



**MINUTES**  
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY**  
**April 20, 2022**

- I. **Call to Order:** The regular meeting of the Regional Transportation Authority of Middle Tennessee (RTA) Board of Directors was held at the Tennessee State Archives & Library, located at 1001 Rep. John Lewis Way N., Nashville, TN 37219 on Wednesday, April 20, 2022. A quorum of the full RTA Board was not established, so the RTA Board meeting was adjourned, and the RTA Executive meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Chair, Mayor Randall Hutto.

**Executive Committee Members in Attendance:**

Mayor Randall Hutto – Wilson County  
Mayor Paige Brown – City of Gallatin  
Mayor Rick Bell – City of Lebanon  
Governor’s Appointee Ed Cole, Secretary – Davidson County  
Mayor Bill Ketron – Rutherford County  
Mayor Billy Vogle – Robertson County  
Mayor Anthony Holt – Sumner County

**Others Present:**

Mayor Jamie Clary – City of Hendersonville  
Andy Barlow – City of Mt. Juliet (Alt.)  
Jim Kerr – City of Murfreesboro (Alt.)  
Gerald Herman – City of White House (Alt.)  
Diana Alarcon – Davidson County (Alt.)  
Margot Fosnes – Robertson County (Gov. Appt.)  
Ed Elam – Rutherford County (Gov. Appt.)  
Ken Davis – Wilson County (Gov. Appt.)  
Ray Render – Rep. for Congressman John Rose’s Office - 6th District, TN  
Patti Carroll – Rep. for Congressman Mark Green’s Office - 7<sup>th</sup> District, RN

II. **Approval of the January 19, 2022 Minutes**

The January 19, 2022, minutes were approved by the Executive Committee at the February 16, 2022 meeting.

III. **Public Comments:** There were no public comments to come before this.at this time.

IV. **Finance Committee Report:** Chief Financial Officer Ed Oliphant reported the following:

- a. **Monthly Financial Report Compared to Budget Report (R-D-22-011):** Chief Financial Officer Ed Oliphant reviewed the year-to-date data of the statement of operations for the month of February 2022 compared to the FY2020 budget and the balance sheet as of February 28, 2022. Chief Financial Officer Ed Oliphant availed himself for questions and there were none at this time.

**V. Operations Committee Report:** Committee Chair Mayor Rick Bell reported the following:

a. **Monthly Operating Statistics (R-D-22-012):** Chief Operating Officer Andy Burke reviewed the RTA Monthly Dashboard Report through the month of February 28, 2022, with the Executive Committee. Chief Operating Officer Andy Burke availed himself for questions and there were none at this time.

b. **Nashville & Eastern Freight Derailments - WeGo Star Service Impacts (R-D-22-013):** Chief Operating Officer Andy Burke presented the following:

Since its inception in 2006, the Star has operated with a high level of reliability and safety, with an overall trip completion percentage of over 99% annually. During the history of the Star, “major” disruptions have generally been beyond the control of the Operator, such as in the aftermath of the 2020 Middle Tennessee Tornado, when downed power lines on the tracks resulting from the tornado required a long-term suspension of service, or washouts of track sections following significant rainfall.

In March 2022, two incidents occurred involving the derailment of freight equipment on the Nashville and Eastern Railroad (NERR) that required a suspension of WeGo Star passenger service while clean-up occurred, and the track was inspected for safety. The relative proximity of these events caused alarm among RTA Operations Staff, who sought to determine if there were underlying issues of concern. Below is an overview of the recent events:

On March 21<sup>st</sup> at approximately 12:30 PM CST, 12 freight rail cars derailed at Mile Post 14.3 between Hermitage and Mt. Juliet Stations causing service disruption to the WeGo Star’s March 21<sup>st</sup> evening and March 22<sup>nd</sup> morning service.

At the time of the derailment, the Nashville and Eastern Railroad (NERR) was undergoing tie and surface rehabilitation as part of the general program of maintaining a state of good repair. Immediately following tie replacement, ballast (crushed stone material that stabilizes the trackbed) was dumped and surfaced to secure the curves from any lateral movement and track buckling. The freight operator (RJ Corman) connected the evening freight service rail cars to the ballast cars – a practice that is not uncommon in the freight industry – and upon dumping the ballast at Mile Post 14.3 moved on into the city to prepare for the evening freight service. After dumping ballast on the high side of the curve it was determined that the low side did not need ballast and therefore, they did not empty the low side of the ballast car. This created an imbalance and the ballast cars started to lean, one turned over which caused a chain reaction of the trailing 11 cars.

Contributing factors:

- 20+ tons of rock still on the low side of the train sitting on an elevated curve
- 2 of the ballast cars had excessive side bearing clearance

Investigation Results and Corrective Action:

- Local NERR ballast car fleet inspected for compliance **(completed)**
- Limiting work trains between commuter service and no commingling of work and freight trains **(completed)**
- Review current design elevation calculations along the commuter route **(completed)**

The findings and corrective actions are deemed adequate to prevent similar incidents in the future to the extent possible.

Nashville MTA assisted the RTA WeGo Star by providing bus bridges (supplementary bus service to connect commuter rail customers to their destination from March 21<sup>st</sup> until March 23<sup>rd</sup>).

MTA invoiced RTA for the bus bridges and services rendered for the incidents above based on the contractual agreement between MTA and RTA for bus service compensation for the 84 & 86 express service. In turn, RTA has been reimbursed by RJ Corman for these expenses.

The staff has found the investigation and corrective action completed by RJ Corman to be adequate, and that proactive steps are being taken to avoid future such occurrences. WeGo Public Transit Staff and RJ Corman Staff were available to address committee member questions regarding these issues.

There was general discussion among the Executive Committee Board members and no further questions from the floor at this time.

**c. Regional Bus Service Restoration & Reliability (R-D-22-014):** Chief Operating Officer Andy Burke presented the following:

Staff engaged the Committee in discussion to refine and expand the various options under consideration, and to gauge the committee's level of interest in various alternatives before proceeding to a recommended action plan. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) operates commuter-oriented transit services within the 10-county regional area. RTA contracts for commuter bus service in 5 corridors (Montgomery, Dickson, Sumner, Williamson, and Robertson Counties) to Gray Line of Tennessee, a 3rd party provider. Gray Line is responsible for providing labor, materials, and all administrative, operations, and maintenance resources required to perform the transportation services detailed by RTA times, schedules, and service hours. The current agreement with Gray Line was entered into on July 1st, 2015. We are currently in the first of two optional extension periods for this service. RTA also contracts with the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) for commuter bus service in the Rutherford County Corridor, and for connector bus services to the WeGo Star.

Prior to the pandemic, Gray Line operated its service with a high level of reliability, completing approximately 99.6% of scheduled trips. However, since the onset of the pandemic Gray Line has experienced severe staffing shortages common to many employers. This has forced us to defer the full restoration of pre-pandemic service levels, as we have on the WeGo Star and Rutherford County Commuter service operated by the MTA. Among the options staff have begun to examine are:

1. Gray Line Contract Amendments - This option would entail an increase in unit pricing for Gray Line-operated services to allow the company to restructure its operator compensation to be more competitive. Any increase in rates would be connected to an incentive/penalty structure to provide accountability for service performance.
2. Potential Partnerships with Regional Operators – Engaging in conversations with neighboring operators (specifically Franklin Transit and Clarksville Transit) about potential interest/capacity to operate commuter-oriented services under contract to the RTA. This option has become more practical as the RTA has acquired its rolling stock that could be provided to regional operators.
3. Potential Expanded Contracting to MTA – Examining options for the MTA to provide contracted bus service in additional corridors for RTA.
4. Examination of Alternate Providers – In the previous solicitation for contracted service providers, Gray Line provided the only competitive proposal (the only other proposal received was over twice the price of Gray Line's proposal). This alternative would amount to communicating with large, national operators to

determine the conditions that would need to be present for them to offer competitive proposals.

While ridership levels remain depressed on RTA services since the onset of the pandemic, ridership has been gradually increasing and the recent increase in gasoline prices provide even more incentive for our regional commuters to use this service. As such, we will need to address the overall issue of service reliability and service restoration to be effective.

There was general discussion among the Executive Committee Board members and no further questions from the floor at this time.

- d. **WeGo Star Future Direction Strategy Planning Process (R-D-22-015)**: Director of Planning Felix Castrodad reviewed the overall intended scope with the Committee and sought input on the direction of the effort and engagement with stakeholders through the course of the process.

Prior to the pandemic, the RTA engaged in an alternatives analysis to assess various options for improving and expanding the availability of the WeGo Star commuter rail service. With a federal requirement that all commuter railroads deploy Positive Train Control (PTC), the RTA pursued an exception due to the extremely high cost of this system (approximately \$50 million) and ongoing annual operating expense (approximately \$500,000 annually). The limited use exception that was approved by the Federal Railroad Administration came with several conditions, including a requirement that the Star does not exceed 12 trips per day.

The planning study (reviewed with the RTA Board in January 2020 – immediately before the onset of the pandemic) outlined 3 phases of possible improvements to the Star with associated high-level cost estimates: (1) extending all trips to Lebanon and providing additional peak-direction service through the creation of an additional passing siding at Martha station and the creation of a downtown-adjacent storage yard; (2) Extension of the line to the Wilson County Expo Center; and (3) a large-scale investment to facilitate expanded service with the deployment of positive train control (PTC), additional rolling stock, and various associated improvements such as additionally protected crossings and quiet zones.

With the onset of the pandemic and associated issues over the past 2 years, staff believes that additional analytic work is necessary to determine recommendations for the future direction of the Star. Some of these issues include likely long-term changing commute patterns including hybrid and remote office environments and reverse commuting, station area development as we have seen around Mt. Juliet, Hamilton Springs, and Donelson Stations, and changing trends in local development as reflected in initiatives such as Lebanon's 2040 Comprehensive Plan, Mt. Juliet's Comprehensive Transportation Plan, and Nashville's ongoing Connect Downtown mobility plan. The RTA is currently soliciting professional services to examine the future direction of service models, financial models, and project development for the Star, but also with an eye toward transferrable information to other aspects of RTA operations.

Director of Planning & Grants Felix Castrodad was available for any questions from the floor and there were none at this time.

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

1. CEO Bland said that he sent out an e-mail communication on April 19, 2022, regarding the decision of a Federal judge in Florida earlier that week that said, the Centers for Disease Control and Transportation Security Administration have discontinued the requirement to wear masks on public transportation. We communicated this to our employees and customers as well on April 19, 2022. The Administration is considering whether or not to appeal this decision.

2. Felix Castrodad, Director of Planning & Grants reported on the pending Star Future Strategies Study earlier in the meeting. Toward looking at how the RTA may better meet regional needs in the post-pandemic future, we have also initiated discussions with economic development officials and employers in Clarksville and Ashland City to investigate potential reverse commute options on our commuter bus systems to help address employee shortages with these employers.
3. Our Quick Ticket Account-Based Fare Collection system is fully functional on RTA commuter buses (both MTA operated and Gray Line operated service) and on the Star. We encourage all members to communicate this simple way to pay fares to your residents. They can either obtain a QuickTicket card or use a smartphone app to pay their fares and
4. The last locomotive scheduled for rebuilding is currently in Nashville and is undergoing testing. Assuming all tests are completed satisfactorily, it will enter regular service in the next month.
5. With Congress completing the FY2022 budget reconciliation bill, we have received our first apportionments under the new Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. For our two largest Federal formula transit programs, urbanized area formula funding increased from \$23,821,894 to \$30,585,133 (an increase of \$6.76 million or 28%. This is split among the RTA, MTA, TMA Group, and Franklin Transit at the regional level. For our Formula State of Good Repair funds, funding increased from \$2,756,721 to \$4,125,627 (an increase of \$1.37 million or almost 50%).

CEO Bland concluded his remarks and was available for any questions from the floor and there were none at this time.

**VII. Chair's Report:** Mayor Hutto thanked everyone for attending the Executive Committee Meeting.

**VIII. Adjournment:** With no further business, Mayor Hutto called for adjournment, a proper motion was made and seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 10:16 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Ed Cole, RTA Secretary &  
Davidson County Governor Appointee