

## Minutes

### RTA External & Stakeholder Relations & Advocacy Committee

9:02 a.m. December 5, 2023

**Committee Members:** Koomar (Vice), Biasiotta, McPherson, Welch

**Other Board Members:** Lucas, Mersmann, Sleasman, Weiss

**Not present:** Love

**Staff/Other:** Becker, Birdsong Terry, Bober, Burney, Caver, Colonna, Dangelo, Davidson, Feliciano, Ferraro, Fleig, Freilich, Garofoli, Gautam, Hudson, Jenkins, Jones, Jones, Jupina, Kirkland, LaTourette, Lincoln, Lively, Miller, Mothes, Peganoff, Prebish, Schipper, Schultz, Sutula, Talley, Tarka, Walker Minor, Woodford

**Public:** Gibbons

The meeting was called to order at 9:02 a.m. Three (3) committee members were present. Ms. McPherson arrived after the roll call.

#### Federal Advocacy Update

Jennifer LaTourette, President and Chief Operating Officer, Van Scoyoc Associates gave the update.

Ms. Jennifer LaTourette is the President and Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Van Scoyoc Associates (VSA). In this role, she represents a broad array of clients, utilizing her experience on Capitol Hill to advance client goals and advocate for funding and legislative language supporting clients' priorities. Jennifer's clients represent a wide variety of industries, including public transportation, healthcare, research institutes, laboratories, non-profits, trade associations, and corporations. Over the course of her career, she has effectively represented both individual organizations and consortium projects.

Before becoming a lobbyist, she worked for Members of the House and Senate for nearly a decade and brings a wealth of experience covering issues for both Republican and Democratic Members of Congress. Jennifer is consistently recognized as one of *The Hill's* top lobbyists.

We have two advocacy firms. Dickinson Wright will bring an update next year. Ms. LaTourette takes RTA staff to the important meetings on the Hill and leads us through the process.

#### *Contract Overview & Scope*

- Initiated: May 2019
- Duration: 3-year base with two option years
- Total Value: Not to exceed \$533,800.00
  - ✓ Federal advocacy for public transportation
  - ✓ Policy and legislative monitoring
  - ✓ Provide impact assessment and assistance to guide GCRTA's funding, programs, and projects in accordance with legislative opportunities and landscape.

*Strategic Collaboration*

- Work closely with GCRTA to create, update and maintain the agency's legislative agenda and annual strategy.
  - ✓ Advocacy support, including coordination of delegation sessions, meetings and hearings
  - ✓ Draft proposed legislation and related research, including responses to legislation and administrative actions
  - ✓ Monitor federal legislative process, funding opportunities and hearings affecting GCRTA's legislative agenda.

Ms. LaTourette spent the last five years of her Hill career as the Chief of Staff in the Ohio Delegation where she started her work with us defending public transit. RTA understands the value of advocacy and was onboard prior to the Pandemic which made it good to guard against threats. Van Scoyoc Associates is one of the largest advocacy firms in D.C. They have senior level staff from across the House and Senate. Her staff is used to problem solving for elected officials across every issue. Clients engage them for strategic advice on how to utilize their advocates. They monitor legislation and participate in weekly conference calls with RTA to keep them apprised of transportation issues.

They do a deep dive with their clients to understand the nuts and bolts of what the client is trying to accomplish, where they are in addition to their wish list, concerns, threats and vulnerabilities. They look at what works and doesn't work for RTA within the existing federal programmatic funding sources that exist. They remove the hurdles to accessing and using those dollars in a way most consistent with what RTA is trying to do. The 'wish list' helps them prepare long-term and annually prepare a proactive and reactive agenda. They ensure the list is eligible across the changing criteria and restrictions. They work to understand the priorities and understand the direct federal dollars RTA would like to receive and make that a piece of the federal agenda. They look at legislation and policy that's moving and their potential to impact the federal dollars flowing to RTA. They look at the most significant issues that don't allow us to do what we want to do with dollars and navigate a way to do that.

They look at what they can do in the existing structure to create that opportunity and remove barriers and position us more favorably, in the case of competitive dollars. In the last few years, they have been successful working on robust grant funding and helping RTA secure funds. For example:

- Two \$5 million Railcar Replacement Program grants
- \$15 million BUILD grant
- \$8 million ADA Rehabilitation Program grant
- \$500,000 Transportation Planning grants
- \$4 million Roof Project grant
- \$130 million grant for Rail Car Replacement Program

RTA has had to compete with larger legacy systems for funding. Rather than create a new pot of money, they help create a pot with dedicated criteria to ensure the dollars from a larger pot comes to RTA. They developed a plan to lobby for dollars for mid-size aging fleets. They work with us to identify transportation partners and stakeholders to garner support. There were challenges. At the time, the leadership of the House and Senate were not big transit supporters. We were able to apply for a grant for rail funding in the IIJA. She shares RTA's rail car award success with potential clients.

The environment will continue to be volatile on Capitol Hill in the coming year. Ohio will continue to be volatile due to changing of the guard. Change pulls the dynamics of the delegation. There may be a risk of more government shutdowns next year. Senator Sherrod Brown will continue to be an ally.

Ms. Terry has been a great leader, allowing them to work with RTA to elevate the profile of RTA in D.C. and testify to committees on the importance of public transportation. We have a new Congress. Most of them have been in place for fewer than five years. Our voice is important for the country.

Ms. Terry added that having an advocacy group in D.C. is imperative. Educating our delegation about RTA has been instrumental.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:36 a.m.

  
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Rajan, D. Gautam  
Secretary/Treasurer

  
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Theresa A. Burrage  
Executive Assistant

