

# Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority

## Board of Directors Meeting

November 21, 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, November 21, 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 & Development  
Amanda Vandegrift, Deputy CEO of Finance & Admin  
Andy Burke, COO  
Nick Oldham, CSSO  
Vince Malone, COSA  
Felix Castrodad, Director of Planning & Grants  
Billy Higgin, Capital Grants Administrator

A quorum was established, and Board Chair Carr Williams called the meeting to order at 2:34 p.m.

Ms. Carr Williams opened the meeting by acknowledging the recent tragic events. She stated, "This tragedy deeply saddens us, and our thoughts are with those affected—the families and friends of the victims, as well as our riders and employees. The safety of our passengers, drivers, and staff is our top priority; it always has been and always will be. We will continue to assess and strengthen our safety measures across all aspects of this agency. Our commitment to maintaining and improving the safety of our transit system remains unwavering. The board, senior leadership team, and staff are united in recognizing the vital importance of safety." She then invited the audience to observe a moment of silence.

- III. **Approval of Minutes:** Vice Chair Miller made a motion to approve the October 24 Nashville MTA Board minutes. Ms. Dauphin 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:

- Jeremiah Wooten

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

- **Monthly Financial Report Compared to Budget** – Ms. Hays Sasser asked if the passenger revenue found on page seven was the amount it cost passengers to ride. Ms. Vandegrift replied yes and said the amount was paid through the fare media, which includes QuickTicket.
- **Monthly Operating Statistics** – No questions
- **Upcoming Procurement Projects List** – No questions

VI. **Consent Agenda Items:**

- a. Web Services Communication – Info Technology

- b. MTA/TDOT Contract for South Nashville WeGo Link Subsidy – Ms. Dauphin expressed her excitement about seeing this initiative move forward.

Mr. Thompson moved to approve the consent agenda items; Ms. Miller seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved them.

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

- a. **Quarterly Route Performance Report (OF-D-24-010):** Katie Freudberg, Scheduling & Service Planning Manager, provided the following update:

Ms. Freudberg reported that not only have MTA service and ridership levels exceeded pre-pandemic ridership levels, but that they were also approaching levels not seen since before service reductions were implemented in the Spring of 2019 in response to a cut in State funding. She reported that, while weekday ridership remained below pre-pandemic levels, Saturday and Sunday ridership were well more than these figures and that Sunday ridership was almost 60% higher than pre-pandemic levels. She also stated that while peak hour commuter ridership and school hour ridership were still below pre-pandemic levels, we have begun to see the peaking phenomena associated with these two markets start to return. Mid-day and evening ridership on weekdays continued to perform above pre-pandemic levels. Ms. Freudberg also operated on our Bus Operator demographics, where we are seeing much higher numbers of operators with less than 3 years of seniority and more than 12 years of seniority, but fewer in the 4 – 12-year cohort.

Chair Carr Williams asked if there was anything that surprised her when she conducted the analysis. Katie replied that while there was nothing particularly surprising, several things sparked the staff's curiosity. She said more detailed research would be undertaken in the coming months to examine root causes.

Janet Miller said she was glad to see that WeGo is headed in the right direction. She said people often say if you build it, they won't come, but in response to that, we now can say, "We built the Dr. Ernest "Rip" Patton North Nashville Transit Center, and the people are coming."

- b. **MTA 60 Foot Articulated Bus Purchase (M-A-24-033):** Andy Burke, Chief Operating Officer, provided the following item for action:

In April 2022, the members of the board approved a 5-year contract with New Flyer of America for the acquisition of 60' clean diesel articulated buses. Concurrent with MTA's efforts to operate within our Capital Fleet Replacement Plan for 60' Articulated Buses, staff requests approval to make an order for twenty-five (25) New Flyer of America Inc. Clean Diesel 60' Articulated Buses to replace twenty-two (22) New Flyer 60' Articulated Buses that were built and purchased in 2013 and will meet Federal Transit Administration (FTA) replacement criteria. In addition, there will be three (3) expansion buses in this order to support service expansion. The purchase will be made under the contract with New Flyer of America Inc. The approval of this purchase is consistent with the agency's efforts to execute a more balanced schedule for capital spending and fleet replacement.

Considering the lead time for the production scheduling, maintenance staff anticipates delivery dates for these buses starting in the 1st quarter of FY27.

WeGo's third-party inspector, Transit Resources Center (AmeriTran), has conducted the required Pre-Award Audit to validate that the overall bus components comply with federal requirements for a minimum of 70% American Built Content and final assembly requirements, proving compliance with Buy America requirements. When bus production is completed, Transit Resources Center (AmeriTran) will perform a post-delivery inspection and confirm Buy

American content requirements are met. Ms. Miller asked if 2 years was a typical delivery lag for this equipment, and Mr. Burke replied that it was.

Mr. Thompson inquired about the typical lifespan of the articulated buses. Mr. Burke responded that it is generally around 12 years. He also asked if this purchase would replace all the articulated buses, to which Mr. Burke explained that no, the replacement would be done strategically over time. Overall, we have a fleet of 45 articulated buses, and this order will bring the total number to 48.

Ms. Dauphin asked what would happen if WeGo didn't receive the \$13 million. Mr. Burke and Billy Higgins responded that they would explore other funding options, such as the Federal Section 5307 Formula program, but this would require the deferral of other projects. Mr. Bland indicated that funding for this project was included in the Capital Spending Plan proposal recently submitted by Mayor O'Connell to the Metropolitan Council, so we do expect the funding to be in place well before the delivery of the buses.

Staff recommended that the board provide the Chief Executive Officer authority to approve the purchase of twenty-five (25) 60' Articulated buses from New Flyer of America Inc. for vehicles used in fixed route service. The requested contract authorization is for a not-to-exceed price of \$1,026,485.67 per bus, plus an additional \$5,000 per bus for tools and training.

The total not-to-exceed purchase authorization for this acquisition is \$25,787,141.75. Staff will return to the board in future years for specific approval to acquire equipment under the remainder of this contract. "Funding for this acquisition will use \$4,838,000 in FY 2024 Metro Capital Spending Plan funds for expansion vehicles and require \$9,400,000 in requested FY 25 Metro Capital Spending Plan funds for replacement vehicles. In addition, the current CIB includes \$13,144,000 in FY 26 Metro Capital Spending Plan funds for replacement vehicles. If the planned FY25 and FY26 Capital Spending Plan funds are not approved, WeGo will need to use Federal 5307 funding with state and local match, which would significantly impact WeGo's ability to maintain a state of good repair."

Ms. Dauphin moved to approve the MTA 60-Foot Articulated Bus Purchase action item. Ms. Hays Sasser seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved the minutes.

**c. MNPD Memorandum of Understanding Renewal (M-A-24-034):** Chief Safety Security Officer Nick Oldham provided the following item for action:

In 2017, DTO partnered with the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department (MNPD) to provide security at the Elizabeth Duff Transit Center, prioritizing safety for customers and employees. The collaboration strengthened safety and fostered a strong relationship with local law enforcement.

In June 2023, DTO was informed of an upcoming price increase for officers in the Secondary Employment Unit (SEU) of MNPD, which led to a significant decrease in officer participation. This reduction occasionally resulted in no officers being on duty at the transit center. To address this, DTO switched to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in July 2023, replacing the flat fee system with regular salaried overtime for officers, which also contributes to their pension. Since the change, volunteer participation has increased to nearly 80%. Under the MOU, instead of a flat fee, the officers get their regular salaried overtime, which also goes towards their pension.

Staff requested the Board give the Chief Executive Officer the authority to enter into an MOU with the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department's Secondary Employment Unit in an amount not to exceed \$1,374,464 to provide the added security of police officers and patrol cars at the Elizabeth Duff Transit Center at WeGo Central.

Ms. Hays Sasser asked if it would be possible to obtain peer data to assess WeGo's performance. Mr. Oldham responded that they are already collaborating with Marine Tiger to gather that information and would be happy to present it to the board. Ms. Miller recommended benchmarking against larger cities.

Ms. Dauphin moved to approve the MNPD Memorandum of Understanding Renewal action item. Ms. Miller seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved it.

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

**a. Adoption of the FY2025-2029 Capital Investment Plan (M-A-24-034):** Capital Grants Administrator Billy Higgins provided the following item for action:

The Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority's (MTA) Capital Investment Plan prioritizes needs, identifies funding sources, and sets timelines for MTA's capital projects over five years. The plan outlines regulatory, state of good repair, and growth and expansion needs that guide the Authority's future project development activity. Generally, projects identified in the first year of the plan are relatively firm in scope and budget, while projects in out-years are likely more conceptual.

Staff requested the Board's formal adoption of the FY2025-2029 MTA Capital Investment Plan. The plan recommends \$110.7 million in investments for Year One (FY2025), with a total project investment of \$434.8 million over the five years. Projects in Year One are fully funded, and staff anticipates a balanced capital budget over the entire plan period, with conservative estimates for future resources.

Ms. Hays Sasser inquired if "local" referred to Metro Nashville, to which Ms. Higgins confirmed that this did represent Metro Nashville funding.

Mr. Thompson asked if the articulated buses were included in the capital budget. Ms. Higgins answered yes.

Ms. Miller asked if this was a forecasting document. Staff clarified that it was, and that this document formed the basis for what we would submit to other processes such as Metro Nashville's Capital Improvement Budget and GNRC's Transportation Improvement Program.

Ms. Dauphin asked if WeGo would revisit these plans now that the CHYM has passed. CEO Bland affirmed that they would.

Mr. Thompson asked if future transit centers would be included, and Ms. Higgins confirmed that they would be.

Mr. Thompson moved to approve the Adoption of the FY2025-2029 Capital Investment Plan. Ms. Dauphin seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved it.

**IX. Approval of the FY2025-2029 Board Meeting Schedule (M-A-24-036):** Chief of Staff and Administration Vince Malone provided the following item for action:

The proposed schedule for the 2025 committee and board meetings is attached. Notable changes include scheduling the November meeting for the third Thursday due to Thanksgiving falling on the fourth Thursday and moving the December meeting to the third Thursday because Christmas Day falls on the fourth Thursday.

Staff recommended the Board adopt the proposed 2025 meeting dates.

Mr. Thompson moved to approve the Board Meeting Schedule. Ms. Dauphin seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved it.

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

1. Mr. Bland echoed the sentiments shared earlier by Chair Gail Carr-Williams and Nick Oldham in expressing deep sorrow and sympathy to the victims of violence this week. The impact of these incidents has been felt across WeGo and throughout the Nashville community. He also commended the staff for their swift and effective response. For instance, when Wednesday's shooting at Central forced the closure of the upper level, the Operations and Customer Care teams immediately relocated operations to the lower level during the busiest time of day. They handled the situation calmly, professionally, and with the safety and well-being of WeGo's customers as the priority.
2. On a more positive note, Mr. Bland said he was pleased to share that on November 5, the voters of Davidson County overwhelmingly supported Mayor O'Connell's Choose How You Move transportation improvement program, passing it by a 65.5% to 34.5% margin with over 270,000 votes cast. This is a remarkable turnaround from the 2018 vote. WeGo staff were already proactively planning an aggressive expansion of services and capital projects even before the measure passed. Mr. Bland thanked all the Board Members for their leadership in making this victory possible.
3. Other cities and regions are now looking to Nashville for guidance. Earlier this week, Mr. Bland and Ms. Vandegrift met with a delegation from St. Petersburg, Florida, who visited Nashville to learn about Nashville's successful transit initiatives. In December, several of the staff, including Board member Jessica Dauphin, will travel to Cincinnati, Ohio, for the Center for Transportation Excellence Transit Ballot Initiatives Workshop, where they'll share experiences and strategies for advancing transit expansion.
4. Mr. Bland took a moment to congratulate Vice Chair Janet Miller, who was recently inducted into the Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame. Several of the board members and staff had the pleasure of joining hundreds of Janet's admirers at the induction dinner and expressed how incredibly proud they were of this well-deserved honor.
5. Last month, amidst the celebrations, including the graduation of our first Maintenance Apprenticeship Class and the WeGo Academy Class, Mr. Bland said that he neglected to introduce a key addition to the WeGo team properly. Nick Pecenka joined WeGo as Director of Operations, replacing Carolyn Riggs-Ferrar, who recently retired. Nick brings over a decade of experience in operations and safety leadership, most recently from the railroad industry. Welcome to WeGo, Nick!
6. Additionally, Mr. Bland acknowledged two long-serving members of the WeGo team. Geraldine "GG" Stafford will be retiring after 21 years of service as a Human Resources Specialist. GG has been an invaluable resource for our staff, resolving countless benefits-related issues. We'll certainly miss her problem-solving expertise. Also, David Eyler, who will be retiring after 23 years of service as an operations supervisor, has been a steady presence in our operations control center. His calm, professional demeanor and commitment to safety have been critical to the smooth operation of our system. Thank you both, GG and David – you will be missed.
7. WeGo staff has been working closely with TDOT, the Mayor's Office, Metro Planning, NDOT, and other stakeholders to ensure the Antioch Transit Center project and the I-24 Choice Lanes project are closely aligned. These productive meetings will help provide a better outcome for the community and region.

8. WeGo's partnership with the Tennessee Titans continues to thrive. The Titans are funding our initiative to offer free fares system-wide on home game days, leading to a 17% increase in ridership on those days compared to an average Sunday. Nearly 1,000 riders use our services to travel to and from the games via bus and train, which is a great success for both WeGo and the Titans.
9. On the RTA side:
  - a. WeGo continues to make progress on the Donelson Station Transit Center and related joint development projects. Debbie has been leading these efforts, along with the Antioch project. We are currently in the federal environmental review phase, and once complete, we'll move forward with design and land acquisition activities.

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

Ms. Carr Williams congratulated Geraldine Stafford and David Eyler on their well-deserved retirements and recognized their significant contributions over the years.

She also expressed her gratitude to Janet Miller for her recent honor, being inducted into the Junior Achievement Hall of Fame, and praised Janet as a true role model.

Ms. Carr Williams expressed her excitement about the referendum's successful passage, noting that Nashville is ready to embrace the challenge ahead. She emphasized that these are exciting times for both the city and WeGo Public Transit.

Additionally, she thanked Ms. Vandegrift for her impactful work before and after joining WeGo and the entire staff for their dedication and hard work.

She expressed her appreciation to her fellow board members, and especially to Janet Miller, for their collective efforts in ensuring the referendum's success.

Finally, considering the recent tragic events, Ms. Carr Williams reminded everyone to check in on their colleagues and loved ones. She encouraged everyone to extend this care and support to the community as well, urging everyone to open their hearts, appreciate one another, and be grateful for the bonds shared.

**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 4:05 p.m.

**Attested:**

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**Gail Carr Williams**  
**Chair**

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**Margaret L. Behm**  
**Secretary**