
**MINUTES OF PVTA'S
ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
January 24, 2024**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Regular Advisory Board Meeting of the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority was held on Wednesday, January 24, 2024, at 12:00 P.M. remotely in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, supplemental state budget provisions for Fiscal Year 2023, authorizing public bodies to continue to hold entirely remote meetings, or so-called “hybrid” meetings, upon the provision of “adequate, alternative means” of public access, until March 31, 2025.

	<u>Present (36.83 votes)</u>	<u>Not Present (25.17 votes)</u>
Agawam		Mayor Christopher Johnson
Amherst	Douglas Slaughter	
Belchertown		Edward Boscher
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		Nancy Talbot
West Springfield		Allyson Manuel
Westfield	Peter Miller	
Wilbraham		Paula Dubord
Williamsburg	J.M. Sorrell	
ADA Representative		Vacant
Rider Representative		Vacant

A quorum of 31.01 votes being present, Chairman of the Advisory Board, Doug Slaughter, called the remote meeting of PVTA's Advisory Board to order at 12:05 PM; majority vote of 36.83 present.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Slaughter asked if any members of the public would like to make a public comment on an agenda item.

No public comments were made.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: Moved and seconded (Sorrell/Huntley) to approve the meeting minutes from the November 15, 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			
Amherst	Douglas Slaughter		
Belchertown			
Chicopee	Steve Huntley		
East Longmeadow	Erin Koebler		
Easthampton			
Granby			
Hadley			
Hampden			Becky Moriarty
Holyoke			
Leverett			
Longmeadow	Mark Gold		
Ludlow			
Northampton	Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra		
Palmer	Benjamin Hood		
Pelham	David Shanabrook		
South Hadley			
Springfield	Tim Sheehan		
Sunderland			
Ware			
West Springfield			
Westfield	Peter Miller		
Wilbraham			
Williamsburg	J.M. Sorrell		
ADA Representative			
Rider Representative			

Motion passed by a vote of 35.83 with 1 abstention (Hampden, 1.00 vote).

4. APPROVAL OF 2024 ADVISORY BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE

2024

1. Wednesday, January 24
2. Wednesday, March 20
3. Wednesday, May 22
4. Wednesday, June 26
5. Wednesday, August 21
6. Wednesday, September 18
7. Wednesday, November 20

Motion: Moved and seconded (Sorrell/Huntley) to approve the 2024 Advisory Board meeting schedule.

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			
Amherst	Douglas Slaughter		
Belchertown			
Chicopee	Steve Huntley		
East Longmeadow	Erin Koebler		
Easthampton			
Granby			
Hadley			
Hampden	Becky Moriarty		
Holyoke			
Leverett			
Longmeadow	Mark Gold		
Ludlow			
Northampton	Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra		
Palmer	Benjamin Hood		
Pelham	David Shanabrook		
South Hadley			
Springfield	Tim Sheehan		
Sunderland			
Ware			
West Springfield			
Westfield	Peter Miller		
Wilbraham			
Williamsburg	J.M. Sorrell		
ADA Representative			
Rider Representative			

Motion passed by a vote of 36.83.

5. REPORT OF THE FINANCE AND AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE

Steve Huntley, Chairman of the Finance and Audit Sub-Committee, reported that the committee met on Monday, January 22nd. The committee received an update on PVTA's fare analysis and PVTA's FY24 Budget revision. The committee voted to recommend approving the meeting minutes of October 4, 2023 as well as recommend approval of the FY24 Budget revision to the full Board.

Motion: Moved and seconded (Sorrell/Huntley) to accept the report of the Finance and Audit Sub-Committee.

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			
Amherst	Douglas Slaughter		
Belchertown			
Chicopee	Steve Huntley		
East Longmeadow	Erin Koebler		
Easthampton			
Granby			
Hadley			
Hampden	Becky Moriarty		
Holyoke			
Leverett			
Longmeadow	Mark Gold		
Ludlow			
Northampton	Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra		
Palmer	Benjamin Hood		
Pelham	David Shanabrook		
South Hadley			
Springfield	Tim Sheehan		
Sunderland			
Ware			
West Springfield			
Westfield	Peter Miller		
Wilbraham			
Williamsburg	J.M. Sorrell		
ADA Representative			
Rider Representative			

Motion passed by a vote of 36.83.

6. **APPROVAL OF FY24 BUDGET REVISION**

Administrator Sheehan reported on the FY24 Budget Revision and stated the following:

EXPENSES

Administration:

- Revisions to merit increases from 3% to 5%

- Salary adjustments to certain positions as recommended by HR Department based on Salary Analysis conducted.

Fringe Benefits

- Pension contribution increased as recommended by pension plan manager and to account for the last couple of years when pension contributions were not made to the account.
- Insurance such as unemployment, long term disability and life were adjusted based on actual costs at half year.

Utilities

- Utilities adjusted based on actual costs at half year.

Paratransit Services

- Salary adjusted based on the contractual obligation for administrative staff who joined the union.
- Utilities adjusted based on actual costs at half year.
- Fuel was adjusted to reflect actual costs at half year.

Fixed Route Services

SATCo/VATCo

- Salary adjusted based on longevity payment and associated taxes made to employees. It was also adjusted to account for OT costs that have increased by 38% from last year.
- Additional staff hired including HR Assistant and CDL trainers.
- Increase in miles of service associated with service enhancements implemented and planned for implementation in the Spring.
- Increase in labor costs associated with service enhancements implemented and planned for implementation in the Spring.
- Utilities were adjusted based on actual costs at half year.
- Fuel was adjusted to reflect actual costs at half year.

Shuttles

- Increase in labor and miles costs associated with service enhancements implemented and planned for implementation in the Spring.

REVENUES

- Farebox Revenue – Fares collected at the farebox have been reduced to account for the Try-Transit Fare Free program sponsored by the MA Legislature.
- Federal Operating Assistance- Due to the increase in state funding and existing workforce shortfall, this line item is being decreased. Funds needed for PM and ADA will be allocated from the State Contract Assistance line item.
- Operating Subsidy State – this line item is being increased to reflect the additional funding received from the state as part of the State Contract Assistance.
- Operating Subsidy Fare Free Program – this line item is being added to account for the funds allocated to PVRTA for the Try-Transit Fare Free program sponsored by the MA Legislature.
- Other Federal Subsidy (CARES/ARPA) – this line item is being adjusted to reflect the federal subsidy needed to balance the budget.

Motion: Moved and seconded (Huntley/Sorrell) to approve PVRTA's FY24 Budget Revision.

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			
Amherst	Douglas Slaughter		
Belchertown			
Chicopee	Steve Huntley		
East Longmeadow	Erin Koebler		
Easthampton			
Granby			
Hadley			
Hampden	Becky Moriarty		
Holyoke			
Leverett			
Longmeadow	Mark Gold		
Ludlow			
Northampton	Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra		
Palmer	Benjamin Hood		
Pelham	David Shanabrook		
South Hadley			
Springfield	Tim Sheehan		
Sunderland			
Ware			
West Springfield			
Westfield	Peter Miller		
Wilbraham			
Williamsburg	J.M. Sorrell		
ADA Representative			
Rider Representative			

Motion passed by a vote of 36.83.

7. **ACCEPTANCE OF TITLE VI ANALYSIS REPORT & APPROVAL OF ROUTE ADJUSTMENTS**

Paul Burns, Director of Transit Operations reported the following:

At the November meeting, the Board approved public hearings and a Title VI analysis for pilots on route enhancements for the P21E, G73E, and the Ware and Palmer Shuttles:

P21E: Improved frequency from 60 minutes to 45-minutes effective December 24, 2023, and further improving frequency to 30 minutes for the Spring Bid. This change affects service Monday through Sunday.

G73E: All trips serve Northampton with 45-minute frequency effective December 24, 2023, and further improving to 30-minute frequency for the Spring Bid. This change affects service

Monday through Saturday and includes the addition of new service on Sundays which began December 24, 2023.

Ware Palmer: Reinstated the previous Ware and Palmer Circulators using 2 separate vehicles which provides more comprehensive service in each town. Additional service to Wilbraham Big Y was added bringing the total number of connections to Springfield to six each day. These changes took effect on December 18 with the addition of weekend service planned for early Spring.

Seven (7) Public hearings were held, one each in the communities of Holyoke, Northampton, Palmer, Springfield, and Ware with two virtual hearings also being held. The meetings were sparsely attended. All comments regarding the proposed enhancements were positive with attendees indicating their support for them.

Carl Jackson, Transit Planner at the PVPC, reported on the findings of the Title VI Analysis and stated the following:

P21E: No disparate impact based on race, no disproportionate burden on low-income riders.

G73E: No disparate impact based on race, no disproportionate burden on low-income riders.

Ware Palmer Shuttles: No disproportionate burden on low-income riders, however, the analysis did find a disparate impact based on race because the population (based on census tracts) of the communities where the routes are located are less diverse than the system average.

However, this impact is mitigated due to the fact that this change is the best possible option for several reasons, including;

1. The service is a restoration of prior service in these communities.
2. Wilbraham Big Y recently replaced Eastfield Mall as the hub near East Springfield (due to Eastfield Mall's closing and construction). The Wilbraham Big Y falls within a less diverse block group than the Eastfield Mall but retains access to the same neighborhoods and retains connections to more diverse Springfield routes, the B7 and B17.
3. The impacts, however, are positive, less discriminatory than any available alternative transit service and could increase ridership from protected classes.
4. Enhancements increase access to employment for individuals living in East Springfield (a more diverse area). Employment includes manufacturing and warehousing within the Palmer Industrial Park among other locations. The connection between East Springfield and Palmer and Ware has solidified with additional trips connecting through the Wilbraham Big Y.

Paul Burns: Overall, the route changes discussed above appear to be well received. The Title VI analysis notes that while there are some disparate or disproportionate impacts each is a positive impact that enhances service. We are requesting that the Board approve the changes to the P21E, the G73E and the Palmer and Ware Shuttles as well as accept the Title VI Analysis Report.

Motion: Moved and seconded (Sorrell/Miller) to accept the Title VI Analysis Report and Approve the Route Adjustments on the P21E, G73E and the Palmer and Ware Shuttles.

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			
Amherst			
	Douglas Slaughter		

Belchertown	
Chicopee	Steve Huntley
East Longmeadow	Erin Koebler
Easthampton	
Granby	
Hadley	
Hampden	Becky Moriarty
Holyoke	
Leverett	
Longmeadow	Mark Gold
Ludlow	
Northampton	Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra
Palmer	Benjamin Hood
Pelham	David Shanabrook
South Hadley	
Springfield	Tim Sheehan
Sunderland	
Ware	
West Springfield	
Westfield	Peter Miller
Wilbraham	
Williamsburg	J.M. Sorrell
ADA Representative	
Rider Representative	

Motion passed by a vote of 36.83.

8. DIRECTOR OF TRANSIT OPERATIONS REPORT

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

December systemwide recovery of 86% is the highest yet recorded for PVRTA, surpassing the previous record of 83% in May 2023. Systemwide, 12 routes exceeded December 2019 ridership.

UMASS recovery dropped to 74% going into December, largely due to winter break starting a week earlier than in December 2022.

SATCo recovery soared to 94% going into December, the highest recovery rate yet, beating its previous record of 85% set during December 2022; in both cases, this was largely due to the “Try Transit” fare-free holiday period.

VATCo recovery dropped to 78%, largely due to the early winter break.

Paratransit ridership was 74.2% of December 2019.

Route Updates: As presented at the November Board meeting, the following route enhancements were implemented beginning on December 24:

- B17: minor schedule adjustments providing consistent 45-minute service all day on Saturdays.
- G1: All trips service Chicopee Big Y.
- R10: Schedule was realigned to provide consistent 45-minute frequency weekdays with all trips serving Walmart and Westfield State University
- R14: Minor schedule adjustments to increase efficiency and improve on time performance.
- G73E: ridership reached an all-time high of 10,519 in December 2023, the second month in a row of record ridership on the route.
- B79: ridership reached an all-time high of 805 in October 2023, surpassing the record set in October 2022. While October saw the highest ridership, the highest increases from the previous year were seen in September (+113) and November (+265). The November increase from 2022 to 2023 was greater than the total November ridership in 2021 (237).

2024 Fare Review: Following the Board’s policy, PVTA is obliged to review its fare structure and consider the need for a fare increase every three years. At present, the base fare is \$1.50, covering a single ride, with transfers sold separately for 25 cents. PVTA is considering four primary approaches to revising its fares in 2024, and will study the financial impact of each approach:

1. NO CHANGE – Recent inflation has raised costs for PVTA, but also imposed pressure on the budgets of PVTA riders, who may be reluctant or unable to bear higher costs at the farebox.
2. FLAT INCREASE – PVTA’s last fare change raised the cost of all fare media (single rides, passes, etc.) by 20%. The following year showed a slight increase in aggregate fare revenue, but a loss in ridership. But this is likely due to significant service cuts. This approach is typical of past fare increases, but as it does not distinguish between different fare media, riders have no incentive to save money by switching to passes and may instead reduce their overall travel to compensate.
3. FARE FREE – PVTA’s fares accounted for 14% of its operating expenses in FY23, or approximately \$6.3 million. If a reliable alternative funding source can be determined, PVTA could eliminate fares throughout the system. This approach may increase ridership but is dependent on the reliability of the alternate funding source—especially its ability to keep up with inflation, and to expand service when ridership grows. It is important to note as well that simply eliminating fares alone will not guarantee long term ridership increases.
4. “ENSEMBLE” – In order to raise revenue without discouraging ridership, PVTA is reviewing several changes to its overall fare structure. This approach does not require that all such changes be adopted, instead, a “package” can be put together by choosing some of the changes and rejecting others. All of these changes contribute to the same overall strategy of encouraging ridership by reducing the marginal trip cost for passengers:
 - a. BUNDLE TRANSFERS – this change could introduce a new “90-minute pass” that combines the role of the current \$1.50 single ride ticket and \$0.25 transfer. The resulting fare would cost \$1.75 and would become the new base fare.
 - b. DISCOUNT PASSES – this change would lower the cost of PVTA’s existing 1-day, 7-day, and 31-day passes. Current pass prices are set very high relative to the base fare, so there is little incentive for riders to pay up front for a pass instead of buying tickets as needed. This imposes a marginal cost on each subsequent bus trip, discouraging ridership. By lowering

the pass cost, ridership can be encouraged while minimizing loss of revenue and reducing transaction costs. These reductions could include some significant reductions that are noted here as starting points for discussion purposes only. Potential examples to be study include but are not limited to:

- 1-day pass from \$3.50 to \$3.00, 7-day pass from \$15 to \$10
- 31-day pass from \$54 to \$36, Youth Passes and Low-Income Passes

- c. RAISE BASE FARE – this change to a \$2.00 fare would raise revenue from infrequent riders while further encouraging regular riders to switch to longer-term passes. This change likely should only be considered as part of a more comprehensive package of changes some of which are outlined above.

Dial A Ride: In November we implemented the following procedures to ensure that all ADA trips are made in accordance with PVRTA and federal standards and to minimize any disruption to Dial A Ride users.

- Dial A Ride trips for non-medical purposes are subject to trip negotiation and may not be scheduled during peak times (8:00 AM to 10:00 AM and 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM)
- Dial A Ride users attempting to schedule non-medical trips during peak times will be offered alternative trip times during off peak hours.
- Dial A Ride medical and employment trips will not be subject to time restrictions.

We are extending Dial A Ride service hours to 9:00 PM to allow sufficient time for eligible riders to complete non-medical non employment trips that are restricted to off peak hours. With scheduling windows ending service at 7:00 PM there is limited available time for shopping or other activities after 5:00 PM. Extending service to 9:00 PM allows more time for passengers to complete trips with no anticipated impact on capacity as the total number of trips is significantly lower in the evening.

9. ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Administrator, Sandra Sheehan, reported the following:

On the federal level, Congressional leaders reached a \$1.66 trillion agreement to finance the federal government continuing last year's budget until March 1st. This budget preserves funding for key domestic and social safety net programs.

APTA has called on Congress to provide \$21.6 billion for public transit and \$20.2 billion for passenger rail in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024. These amounts would honor the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

On the state level, Governor Healey announced a plan to cut \$375 million from the FY24 budget due to lower than expected tax collections (approximately \$1 billion less), and to build next year's budget on the assumption that even less tax revenue will come in. Halfway through fiscal year 2024, the state has collected \$769 million or 4.1 percent less tax revenue than the projections used to prepare the budget.

In anticipation of the FY25 budget, the RTAs through MARTA, are preparing a request for the stabilization of the Commonwealth Transportation Fund by transferring monies from the Education and Transportation Fund (Fare Share) line item and including a percent increase tied to the CIP. The Fare Share revenue is forecasted to be \$1.3 billion instead of \$2B.

The Governor is expected to release a budget today after her press conference at 1p.m.

MARTA will be hosting a Legislative Luncheon in Boston on March 5th in part to kick off the 50th Anniversary of the RTAs,

It is PVTA's 50th Anniversary in 2024. We will be working with Brandy to plan activities to thank our passengers, employees, and stakeholders for their support for the past 50 years.

And to support the RTA Advancement Bill. This Bill ensures stability in the newly enhanced transit network. A consistency in funding that allows RTAs to maintain its needed labor force, attract new drivers and maintenance workers, and keep buses running on our roads longer and more frequently. The Bill asks for the same funding level as this year with a base at \$150M and an adjustment based on the CPI.

On the Capital side, Award of a contract was made for Phase I of the Electrification at Cottage Street. Design continues for Phase II of this project.

Completion of design for the Expansion of the UMass Garage took place. Bid documents are being prepared.

PVTA went live with the new validators, this piece of equipment allows the mobile ticketing system to be scanned as you board the bus. The plan is to use the data collected to improve the service provided and in the near future accept other electronic forms of payment like Apple pay or Google pay, pay as you go and account base payments.

PVTA is moving its Avail CAD/AVL to the cloud hosted solution leveraging cloud computing and eliminating the need to maintain the PVTA IT environment 24/7.

Paratransit is now on cellular data services. This includes on board tablet computers, Stratagen vehicle software, and a new backend voice radio dispatch solution. PVTA is no longer on voice and data radio communications.

PVTA partnered with BRTA and FRTA to submit a joint application for transit service connecting Pittsfield to Northampton and Pittsfield to Greenfield through the MassDOT innovation Grant Program.

Lastly, I am to remind you that three documents are needed by Brandy by February 1st:

- 1) Standards of Conduct Disclosure
- 2) Conflict of Interest Law
- 3) Conflict of Interest Training Certificate

These documents are requested by the auditors every year. It is very important that you complete the training, signed the forms and return to PVTA.

10. NEW BUSINESS

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

11. OLD BUSINESS

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

12. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Slaughter asked for a motion without objection to adjourn.

Motion: Moved and seconded (Huntley/Gold) to adjourn.

Chairman Slaughter stated this meeting is adjourned.

The meeting of the Advisory Board adjourned at 12:47 P.M.

A TRUE RECORD

ATTEST: _____
BRANDY PELLETIER

Documents filed with Board Meeting packet:

- Roll Call Votes
- Advisory Board Minutes of 11-15-23
- 2024 Advisory Board Meeting Schedule
- FY24 Revised Budget
- Title VI Analysis Report
- Route Adjustments
- Fare Analysis Update

Minutes Approved: March 20, 2024