

NASHVILLE METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY
Board of Directors Meeting

February 24, 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, Ste. 100, Nashville, TN 37228 on Thursday, February 24, 2022.
- 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 Executive Officer Steve Bland; 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 System Safety & Risk Management Nicholas Oldham; Sr. Transit Planner Justin Cole; 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 2:32 p.m.

- III. **Approval of Minutes:** Walter Searcy made a motion to approve the January 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 reflected several ongoing concerns over the condition of many of the older buses he has ridden.

- V. **Operations & Finance Committee Report:** Committee Chair Walter Searcy introduced the following items for discussion and action:
 - a. **Monthly Financial Report Compared to Budget (OF-D-22-006):** Chief Financial Officer Ed Oliphant reported and reflected on the statement of operations for December 2021 compared to the budget and a balance sheet as of December 31, 2021.

Vice-Chair Miller asked CFO Ed Oliphant to talk briefly about fuel costs. CFO Oliphant said fuel costs are going up, but we're still in a good position in the current fiscal year because of our existing hedge program which locks in significant percentages of our fuel volumes at lower prices. However, the current fuel hedging contracts will expire in June 2022 and next year's forecast is that this line item will increase by approximately \$2.5 million.

There was no further discussion at this time.
 - b. **Monthly Operating Statistics (OF-D-22-007):** Chief Operating Officer Andy Burke reported and reflected on the monthly operating statistics report through December 2021.

There was no further discussion at this time.
 - c. **Quarterly Route Performance (OF-D-22-008):** Deputy COO-OP Systems Dan Freudberg provided an update on the Quarterly Route Performance for the months of October through December 2021.

Vice-Chair Janet Miller asked Deputy COO-OP Systems Dan Freudberg to expound further on the passengers per hour category being marked mostly as underperforming. Dan said that we set a pre-pandemic goal of 12 passengers per hour as productivity indicators and the current

underperformance reflects lower ridership post-pandemic. As ridership returns, it would be appropriate to revisit these goals with interim targets.

There was no further discussion at this time.

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

a. Spring 2022 Service Changes & Title VI Analysis (M-A-22-002): Director of Planning and Grants Felix Castrodad presented the following:

At the January 27, 2022 MTA Board meeting, staff presented to the Board an overview of the proposed service changes for Spring 2022. The changes were approved in July 2021 for a phased implementation during Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 due to constraints in the workforce and equipment availability. Last fall changes focused on extending span on frequent network routes and restoring frequency on major corridor routes based on ridership trends. Spring changes expand improvements including restoring frequencies on local routes, additional weekday frequencies during peak times of the day, and evenings and nights.

Overall, the changes contribute to restoring service to 100% pre-pandemic levels considering Metro's reinstatement of MTA's operating budget for FY 22 and advance an initial phase of the Better Bus plan by taking advantage of the apportionment of the federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act funds. Service expansion as part of Better Bus represents approximately 35,500 additional service hours or a 7% increase in service.

Effective implementation of the changes is subject to the availability of operators and vehicle equipment. The staff has been making progress on that front and an update on the status of those is included on this item. Additionally, since the approval of Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 last year, staff identified some additional improvements for implementation in the spring. Those improvements have been included here for the Board's consideration along with equity analysis. The specifics of the additional changes were outlined further under the Service Change Recommendations section.

The outline provided information in the following areas:

- Operator & Fleet Availability
 - Public Outreach Process
 - Service Changes Recommendations
 - Service Change Equity Analysis
- Director of Planning & Grants Felix Castrodad availed himself of questions and there were no questions at this time.

The NICE Committee recommended the Board to approve this action item. There was no further discussion and the vote of approval was unanimous by the Board.

b. Bus Stop Signage Redesign Update (NICE-D-22-010): Sr. Transit Planner Justin Cole presented an overview of a project update including a summary of customer & operator engagement, revisions to sign designs, and process/timeline for replacement of all 1,500 bus stops across the system.

Board Member Jessica Dauphin asked if there had been any thoughts to the signs being double-sided? Sr. Transit Planner Justin Cole said that it could be done, but would add significant expense to the project. The primary purpose of the decaling on the back of the sign is to make clear that the sign is a bus stop for people approaching from the opposite direction, and that full sign information would be available on the flip side.

Mr. Cole reported that the replacement program would begin in the spring with a priority placed on routes and stops affected by the spring service changes; and that the overall replacement program would extend into 2023.

- c. **Marketing Plan Update (NICE-D-22-011)**: Director of Marketing, Communication, and Sales Renuka Christoph provided an update on the Marketing Plan. She engaged with the Board for their input on marketing goals as well as SWOT analysis to support the development of future iterations of the FY2022-23 Marketing and Communications Plan.

Each of the Board members offered the following suggestions:

- Consider revising one of your goals from “Promote Image” to “Promote the Brand”
- Try to tie all three of your goals with all of your projects
- Make sure that the messaging is consistent
- Take care of our existing riders and customers
- Consider outsourcing/external partners for advertisement
- Develop strategic partnerships and use celebrities for social media advertisements, etc.
- Strengths:
 - Service enhancements (higher frequency routes and longer service hours)
 - Press coverage and media are outstanding
- Threats:
 - Work from home
 - Funding

- d. **Access Improvement Study & Technology Assessment (NICED-22-012)**: Deputy COO-OP Systems Dan Freudberg and members of the project team for KFH Group, Inc. provided a project update during the Board Meeting. The update included a review of key findings from the Benchmark Analysis and Review and the Policy Review.

Deputy COO-OP Systems Dan Freudberg availed himself for questions and there were no questions at this time.

- e. **FY2023 Budget Submission to Metro (NICE D-22-013)**: Staff referred to the FY2022-23 Operating Budget Submission to Metro Finance which was included in the distributed Board packets. There were no questions or further discussion at this time.

VII. CEO’s Report: CEO Steve Bland reported the following:

1. Like the rest of the country, we continue to see a downturn in COVID cases in our workforce. As of early this week, we only had 3 employees off for COVID, down from the 25 – 30 range earlier in 2022. Let’s hope this trend continues quickly to zero.
2. Work on our transit center projects continues at a steady pace, with Hillsboro moving nearer to completion and North Nashville in the final design stages, to issue construction documents for bid in the next 2 months. Hopefully, you all received your invitation to the formal ribbon cutting at Hillsboro, scheduled for March 31 at 11 am. Please let us know if you can attend. We are also continuing early development work on a future regional transit center at Hickory Hollow, having productive conversations with the property developer, Metro Planning, and related entities. Hannah Schaeffer on our Planning staff has completed and will soon be submitting documentation to the FTA for environmental review, and we plan to assemble a project application for the USDOT’s RAISE Grant program. RAISE is a highly competitive discretionary grant program included in the new Infrastructure bill. Although the odds are steep, we think this project checks the boxes for almost all of their selection criteria and, even if we’re not successful, the information we’re assembling will be valuable for future funding opportunities and project development.
3. As we mentioned, you received copies of our submissions to the Metro budget process for FY2022-23. We welcome any questions you might have. Our budget meeting with the Mayor’s Office and Metro Finance is scheduled for March 29.
4. We continue to be heavily involved with NDOT, the Mayor’s Office, and Metro Planning on advancing mobility plans associated with pending East Bank development. This process could present many generational opportunities to enhance overall mobility for the region, including the development of high-capacity transit corridors.

5. Operations and Development Staff continued to work with our consultants from HDR Engineering on an assessment of improvement options for the Nestor Bus Operating Facility. We have received some high-level programming options and will plan to develop a Board update in the coming months when we have a bit of a lull in the agenda. CEO Bland said that he didn't think that he'd be spoiling the surprise if he said that it would take a tremendous amount of money to either upgrade the existing facility to necessary future standards or to replace this facility.
6. Although the process is moving more slowly than we might have liked due to COVID and scheduling conflicts, Gail, Janet, Margaret and CEO Bland are continuing to work toward a Board/ Senior Staff workshop in the spring. Our workshop steering committee will be meeting as soon as we can find a convenient date for everyone, and we'll be targeting a date sometime in late Spring or Summer.
7. Along with other Metro infrastructure departments such as Parks, Water, and NDOT, CEO Bland participated in a joint meeting of the Metro Council Budget and Planning committees to discuss how we approach the development of our Capital Improvement Plans. Thanks to the intense process we're required to follow by the FTA for our Transit Asset Management Plans, and the refined process the Board has advanced in producing our annual capital improvement budget, our information was well received.
8. In a recent meeting, CFO Ed Oliphant walked through our recent "true-up" of the pilot WeGo Ride program with Vanderbilt. He reported that, due to the onset of the pandemic almost simultaneous with the start of the new program model, Vanderbilt has been paying a significantly higher price per actual ride under the new model than would have been the case under the old system. As this was never the intent, we have had productive discussions with them on how to address this issue moving forward, including the possible development of experimental "route guarantee" payments coming from overpayment to experiment with new service models.
9. Speaking of Vanderbilt, we have the pleasure of hosting Crystal Cheng this semester as an intern. Crystal is a civil engineering major with an interest in mass transit, who has also interned at her "closer to home" transit agency, the MTA of Maryland. She is doing a lot of work with our Planning staff, but also "shadowed" CEO Bland for a day. He suspects that her main takeaway is that the title CEO sounds way more glamorous than it really is!
10. CEO Bland said that he had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Troy White this month, the still relatively new Executive Director for MDHA. Among many other topics, Dr. White agreed to have MDHA partner with us on the upcoming Murfreesboro Pike Corridor Study, particularly focusing on the area around the Sudekum Napier Housing Complex, and overall strategies to attract and retain affordable and workforce housing opportunities in the corridor as a transit project emerges.
11. On the RTA side:
 - a. CEO Bland said that he continues to participate in meetings of the Nashville Area MPO Project Delivery Task Force. The Task Force is made up of TDOT, several regional mayors, and GNRC staff examining ways to expedite project delivery in the region with Federal funds.
 - b. The RTA continues to receive the order of new over-the-road buses that will be deployed in Rutherford County corridor service by the MTA. We currently have 7 of the 10 buses on the property and they are being prepared for service. We expect to have the remaining 6 buses on the road by the end of March, in time for our Spring service expansion.
 - c. The steering committee for the South Corridor Study being undertaken by the Greater Nashville Regional Council met this past month. The study boundaries are from Downtown Nashville through Franklin, Spring Hill, and Columbia roughly paralleling the

I65 corridor. The study is nearing completion, with anticipated next steps including a meeting of members of the Steering Committee with TDOT Executive Leadership.

- d. Continuing the theme of the South Corridor, we are working with staff from the City of Franklin to identify sites for a new Park-and-Ride location in the City. With their help, we have identified several potentially viable sites and are currently advancing them through a screening process including property availability, safety and access, and environmental review.
- e. At the request of Montgomery County Mayor Jim Durrett, and the Clarksville-Montgomery Economic Development Corporation, Felix Castrodad, Katie Freudberg, and CEO will meet with local officials later to examine potential reverse commute opportunities to an industrial park that the IDC owns adjacent to I24, and near our Clarksville Park and Ride lot. This location has been extremely successful in attracting significant industrial investment, and the new and expanding employers are looking to expand their workforce attraction efforts.

12. Lastly, CEO Bland made the Board aware that he would miss the March Board meeting as he and his wife will celebrate their anniversary out of town that weekend.

VIII. **Chair's Report:** Chair Carr Williams recently participated with Mr. Bland and two other transit agency Board Chair/CEO teams for a Transit Board Member seminar conducted by the American Public Transit Association (APTA). She indicated that the good things said about CEO Bland and WeGo Public Transit in this national forum were rewarding. Chair Carr Williams also said she had the opportunity to honor Elizabeth Duff and her family on Transit Equity Day. She said that it was good to see how delighted and honored the family was. Last, but not least; she thanked everyone for being present and remaining safe.

IX. **Other Business:** There was no other business to come before the Board at this time.

X. **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