



Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 25, 2023
1:30 p.m.
269 Melrose Street, Providence
Transportation Board Room

Members Present: Peter Alviti, Board Chair; Robert Kells, Board Vice Chair; Michelle Wilcox, Board Treasurer; Patrick Crowley, Board Secretary; James Leach; and Normand Benoit.

Absent Members: Marcy Reyes and Heather Schey.

Also Present: Scott Avedisian, CEO; Christopher Fragomeni, Esq., Board Counsel; Christopher Durand, Chief Financial Officer; Roy Rivers, Executive Paralegal; Jamie Pereira, Chief of Security; Steven Colantuono, Chief Legal Counsel; Kathy Nadeau, Chief of Human Resources; members of RIPTA's staff; and members of the public.

Call to Order: Director Alviti calls the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m., indicating that quorum is present.

Agenda Item 1: **To Consider for Approval the Draft Regular Meeting Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting of September 27, 2023.**

Mr. Crowley makes a motion to approve the minutes of the September 27, 2023, meeting. Mr. Kells seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Director Alviti; Ms. Wilcox; Mr. Leach; and Mr. Benoit.

Agenda Item 2: **To Consider for Approval the Draft Regular Meeting Minutes of Special Board of Directors Meeting of October 10, 2023.**

Mr. Crowley makes a motion to approve the minutes of the October 10, 2023, special meeting. Ms. Wilcox seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Director Alviti; Mr. Kells; Mr. Leach; and Mr. Benoit.

Agenda Item 3: **Public Comment**

1. Walter Melillo, Local ATU 618/618A

Mr. Melillo addresses ongoing issues at RIPTA, including: Manpower; he states that RIPTA needs more attractive wages, sign on bonuses and that the Union has had previous talks

with RIPTA regarding these issues. He encourages the Board not to oppose these measures, if and when, requested; and Funding; he states that funding is a crisis and the citizens of Rhode Island depend on RIPTA. Mr. Melillo comments that RIPTA employees do a fantastic job providing service despite being understaffed. He encourages the Board that “we need to work together to come up with ideas to get the funding for RIPTA.”

2. John Flaherty, GrowSmart RI

Mr. Flaherty comments on the shortage of workers and that he has concerns regarding the Annual Financial Plan. The first concern being not filling forty positions to reduce the deficit and the second not making the full OPEB payment. Mr. Flaherty expresses his concern for statements and comments that have previously been made which undermine public trust and confidence in RIPTA, and which are continuing to be made. He cites articles from the August 2023 Providence Business News; Providence Journal; the Rhode Island Current; and the Boston Globe. He mentions Senator Reed’s \$5 million Action Plan Grants. He further cites a Boston Globe article from April 2023. He states that the issue of the fiscal cliff is affecting transit agencies across the country. Mr. Flaherty mentions that statements have been made that elude RIPTA does not have a plan or a clue where funding will come from and cites RIPTA’s Transit Master Plan. He further mentions that there has been criticism that RIPTA has not demonstrated the benefits to the legislature or to the people. He further cites reviews from outside sources which demonstrate that RIPTA is reasonably well run and outperforms its peers. He mentions that it was previously stated that RIPTA serves only 3% of the population compared to other states serving 15% to 20% and states that RIPTA needs to raise the level of service to attract people who have a choice to use it to raise that percentage. Lastly, he states that RIPTA has done all the work regarding funding opportunities, and it is now up to the Governor and Legislature to choose the most executable.

3. Daria Brashear

Daria Brashear is an Edwood resident who states that there is a need for RIPTA to be funded and that other states spend far more than they bring in.

4. Paul Lebon

Mr. Lebon states that he has a long history using transit in 160 cities all over the world. He is here to praise RIPTA and states that RIPTA has the most customer centric system in the United States. He states that RIPTA goes to the four corners of the state, and he has recently had to rely on it. He further states that RIPTA has been a life saver getting him to doctor appointments and other events. He advised that every driver he has come across has been courteous and helpful. Mr. Lebon offers two suggestions: the first regarding the bus shelter at Our Lady of Fatima Hospital, he suggests that the shelter be designated as a two-way shelter; the second suggestion is regarding Bus 54 Woonsocket, he suggests altering the route to avoid the light. Mr. Lebon states that he has a problem regarding his bus pass and asks that RIPTA look into it. Lastly, Mr. Lebon makes a suggestion as to RIPTA’s personnel issue. He states that RIPTA should look towards H1B2 visas for recruiting workers out of the United States.

5. Pam Jennings

Ms. Jennings states that she is a lifetime rider and a member of Mathewson Street Church where she has helped people apply for bus passes. She makes a suggestion on how to strengthen the low income /senior / disabled program by breaking down the barrier to paperwork. She asks if there is a possibility of having program enrollment access throughout by RIPTA having access to other state and federal agencies' records to process applications without the need of the applicant to present physical copies of required paperwork.

6. Joe Cole

Mr. Cole thanks Scott Avedisian for answering his letters. He states that the Board could be more proactive to obtain more funding for the R Line. He expresses the need for transit buses to be sanitized. He also states that the Board has not appointed a lobbyist and suggests that the Board needs to get involved with lobbying and the legislature. He advises that thirty-five pull outs were cut last year due to lack of drivers. He further states that ridership is high, and traffic is causing missed connections and late schedules.

7. Grant Dulgarian

Mr. Dulgarian inquires about responses to the three items he mentioned during the last Board Meeting. First, his desire to meet with Director Alviti in return for giving out gift cards. Second, his notion regarding free passes for Earth Month or Earth Week. Third, his plan for revamping Kennedy Plaza. Mr. Dulgarian further elaborates on his proposed plan for revamping Kennedy Plaza. He asks for the cost associated with low/free fare during Earth Week. Mr. Dulgarian reiterates his offer to reward the longest serving drivers. He reiterates his request for heaters at the bus shelters in Kennedy Plaza. Finally, he suggests the hiring of one full-time telephone operator to contact regarding the bus schedule.

8. Randall Rose

Mr. Rose speaks about the ticket window in Kennedy Plaza. Mr. Rose states that it is a central function of RIPTA as a transit agency; that the limited Wednesday hours make it difficult to use; and that it should be open from 9-5, five days a week. Mr. Rose states that the Annual Financial Report mentions RIPTA cutting down on staffing for drivers and customer service. He states that it is essential to obtain money to staff the Ticket Window and Photo Identification Office full-time. Mr. Rose further states that there is a reluctance of certain Board Members to ask for money despite RIPTA identifying potential funding sources and further states that RIPTA should not be opining as to the funding source.

Agenda Item 4: CEO Report

Mr. Crowley recognizes Karen Hazard, Business Manager of the Local 808 Union, for her recent bestowment of the Donte Mollo Award from United Way. Mr. Crowley explains that the award is for efforts in community service.

Director Alviti passes along the Board's congratulations to Karen Hazard.

Scott Avedisian, RIPTA's CEO, presents the CEO report. Topics included in his update are:

1. Rhode to RIPTA
2. Commendation
3. Employee Spotlight

Chris Durand, RIPTA's CFO, presents the following:

4. Financials

Agenda Item 5: Request for Approval: New (Phase Two) Low-Income Pilot Program

Sarah Ingle, Executive Director of Planning and Nathan Hannon, Customer Service Operations Manager presents a summary of the No Fare Pilot Program and recommends a New (Phase Two) Low-Income Pilot Program including reaching out to partner organizations and a set aside not to exceed \$280,000.00 and exploration of partnering with additional organizations or in the alternative, ending the program and deactivate the 775 wave cards.

Ms. Wilcox makes a motion to approve the proposal. Mr. Benoit seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Director Alviti; Mr. Kells; Mr. Crowley and Mr. Leach.

Agenda Item 6: Request for Approval: Annual Financial Plan

Mr. Benoit advises that the Finance Subcommittee met and voted to recommend approval of the Annual Financial Plan to the Board. Mr. Avedisian advises that the Finance Subcommittee also requested technical amendments to the Annual Financial Plan.

Mr. Crowley makes a motion to table Agenda Item 6 from the Agenda for a special board meeting, including an open and an executive session, at a later date. Ms. Wilcox seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Director Alviti; Mr. Kells; Mr. Benoit; and Mr. Leach.

Agenda Item 7: Request for Approval: Tunnel Repair - Construction

Mr. Avedisian advises the Board that Agenda Items 7 and 8 are long awaited items which allow RIPTA to make restorations and renovations to the historic East Side Bus Tunnel, a project of more than \$15 million funded through the FTA with State match.

James Canty, Deputy Chief of Planning and Project Management and Jack Plouffe, Project Manager present a request to award a contract to Bentley Construction, Inc., in the amount of \$13,720,117.00 with a 15% contingency for the renovation of the East Side Bus Tunnel and restoration of the East Side Bus Tunnel Shelter.

Mr. Crowley makes a motion to approve the request. Mr. Benoit seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Director Alviti; Mr. Kells; Ms. Wilcox and Mr. Leach.

Agenda Item 8: Request for Approval: Tunnel Repair – Construction Services

James Canty, Deputy Chief of Planning and Project Management and Jack Plouffe, Project Manager present a request to award a contract to WSP, Inc., in the amount of \$1,033,627.29 with a 10% contingency for 24/7 field oversight, engineering and design services in relation to the renovation of the East Side Bus Tunnel and restoration of the East Side Bus Tunnel Shelter.

Mr. Benoit makes a motion to approve the request. Mr. Crowley seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Director Alviti; Mr. Kells; Ms. Wilcox and Mr. Leach.

Agenda Item 9: Board Questions and Answers

Director Alviti asks if there are any additional questions.

Mr. Benoit advises that the Memorandum of Understanding with the Providence Public School Department should be signed.

Director Alviti asks what the issue was regarding Providence Public School Department and Wave passes. Mr. Avedisian advises that a person from Providence Public School Department was on vacation and as a result passes were not distributed. Paul Harrington, Executive Director of Transportation states that RIPTA's Transportation Department made every effort to ensure all students were provided transportation. Mr. Avedisian further advises that the distribution process was changed to prevent further issues.

Agenda Item 10: Adjournment – 3:40 p.m.

Mr. Crowley makes a motion to adjourn. Ms. Wilcox seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Director Alviti; Mr. Kells; Mr. Benoit; and Mr. Leach.

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick Crowley, Secretary