



**Green Mountain Transit Board of Commissioners
November 17, 2020 - 7:30 a.m.
101 Queen City Road, Burlington VT 05401
Virtual Meeting via Zoom Meetings**

The mission of GMT is to promote and operate safe, convenient, accessible, innovative, and sustainable public transportation services in northwest and central Vermont that reduce congestion and pollution, encourage transit oriented development, and enhance the quality of life for all.

Present:

Commissioner Davis
Commissioner Waninger
Commissioner Pouech
Commissioner Derenthal
Commissioner Kaynor
Commissioner Buermann
Commissioner Dimitruk
Commissioner Spencer
Commissioner Baker
Commissioner Krohn
Commissioner Gallagher
Commissioner Polyte
Commissioner Bohne
Commissioner Wallis

Jon Moore, General Manager
Jamie Smith, Dir. of Marketing and Planning
Chris Damiani, Transit Planner
Hunter Eddy, Training Supervisor
Jenn Wood, Community Relations Manager
Kim Wall, Grants Manager
Pam McDonald, Accounting Coordinator
Trish Redalieu, Dir. of Human Resources
Debbie Coppola, Senior Accountant
Nick Foss, Dir. of Finance
Matt Kimball, Capital Projects Manager
Jordan Posner, Mobility Manager
Ross MacDonald, VTrans

Absent:

Commissioner Sharrow

Public:

Spencer Smith

Open Meeting

Commissioner Waninger opened the meeting at 7:30AM

Adjustment of the Agenda

There were no adjustments to the agenda.

Public Comment

Spencer Smith commented that she is looking forward to VTrans update and updates on electrification of the fleet.

Consent Agenda (Action Item)

Commissioner Bohne made a motion to approve the consent agenda, Commissioner Baker seconded. All were in favor and the motion carried.



VTrans Update

Mr. MacDonald talked about the VTrans continued focus on COVID protocols. Internally there have been some changes, staff is required to wear the mask in and out of the building. The VTrans offices will likely start limiting access to offices, and they will be required to wear masks inside and out masks. He wanted to stress that all partners should continue safety measures that may be arduous and extreme.

VTrans has been speaking at events outside of Vermont to discuss the microtransit pilot, and Mr. MacDonald said other areas are anxious to have the data for the Montpelier pilot to determine feasibility of their own microtransit services.

VTrans has begun to award the TCI Grant funds. Mr. MacDonald said that there were several really great projects submitted and VTrans was pleased to see such creatively given the tight turnaround of the grant submission period.

VTrans has no news on electric vehicles, except that they continue to meet with other transit partners to make sure the project continues to move forward. Mr. MacDonald said that the process has moved smoothly due in large part to the amount of work done by Matt Kimball. He then thanked Mr. Kimball for his hard work.

General Manager Report – Updates and Opportunity for Questions

Mr. Moore wanted to add an update on the COVID related service changes. He mentioned that he presented the changes to the Leadership Committee along with his assumption that the GMT Board of Commissioners still felt comfortable with him making these decisions, as decided in March.

He mentioned that internally there is still some challenges getting folks to adhere to the face covering policy, but there are new designated safety officers who are helping to remind folks to wear their face coverings. Due to the rising number of cases in the state, we are having some crowding issues, although drivers and passengers are inquiring about allowing more distance on board. Mr. Moore said GMT may need to decrease on board capacity to 50% of seated capacity.

Commissioner Waninger asked about the Washington County case number and are there additional challenges? Mr. Moore said that we have had challenges; some passengers have contacted GMT to make us aware that they may have been exposed. GMT continues to work through COVID-19 procedures to address these issues.

Commissioner Kaynor wondering if the idea to purchase Gillig 40' buses is related more to COVID spacing versus purchasing 35' buses? Mr. Moore said that social



distancing played a factor in that decision since we don't believe that the capacity will be at 100% soon. Both 35' and 40' buses need replacement.

Commissioner Bohne asked if there were any updates on electric buses? Mr. Moore said that as of the day before, both vehicles were in service. GMT Dispatchers have inquired about additional trainings on the electric vehicles as there remains some apprehension for drivers to use them in service. Commissioner Kaynor mentioned a study around electric school bus vehicles and the success of the operation once drivers were familiar with the vehicle and how their driving affected the charge of the battery.

Board Committee Reports

Strategy Committee: Commissioner Buermann said the committee did not meet this month.

Operation Committee: Commissioner Baker said the committee focused on topics that would be coming up later in the board agenda.

Fairness and Inclusion Committee: Commissioner Polyte said the committee has not met again, but she is getting ready to schedule the next meeting. After attending the Burlington Diversity Committee meeting to learn more about what the City is doing, she will follow up with Mr. Moore to start planning the next committee meeting.

Retirement Committee: Mr. Foss said a possible investment advisor came in to interview, and the committee asked for a second option to interview. The next meeting will be in December.

Finance Committee: Commissioner Bohne said the committee reviewed the preliminary FY22 budget nothing that FY22 is going to be a tough budget year to pull together. The full GMT Board of Commissioners will likely see the preliminary budget in December.

Leadership Committee: Commissioner Waninger said the committee reviewed the COVID service changes incorporated in the GM Report. The Committee also discussed the process for the GM six-month review. Commissioner Waninger said she would speak more about the process in the upcoming agenda item.

Public Transit Safety Agency Plan (PTASP) Presentation (Action Item)

Mr. Moore gave a quick summary on this plan and the FTA requirement for 5307 funded agencies. Hunter Eddy gave a quick overview of the plan and talked about the FTA requirements for agency documentation of safety response. Mr. Eddy talked about other external agencies that he worked with to develop the plan.



Commissioner Dimitruk asked if we should include some sort of protection against retaliation of someone who chooses to bring forward a concern? Mr. Eddy said that is in the policy. Commissioner Dimitruk said that protection from peers should also be included, for example if one person reports a concern against another person. Mr. Eddy said the anonymous part of the plan is to help prevent peer to peer retaliation.

Commissioner Bohne asked how this plan would be rolled out? Mr. Eddy said the rollout would include the distribution of the plan and any trainings, by workgroup, necessary to help folks understand the plan fully. Safety boards are being put up in the building for updates and reporting requirements. Mr. Moore noted that GMT has two safety committees that Mr. Eddy will co-chair and that both committees will have seen the plan in the coming weeks.

Commissioner Derenthal asked if there was going to be a condensed version of the plan rolled into the safety dashboard? Mr. Eddy said that there would, and walked through the data reporting functionality.

Commissioner Baker made a motion to approve the Public Transit Safety Agency Plan, Commissioner Bohne seconded. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Zero Fare Policy Presentation & Discussion

Mr. Moore gave an overview of the fare free policy presentation and said staff would like to start a formal policy discussion. He discussed the study of fare free service that was conducted by Steve Falbel. The remainder of the FY21 budget assumes no fares. Mr. Moore asked how the Board of Commissioners would like to proceed. Any fares that could be collected in this fiscal year would allow more of the reserve funding to be preserved for FY22, which looks to be a tight budget year.

Mr. Moore noted that if the GMT Board of Commissioners wants to remain fare free beyond FY21, the staff perspective is that finding \$2.2 million dollars between now and the end of FY21 would be challenging but to start the conversation for future years would be appropriate.

Mr. MacDonald said there is a lot of state level conversation about being fare free. \$560,000 to go fare free in the rural system is something of interest to the House Transportation Committee. VTrans has been asked to prepare the budget assuming fares and without fares. VTrans doesn't want to dip into Operations. What other partnerships can we look at? Mr. MacDonald said that there has been some conversation about the urban system, the response from VTrans is that they are not the cognizant agency and they don't oversee the 5307 program. It's more complicated and fares may be more amenable in the urban system because of the



higher level of service. VTrans will continue to steer questions to the GMT Board of Commissioners and Mr. Moore.

Mr. Moore said that of the \$2.2 million dollars in fares, \$1.6 million is direct passenger fares and the remainder is from the Unlimited Access program. There is the opportunity and likely requirement to continue a restructured relationship with institutional partners. In the initial draft of the FY22 budget, there is urban fares included. We would be looking to fund \$2.3 million in fare revenue in order to go fare free and not see any impacts to service levels. In the state study to increase ridership, there was a projected 34% increase to ridership, and Mr. Moore noted that we would have to consider the possibility of increasing service to meet that demand.

Commissioner Davis said that he spoke about fare free service with others in municipal government and they had the unexpected impact of folks riding the vehicle for no reason and loitering. Mr. Moore said we have considered that and GMT has a policy that folks cannot remain on board and ride around all day. He noted this hasn't been an issue during the current fare free period. Commissioner Waninger asked if that might ramp up during winter months. Mr. Moore said he would think so, but again the policies in place would prevent that behavior.

Commissioner Gallagher said the advocacy that she saw on the state level was to allocate \$3 million dollars of the transportation budget and she assumed that was urban and rural service. Is that correct? Mr. Moore said that would cover urban and rural.

Commissioner Baker said that this is a good direction realizing that revenue would need to be replaced. It might be a good short-term fix to have the state take that from the transportation budget, but that doesn't seem like the right or sustainable way to do this. He noticed that the study had some examples and he was intrigued by the Corvallis example where there was a fee on the electricity bill, particularly for electrifying the fleet. This made more sense for the long-term. Mr. Moore spoke about the example and said that the Corvallis was a unique circumstance because the public transit and electric utility were both part of city government, so a different structure. It might be hard to replicate here. Commissioner Baker said it may not and CCRPC is having a lot of conversations about how they are going to get to NetZero given all the gas being used.

Mr. MacDonald said that VTrans is in discussion with the Tier 3 group and they are providing them metrics to show what it would look like if they help offset the fares.

Commissioner Pouech said maybe the GMT Board could push this for one more year while we find more funding, these options are appropriate to look at, but they will take time and legislative work to achieve.



He thinks that moving forward to charge a fare for commuter service is a good idea.

Commissioner Dimitruk wanted to mention that there is a lot of advocacy around fare free. She feels the conversation needs to move to beyond the GMT Board allow advocates to provide comments as well as understand the budget as we move forward. She noted that it's important to look at how fare free not only impacts our current routes and ridership, but we should look at the opportunity costs. What are we losing in terms of opportunity to expand routes and service.

Commissioner Derenthal asked if there is any chance that we could get funding through an extra charge on income tax. He noted that most examples were regressive, the only thing that would not disproportionately impact low income folks would be to tie this to something progressive like income tax. Mr. Moore said it is hard to say what funding sources would be most beneficial.

Commissioner Davis wanted to echo comments about looking at the opportunity costs and expanding service. He said that riders in Winooski are interested in expanding service. He noted that a better way to increase ridership, at least in Winooski, is to offer more convenient and frequent service. He also pointed out that the state is looking at a tax deficit for the next two years. He also wanted to point out the increasing annual costs and whatever we choose to peruse for a funding source should also assume growth.

Commissioner Kaynor said he thinks we should be combing looking at funding for fare free alongside looking at regional funding for our local match. He said if the state had a way to charge business a fee per parking space, that would be one way to fund transit that is directly related to reducing automobile traffic. He said that Unlimited Access partners save a lot of money by saving parking spaces. Tier 3 and other climate change funding may come into the picture. He spoke about a fee on electrical sources in other areas, at a wholesale level, so customers don't see the impacts.

Commissioner Spencer he thinks overhauling a funding structure that already receives a lot of funding from state and federal sources is a tall lift, which is why we keep coming back to the conversation. He said if the board wants to set this as a goal in the TDP or the Strategic Goals, there needs to be a structure in place to help achieve it. He noted, this would be a good goal to move toward. In order to build a movement, there needs to be external stakeholders and a multi-year legislative plan. If GMT is interested in tackling this as part of the strategic plan, the key would be to find a one-year bridge funding for an FY22 solution so a board subcommittee could formulate a plan that isn't on the backs of current rider but on external stakeholders.



Commissioner Pouech said what would demonstrate the value of public transit most is increased ridership, and fare free service is the best way to increase ridership.

Commissioner Davis said that fare free service wouldn't necessarily increase ridership, it could along with other things, but in Winooski increased frequency, reliable service, and expanded service is what would be most impactful and most likely to increase ridership.

Commissioner Gallagher expressed concerns about regaining ridership that we lost due to the pandemic.

Commissioner Polyte said she appreciates the conversation and agrees with Commissioner Spencer that if this is the strategic goal of the board then she is sure that the Board can figure it out. She believes that there are partnerships that we haven't explored. She thinks the most important thing the board can do is decide if this is a goal and then start taking steps to reach that goal.

Commissioner Waninger asked if the Board would need to decide about FY22 next month at the December Board meeting? Mr. Moore said yes, staff is hoping for a decision on the FY22 budget at the December meeting, which does include reinstating fares. That is not to say we couldn't find funding between December and July and reverse course.

Commissioner Waninger said that the Board has had this conversation a number of times and next month will have to make a short-term decision to make a long-term decision.

Commissioner Kaynor wanted to make the point that fare free service has been shown in every study to increase ridership.

Commissioner Dimitruk said that the Agency of Administration put out a policy evaluation tool to evaluate the equity implications of policy decisions. She feels this decision has wide reaching implications and we should consider using the tool to evaluate the decision.

Commissioner Davis clarified that he didn't mean that fare free service wouldn't increase ridership, he just meant that if there isn't increased frequency you won't see the ridership pick-up in some areas.

Commissioner Waninger said that the Board has heard many points in one way or the other regarding fare free service. She is not expecting to have the same conversation in December, the point today was to get the comments on the table.



Commissioner Bohne wanted to say that this is an operation that is in the red. Most all of our reserve funding is gone and we need to be looking at this more in the short-term. Long-term fare free is a good goal, but we need to look short-term for financial viability. One way that we are balancing the budget now is by reducing service. He believes that we should consider reinstating fare in January, not next July.

Commissioner Wallis wanted to make the point that this was valuable discussion but it was idealistic. She hopes that the strategic planning will really focus on analysis.

COVID Related Service Changes Update Presentation

Commissioner Waninger opened the discussion reminding the board that they authorized the GM in March to make service decisions based on the fluctuating nature of COVID. Mr. Moore briefly updated the board on COVID related changes, which shifts reserve time designated for commuter service to local service to allow for more frequency. The additional frequency will allow for social distancing on board the vehicle and will help alleviate some capacity issues.

Mr. Moore presented an upcoming change in the Mad River Valley. Due to the restrictions about lodging and dining, the Mad River Valley TAC, Sugarbush, the Chamber of Commerce, and GMT decided that it wouldn't be beneficial to operate the Valley Evening Service this season. Staff held a public meeting at the last MRV TAC meeting and heard no opposition on the proposed change.

Mr. Moore presented a third change related to COVID. Due to staffing levels, GMT is anticipating the need to lower the service levels for the upcoming season. Mr. Moore said that he had sent proposed changes to the partners in the Stowe/Lamoille area and he would follow up to make sure these changes could be made.

Commissioner Waninger spoke about Valley Evening Service public meeting and thanked staff for working with stakeholders in both service areas to address the service changes.

Six Month General Manager Job Performance Review Process

Commissioner Waninger spoke about the six-month evaluation, and talked about the annual evaluation. This is a contract obligation from Mr. Moore's contract. She proposed sending a survey monkey link to the full GMT Board of Commissioners and alternates. After the results are compiled, she and the Vice Chair Davis would meet with Mr. Moore one-on-one to review the results.

Commissioner Polyte said it was important to note that this is in conjunction with the very in-depth annual review and this won't be the only opportunity to give feedback. The annual review will begin in December.



Commissioner Wallis said six-months in COVID time is like 6 years in other times and asked the Board to consider the level of changes that Mr. Moore and the agency have dealt with in the last few months.

Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Kaynor wanted to comment that the Williston Town budget development is beginning and he was asked what to put into the budget for their local assessment? Mr. Moore said the FY22 budget assumes a 4% assessment increase for fixed routes communities.

Commissioner Waninger thanked the staff for the work they are doing. She asked Mr. Moore to anticipate questions on the resumption of hazard pay as COVID cases continue to climb.

Adjourn

Commissioner Dimitruk made a motion to adjourn, Commissioner Davis seconded. All were in favor and the motion carried.