



Green Mountain Transit Board of Commissioners
September 15, 2020 - 7:30 a.m.
101 Queen City Road, Burlington VT 05401
Virtual Meeting via Zoom Meetings

Present:

Commissioner Buermann
Commissioner Waninger
Commissioner Spencer
Commissioner Sharrow
Commissioner Derenthal
Commissioner Brewer
Commissioner Davis
Commissioner Dimitruk
Commissioner Kaynor
Commissioner Baker
Commissioner Gallagher
Commissioner Bohne
Commissioner Pouech
Ross MacDonald, VTrans
Jon Moore, General Manager

Jamie Smith, Dir. of Planning and Marketing
Rick Laferriere, GMT Bus Operator
Trish Redalieu, Dir. of Human Resources
Matt Kimball, Capital Projects Manager
Christopher Damiani, Transit Planner
Debbie Coppola, Senior Accountant
Jenn Wood, Community Outreach
Manager
Kim Wall, Grants Manager
Nick Foss, Director of Finance
Pam McDonald, Accounting Coord.

Members of the Public:
Catherine Farmer
Kelly Duggan

Open Meeting:

Commissioner Waninger opened the meeting at 7:33AM.

Adjustment of the Agenda:

Commissioner Dimitruk asked about the SSTA accident. Mr. Moore said he would have an update during the GM Report.

Public Comment:

Ms. Duggan, who was representing the Old Spoke Home Transit Equity Coalition, spoke in favor of continuing fare free service. She noted the importance to essential workers, social workers, etc.

Ms. Farmer, who was representing STVT, spoke in favor of continuing fare free service.

Consent Agenda (Action Item):

The GMT Board pulled August 2020 minutes from the consent agenda. Commissioner Kaynor made a motion to approve the consent agenda withholding the minutes. Commissioner Spencer seconded. All in favor and the motion carried.



Commissioner Kaynor said he sent board minute edits prior to the meeting, staff will make edits and repost. Commissioner Kaynor made a motion to approve the August minutes with edits, Commissioner Sharrow seconded. All in favor and the motion carried.

New Burlington Alternate Commissioner Introduction – Tom Derenthal:

Commissioner Derenthal shared some of his background and history. He has an interest in public transportation and has been a bus rider. He said he is excited to see how he can help GMT.

Board members introduced themselves to Commissioner Derenthal. Commissioner Waninger welcomed him to the GMT Board of Commissioners and said she speak with him later about joining a board committee.

Rick Laferriere Retirement Recognition:

Mr. Moore gave some history of Mr. Laferriere's time at GMT/CCTA. Mr. Laferriere mentioned his support of fare free service noting the highest percentage of conflict onboard happens around paying fares. Fare free service allows quicker boarding which keeps buses on schedule.

Commissioner Waninger thanked Mr. Laferriere for his 40 years of dedicated service and his input on fare free service.

VTrans Update:

Mr. MacDonald said it was interesting to hear from Mr. Laferriere and thanked him for his perspective regarding fare free service.

He said VTrans is working to reconcile FY20 unspent money and is working with GMT staff to identify places where we still need money in the grant amendment. The next finance committee meeting will identify the needs for FY21.

Since last month, VTrans has spoken more with Rep. McCormack on his thoughts from the prior Board meeting. VTrans and begun working with utility providers to discuss their Tier 3 funding; working to identify opportunities to help fund the delta between GMT and the utilities for the battery cost. Transit buses are not the priority at this time for VW funds. VTrans has created a white paper that lays out where we are with the 14 EV buses and overall direction.

VTrans has been contacted by RouteMatch who was recently purchased by Uber. They are exploring the idea of marrying the volunteer driver program and folks who drive for Uber and Lyft. Friday VTrans will hear a presentation on a plan.

PTAC will be reviewing COVID activities in terms of ridership, PPE levels, and will ask for an update from Mr. Moore on the microtransit initial plan and vision.



Intercity bus (Burlington to Albany) has been suspended, looking for safety plans before we reinstitute services. Hoping to coincide with Amtrak opening. Once the boarder is re-opened, the bus from Burlington to Montreal will resume. Route 7 and Route 4 (Premiere operated) changing to focus on the route 7 corridor to focus on connections from Bennington and Manchester through Rutland and Burlington. VTrans will be combining resources to focus on the successful service.

He said emails will be coming for the VTrans Management Review. This year will likely be a desk review, not on-site. The Management Review is a VTrans 360 oversight. Gave kudos to some staff. Staff is leading the state in terms of these considerations.

Commissioner Bohne said this is exciting news on the Uber/Lyft front and hopefully that works. He was wondering about life cycle costs of comparing clean diesel to electric vehicles. Mr. MacDonald said that about three years ago there was an analysis conducted through VEIC. At the end of 12-years there was still a delta between \$35,000-\$40,000 between the clean diesel and electric buses. On paper, that isn't bad, but what VTrans has found recently through some electric vehicle case studies, that isn't penciling out.

Commissioner Waninger asked how VTrans is fairing in the 9-month budget? VTrans said that Public Transit is doing fairly well. Thinks will receive one of two grants set aside for Microtransit and TDM. Likely won't have is an injection of state funds for admin. Using all the projected CARES funding in FY21. FY22 is going to be the tough year in terms of funding, state match. Capital budget is tied up in EV, needs to find funding for other fuel vehicles.

General Manager Report – Updates and Opportunity for Questions:

Mr. Moore gave an update on the SSTA accident. That driver was operating an ADA trip in an SSTA owned vehicle. There were no passenger injuries, however the driver sustained fatal injuries. GMT has spoken to FTA and SSTA has spoken to VTrans regarding the accident. GMT will need to do monthly safety update for FTA. GMT offered support and condolences for SSTA team and offered whatever assistance we can.

VPTA has been awarded the NEMT contract at of January 1, 2021. Mr. Moore will come to the board for approval to operate that service as a subcontractor, as it will be over \$100,000. The group is working toward a profit share model; VPTA will negotiate the rates and contract details with DVHA. Mr. Moore mentioned that there will be more in the budget adjustment related to the NEMT contract.

GMT staff with the folks at Vail/Stowe. The meeting was an overall update on resort operations in the upcoming season. Staff has also had similar conversations with the folks in Mad River Valley. Commissioner Waninger asked if there is a concern on



recruiting drivers for seasonal due to COVID. Mr. Moore said at this time things seem to be on track for hiring seasonal drivers.

Commissioner Waninger asked if there were concerns regarding bus capacity issues. Mr. Moore said that some on the systems, such as the reservation system, will help limit passengers on board.

Commissioner Sharrow asked if we be responsible for the cost of the reservation procedure? Mr. Moore explained that the reservation system will only be for mountain operations, not for riding the bus.

Commissioner Kaynor asked about capacity changes; what have we done so far and what do we expect? Mr. Moore said as of last week barriers have been installed on all vehicles, increased capacity to 30 passengers on 40' buses, and hand sanitizer stations have been installed on board. This change has helped with capacity issues. Last week we had one/two instances where we were over capacity versus the weekend before where we around forty trips. Mr. Moore said that Ross MacDonald has provided a great contact at the Department of Health and we are working on improving air filtration in buses.

Board Committee Reports:

Operations Committee: Commissioner Sharrow gave an update on the last meeting. The committee was able to clean up old business (minutes), talked about the time off policy, and began roughing in the performance dash board.

Strategy Committee: Commissioner Buermann gave an update on the last meeting. The committee spent time working on the draft vision and values statement, as well as strategic goals. Commissioner Buermann defers to full board discussion later in the agenda.

Leadership Committee: Commissioner Waninger talked about the board retreat and agenda, she deferred to next agenda item for more discussion.

Inclusion and Diversity Committee: The committee is still working to schedule the next meeting.

Finance Committee: Commissioner Bohne said the committee focused on the FY21 Operating budget adjustment and deferred to later in the agenda.

Board Retreat Discussion:

Commissioner Waninger said the Leadership Committee spoke about last board meeting and felt they had been given the charge of look into format options for remote retreats. Possible topics include: Role of the Board, Strategic Planning and Visioning, furthering work on Fairness and Inclusion.

Commissioner Waninger will contact individual board members to lead discussion at the mini retreats as they pertain to their committees. She asked that Board members



hold October 27th and November 10th as tentative dates for the first two mini retreats.

Draft Vision, Values and Strategic Goals Review:

Commissioner Buermann turned the conversation over to Mr. Moore and Ms. Smith. Mr. Moore gave an update on the Draft Vision and Values statement and went through the Strategic Goals document. Commissioner Waninger asked if the Strategy Committee needed decisions from the board or discussion? Mr. Moore said this was the start of the discussion, noting that the committee and staff are making sure that this is the right path. We said any feedback would be valuable.

Commissioner Kaynor thanked staff for the work, and asked who should he ask specific questions to once he reviews the documents? Mr. Moore said that feedback can go to him and he would pass along to the appropriate staff member. Mr. Moore said that he is hoping to make this the focus of October and November committee meetings and hopefully staff can deliver a full plan to board by the end of calendar year. Commissioner Waninger asked whether this plan has a set time frame? Mr. Moore said this would coincide with TDP which is a longer planning timeframe. The full transit document will have short term minor updates annually, and major updates every few years. Commissioner Buermann said he imagines the Vision and Values having a timeframe of 10-15 years and the strategic goals a timeframe of 3-5 years.

FY21 Operating Budget Adjustment (Action Item)

Mr. Foss gave an update, on the FY21 Operating Budget. He said FY22 looks like it's going to be a challenging year. The Finance Committee went through the adjustment line-by-line at the last meeting, but Mr. Foss gave a high-level overview. The Capital Match Fund has increased to utilize all the CARES funds allowing us to use some of that funding in FY22.

Commissioner Bohne commented that the committee appreciated the conservative approach and appreciated Mr. Foss's fair warning about FY22. The Finance Committee recommended this to the board for action. Commissioner Bohne made a motion to adopt the Fy21 Operating budget Adjustment totaling \$22,695,594.00, Commissioner Kaynor seconded. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Zero-Fare Continuation Discussion

Mr. Moore said, as mentioned previously, that staff did budget for zero fares in FY21 noting any additional revenue we could collect would result in less CARES funding that we would use and could be carried over to FY22. CARES wouldn't be used for capital or service expansion. The Finance Committee discussed engaging in a public process prior to implementing fares. Mr. Moore noted that the FTA does allow us to use the fares from Unlimited Access as local match. If the board approves zero



fare, staff will have to develop a plan to receive those funds elsewhere. Mr. Moore said no one wants to see a scenario where we go fare free and then GMT has to cut service due to budget challenges. Mr. Moore offered staff perspective that we support fare free service if there is a budget replacement and said fare free service could benefit GMT resulting in additional STIC factors or, at minimum, we would keep the 4 STIC factors that we have in place.

Commissioner Kaynor said in general he favors fare free and replacing that revenue in other ways. Does not favor fare free for long-distance commuters like LINK Express. Fare free should be on short stop local service where there is a lot of on and off only, given the advantages. Until we have an alternative funding mechanism, our Unlimited Access partners are gaining a lot from fare free; GMT is helping them have to provide less parking and feels that it's fair to ask for a contribution from partners even if we are not charging fares.

Commissioner Spencer said these are exciting times despite our challenges. There is an opening in the community for organizations like GMT to help dream and stake a positive vision for the future. He thinks this is the time for big audacious goals even though it's a time with limited resources. There is an opportunity for the Board to open a public window for this discussion and allow the public and stakeholders to explore the concept with us. He said the Finance Committee saw a pretty sobering financial picture at the last meeting and doesn't want to make a short-term fare free gain that would hurt the long-term health of the authority. This is a period of rebuilding; more people want to help us rebuild if the vision is compelling. Board should give staff some space to do some planning work, but board members can help identify creative partnerships. He said he would be happy to help and be on working group; it will take more than staff budget exercise.

Commissioner Dimitruk agreed with both Commissioners and stated that fairness doesn't mean that everyone is treated equally. Looking at institutional partners should be in the mix; and she said that a robust public conversation is necessary.

Commissioner Pouech stated this is an opportunity to look at and explore as much as we can. Climate change push could be an opportunity and exploring a separate working group could be beneficial. This is an opportunity to complete transform the way that we look at public transportation.

Commissioner Davis said he has been a proponent of fare free but doesn't want to do it expense of our mission of increasing service. Winooski is split on fare free; they would rather see increased frequency, more reliable service, and increased service hours. He agrees that we should take some time to engage the communities more. He also noted that lots of people telling us to be fare free, but he would like to hear



ideas on where the money would come from.

Commissioner Gallagher supports fare free for many reasons. She sees opportunity to increase ridership by offering fare free service, especially on the commuters.

Commissioner Sharrow said there is no such thing as a free ride. Looking at our past and future financial issues, as well as our current finances, without CARES funding we would be further in debt. He noted that the Board and staff did an exercise to identify potential funding sources; GMT increased fares, delayed bus purchases causing vehicle maintenance to suffer, we've cut service and staff. He said with the current federal government debt, he believes the issues will trickle down to a state level and that would have an effect on GMT. Pay service is better than no service.

Commissioner Baker said he supports all comments, and he appreciated Commissioner Sharrow's dose of reality. He said this is a weird time and a good opportunity to try things. He asked about the process; could a revenue study be completed in a few months. Mr. Moore mentioned that some of this data is already available, and staff could pull that together.

Commissioner Waninger asked if there is sufficient time before the board needs hard decisions?

Commissioner Bohne said this is a complex topic and the and the Board/Staff should spend a little time to start talking through various issues. He suggested a white paper analysis of revenue sources. He noted that he doesn't think that GMT can go through the year without reinstating fares.

Commissioner Baker said he supports a clearer process over the next 3-6 months. He noted this process should include more than staff analysis. CCRPC is working on an I89 study and asked the hypothetical question, "do we spend money to widen I89 or can we shift focus on asking people to take transit," to illustrate that other projects not related directly to GMT could impact the decisions.

Commissioner Buermann said philosophically he feels we should be fare free, but mentioned that if the organization had an influx of money, is fare free the best place to spend that money? He mentioned that he is in a region that still doesn't even have service and asked that the board weigh all the priorities and focus on the whole picture.

Commissioner Waninger recommended a thought exercise to explore scenarios like more buses equaling lower maintenance costs over time, high paid staff for retainment and efficiency purposes, etc.



Mr. Moore said FY21 is balanced with zero fare and staff can start the process for FY22 budget to identify the hole in the budget.

Commissioner Baker reminded the Board and staff to consider needs prior to the start of the Legislative session if we hope to make traction this year.

Retirement Committee Formation (Action Item)

Mr. Foss discussed the previous board meeting where the retirement committee was discussed, and said that he took the feedback received and updated the responsibilities that would fall to the retirement committee. Commissioner Waninger asked for clarification on the memo, where the memo says, "a Finance Committee appointed by the Chair," does Mr. Foss mean appointed by the Board Chair or by the Finance Committee Chair? Mr. Foss said that it would be the Finance Committee Chair.

Commissioner Baker made a motion to approve with Commissioner Waninger's change, Commissioner Dimitruk seconded.

Commissioner Kaynor wanted to highlight an issue, fiduciary responsibility of the committee is to make decisions in the best interest of the employees/investors. Wanted to emphasize that investors want to invest in things that provide social benefit, or avoid oil companies and fossil fuels, even if it means a slightly lower return. He hopes this committee can look at issues like this in a way that is both legal and balanced. Mr. Foss said this is exactly why this committee is important. Commissioner Davis agreed with comments made. He looks forward to seeing the governance and structure and the potential for Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) protocols and criteria to be considered to reflect the investors values.

All were in favor and the motion carries.

Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Bohne congratulated Commissioner Waninger for keeping the meeting on time.

Commissioner Kaynor gave a big thank you to staff and operators for keeping the organization moving despite challenges.

Commissioner Waninger asked Mr. Moore to offer the Board's condolences to the SSTA staff and the family of the driver who was killed.

Adjourn

Commissioner Spencer made a motion to adjourn, Commissioner Sharrow seconded. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned.