

NASHVILLE METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY
Board of Directors Meeting
November 17, 2022

- 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, November 17, 2022.
- II. **Roll Call of Persons Present:** Gail Carr Williams, Chair; Janet Miller, Vice Chair; Walter Searcy, Member; Jessica Dauphin, Member; Mary Griffin Member; Margaret Behm, Board Secretary; Chief Executive Officer, Stephen Bland; Chief Financial Officer, Ed Oliphant; Chief Operating Officer, Andy Burke; Chief Development Officer, Trey Walker; Director of Planning & Grants, Felix Castrodad; Scheduling & Svc. Planning Manager, Katie Freudberg; Director of System Safety & Risk Management, Nick Oldham; Dispatch Manager, Karl Dean; and Sr. Executive Assistant & Board Liaison, Monica Howse.

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

- III. **Approval of Minutes:** Walter Searcy made a motion to approve the October 27, 2022, MTA Board minutes, the motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Janet Miller 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:

Darius Knight

Mr. Darius Knight's comments were as follows:

- Mr. Knight shared concerns of bus 1830 on route 23 pulling out in front of an ambulance and said that more training is needed.
- Mr. Knight shared concerns about pedestrian safety at Central.
- Mr. Knight asked if the low ridership on routes 75 and 79 was due to the electric Proterra buses that are on this route.
- Mr. Knight asked if route 41 could be reconfigured to include route 14.
- Mr. Knight shared concerns with routes 56, 23, and 79 buses safely getting down Broadway and asked if WeGo could encourage the city to provide dedicated bus lanes going out on 4th and 5th Avenue.

- V. **Informational Items:** The following items were presented for the board members' review. If any members had questions, they were asked to reach out to the staff for the specific item.
- Monthly Financial Report Compared to Budget
 - Upcoming Procurement Projects List

There were no questions.

VI. **Consent Agenda Items:**

a. **Approval of the 2023 MTA Board Meeting Schedule (M-A-22-035):**

Jessica Dauphin made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda Item. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Janet Miller and unanimously approved by the Board.

- VII. **Operations & Finance Committee Report:** Committee Chair Walter Searcy presented the following for discussion and action:

- a. **FY2022 Annual Audit Report (M-A-22-036)**: Chief Financial Officer Ed Oliphant along with MTA's outside accountants from Crosslin reviewed the Annual Report and their required communications for action:

Ms. Erica Saeger said that she was pleased to report that the MTA received a "clean" opinion on the report and that no material internal control weaknesses were encountered during the audit.

The Operations and Finance Committee requested the Board accept the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2022, and it was unanimously approved by the Board without further discussion.

- b. **Monthly Operating Statistics (OF-D-22-024)**: Chief Operating Officer Andy Burke reviewed the monthly operating statistics through September 2022 that included draft performance metric targets. The targets were developed by reviewing a combination of factors, including historic performance, recent trends, known internal and external factors, and industry standards/benchmarks (where available). He said that he was appreciative of the board's feedback on these targets, which are designed to be a balance between aspiration and attainability. For this reason, we scheduled this as a discussion item by the Operations and Finance Committee, rather than including the material as an "Information Only" Item as we typically have done.

Vice-Chair Janet Miller asked that a legend be added at the bottom of the report to explain what the green and red targets mean, along with an indicator of what a normal range looks like. Overall, the board members expressed their appreciation of the draft performance metric targets that were added to the report. All members requested that the report be provided in a larger print format.

There were no additional questions or further discussions at this time.

- c. **Quarterly Route Performance Report (OF-D-22-025)**: Scheduling & Service Planning Manager Katie Freudberg presented the Quarterly Route Performance Report for the months of July, August, and September.

System ridership continues to increase, with ridership this quarter at 90% of pre-pandemic levels. This is the first quarter that we have seen routes other than the 55 Murfreesboro Pike exceed pre-Covid numbers: In addition to the 55, Routes 18 Airport / Elm Hill Pike, 23 Dickerson Pike, and 52 Nolensville Pike all saw higher ridership than they did in the second quarter of FY20. All but one MTA route had higher ridership this quarter than in the quarter immediately preceding it (April - June 2022).

Ridership on both Saturdays and Sundays exceeded pre-pandemic numbers this quarter, but compared to last quarter, weekdays showed the most ridership growth.

System ridership also increased by about 18%, or just over 100,000 rides, between July and August of this year. Around two-thirds of those added rides are student ridership, and the remainder represents other ridership growth. Although ridership at several magnet schools has returned to pre-pandemic levels, StrIDe ridership as a whole is still returning more slowly than overall ridership.

On-time performance system-wide remains slightly above pre-pandemic levels, but the impact of increasing congestion and ridership at the start of the school year was clear: the number of times a bus was more than 15 minutes late increased by over 50% between July and August of this year. We anticipate needing to add service hours in order to maintain current service levels in Spring 2023.

Chair Carr Williams said with StrIDe ridership being down and the fact that people are still working from home, are we saying that we have new riders? Katie said we are fairly confident that we have new riders and more of them are adult/non-youth riders. If StrIDe ridership returns to normal and people return to work, we feel that we'll see a great increase in ridership. CEO Bland reminded the Board that one of the reasons we have seen a much faster return of ridership than most transit agencies is because we reallocated service to busier lines. This reallocation included the complete elimination of a number of routes that operated prior to the pandemic, and that a complete return of ridership would require a reinstatement of those routes, which would require continued increases in funding from Metro Nashville.

There were no additional questions or further discussions at this time.

- d. **Operations Dispatch Overview (OF-D-22-023)**: Dispatch Manager Karl Dean presented the following item for discussion:

Karl Dean discussed the functions of Dispatch and its impacts on the organization and provided an overview of ongoing and planned improvements. With the upcoming and ongoing Better Bus improvements and enhancements to the service, it is crucial that dispatch continues its innovative approaches to managing the day-to-day operation to both improve service reliability and enhance efficiency. Mr. Dean's presentation outlined a series of operational improvements that have been made in the Dispatch function, with a key element being the reallocation of "extra-board" operators to days of week and times of day when they can be more effective. As a result, even though our Operator shortage is just as acute as it was in mid-2019, lost service trips have been reduced by over 75% from that time.

Jessica Dauphin said that the bus operator shortage is a nationwide issue and some other transit agencies are having to cut routes and or pull back service, but she's happy to see that our shortages are nowhere near some of our peer agencies, and that we've actually been able to add service, even if we haven't been able to add more service as quickly as we would like.

CEO Bland and members of the board expressed their appreciation to Karl Dean for a job well done and for the outstanding report that was presented at the meeting. Mary Griffin asked how the board members could help with the bus driver shortages. Karl Dean said to continue to raise awareness of the agency and encourage their contacts to spread the word about working for WeGo!

There were no additional questions or further discussions at this time.

- VIII. **New Initiative & Community Engagement Committee Report**: Vice-Chair Janet presented the following item for discussion:

- a. **2022 Title VI Program Update Adoption (M-A-22-037)**: This action item was deferred to next month at the request of staff.

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

1. CEO Bland thanked the Board for their ongoing support of the Dr. Ernest Rip Patton Jr. North Nashville Transit Center project. As you know, we celebrated the groundbreaking for this facility, and special thanks to Gail, Jessica, and Janet for attending. Mary and Walter, were unable to attend because they both were under the weather, but we still have commemorative hard hats and shovels for you. We were delighted to have a number of important partners speak including Deputy Governor and TDOT Commissioner Butch Eley, Mayor Cooper, and several Metro Council Members; not to mention the son of Dr. Patton, Michael Patton. CEO Bland said that he speaks for everyone that was in attendance when he said the most inspiring words about the purpose of this facility, and of public transportation in general, were spoken by our closing speaker, Board Chair Gail Carr Williams. We have received all of our grading and building permits, and the contractors are working on various required submissions. We anticipate a grand opening in the Spring of 2024.

2. CEO Bland said that we're anxiously awaiting Vince Malone to start in his role as Chief of Staff and Administration the Monday after Thanksgiving. He said, even though he isn't officially on board yet, Vince has been getting up to speed on current issues and meeting various staff with whom he'll be working closely.
3. The staff has continued to meet with NDOT, Metro Planning, and representatives of Oracle to advance plans to incorporate transit into the northern sections of East Bank Boulevard enumerated in the East Bank Vision Plan as Oracle works on designs for their campus. The current design iterations will allow for a station adjacent to their campus with sufficient right of way to support future Bus Rapid Transit in the East Bank corridor.
4. Similarly, we have been meeting with representatives of NDOT, TDOT, and developers of the properties along West End Avenue adjacent to the Beaman Auto Dealerships regarding how transit could be incorporated into this major redevelopment, and we are optimistic about a very positive improvement.
5. Metro Planning recently kicked off its revisioning study for the former Global Mall Property in Antioch. Earlier today, CEO Bland and Felix Castrodad met with their consultants to review our service profile in that area, and how a regional transit center might be incorporated into future development. You may recall that we were advancing a Regional Transit Center project with the former developer of that site and have, in fact, already secured \$4 million in funding toward this center, including \$3.2 million through competitive Federal funds.
6. Technical and Community Advisory committees for NDOT's Connect Downtown mobility study met this past month. The project recently issued its "State of Downtown Mobility Report" with a lot of great information about various aspects of Downtown Mobility. This information is publicly available on NDOT's website. Among the many aspects of the plan, the process is the examination of ways that our transit operations can work more smoothly and reliably through Downtown Nashville.
7. We participated in several meetings with NDOT, Metro Planning, and Members of the Metro Council with respect to legislation regarding the elimination of minimum parking requirements for certain types of development in the Urban Services Zone of Metro. One of the issues that came up in debate is the availability of adequate public transportation services in areas impacted by the legislation.
8. CEO Bland and Renuka Christoph had the opportunity to meet this month with representatives of the Mayor's Sustainability Advisory Committee to discuss ways in which the committee might help to promote transit use as a way of reducing reliance on single-occupant autos.
9. We hope that some of you had the opportunity to have your photo taken with Elvis at WeGo Central. As part of our overall WeGoCation program from earlier this summer, we are working with Madame Tussauds wax museum to increase ridership on the Opry Mills bus and, in order to give folks a taste of what they can expect if they take that ride, the museum brought Elvis to us this week.
10. On the RTA side:
 - a. The RTA Board approved a consulting contract to Hatch Consulting to undertake a "future visioning" study of the Star to examine opportunities to enhance the impact of the Star in regional mobility including potential service expansion, reallocation of existing services, and opportunities for station area development. We anticipate that the full effort will take about 18 months, and will continue to report progress back to you, particularly as it pertains to interactions with MTA service.

- b. The Titans Express continues to operate all home Titans games and, so far, it has been very successful as the trains so far have sold out. I would encourage anyone who plans to attend any of the upcoming games to go to our website for access to train tickets.

CEO Bland availed himself of questions and there were none at this time.

X. Chair's Report: Chair Carr Williams provided the following report:

Gail Carr Williams was thrilled and pleased at the turnout for last week's groundbreaking of the Dr. Ernest RIP Patton, Jr. North Nashville Transit Center. She recently attended a health fair sponsored by a service organization that she's a part of and noticed that you could literally see the transit center hub from the apartment complex and community center area. She said it's symbolic of what the transit center is going to do in this community and said it was a great success. She further stated that this project will be transformational for the citizens of North Nashville, and a lot of people worked hard to make certain that the transit center came to fruition, and she was glad to be a part of it.

Chair Carr Williams gave kudos and a job well done to Dispatch Manager Karl Dean for his first presentation with the MTA Board. She said that his innovation and creativity are meaningful for his peers and our riders. She thanked him again for working so hard while keeping a positive and happy attitude.

In conclusion, Gail Carr Williams yielded the remainder of her time to allow board member Jessica Dauphin to share about her recent visit at the APTA - Transit Initiative & Communities Workshop in Austin, Texas.

In summary, Jessica said the workshop was highlighted by those few cities that have recently gone through a transit referendum or are considering it. Jessica attended because of her work as a transit supporter and advocate in Nashville to find out if successful referendums employ similar tactics and tools and what steps cities that saw success took before there was a campaign to lay the groundwork for success. The intimate gathering of experts, advocates, and transit agency representatives gathered several times over three days to network and discuss particular issues facing them and their move toward the referendum. There was networking with regional representatives where Jessica sat with Kentucky, Florida, and Virginia to discuss the relative challenges of finding support for funding and building transit infrastructure in the South. She mentioned the Six Steps for Winning Transit:

1. Set a vision for transit in your city.
2. Set specific, ambitious, and attainable goals to realize that vision.
3. Identify who can make these goals happen and hold these decision makers, typically political leaders, accountable.
4. Speak from a rider's perspective and combine human stories with compelling statistics.
5. Use a variety of tactics to sustain pressure for change.
6. Support and create opportunities for transit officials and agency staff to implement new policies and practices. Celebrate their progress.

Jessica concluded her remarks by saying, the key note that stood out was the mayoral roundtable and spotlight on Austin. Mayors Kate Gallego, Phoenix, and Steve Adler, Austin, really spoke to the necessity of investing in public transit, and multimodal safety infrastructure while protecting affordable housing and anti-displacement measures. The one quote she took from that was "The tilling of the soil was critical to Prop A's success." The tilling of the soil is the community engagement that led up to the campaign. They very purposefully went to the communities they serve years ahead of a campaign and kept their promises to those communities—even changing the projects when community feedback demanded it. Community outreach engagement is very important and where Nashville advocacy should be looking.

Chair Carr Williams thanked Jessica Dauphin for her summary report and wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

- XI. **Other Business:** There was no other business to come before this board.
- XII. **Adjournment:** With no further business, Chair Carr Williams called for a motion to adjourn the meeting, a proper motion was made and seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 4:04 p.m.

Attested:

Gail Carr Williams
Chair

Margaret L. Behm
Secretary