines.

- f. **MTA Legal Services Contract Value Increase (M-A-21-035)**: Chief Administrative Officer Rita Roberts-Turner reported the following:

Following a competitive procurement process, the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority Board of Directors through its Chief Executive Officer entered into a five (5) year contract with Dodson Parker Behm & Capparella (Dodson Parker Behm) for general counsel and Board Secretary services and a five (5) year contract with Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP (Bradley) for general legal services on September 1, 2018.

Staff requested the Board to approve the contract amendments as outlined and presented at the board meeting, to increase the total not to exceed contract value to \$475,000 for Dodson

Parker Behm and to increase the total not to exceed contract value to \$350,000 for Bradley for the remainder of both contracts. Significant issues associated with the proposed increases included research related to COVID as well as legal work associated with development of the North Nashville Transit Center. Available funding will continue to be incorporated into annual operating and capital budgets.

The committee made a recommendation to approve the MTA Legal Services Contract Value Increase and it was unanimously approved by the board.

VI. New Initiative & Community Engagement Committee Report: Vice-Chair Janet Miller introduced the following items for discussion and action:

a. nMotion Status Report (NICE-D-21-013): Director of Planning & Grants Felix Castrodad presented the following project update at the Board Meeting:

The nMotion plan identified several opportunities and outlined a series of strategies to enhance the transit system by improving service, attracting and retaining riders, and meeting the growing needs of the Middle Tennessee region through the year 2040.

Since the nMotion plan adoption, the agency has been strategically working on incremental improvements to advance the plan strategies within the existing resources. As we continue to plan and adapt for service post-pandemic, the resiliency built into the nMotion plan improvements will play a critical role in enhancing WeGo's relevance for the future.

VII. 2022 MTA Committee & Board Meeting Schedule (M-A-21-036): Chief Administrative Officer Rita Roberts-Turner presented the proposed schedule for the 2022 committee and board meetings, with highlights to mid-year and holiday schedules, noted below:

- **November 17** – Thanksgiving falls on the fourth Thursday, so the November meeting will be on the third Thursday.
- **December 15** – In recent years, the Nashville MTA Board has met earlier in December to free up the week before Christmas for travel and family plans for Nashville MTA Board members and staff.

The committee made a recommendation to approve the 2022 Committee & Board Meeting Schedule and it was unanimously approved by the board.

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

1. With respect to COVID status, we've seen a slight uptick in employee cases lately reflecting the overall trend in cases throughout Nashville. As of this morning, we had 3 employees off for COVID-related leave, and one-off awaiting test results. Tragically, one of our maintenance employees passed away last week from complications arising from COVID. Appreciation was extended to Senior Safety Manager Nick Oldham and the Metro Nashville Health Department for holding an on-site vaccine booster event at the Nestor facility.
2. Also, with respect to COVID, we remain subject to the TSA requirement of customer and employee masking while on WeGo properties and vehicles but are also faced with legislation passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Lee last week prohibiting most local government entities from enforcing mask mandates. There is a provision in the law for entities that would risk losing Federal aid to file for an exception with the Office of State Comptroller, and CAO Rita Roberts-Turner and Board Secretary Margaret Behm are working on that filing.
3. Earlier this month, the Federal Infrastructure Bill was signed into law by President Biden. We are anticipating approximately a 30% increase in the formula funding that MTA receives, although the final numbers are somewhat dependent on the 2020 census. This will allow us to advance several projects in the Metro Nashville Transportation Plan more quickly but will also require increased local match as the basic structure of the major programs did not change from previous legislation. The legislation also provides a number of opportunities for competitive grant programs of various types.

4. With respect to the North Nashville Transit Center, we anticipate demolition of existing structures on that site to commence by the end of this month, as we only have one remaining permit to pull. Demolition will not have an impact on surrounding neighbors in terms of lane closures or other disruptions. We concluded 3 meetings of our North Nashville Transit Center Advisory Committee 2 weeks ago. This group provided valuable input to our design team with respect to cultural programming and design aspects to make sure that the Center properly represents the culture and history of the neighborhood. We anticipate spending time at your December meeting to review the design concepts and overall project status.
5. Also, on the topic of “coming attractions,” CFO Ed Oliphant and Comptroller Shelly McElhaney have kicked off the budget planning process for the FY2022-23 Operating Budget. As in past years, we will have our initial budget planning workshop with you via the NICE Committee in December.
6. Following the award (last month) of a consulting contract for the Downtown Neighborhood Traffic Project on behalf of NDOT, all contracting documents are in place and a kickoff meeting will be held with the Consultants and various stakeholders later this month.
7. Last month, the Mayor submitted a proposed capital spending plan totaling \$568.855 million to the Metro Council for their consideration over the next several months. The Mayor’s Plan included \$26.76 million for public transit. Following Council review, specific Council Members submitted several questions and filed some amendments that will be considered as the plan works its way through the legislative process. Council is expected to act on a final plan in December.
8. Last week, several of the staff attended the Annual Conference and Expo of the American Public Transportation Association in Orlando. This was a terrific learning and networking opportunity for several of our staff, particularly with the presence of hundreds of product vendors displaying the latest in transit products and technology. CEO Bland particularly thanked Board Member Jessica Dauphin for taking time away from her family to attend and to engage with other Transit Board Members.
9. Mayor Cooper has announced the hiring of a new Director of Transportation for the City of Nashville. Ms. Diana Alarcon will bring over 30 years of experience, including City DOT Director roles in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and Tucson, Arizona. We look forward to working with her and continuing to work with Faye DiMassimo who will return to her full-time role as Mayor Cooper’s Senior Advisor for Transportation and Infrastructure.
10. On November 4, 2021, the American Council of Engineering Companies of Tennessee awarded the Grand Award for Engineering Excellence to the Nolensville Transit Stop Improvement Project in the small transportation projects category. This is a tremendous honor for our staff and design team and can now join the project award of the year it won from Walk Bike Nashville in our trophy case!
11. On the RTA side:
 - a. As is typically the case, ridership on the WeGo Star Titans Express Train is following in lockstep with the success of the team. With 5 home games under their belt and ours, we have been averaging about 600 trips per home game.
 - b. The supply chain issues that are making worldwide news remain in effect for two specific RTA projects. The rehabilitation of our last locomotive has been delayed due to some parts availability shortages, and the delivery of 10 new commuter buses has similarly been delayed. While we are hopeful both projects will be complete by the end of the first quarter of 2022, this is still a very fluid situation.
 - c. We are partnering with the City of Murfreesboro on a park-and-ride lot adjacent to their soon-to-be-built transit facility. At this time, Hannah Schaeffer of our staff is working with Federal Transit Administrative staff on the necessary environmental reviews that must precede our projects.

IX. Chair’s Report: Chair Gail Carr Williams reported the following:

Chair Williams expressed her appreciation to CFO Oliphant for a great audit report and all of its highlights. She also echoed CFO Oliphant's remark's when he said, "*We kept our employees whole during the pandemic.*" She said that she was proud that the board was able to support those efforts.

Chair Williams expressed condolences to the Ohler family and the WeGo family in the loss of Maintenance Employee Robert "RJ" Ohler on Sunday, November 7, 2021. Mr. Ohler worked for WeGo Public Transit for a total of 15 years.

Chair Williams gave Director of Marketing & Communications Renuka Christoph kudos for capturing the voice of the gospel legendary Bobby Jones. She said, "*We are honored to have the voice of the iconic Dr. Jones to keep our riders safe and comfortable, "We are grateful for his partnership and his continued gifts to Nashville."*

Chair Williams also expressed appreciation to the following: Board Member Jessica Dauphin for attending and representing WeGo at the APTA Conference; to Board Member Mary Griffin for working and helping to recruit drivers; to Board Member Walter Searcy and Vice-Chair Janet Miller for anchoring us in the committees that they chair. Board involvement is a way to show our support for WeGo. She went on to say that the board is working on a Strategic Planning Session and Board Secretary Margaret Behm would be reaching out to all board members to see what each of their expectations are to make certain that everything is considered.

Lastly, Chair Carr Williams acknowledged and expressed her appreciation to Board Secretary Margaret Behm who On October 7th, during the National Association of Women Judge's Annual Conference in Nashville, was presented with the Florence K. Murray Award. The annual award was presented to a non-judge who, by example or otherwise, has influenced women to pursue legal careers, opened doors for women attorneys, or advanced opportunities for women within the legal profession and women in general.

In closing, Chair Gail Carr Williams wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and encouraged everyone to enjoy their families and be safe.

X. Other Business:

XI. Adjournment: With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:31 p.m.

Attested:

Gail Carr Williams
Chair

Margaret L. Behm
Secretary