
**MINUTES OF PVTA'S
ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
March 22, 2023**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Regular Advisory Board Meeting of the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority was held on Wednesday, March 22, 2023, at 12:00 P.M. remotely in accordance with the Governor's State of Emergency Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, Section 20, relieving from the requirement of section 20 of chapter 30A that it conduct its meetings in a public place that is open and physically accessible to the public, permitting a public body to allow remote participation by all members.

	<u>Present (35.48 votes)</u>	<u>Not Present (26.52 votes)</u>
Agawam	Michael Squindo	
Amherst	Douglas Slaughter	
Belchertown	Brian O'Leary	
Chicopee	Steve Huntley	
East Longmeadow	Erin Koebler	
Easthampton	Cindy Tarail	
Granby		Glen Sexton
Hadley	David Moskin	
Hampden	Becky Moriarty	
Holyoke		Gloria Caballero-Roca
Leverett		Peter D'Errico
Longmeadow	Mark Gold	
Ludlow		Derek DeBarge
Northampton		Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra
Palmer	Benjamin Hood	
Pelham		David Shanabrook
South Hadley		Jeff Cyr
Springfield	Tim Sheehan	
Sunderland		Geoff Kravitz
Ware		John Carroll
West Springfield		Allyson Manuel
Westfield		Peter Miller
Wilbraham		Paula Dubord
Williamsburg		J.M. Sorrell
ADA Representative		Vacant
Rider Representative		Jake Hasson

A quorum of 31.01 votes being present, Chairman of the Advisory Board, Douglas Slaughter, called the remote meeting of PVTA's Advisory Board to order at 12:07 PM; majority vote of 35.48 present.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Slaughter asked if there was anyone that would like to make a public comment. No public comments were made.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Slaughter asked for a motion from the Advisory Board to approve the meeting minutes from the January 25, 2023 Advisory Board Meeting.

Motion: Moved and seconded (O’Leary/Huntley) to approve the meeting minutes from the January 25, 2023, Advisory Board Meeting.

Chairman Slaughter asked if the Board had any discussion. Hearing none; asked for a roll call vote to approve the minutes.

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Abstained</u>
Agawam	Michael Squindo		
Amherst	Douglas Slaughter		
Belchertown	Brian O’Leary		
Chicopee	Steve Huntley		
East Longmeadow	Erin Koebler		
Easthampton	Cindy Tarail		
Granby			
Hadley	David Moskin		
Hampden			Becky Moriarty
Holyoke			
Leverett			
Longmeadow	Mark Gold		
Ludlow			
Northampton			
Palmer	Benjamin Hood		
Pelham			
South Hadley			
Springfield	Tim Sheehan		
Sunderland			
Ware			
West Springfield			
Westfield			
Wilbraham			
Williamsburg			
ADA Representative			
Rider Representative			

Motion passed by a vote of 34.48 with one abstention.

4. REPORT OF PVTA’S FINANCE & AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE

Steve Huntley, Chairman of the Finance & Audit sub-committee, reported that the committee met on Thursday, March 16th. The committee received an update from PVTA’s Chief Financial Officer on PVTA’s FY24 Draft Budget and voted to approve the minutes of November 14, 2022.

Chairman Slaughter asked the Board for a motion to accept the report of PVTA’s Finance & Audit Sub-Committee.

Motion: Moved and seconded (O’Leary/Squindo) to accept the report of PVTA’s Finance & Audit Sub-Committee.

Chairman Slaughter asked if the Board had any discussion. Hearing none; asked for a roll call vote.

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Abstained</u>
Agawam	Michael Squindo		
Amherst	Douglas Slaughter		
Belchertown	Brian O’Leary		
Chicopee	Steve Huntley		
East Longmeadow	Erin Koebler		
Easthampton	Cindy Tarail		
Granby			
Hadley	David Moskin		
Hampden	Becky Moriarty		
Holyoke			
Leverett			
Longmeadow	Mark Gold		
Ludlow			
Northampton			
Palmer	Benjamin Hood		
Pelham			
South Hadley			
Springfield	Tim Sheehan		
Sunderland			
Ware			
West Springfield			
Westfield			
Wilbraham			
Williamsburg			
ADA Representative			
Rider Representative			

Motion passed by a vote of 35.48.

5. PVTA FY24 DRAFT BUDGET UPDATE

Chief Financial Officer, Lisa Seymour, reported the following:

EXPENSES

Administration

- Administration Wages minimally increased by a little over 2% due to a cost-of-living increase and new positions being filled at a lower salary.
- Administration Services increased significantly due to the higher price of electricity, heat, diesel and parts and supplies.
- Dues and Subscriptions were increased to reflect current expense performance.
- Mobility Training increased significantly due to grant funding. When the funding was awarded there were two full time Mobility Trainers. Currently there is one full time employee and one part time employee in this role. PVTA is currently seeking to fill another part-time position. All Mobility Training positions are fully grant funded and offset by federal or state grants.
- Conferences, Meetings and Travel were restored to pre-pandemic costs as the Authority's employees can complete in person training that is critical to the new Safety Plan (the PTASP) as well as other in person events.
- The pension reserve is a zero line item as a cost saving measure.
- A new line item has been added to capture the fees of Bytemark our fare collection company. The fees had been offset by the fares in past budgets but due to improvements with Bytemark's reporting system we are now able to obtain a clearer picture of the fares and fees associated.
- Health insurance for Administration increased by 10% due to market trends.
- The retirees' health insurance decreased due to two retirees being removed from the insurance plan.
- Life/LTD benefits decreased due to new employees joining the plan therefore changing the premiums.
- Unemployment insurance increased due to current market trends.
- Services Miscellaneous has remained the same as the previous fiscal year due to snow removal services at shelters being a variable every year.

Paratransit

- The COA's paratransit program is level funded as Ware being added to the Beyond ADA grant funding and Northampton removed.
- The Paratransit Vendor, MV, service assumption is a return to service at post pandemic levels.
- Equipment, Maintenance and Miscellaneous have been adjusted to more accurately reflect costing of these categories based on FY23 financials.
- The current paratransit contractor is responsible for the auto insurance thus lessening PVTA's claim risk. Accidents are subrogated with the Contractor therefore eliminating much of the claims process.
- Fuel Cost increased system wide due to the current market. This figure could increase depending on the market trend.

Fixed Route

- The subsidy for SATCo/VATCo increased by 4% due to contractual obligations as well as an increase in health insurance and legal expenses attributed to ongoing arbitration cases. In addition, in-house CDL training is scheduled to commence during this spring.
- The management fee increased due to contractual obligations.
- Fuel Cost increased system wide by 8% due to the current market. This may change as the Contractor analyzes the market changes and is able to lock in at a suitable price.
- UMass Transit Services budget is funded at a 3% increase.

Shuttles

- The shuttle subsidy for Wilbraham and Northampton has been adjusted as the paratransit contractor is able to perform these trips at a lower rate than in previous years.
- Fuel has been adjusted to reflect fuel and parts/supplies market increases.

Allocated Insurance

- Allocated Insurance is assumed to increase by 3% based on the completion of an RFP process for an insurance broker that may be able to result in lower rates.

Allocated IT Support

- Allocated IT increased by 3% as the threat of cybercrime requires that IT systems are continually upgraded with new security releases. The current environment requires constant vigilance to ensure the PVTA networks are as secure as possible. Included in this budget is an increase in IT service costs to support this effort.

REVENUES

Farebox

- SATCo/VATCo revenues are based on full service of the transit system and post-pandemic ridership predictions.
- College passes increased due to the assumed restoration of the 39E service.
- Mobile fare collection is resulting in the increase in pass sales revenue as riders continue to embrace the contactless mobile fare option.
- Shuttle revenue has been adjusted to reflect current performance.
- Paratransit revenue assumes post pandemic ridership predictions as well as the continued success of the extended hours Dial-A-Ride program.

Advertising/Interest and Insurance Recovery

- Other non-fare revenue for Administration containing Interest is increased based on the time the SCA payments are received from that state. A breakdown of three payments allows a higher rate of Interest on the funds.
- Although Insurance Recoveries are higher for FY23, an accounting analysis of current claims shows a recovery rate lower than the previous year.
- Other Non-Administration line item has been reduced to reflect current financials.
- The anticipated sale of buses during the fiscal year is attributed to the gain on assets.

Operating Subsidy, Other

- The expected return of full service to UMass and Five College Inc. resumes their subsidies for the service.
- The remainder of the CMAQ grant funds are available to offset the cost of operating the P21E portion of the G73E.
- Funding has been awarded for another year for the Amherst/Worcester route.
- The Brennan Express service grant funding is no longer available. The success of this service recommends it be absorbed into the budget as the ridership and the demand for express service is high.
- Other Operating Subsidy – the Beyond ADA assistance to the communities of Agawam, Hadley, East Longmeadow/Longmeadow/Hampden, and now Ware has been awarded for FY24.
- The Travel Trainer Program has been awarded Mobility Grant that funds for FY24.

Federal Operating Grants

- This amount of operating assistance for ADA and Preventive Maintenance is being adjusted to \$4 million to assist in balancing the budget.

State Contract Assistance

- The amount for FY24 increased in accordance to the Governor's H1 budget. RTAs are being funded at \$96,820,000 from the Commonwealth's Transportation Fund, an increase of \$2,820,000 from FY23 levels and an additional \$6M allocation from the Fair Share Amendment. This line item shows PVTAs expected allocation.

Local Assessments

- The Local Assessments are increased by the allowable 2.5% by statute.

Chairman Slaughter asked if the Board has any questions.

Mark Gold: The pension reserve has been removed; can you explain why.

CFO Seymour: It is being funded enough to fund the retirees.

Mark Gold: Is this based on actuary, so we know we're keeping up.

CFO Seymour: Yes.

Mark Gold: What are we doing long term to address the \$4M budget deficit that we will see in the future when the AARPA and CARES funds run out.

Administrator Sheehan: We are working with MARTA to adjust the gap. We have reached out to the Legislature making them aware that additional funding is needed for the RTAs, and we are also doing everything we can in-house.

Brian O'Leary: I would like to see a contingency plan. I understand you are working hard but would like to see a plan in place in case we don't get additional funding. I would hate to see service cuts made. We need to look at the agency as a whole and make sure we are doing everything internally to reduce the deficit before making changes to service.

Administrator Sheehan: We will work on providing a contingency plan to the Board.

6. DIRECTOR OF TRANSIT OPERATIONS REPORT

Paul Burns, Director of Transit Operations, reported the following:

Fixed Route Ridership:

Systemwide January 2023 ridership was at 365K, up 6% from 345K in January 2022.

- SATCo ridership was at 286K (up from 217K in 1/22)
- UMass was at 49K (down from 93K in 1/22)
- VATCo was at 30K (down from 35K in 1/22)

VATCo and UMass ridership loss was directly attributable to the late start of the spring semester this year which began in February rather than January.

The strong ridership for SATCo was enough to make up for these losses, resulting in a net increase systemwide.

Paratransit:

Paratransit ridership continues to increase steadily when compared to the previous year. Ridership for all of FY23 to date is up 21%.

Ridership recovery:

The January systemwide recovery of 52% tied with January 2022, despite the steep declines due to the late spring semester.

Preliminary February numbers show a systemwide recovery of 68%. These numbers are still impacted by a late return of UMass students with classes resuming on February 6. UMass ridership, despite the late start, rebounded to 77% of pre-pandemic levels for February. SATCo ridership recovery for February was at 62% with VATCo rebounding to 71% with the resumption of classes.

We expect fixed route ridership to be at least 68% of pre-pandemic levels for FY23.

We anticipate paratransit ridership to be approximately 70% of pre-pandemic levels for all FY23.

Routes:

MV continues to operate the 39 connecting Smith and Hampshire Colleges. There have been some issues with on time performance during midafternoon hours and we are reviewing options with Five Colleges and likely eliminating a run in the afternoon and increasing run times during that time period to reduce the likelihood of delays.

The Job Corps Tripper route continues to have very low ridership. The pilot on this route is scheduled to end on June 5th. Job Corps has not indicated any desire to fund the route moving forward. Given the low ridership numbers it would be difficult to justify continuing to allocate resources to this route given the current operating environment.

Safety and Security:

As mentioned in the Board packet, the Safety Committee is working on increasing awareness of safety and safety concerns throughout the agency. This involves overseeing the rollout of Safety Management System (SMS) trainings across the agency and working with operators to ensure consistent safety monitoring systems are in place.

We have also worked with the Safety Committee to update the Passenger Code of Conduct as outlined in your packets. The Committee is also overseeing PVTA's assault prevention activities.

Grants:

Areas of Persistent Poverty Program: We submitted an application for an Areas of Persistent Poverty Grant to study economic and societal impacts of the lack of efficient transportation options to transport low income parents and their children to day care, which often becomes a significant barrier to employment. If awarded, PVTA will work with various departments at UMass to study this issue and hopefully develop transit solutions.

AARP Demonstration Grant

We also submitted an application for a project to pilot a reduced-cost transportation program for older adults in the towns of Amherst, Westfield and Pelham. The goal of the project is to improve community connections and socialization for a disadvantaged age group within these communities.

Code of Conduct updates

- Wearing of any mask, hood, or other device whereby a substantial portion of the face is hidden or covered so as to conceal the identity of the wearer.

The following changes are in response to FTA and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law changes;

- Interfering with the general operation of the transit vehicle and/or transit worker’s duties (includes but not limited to the following; failure to properly board or alight, blocking progress of transit vehicles, disturbing the driver, crossing the yellow line, improper use of priority seating, etc.) this will now be categorized as a major infraction.
- The use of Rude, hateful, obscene, offensive, discriminatory or derogatory language is prohibited. When directed towards a transit worker, this is considered an assault and will result in a

MAJOR INFRACTION

- Minor assault: any taunts, language, or placement of one’s body that a reasonable person would perceive was intended to or could reasonably endanger the safety of any individual or interferes with a transit workers ability to safely perform their duties.
- Serious assault: repeated verbal taunts and or threats, without physical contact, that a reasonable person could perceive as a threat to the safety of the driver or another person.
- Battery: any unwanted or unwelcome physical contact that can include slight touch, hugging or other unwanted sexual advance or more serious instances of physical contact that a reasonable person could believe included an intent to harm or intimidate.
- Bias assaults: All offenses targeting individuals or groups based on race, color, religious creed, national origin, ancestry, sex, gender identity, age, disability, mental illness, retaliation, sexual harassment, sexual orientation, or any other protected class are subject to additional penalties. For assaults and batteries committed with the intent to target the above groups penalties will be doubled.

Penalties for assault violations have been updated and clarified as follow;

- Minor Assault: Not less than 30 days nor more than 1 year, depending on severity and nature of assault.
- Minimum for serious assault: 1 year
- Minimum for battery: 2 years with a potential to escalate based on severity to a permanent ban.

Michael Squindo: The Infrastructure Law changes, are those to enhance consequences additionally.

Paul Burns: These will be in addition to more serious offenses and will take precedence.

Michael Squindo: Would like to see a full review of the Code of Conduct. Some of the language needs to be reviewed as its subjective. For example, “slight” touch. I also have reservations to the definition you have in the policy for assault. Minor with no intent should be switched around so intent follows the more serious in fracture.

Paul Burns: We will need to review the Federal Regulation. The vast majority of incidents, we are unable to identify the rider to be able to take action.

7. ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Administrator, Sandra Sheehan, reported the following:

On the federal side, the President’s 2024 Budget continues the Implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The Budget provides a total of \$76.1 billion for highway, highway safety, and transit formula programs, supporting the amounts authorized for year three of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This includes \$60.1 billion for the Federal-Aid Highway program. The Budget

also includes \$14 billion for Transit Formula Grants, a \$356 million increase above the 2023 enacted level, to support core capital and planning programs for transit agencies across the country, as well as transit research, technical assistance, and data collection. This funding would also support building out a national network of electric vehicle chargers, consistent with the approved plans to achieve the President’s climate and Made in America goals.

On the state side, Governor Healey’s proposed \$55.5 billion state budget includes roughly \$1.5 billion in transportation funding, along with an additional \$1.46 billion in sales tax revenue dedicated to the MBTA. The administration is supplementing this investment in transportation with \$490 million in new funding made available through the Fair Share Amendment. For these funds for transportation, Governor Healey is proposing \$100 million for municipal programs, \$164 million for state highway initiatives, \$186 million for the MBTA, and \$40 million for regional transit funding, including \$12.5 million for construction projects related to East-West Rail and \$2.5 million for water transportation.

The MBTA will receive \$186 million of that funding, \$181 million of which will go toward capital investments. The remaining \$5 million will be put toward a study that will look at the feasibility of means-tested fares, such as reduced or free fares across the MBTA system.

Of the actual \$25 million for regional transit, \$6 million is for distribution to the RTAs, \$15 million is for discretionary innovation grant programs available for public, private, and non-profit transportation providers to support initiatives including but not limited to: new and innovative service delivery models, expanded service hours or weekend service, and rural connectivity. 25% of the funds awarded through this program shall be awarded to rural providers and the balance of \$4 million is for grants through the Community Transit Grant Program to support expanded mobility options for older adults, people with disabilities and low-income individuals. These grants are to be managed by MassDOT.

The RTAs portion includes a transfer from the Commonwealth Transportation Fund of \$96,820,000. An increase of \$2,820,000 from FY23 levels and an additional \$6M allocation from the Fair Share Amendment. PVTA’s share based on the hold harmless formula and the agreed upon formula of 60% ridership, 30% population and 10% service area is approximately \$29,198,348. This is a \$2,310,563 increase is SCA.

The RTA Advancement Bill sponsored by Senator Susan Moran and Representative Natalie Blais sets to improve and expand Regional Transit Authority (RTA) service to meet community needs. It sets the floor for state contract assistance to the RTAs at \$150M to provide improved frequency, evening and weekend services. It also establishes an RTA Fund similar to the MBTA’s Fund for investments in regional transit including fees from Transportation Network Companies like Uber and Lyft. Currently the Bill has 80+ sponsors. MARTA is working to see this Bill enacted.

8. NEW BUSINESS

Chairman Slaughter reported that there is no new business to discuss.

9. OLD BUSINESS

Chairman Slaughter reported that there is no old business to discuss.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Slaughter asked for a motion to adjourn.

Motion: Moved and seconded (Huntley/O’Leary) to adjourn.

Chairman Slaughter asked for a roll call vote.

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Abstained</u>
Agawam	Michael Squindo		
Amherst	Douglas Slaughter		
Belchertown	Brian O’Leary		
Chicopee	Steve Huntley		
East Longmeadow			
Easthampton	Cindy Tarail		
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Pelham			
South Hadley			
Springfield	Tim Sheehan		
Sunderland			
Ware			
West Springfield			
Westfield			
Wilbraham			
Williamsburg			
ADA Representative			
Rider Representative			

Motion passed by a vote of 34.06.

The meeting of the Advisory Board adjourned at 12:54 P.M.

A TRUE RECORD

ATTEST: _____
BRANDY PELLETIER

Documents filed with Board Meeting packet:

- Roll Call Votes
- Advisory Board Minutes of 1-25-23

MINUTES APPROVED: May 17, 2023