

**NASHVILLE METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY**  
**Board of Directors Meeting**

**January 28, 2021**

- I. **Call to Order:** Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the declaration of a state of emergency by Governor Bill Lee, the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (Nashville MTA) held a special, limited agenda meeting via videoconference on Thursday, January 28, 2021 to conduct essential business to protect the health, safety and welfare of Tennesseans in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. This meeting was held in accordance with Executive Order No. 71 in order to discuss essential business.
- II. **Roll Call of Persons Present:** Gail Carr Williams, Chair; Janet Miller, Vice Chair; Hannah Paramore-Breen, Member; Mary Griffin, Member; Walter Searcy, Member; Secretary Margaret Behm; Chief Executive Officer Stephen G. Bland, Chief Financial Officer Ed Oliphant, Chief Operating Officer Bill Miller, Director of Service Quality Dan Freudberg, Chief Development Officer Trey Walker, Project Manager Lydia Benda, and Sr. Executive Assistant and Board Liaison Monica Howse.

A quorum was established, and Chair Williams called the meeting to order at 2:31 p.m.

**Approval of Minutes:** Hannah Paramore-Breen made a motion to approve the December 17, 2020 minutes. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Janet Miller and unanimously approved by the board by roll call vote.

- III. **Public Comments:** Chair Williams opened the floor for public comments. The public was reminded that comments were limited to three minutes.

**Darius Knight**

Mr. Darius Knight's comments were as follows:

- Mr. Knight said that he was concerned for all customers and operators and support staff with the continuing pandemic .
- Mr. Knight said that he was looking forward to the upcoming service changes and he hopes that there would be open dialogue with customers and operators.
- Mr. Knight said that he hoped that staff would look at possible ways and efforts to improve the upcoming QuickTicket roll out system. He suggested having a "help" option on the main line for QuickTicket issues, and assigning at least 2 main people to deal with QuickTicket issues. He also suggested that operators take a refresher course for the QuickTicket system.
- Mr. Knight said the speaker system could best be used to address the main points of interest stops to help cut down customers interacting with operators, especially during this pandemic.
- Mr. Knight recalled when there was a request to increase customer service hours. He made a suggestion for customer service to have split shift representatives who would take calls up to 11:30 p.m. Hopefully, this wouldn't increase the pay, but would just be a shuffling of hours.

**John Bull**

Mr. John Bull's public comments were as follows:

- Mr. Bull said that he was a pre-covid frequent rider (4-8 times a day) and he continues to encourage people to use bus service for essential trips only.
- Mr. Bull said that he continues to shelter in place and wears double masks, head coverings, gloves and goggles when he does go out.

- Mr. Bull said that buses 52, 23, 14 and 50 are all on time and clean.
- Mr. Bull said that he was in favor of spring changes, particularly with bus #23 addressing the overcrowding issues by running more frequently.
- He likes the QuickTicket system, but there are a few technical issues that need to be worked out and he will relay those concerns with staff.

**IV. Operations & Finance Committee Report:** Walter Searcy introduced the following items for discussion and action:

- Monthly Financial Report Compared to Budget (OF-D-21-001):** Chief Operating Officer Ed Oliphant reported and reflected on the statement of operations for the month of November 2020 compared to the budget and balance sheet as of November 30, 2020. There was no further discussion at this time.
- Monthly Operating Statistics (OF-D-21-002):** Director of Service Quality Dan Freudberg reported and reflected on the monthly operating statistics report through November 30, 2020.

There was general discussion about how to model ridership for the next fiscal year. Dan Freudberg said that we can't be certain of what the demand curve will look like over time, but we can ramp up the level of service on our most frequent corridors as ridership grows. This could be done on an ad hoc basis through the deployment of our helper buses wherever needed, with these extra trips being built back into the schedule as ridership changes become more permanent. CEO Bland said that we can look at our significant markets were pre-COVID, such as Metro Nashville Public Schools and downtown office commuters. He said when schools were in session, they made up almost 10% of ridership, so when we schools are back in session and when we see the downtown employees returning to work it will trigger a service response on our end. Our expectation is we will see gradual changes over time vs. a one-day flood of returning riders.

There was additional discussion regarding the safety of our bus drivers during this pandemic and what protocols we have in place with passenger compliance. Dan Freudberg said that we have processes in place to manage the levels of facial covering compliance on our vehicles. He said that we've noticed that the mass majority are complying with our policy. However, there continues to be challenges with passengers wearing their facial coverings correctly. CEO Bland said that we continue to work very closely with Metro Public Health to examine all of our practices. In operator protection, we've installed protective shields and the mandate of masks has been key. We continue to monitor compliance via live monitoring onboard, and video surveillance systems. The most recent data shows that our passengers were approximately 85% compliant with the facial covering policy, with the majority of the 15% not in compliance wearing the mask improperly, as opposed to refusing to comply. We also rely on our Security personnel to go out periodically to hand out masks and to educate passengers about being safe during this pandemic. CEO Bland said our Sr. Safety Manager, Nick Oldham is in constant communication with Metro Public Health and is becoming a national expert on transit efforts in conveying pandemic information. COO Bill Miller concluded this discussion by saying protective barriers have been installed and we have a repeat audio message that is played reminding passengers of the proper wearing of the masks.

- Gresham Smith and Partners A&E Contract Task Order Increase for Murfreesboro Transit Signal Priority Project (M-A-21-001):** Project Engineer Lydia Benda reported the following:

The Gresham Smith and Partners (GS&P) contract has a remaining balance of \$1.1 million. Due to delays in final acceptance testing for the TSP software, completion of the Murfreesboro project is currently projected for June 2021. These delays were primarily caused by

unavailability of necessary Public Works staff due to tornado recovery efforts and the impacts of the pandemic, and slower than anticipated completion of necessary software adjustments by the traffic signal software supplier, Econolite. As project management consultant, GS&P's services are required through project completion and project closeout at an additional cost of \$115,000, bringing the total cost of the assignment to \$758,000. Sufficient authorization remains in the contract balance to cover the cost of the additional work, so it will not be necessary to increase the overall contract value. With GS&P's involvement in the project since its inception, it would be impractical and not cost-effective to engage a new consultant to provide project management services in this late stage of the project. Only an extension of the termination date of the contract is being sought.

The contract has a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) participation goal of 15%. The DBEs participating in the contract are ARTifice, Civil Infrastructure Associates, Connico, Inc., and Geotek Engineering. Through October 31, 2020, DBE participation on the contract has reported the following: reached 15.73%.

Chair Williams asked what percentage of the delay was due to the contract vs. Covid and the tornado delays? Trey Walker said the delay was due to everything that happened last year and having to freeze project effort while Metro was having to understandably adjust their attention elsewhere. As for the software development, this is a relatively new and innovative technology and this represents a normal learning curve. Nashville is only the second city to install this software, with Charlotte being the first. Charlotte had a much broader rollout of this software and also had similar experience. He reported that our most recent system acceptance testing has gone well, leading to optimism for full system acceptance in the next few months.

CEO Bland said the delays were due to all of the crises that Nashville faced last year, as well as the innovative nature of the technology. He reminded the Board that GS&P is not the software supplier, and so is not responsible for the delays. He said the overall project is still within budget.

Walter Searcy asked for a DBE Participation list of the persons or entities that fall within the 15.73% to be sent to the board.

The Operations & Finance Committee recommended that the Board approve an increase of \$115,000 for the Murfreesboro TSP project management services task order for a new not-to-exceed task order value of \$758,000, with no increase to the overall contract value and to be funded using 5307 flexed and local funds.

Mary Griffin made a motion to approve the Gresham Smith and Partners A&E Contract Task Order Increase for the Murfreesboro Transit Signal Priority Project. It was seconded by Mr. Searcy and it was unanimously approved by the board by roll call vote.

V. **NICE Committee: Chair Janet Miller reported the following:** Vice Chair Janet Miller introduced the following item for discussion:

a. **Applications of Innovative Technology to Enhance Service Reliability (NICE-D-21-001):** Director of Service Quality Dan Freudberg and Faye DiMassimo, Senior Advisor for Transportation and Infrastructure to Nashville Mayor John Cooper presented the following:

Over the past few years, WeGo Public Transit has implemented a variety of technology projects to enhance operations, including automatic vehicle locations systems, automated passenger counters, next stop announcement systems, transit signal priority, and (most recently) account based next generation fare collection equipment. Information generated through these systems has been extremely beneficial in terms of both system planning

(such as measurements of corridor delay leading to schedule adjustments) and in providing better information in real-time to our customers.

Within the past month, Nashville received notification of two highly competitive Federal Grant Awards that will help to facilitate more rapid deployment of innovative technologies to help improve transit service reliability (as well as advance other city mobility goals). The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County was awarded \$1.5 million in Advanced Transportation and Congestion Management Technologies Deployment (ATCMTD) funding through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to support a \$3 million project in the Charlotte Avenue Corridor involving traffic management system upgrades, and featuring advanced transit system headway management techniques. Closely related, WeGo Public Transit has been notified of an award of \$585,000 in Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Funds under its COVID-19 Research and Demonstration Grant Program to support real-time and predictive approaches to passenger load management. Director of Service Quality Dan Freudberg described the overall objectives and approaches of the WeGo Public Transit dynamic operations management approach. Faye DiMassimo, Mayor Cooper's Senior Advisor for Transportation and Infrastructure expanded on Mr. Freudberg's presentation and outlined the City's broader mobility goals for the Charlotte Avenue Project.

Vice-Chair Miller said the Mayor's transportation plan will help us with grant money and to have such an early win on this is a great endorsement of the plan.

Chair Williams said that she was excited about the enhancements on Charlotte and she agreed that the plan poises us to be ready to advance a project at any time.

Faye DiMassimo also mentioned other forthcoming projects which are multimodal opportunities, including the Downtown Neighborhood Traffic Project, which will examine how we prioritize operation of the downtown street network to accommodate all of our users, including public transit. We are also aiming at the Bloomberg Mayor's Challenge which focuses on the equity by design tool development so that we can build much strength into equity in all of our improvement projects and systems. She said that there's a lot more coming down the pike.

Mary Griffin stated that she was excited about the real-time monitoring. She said that she was excited about other projects that are in the pipeline.

**VI. CEO's Report:** CEO Bland reported the following:

1. Tragically, we lost our first active employee to COVID-19 this past month. Larry Williams was a 10-year Bus Operator with an exemplary safety, attendance, and customer relations record. He enjoyed working on the extra board for the variety it offered and glowed whenever he spoke of his daughter. To say he will be missed by all of us – including our riders – is a severe understatement.
2. Hopefully, on a more positive note, after significant concern with the post-Thanksgiving spike in cases resulting in as many as 40 of our employees being off – either having tested positive or awaiting test results – active cases have come back to the 10 – 15 range. Hopefully, we will hold the line until our employees can be vaccinated. Right now, they fall into the “critical infrastructure category” for vaccine priority.
3. As vaccinations have begun to become available for highly vulnerable populations, we have partnered with Metro Health, Neighborhood Health Services and the Metropolitan Development and Housing Authority (MDHA) to provide Access service to those senior citizens receiving vaccines who do not have an alternate mode of transportation. When seniors arrange their vaccination appointments with the Health Department, they can indicate that they need transportation. Each Thursday, the Health Department gives

Access details for trips the following week. This weekend, we are scheduled to deliver our first trips under this program. Unlike the program we developed with Neighborhood Health Services to transport folks to testing, these trips can be accommodated on our normal Access service because these individuals are not exhibiting any symptoms.

4. CEO Bland said that he continues to be impressed with all our staff for the enormous efforts being put into COVID safety practices, from frequent announcements about facial coverings on our buses to the “between trip” disinfecting of buses being done by our custodians at Central, to the efforts of our contracted security personnel to educate riders about our mask policy. At the outset of the pandemic, the Federal Transit Administration provided us with 23,000 masks to distribute to our customers, and we have fully exhausted that supply. Metro Health is working with us to keep those supplies flowing.
5. Based on Board discussion last month, we are out for public comment on a series of proposed service changes that will come back before the Board in February. Adopted changes will take effect in April. In large part, the proposed changes are reflective of the alterations we’ve made to the system based on the pandemic and will result in a net service increase this spring. However, we do anticipate some confusion and opposition, as some of the services we’ve suspended would be discontinued until ridership demand and available funding call for their reinstatement. Particularly with respect to our commuter express services, this will be heavily dependent on the return of downtown employees to their offices. Although MTA has suspended all commuter express services, those that are operated by the RTA are still seeing ridership reductions in the 80-90% range – a far higher loss of ridership than the MTA is experiencing.
6. Speaking of funding, Metro Finance has requested – and we have submitted – requests for funding under the City’s capital spending plan. The projects we requested were drawn from previously adopted MTA Capital Budgets and the recently adopted City Transportation Plan. They include \$5 million to match available State & Federal Grants; \$3 million for stop and shelter upgrades; \$3.3 million to advance additional transit centers; and \$10.2 million for fleet expansion to support future Better Bus improvements.
7. Our Operating budget proposal is due to Metro on February 16 and following last month’s extensive Board discussion, will include a request of \$54,835,900 to restore the funds cut in last year’s budget and allow us to keep our baseline level of service. This also includes \$3.2 million to fund 9 months of service improvements as outlined in the Better Bus program and the Mayor’s Adopted City Transportation Plan. These improvements would focus on our off-peak services.
8. Over the past few months, we have been providing support to Mayor Coopers Sustainability Advisory Committee as they developed recommendations to the Mayor for the city’s overall carbon footprint. The Committee’s recommendations were published this week. Among those that could affect MTA are aggressive trip reduction recommendations and possible conversion of Metro’s fleet – including WeGo Public Transit buses – to electric propulsion.
9. This past month, we participated in meetings with the Airport Authority and their consultants relative to planning for the extension of their Runway 2L. This is a major project that would lengthen the runway to allow for direct air service to Asia and would require the runway to extend over Murfreesboro Pike, as the parallel taxiway does now. Our discussions centered on planned and potential transit service upgrades in the corridor to assure that their project allows for possible upgrades. The Airport has been tremendously supportive of developing future transit upgrades in the corridor and to the Airport itself.
10. Progress on a number of our capital projects continues at a good pace:
  - a. For the North Nashville Transit Center, TDOT notified us that our Improve Act funding application was successful, and we are being awarded \$2.7 million for this project. This fully funds our project budget goal of approximately \$8.4 million. We initiated

discussions with our designers to start the public engagement and design process. DuGuard Communications will be supporting our outreach efforts in North Nashville. We anticipate design to take most of this year, with construction bidding in the Spring of 2022.

- b. The Nolensville Pike shelter project continues to move at a fast pace, with all sites completed except our inbound and outbound stations at Walmart, where construction of the structures is underway now. We are also advancing the design of an inbound/outbound station pair at the Fairgrounds, which is complicated somewhat by the evolving site plan for the Fairgrounds and the presence of the stop in the Browns Creek Floodplain. Next month, Trey Walker will present an overview of this project, and the concepts we're examining for the Fairgrounds stop.
- c. We anticipate bringing forward a construction contract award recommendation for the Green Hills/Hillsboro Pike Transit Center at your March meeting. This will keep us on pace to complete the construction of the center this summer. Work on related right of way activities along Hillsboro Pike is occurring now.
- d. The Quick Ticket Fare Collection project keeps moving along in its current beta test mode. If COVID has had one benefit, it's that the reduced level of ridership has made managing the volume of transactions more manageable. Along with customer testing of the mobile payment and proximity card products, Finance can test the various reports and internal control tools for accuracy and thoroughness. We anticipate project completion this year.

**11. On the RTA side:**

- a. Two of the four STAR locomotives have been completely rebuilt and are in service, working well. The third locomotive is currently at the rebuilder in St. Louis, in the early stages of its rehabilitation.
- b. Upgrades and parking expansion at Mt. Juliet Station are complete, with just a few punch list items remaining. We are currently working with the City of Mt. Juliet on a long-term maintenance agreement. The developer of the Vintage Station North Mixed-Use Development on the opposite side of the tracks from the station is working with us, the City, and the railroad to construct a platform on their site to enable boarding on both sides of the train.
- c. The Procurement Staff are currently preparing a "Request for Information" to the consulting community to support an examination of options for significantly enhancing the Star, with a focus on how to add additional trips, possibly even encompassing the Positive Train Control technology that limits us to 12 one-way trips per day. Mayor Cooper's Transportation Plan includes the Star enhancements among its recommendations. Earlier this week, Eric Beyer, Trey Walker, and CEO Bland met with Lebanon's new Mayor, Rick Bell, to discuss the RTA and the Star in particular. Mayor Bell has been a long-time advocate of the Star, and we discussed some potential partnership opportunities with the City of Lebanon.
- d. This month the RTA Board approved the purchase of 10 additional commuter coaches. Aside from RTA information, this project is important to the MTA Board because 7 of these buses will replace coaches the MTA operates under contract to the RTA for its Rutherford County corridor service, and it also means that there will be 10 more purple buses traversing the highways of Middle Tennessee.

**VII. Other Business:** There was no other business at this time.

**VIII. Chair's Report:** Chair Williams reported the following:

Chair Williams expressed her condolences to the family of Larry Williams, who recently passed due to Covid. She said that her heart also breaks for other families that have lost loved ones

due to Covid. She said if there is anything that the Board can do to please let them know. She said that the Board members are available to assist in whatever way that they can, especially with the enforcement of the mask mandate.

Chair Williams gave special thanks to MTA Board Members, CEO Bland and staff for the work they do and how they continue to serve the citizens of Nashville. She said that she was especially proud of the way MTA responded to the Downtown bombing that happened on Christmas Day. She said MTA always rises to the occasion and is always very supportive in responding to the needs of the city.

Chair Williams thanked Ms. Faye DiMassimo for her presentation at the Board Meeting and for her continued hard work in the community.

As for the FY2022 Budget, Chair Williams expressed her appreciation to Ms. Mary Griffin for offering to draft a letter, on behalf of the Board to the Mayor's office, advocating for our funding request.

Last, but not least, Chair Williams thanked Mr. Knight, Mr. Bull and Ms. Hansen for their comments that they give regularly. She said that their comments help us to be a better transit agency.

- IX. Adjournment:** With no further business, Chair Williams called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Walter Searcy made a motion to adjourn, the motion was seconded by Vice Chair Janet Miller and the meeting was adjourned at 4:03 p.m.

**Attested:**

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**Gail Carr Williams**  
*Chair*

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**Margaret L. Behm**  
*Secretary*