

Minutes

RTA Board of Trustees Meeting

9:50 a.m., December 15, 2020

Present: Clough (Chair), Lucas (Vice Chair), Bibb, Byrne, Joyce, McCall, Moss, Pellot, Serrano, Weiss

Not present: None

Also Present: Becker, Benford, Birdsong, Bitto, Burney, Catalusci, Caver, Coffey, Dangelo, Davidson, Fields, Freilich, Garofoli, Gautam, Johnson, Jones, Lincoln, Mothes, Schipper, Young.

Mayor Clough called the meeting to order at 9:50 a.m. The secretary called the roll and reported that eight (8) board members were present. A few Board members had audio issues and joined the meeting later. This meeting was conducted by teleconference for members of the Board in accordance with Sub. H.B. 404 of the 133rd General Assembly, passed on November 19, 2020, signed by the Governor of the State of Ohio on November 22, 2020 and the March 9, 2020 order of the Governor of the State of Ohio declaring a public health emergency, this meeting was live-streamed on RTA's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/rideRTA) for staff and members of the public.

The Secretary advised that notice of this meeting have been posted more than twenty-four hours in advance of the meeting, that the usual notification has been given the news media and other interested persons, and that all requirements of the Ohio Revised Code and Rules and Bylaws of this Board regarding notice of meeting have been complied with.

Public Comments – Agenda Items (comments were submitted by form and phone)

1. Bruce Checefsky – Cleveland, OH - Will the bus at Lakeview Terrace remain #81, or will the bus be a different number? Could you clarify, please?

Dr. Caver said the bus will change to the #25.

2. Justine M. Smith – Cleveland, OH - I have not used RTA since March, 2020 because I have heard that riders are not keeping their masks on and that RTA is not limiting capacity as required by the State of Ohio Governors requirement that people wear masks and practice social distancing in indoor public places. I will ride RTA again once there is mask compliance and enforcement. If Marc's, CVS and other retail can do it why can't RTA? Non-mask compliance on buses, rail cars and transit stations should be reported to the Cuyahoga County Mask Compliance hot line. Photos can also be sent.
3. Chris Martin – Cleveland, OH - Today you will ratify the budget plan staff has presented to you. While at your retreat, you all heard a lot about listening to riders, I am uncertain whether that message has stuck. We call on you to defund your police and reallocate the funds to improve service. We call on you to seek more funding and implement the expanded service redesign. We call on you to maintain direct service to Lakeview Terrace. We call on you to heal the Healthline. We call on you to implement rear-door boarding and suspend fare collection during the pandemic. We call on you to provide mask dispensers on board buses and trains. You have done none of these things. Instead, you give your C-Suite a 3% raise. Instead, you pad your reserve fund to the tune of \$139.7 million. As I said last month, budgets are moral documents. Today, you ratify this budget, this expression of your morals.

4. Jill Pappenhagen – Mayfield, OH - Free public transit, combined with increased routes between the east and west sides of Cleveland, would increase ridership and make employment possible for so many people. Such policies and changes could serve as a model throughout the USA.
5. Taneisha Fair – Cleveland, OH - I am submitting a comment to express concern regarding the proposed elimination of services for buses #81 and #38. Please do not make these changes. Many people rely on these particular buses because the routes they offer are very convenient, and often allow the ability to only need 1 or 2 buses depending on where you are going. Steelyard is a very important shopping area in the Tremont and surrounding Cleveland neighborhoods, and the 81 gives a direct route to it. The 81 is also a 24-hour bus, and losing certain stops could cause great inconvenience for many who have to work late hours, or have to come from farther distances across Cleveland, etc. The 38 services an area that often already has trouble with transportation, and cutting stops would add a great inconvenience. Transportation for RTA riders is already a hardship at times due to higher bus fare, for those who may already have trouble with affording it. In addition, it can already take multiple buses and long wait times to get to places like work, etc. Accessibility of transportation is already of great concern here in Cleveland, especially for low-income individuals. Cutting stops from these routes would only add to that.
6. Tara Peppard – Lakewood, OH - I urge the board to consider not collecting fares in 2021. The 2021 budget projects only 10% of revenue from fares. RTA has a surplus in their 2020 budget of \$140 million (\$139,654,092). With Cares Act funding this would be an opportunity to increase transit access for the greater community. The disadvantaged of our community who rely on public transportation have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Please do your due diligence to support those who need it most during this terribly difficult period of time.
7. Dominic Mathew – Cleveland, OH - With regards to the Redesign, has the GCRTA used any existing data sources to map the effects of COVID? I'm thinking of the Streetlight Data platform that ODOT has a contract with, and that tracks phone data of residents to differentiate different mode users. Is this being used with current B&A data to estimate COVID impact on certain neighborhoods or routes? The board packet mentioned that the Cleveland Foundation sponsored free rides day resulted in a larger than normal footfall. In conjunction with the Fare free ideas discussed by the board previously, is this data being compared with previous free-ride days data? Is it possible to estimate the effect of a fare free system on access and equity in the county? Thank you.
8. Hope Wondowsky – Cleveland, OH - Hello, My name is Hope, and I have been a rider of RTA since 2015. I have chosen a lifestyle without a car for environmental reasons, and I rely on RTA for all of my transportation needs. I pride myself on knowing this transit system, and would like to see ridership increase, being an equalizer for Cleveland. I routinely ride the red line, blue line, health line, 26, 55, and 32. I grew up in NJ, and I tell all my family there that I live in the one city in Ohio with decent Public Transit. As a matter of fact, RTA was a deciding factor for me relocating here. That being said, I urge the board to consider not collecting fares in 2021, matching progressive cities throughout the country. My reasons are as follows: The 2021 budget projects only 10% of revenue from fares - is the juice worth the squeeze? Free Public Transit could pay for itself. The cost of collection outweighs the earnings from fares. I work at Cleveland Public Library, and this was the same situation before we went Free. It lifts a significant burden from our patrons. RTA has a surplus in 2020 of \$140 million (\$139,654,092). With Cares Act funding this would be an opportunity to increase transit

access for greater community recognizing people who are low-income and people of color have been disproportionately impacted by the covid-19 pandemic.

9. Bob Ross – Strongsville, OH - As to the changes to Routes #38 and #81. Don't do it! This will eliminate important links and restrict access for many elderly people, people of color and lower income people. The hundreds of people in Lakeview Terrace alone would be devastated. As emerging neighborhoods develop, public transit is important. Ohio City, Tremont and Steelyard Commons would be adversely affected. Reconsider this...
10. Marina Marquez – Lakewood, OH - Dear GCRTA Board Members. Based on data shared at the last Board Meeting, with fares only projected to make up 10% of revenue in 2021, this is the time for GCRTA to pilot Free Public Transit and increase transportation accessibility. Free public transit could pay for itself. GCRTA has a surplus in 2020 of \$140 million (\$139,654,092) and with Cares Act funding this would be an opportunity to increase transit access for the greater community - recognizing people who are low-income and people of color have been disproportionately impacted by the covid-19 pandemic. As a lifetime transit rider for 46 years, in my childhood I depended on the number 3 Superior bus line and now as an adult and Lakewood resident I depend on the 55 Clifton line and the 26 Detroit line for mobility. My brothers and sisters and the children and youth who live in the Corlett/Mt. Pleasant/Union-Miles Community depend on public transit but cannot afford the fares as they have been disproportionately impacted by the covid-19 pandemic. FREE PUBLIC TRANSIT is symbolic to healing the divide and disparities among all Cuyahoga County residents.
11. Jeff Sleasman – Cleveland, OH - Good morning. With passenger fares estimated to make up only 10% of GCRTA revenue for 2021, has GCRTA considered its options to go fare-free? Even if only a pilot project, the benefits to the community of improved service surely outweigh the costs of foregone passenger fare. As such, one could see local philanthropic, corporate, or government institutions partnering with GCRTA to aid in defraying the cost. Especially institutions that buy passes in bulk, as fare-free service would reduce their expenditures. Between partners and CARES Act funds, the financing is likely to work out. Workforce development orgs, social service orgs, and private companies could also monitor and collect data on the improved outcomes for their constituents and employees.

I was a daily Healthline rider when our highly-rated BRT system lost its proof-of-payment fare enforcement. I witnessed first hand the resulting service slowdowns, short-term bus crowding, and long-term loss in ridership. One wonders to what extent the reverse circumstance might be true: ridership could drastically increase if service is sped up by eliminating the dwell times for fare enforcement. In addition, RTA personnel dedicated to fare enforcement could also be redeployed as Transit Ambassadors, further improving the customer experience.

2020 was a struggle and Greater Cleveland could use some bold ideas to help us see a light on the horizon.

12. Mary Ann – Strongsville, OH - Good morning RTA. As a frequent rider of public transit I urge RTA to consider free transit for all. In the face of economic downturns and the Covid19 crisis, elimination of fares would help many people. People who could save the money associated with obtaining education, medical, food shopping and employment. It is expensive to own a car. People that don't own a car need public transit. We need to help them. I use the red line, #52, the health line and the trolleys to get where I need to go. I am on a fixed income and even though I get a reduced senior rate, no fare at all would be great. Federal, State, County and City funding is available. I think that it probably costs more to collect fares than to just let everyone ride free. It has worked in other places. In the budget you should look at fare

collection and transit police as great places to cut and supplement fares. I have rarely seen police on the rapid or buses. I have always felt safe. I have used public transit for 60 years. Who knows what sales tax revenue will be in 2021? A tax levy on the ballot would probably help. Expansion of routes and frequency of buses would make people want to vote for a levy. And of course no fares. The time is now! The future is uncertain. Let's take a big step forward. Merry Christmas and happy holidays to all of GCRTA and your families.

Mayor Clough asked if there were comments expressing a different view from what has been read. He said if it is the same subject matter, the rest can be summarized. Rev. Lucas wanted to make sure that all the comments were recognized. Ms. Birdsong said they are reviewing free fares data wise. They will bring it back to discussion early in the 1st quarter. Mayor Clough thanked everyone for their comments.

13. Erin Gay Miyoshi – Cleveland Heights - The proposed 2021 budget is projecting only 10% of revenues from fares. At the November board meeting, Justin Bibb requested information on the expense related to collecting fares versus the actual revenue. I echo this request. Is the juice worth the squeeze? Pre-pandemic the majority of GCRTA riders were low-income. During the pandemic, GCRTA has been an essential service in our community, yet the cost of a \$5 daily pass is still a barrier to serving people who need public transit. In fact, a \$5 daily pass is a barrier to me. It's more cost effective as a family of 3 to drive than take public transit.

As a taxpayer, and therefore investor in RTA, it makes me wonder if more people would be served by RTA if fares were reduced or eliminated. RTA is ending the current year with a \$140 million surplus. With Cares Act funding, RTA is in the financial position to expand how it is serving our community, particularly residents most impacted by the covid pandemic. Eliminating the collection of fares could pay for itself. Before approving the budget, I urge you to look closely at the current budget model. Eliminating fares could have a transformative impact on Northeast Ohio's recovery from the pandemic. Free transit means more access to jobs, health care, groceries, and essential services – for more people.

14. Chris Martin – Cleveland, OH – He spoke earlier. He doesn't think it's fair for Mayor Clough to select which comments to listen to. This speaks to the strength of public opinion. Staff said they wanted to listen to riders.

Mayor Clough added that he believes they have listened to the riders. All comments are being recorded. There is another non-agenda comment portion at the end of the meeting. He recognizes that the public is interested in free fares. He is not trying to eliminate comments, but wants to recognize that they have business to conduct.

Minutes

Mayor Clough stated that the minutes from the November 17, 2020 Board Meeting had been previously distributed and reviewed and asked whether there were any additions and/or corrections. There were no corrections. The minutes were approved.

Committee Reports

There were no committee reports.

Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

There was no CAC report.

Ad Hoc Committee Reports

There was no Ad Hoc Committee report.

Introduction of New Employees/Promotions

New Hires:

1. Jesse Church – Security Systems Specialist, Operations
2. Sheila Miller – IT Engineer, IT
3. William Mariner – Sign Shop Leader, HR
4. Matthew Seegert – Talent Management Coordinator, HR

Promotions:

1. Alroy Gibson – Manager of Transportation, Paratransit
2. Conor Miller – ITS specialist, Operations

Mayor Clough congratulated the new hires and promotions.

Introduction of Resolutions

- A. 2020-91 – Authorizing Contract No. 2020-161 with Hill International, Inc. for Project 18.87 – On-Call Inspection Services - 2020 in an amount not to exceed \$450,000.00 for a period of twenty-four (24) months (RTA Capital and/or Development Funds, Engineering & Project Development Department budget), the adoption of which was moved by Mr. Serrano, seconded by Mayor Byrne and approved by unanimous vote.
- B. 2020-92 – Authorizing Contract No. 2020-163 with the Ruhlin Company for Project 61F – Triskett Garage CNG infrastructure upgrades, in an amount not to exceed \$6,262,000.00 (RTA Development Fund, Engineering & Project Development Department budget), the adoption of which was moved by Rev. Lucas, seconded by Mr. Bibb and approved by unanimous vote.
- C. 2020-93 – Authorizing Contract No. 2020-181 with CBTS, LLC for the purchase of Network Core Upgrade Equipment and Services in an amount not to exceed \$293,281.40 (RTA Development Fund, Information Technology Department budget), the adoption of which was moved by Mr. Serrano, seconded by Ms. Pellot and approved by unanimous vote.
- D. 2020-94 – Authorizing Contract No. 2020-194 with Motorola Solutions, Inc. for the purchase of Transit Police portable radios, dispatch consoles & body cameras for a total contract amount not to exceed \$1,334,907.00 (RTA Development Fund (\$966,905.00) and General Fund (\$368,002.00), Intelligent Transportation Systems Department budget), the adoption of which was moved by Mayor Weiss, seconded by Mayor Byrne and approved by unanimous vote.

Ms. Moss said this went through committee and there was a great presentation on this item.

- E. 2020-95 – Authorizing a Change Order to Contract No. 2016-099 with Lamar Transit, LLC for Transit Advertising Sales Services (Revenue Generating, amount variable based upon

net sales), the adoption of which was moved by Mr. Serrano, seconded by Ms. Pellot and approved by unanimous vote.

- F. 2020-96 – Authorizing the purchase of property insurance from various insurance underwriters through AON Risk Services Northeast, Inc. for a period of twelve (12) months for a total contract amount not to exceed \$1,126,116.00 (General Fund, Risk Management Department budget), the adoption of which was moved by Mr. Joyce, seconded by Ms. Pellot and approved by unanimous vote.
- G. 2020-97 – Amending Sections 460.02 and 460.03 of the Codified Rules and Regulations of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, the adoption of which was moved by Mayor Byrne, seconded by Mr. Joyce and approved by unanimous vote.
- H. 2020-98 – Authorizing an interagency agreement with the Ohio Department of Transportation for Section 3 of the Opportunity Corridor Project (RTA Development Fund, Engineering and Project Development budget), the adoption of which was moved by Mr. Serrano, seconded by Ms. Pellot and approved by unanimous vote.
- I. 2020-99 – Authorizing the General Manager, Chief Executive Officer to enter into an intergovernmental agreement with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District for student fares for the 2020-2021 school year and ratifying the issuance of tickets, the adoption of which was moved by Ms. Moss, seconded by Ms. Pellot. Mr. Serrano asked to recuse himself. The roll was called. There were eight (8) ayes and one (1) recuse from Mr. Serrano. It passed.
- J. 2020-100 – Amending budget appropriations for the FY 2021 Capital Improvement Fund budget to provide for an increase of \$12,650,000, the adoption of which was moved by Mr. Joyce, seconded by Mayor Weiss and approved by unanimous vote.

Public hearings were held on this resolution and the next two resolutions.

- K. 2020-101– Making appropriations for the current expenses and other expenditures for the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority during fiscal year 2021, the adoption of which was moved by Mayor Weiss, seconded Mayor Byrne and approved by unanimous vote.
- L. 2020-102– To amend the Fiscal Year 2020 revenues and appropriations for the General Fund, as adopted in Resolution No. 2019-118 and to provide for a \$5,000,000 transfer to the Reserve Fund for Rail Car Replacement, the adoption of which was moved by Mr. Serrano, seconded Ms. Pellot and approved by unanimous vote.

Interim Secretary-Treasurer's Report

Dr. Caver gave the report. The unemployment rate has been dropping nationally, Statewide and countywide. This is a better position for RTA than it was at the height of COVID, but he cautioned that there is still difficulty in the community. Transportation and warehousing has the largest gain regionally. The declines are starting to happen in government. With state budgets and with other budgets being depressed, it is likely we will lose economic activity and jobs. Ridership has continued to be stagnant. It is an YTD total ridership reduction of 45%. Throughout the COVID time period, that number has been 55% of pre-COVID ridership numbers. Passenger fares have been depressed about 50% of its pre-COVID levels. Sales tax has been resilient, but there is some caution as to a major rebound through a 2021 year. Economic analysis predict that a return to pre-COVID levels may

not come until 2022-2023. The supplemental insurance payments for unemployment insurance have been discontinued. That was a major component of spending through the core of the Pandemic. We've drawn down all of the CARES Act funding through October. It allows us to support the Operating budget and the levels of service approved today for the 2021 appropriations.

Mr. Bibb thanked Ms. Birdsong for her comments about exploring scenarios with free fares. He asked if there could be a piloting of this in 2021 maybe with the HealthLine. He wants to be creative in ways that ridership can be increased as economic recovery takes shape. Rev. Lucas asked about the Bill in Congress and how it affects public transit. Mr. Schipper said there is \$15 billion allocated for transit. There is a cap. We're capped at 75% of our operating expenses from 2018 when it is combined with what we've received already. He is not sure how it draws down. Staff will be working with the Advocacy firm and FTA. Hopefully it gets approved this week. It will be a similar mechanism to the CARES Act. Rev. Lucas asked if RTA was receiving \$75 million. Mike said they need to look at RTA's National Transit Database (NTD) data from 2018 to see what that amount would be.

General Manager, Chief Executive Officer Report

Ms. Birdsong gave the presentation. RTA participated in a joint Public Transportation Virtual Rally, which included other large and mid-size agencies such as Indianapolis, Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, San Francisco, New York, Denver and New Orleans. Steve Bitto, Executive Director for Marketing and Communications, represented RTA. The rally was to call for significant and immediate emergency federal relief via the CARES Act and any subsequent funding packages that might be passed at the federal level to support public transit. The talking points included that RTA is in a positive state financially for next year, largely in part due to the allocation of the previous CARES Act funding, which totaled \$112 million.

As a result of that funding, the RTA has been able to maintain current levels of service up to 93%. There have not been any layoffs or furloughs. Service vehicles and facilities have been cleaned at an accelerated rate and PPE has been distributed to staff and customers in the thousands. There are still subsequent funding needs. There is still \$514 million of unfunded capital projects that are in need of state of good repair updates and infrastructure work. We have requested that Congress and the administration look to pass a COVID-19 bill for public transit before the end of the current session. We are awaiting the next update. Being fiscally responsible does not equate with being flush with cash. We need to continue to be good stewards of our financial scope. She believes that we have done so, so we can continue with the service redesign.

We will take into consideration all of the public comments and board members interested in what free fares would look like. To her knowledge, no public transit agency close to RTA's size has undergone free fares. Agencies are in the same boat when it comes to evaluating what can be done to help the community to enjoy free transit, if possible. However, anything that is proposed has to take the long term into consideration. We do not want to put in a policy that is short lived due to the inability of RTA to recoup on any relief packages. We need to ensure it is a permanent change that may cause confusion or further hardship for riders.

RTA received a Healthy Worksite Silver Award for the 2nd year in the row. This recognizes Ohio employers who demonstrated commitment to employee wellness. A large part of the application was our response to the Pandemic. There was a true commitment to wellness, safety and cleanliness. RTA received an Ohio Air Quality grant for \$2 million to replace six diesel buses with six compressed natural gas (CNG) buses. The grant should cover almost 64% of the cost to replace those vehicles. A presentation will be made to the Board on Feb. 16, 2021 and the estimate delivery date is 10 months after the Notice to Proceed. The Marketing Department decorated several trains calling them Holiday Trains. Customers have responded with positive feedback on social media. Patrolman

Cummings dress up as Holiday Santa and visited several RTA properties. She thanked the Marketing and Operations staff. Rev. Lucas suggested one of the Paratransit vehicles be decorated next year. The Employee Giving Campaign goal was adjusted to \$40,000 because of COVID. Donations have dropped due to the financial situation of our country. We are currently at 64% of that goal at \$25,611. We appreciate the giving and look forward to continued participation.

The Board of Trustees held a virtual retreat last week. TransPro facilitated the retreat. They are assisting staff with organizing success outcomes. The Deputy General Managers and Directors did a great job of explaining their scorecards. This is draft information. The ten-year Strategic Plan is lofty as far as goals and objectives, so the team decided to have an interim plan to hit the goals in the short-term. They will come back to the Board with updates in 2021 and a roll out to the staff and operational partners to understand the new metrics. The IT team did a great job live streaming the meeting.

Public comments on non-agenda items

Comments were received via form and by dial in. Mayor Clough said it is a disadvantage that the public cannot attend the meetings in person to share their comments, but all comments can be sent in writing. But he believes that if several comments have the same subject, they should be categorized by topic. If the topics are the same, it would be better to have one spokesperson. It was brought up by the Board whether there should be one comment portion with the time extended or continue with two comment periods. Currently there is a two-minute limit. This was not discussed at the recent retreat. He would like there to be one comment period and maybe extend the time limit. Mr. Bibb suggested comments be taken at committee meetings in addition to the regular Board Meeting.

1. Loh – Cleveland, OH - Today's board meeting is informative as expected. However, Mayor Clough's view of making meeting efficient by NOT reading the public comments of the same or similar topic LIVE is definitely NO help to GCRTA's public image, Again! Any way to let him know riders and general public are Not sharing his point of view, Especially on how public make public comments and what public express in their public comments???

The following is Loh's revision of the public comment sent earlier this morning via GCRTA website for your references:

Loh has been asking for Fare-FREE public transit service from GCRTA, at least, since 2017 Not Only because people should Not pay Twice, ie Tax And Fare, to use such an important public service, But Also GCRTA will be FREE of all the troubles and the wastes of limited resources with the expenditures on collecting, such as the problematic fare cards, fare boxes, fare card vending machines, technologies, and the co\$tly contracts, together with expen\$ive updates/upgrades/ Furthermore, Fare-FREE Policy definitely eliminates the unnecessary, agonizing complications from the Misuse of GCRTA Transit Police for fare-collecting reinforcement. More Importantly, due to COVID-19, Fare-FREE Policy will definitely enhance all other ongoing efforts GCRTA has been working on to strengthen the appreciation and trust from riders and general public, which will benefit the public transit system for the long run, ie to help GCRTA to go for any federal, state, and even local transportation funding opportunities simply because there are louder, stronger Voices from the people GCRTA serves than before! Thanks for your time and consideration of this timely matter.

2. Jack Brancatelli – Cleveland, OH - Many of us have been concerned about people not wearing masks on the busses, but absolutely do not want more enforcement, policing, or punishment. Could the RTA supply masks on each vehicle to simply provide masks to people who aren't

wearing one? Perhaps a mask dispenser. This would be following the lead of other cities instituting that policy.

Executive Session Requested

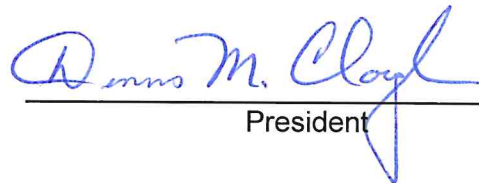
10:53 a.m. - Mayor Clough asked for a motion to go into Executive Session to consider the appointment, employment, dismissal, discipline, promotion, demotion, or compensation of a public employee or official. It was moved by Rev. Lucas, seconded by Mayor Weiss. There was ten (10) ayes and none opposed. There will not be any action taken after the meeting.

11:14 a.m. - It was moved by Mr. Serrano, seconded by Chief McCall to come out of Executive Session. There were seven (7) ayes and none opposed. Rev. Lucas, Mr. Bibb and Ms. Pellot had to leave the meeting.

Upcoming Meetings

The next regular Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 19, 2021 in the Board Room of the Authority, Root-McBride Building, and 1240 West Sixth Street, Cleveland, Ohio 44113. This meeting will be live streamed on RTA's Facebook page for staff and members of the public at www.facebook.com/riderta Only Board members and required RTA staff will be allowed in the Board Room.

This meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.



President

Attest: 

Interim Secretary-Treasurer