



## Public Transit Advisory Council June 16, 2022 1:00pm – 2:45pm

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### Draft Agenda

- 1:00pm *Welcome and Introductions – Michele Boomhower, VTrans Director of Policy, Planning and Intermodal Development, Membership updates*
- I just can't thank everybody enough for the support you all provided during the legislative session. I have to say, I feel like we came out of the session in a very, very strong position light.
  - Like to represent to recognize Representative Burke for her support of our transit issues and our transit funding and all the hard work that she did in the committee
  - **Rep. Mollie Burke (Guest)**  
I just want to thank you, Michelle, but I it's it was a team effort. I think our whole committee is behind public transit and I'm glad to be able to get some money there.
- 1:10pm *Review and approval of the March 2022 PTAC minutes/record (attached)*
- approval of the PTAC minutes? I'm afraid that we're not going to do that now. I'll send the minutes around, but I did find some inconsistencies when I was reviewing them and just wanted to go back and review my notes and get out. Revised version, no worries there. And you'll have that. And those will be in the record. We'll do that through email.
- 1:15pm *COVID and Operations Update.*
- We are at almost regular ridership, there have been reports, like Christine shared with us that Brattleboro is now seeing more ridership than pre COVID, and we're seeing more intown routes bouncing back to pre COVID status. But when we saw April, that was just collected on Monday, we were surprised to see that dip. So now we go back and look at historical data and see if there's other consistencies of at that time of the year.
  - Largely, these numbers are the loss of Fair revenue and our rural system, as well as some of the continuing costs of barriers, sanitation, additional hours for cleaning crews and the like. This is how we are getting to the new normal and that new normal is not more cost effective.
  - **Tim Bradshaw:**
  - We had an initial pilot under the recovery and Job Access competitive 5339 grant, it's winding down we have allocated on most of the funds. At this point we are carrying over

these funds into the grant agreements for state fiscal year 23 for the transit providers. The statewide outreach and awareness of this pilot we've had status calls with all of the providers to try to drum up more business because we just haven't seen the level of activity that we would like to see under this under this pilot.

- we've provided over 5000 rides to date. Most of those rides have been in the Northeast Kingdom and Lamoille County through rural community transportation, Fred is sitting right next to me and we really appreciate everything that our CT has done to expand access to transportation through this pilot that supplements their normal transportation services through Medicaid, E&D and other.
- We're investing additional 400,000 in state fiscal year 23 into recovery and job access statewide.
- It's a \$200,000 federal investment, plus V trans is coming up with another 100,000 of the 50% state match, and HWYS is partnering with us again for the other \$100,000. So, we're very excited about continuing this initiative into the coming years and expanding access to transportation, not just for those that are in recovery for but for others are also looking for job accesses since the transportation assistance.
- You can visit our website, there's a bunch of information about this program as well as trip eligibility.
- Rides to Wellness. That pilot is winding down, but we continue to allocate, reallocate their remaining federal funds to assist transit providers with ships that are not eligible under Medicaid. I've been working closely within the and committees, some of the and the committee local partners have indicated that they they're constraints. Right now. They're kind of, you know, they burned through a lot of their funding, and they'd asked if we could use some of the rides to Wellness of funding is, which is applicable. I also know the adult day and one of the calls that I just recently attended for the Red Pack and Washington County, Washington, Orange County. They're looking for assistance to get clients from that area to other counties because there is no longer adult day in that region.
- I'm the chair of the Transportation Committee for the statewide Independent Living Council. I was voted into that position. We're looking for additional guest speakers as well as committee members to really be more inclusive than our monthly meetings.
- We have an active RFP out so new software. Last software was not as user-friendly as anticipated. So, we are going to do some site visits in the coming weeks to a couple of agencies. that use the new software and then make a final decision based on that.
- **Rep. Mollie Burke (Guest)** Yeah, I remember when the new (old) software was implemented, I heard a lot of complaints so it's nice to know that new software is on the horizon.
- MacDonald, Ross; Elders and persons with disability recovery job access/ Rides to Wellness; those are done by volunteers, and I do know that Vermont has the highest percentage of volunteers and the country, but we've really relied on this precarious balance. And this reliance on volunteers, is it's getting away from us.
- we spoke with Department of Labor about the extent possible to provide additional incentives for our volunteers. And there's not a lot there. Part of that is because we rely on our volunteers to almost be our employees but not pay or bring them on as full employees. We are looking at/ brainstorming options.
- **Brenda Siegel, she/her (Guest)** We are asking a lot from people who have full hearts, but not a lot of resources to give so much of themselves without some pay and then also being able to more fully doing a lot of work that relies on volunteers; I know also how unreliable that can sometimes. So, a solution would be ensuring that there's more reliability for both the clients and for the agencies.
- MacDonald, Ross; Thanks for that, Brenda, and thanks for joining us today. There's no question in the past that was always the way if we didn't have volunteers, then we would

just put that van out with our professional drivers and pay that long dollar and that's what we would be faced with if we don't look at new or different options to provide those trips.

- MacDonald, Ross; Anything else on volunteer recruitment experience? Elaine, I know. we've spoken about this and we just keep hoping somebody's going to come up with a great idea to solve it. It hasn't revealed itself today.
- **Elaine Haytko**; Yeah, I don't think anybody's going to come up with the magic bullet, Ross, but I do think the mid-tier model is something that we can't ignore, that we need to be working towards. We are doing everything we can to recruit volunteers. It's a hard recruit when gas is \$5 a gallon. On July 1, the IRS reimbursement rate jumps up a whopping four cents. Unfortunately, the IRS looks back on a full year of data of cost of operating a vehicle. It's somewhat unprecedented that they made four cents increase halfway through the year, and we're grateful for it, but not sure it's going to do enough to sustain.

*1:55pm Microtransit Feasibility Studies – Initial outcomes and Planned Pilots for FY'23*

*1:45pm FY'23 Program Grant Awards*

*1:25pm FY'23 Legislative Directives and Studies.*

- **Rep. Mollie Burke (Guest)** We in the committee have been very excited about Microtransit and all the pilots at work, and yet I realized, from your presentations that it's not a perfect situation. You know that there are challenges. But it is exciting. And I think as we work out the kinks, how many feasibility studies are happening?
- MacDonald, Ross; Correct. And our providers were asked to pick two communities they thought, would be best. And then we prioritized one provider. And just to meet the deadlines for the application process. We didn't want to lose FY23. And so we had six or seven of those feasibility studies by April, so that those costs and the approach could be captured in the application for FY23 funds.
- We will have our monthly meetings really focused on who is implementing microtransit. How are they doing? What is the best process to be replicated? Looking at material, shared materials and questions and accommodations.
- **John Sharrow (Guest)**; I'm concerned about putting the local cab companies out of service. but people need transportation at night and on the weekend. And I'm just wondering to help salvage some of these cab companies if we could blend some of the service or providing with a reputable cab company during the day during the downtime and maybe replace a \$90.00 an hour vehicle. Just my thoughts on that.
- MacDonald, Ross; I think it's a really good idea, John. And if we had an ADA vehicle ready to provide complementary service in those areas where it's required, Look at that type of option, we know the value of cab companies in terms of mobility, meeting mobility needs around the state. And so many times the issue is not having a cab company option in some of our communities, drug tests, vehicle checks, maintenance plans, and all those things would be part of it. But, just because there's some hurdles in that, it could be difficult, doesn't mean it won't be worth it. Thanks for that, John.
- **Elaine Haytko**; I just want to bring a note on that, that Medicaid requires all those folks in cab companies to be not only registered, and all the same requirements as any other driver. That includes passing 7 background checks, signing manifests on the driver who provides those rides during the day. So that has been a little bit of a hurdle in each one of those cab companies has to be pre-approved by Medicaid before they can provide service. So they have to meet the same insurance requirements. It's a little bit of a hurdle keeping those smaller cab companies in the loop. It's an expensive process, but it is something that should be considered. So just wanted to bring that to your attention.

**2:10pm**      **FTA Research Grant – Far UV Light/Filter Update**

- **Dan Currier**; V trans was awarded some COVID funding. We are using those funds to research the UV technology on buses and whether it's going to be helpful or not to the health of the passengers. With this funding for the research project has allowed us to be

successful at installing all UVC. This is a roof mounted interior box. This has a fan in it circulating air through the bus and it has UV light inside of the housing and then a HEPA filter.

- Six-week testing period which started in May, and we had 800 riders signed up to actually participate in the surveys for those six weeks and so and then in at the same time as we're doing on board bus testing, we're also running some tests at 2 colleges. One is Dartmouth College and they've completed their first round of testing, which included basically a dosing samples of different flues and some coronaviruses with UV light to see how effective UV light was at killing them or not, and so there's a lot of great research going on as we get started.
- To date, of the 800 people that have that originally signed up, about 500 ish have completed at least the first two weeks of surveys. We're already into the 4th week and so we get about an update the week after. I should get an update for week three here by Friday to understand how we're doing. This is exciting
- The next step for the testing is ending in June for the onboard bus and then everybody will complete their survey by the end of June as well. We're then going to kick off a round of public opinion statewide research and we've contracted with a firm to help us with that. And so we're going through the month of July, send out some public opinion research, basically asking the question, how do you feel about having a UV technology on buses would you feel safer riding public transit with this technology incorporated into the facilities? And So what would it mean to operate this year round? We look forward to those results.
- UVM, which is the 2nd college is helping us do a portion of the research. They have a more technically savvy research lab and so they were allowed to do even more robust testing The goal for you UVM is actually to aerosol some of the virus and so and actually see if inside of one of these lab units we can actually test how much is that neutralized as well. We are excited to see what UVM comes up with at the end of summer. So altogether, we will plan to be done by the end of the year, December of 2022.

## 2:20pm National Panels and Projects

AASHTO which is the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, the MTAP, the multi State technical assistance.

- The Transportation Research board. That's a big one. Community Transportation Association of America Northeast Public Transit Association. We're part of all of this.
- Because of Vermont's leadership position in rural transit, mostly because of our funding and our services, that's providers put out. We are invited every year to be on several panels or present what's going on in Vermont, for example, this year I'm on a fair free panel with AASHTO and we'll be presenting our experience over the next few conferences.
- I'm also on a panel for the next Transportation Research Board conference to talk about all on demand microtransit mostly rural areas and states. Michigan Rural Area and North Carolina and Vermont are the three states representing Microtransit in rural areas.
- Helps us with our applications for discretionary funds that helps us with partnering with other organizations also we get contacted by a lot of these Members about; what's Vermont doing with your trip planner?
- Dan is part of the National Center for Applied Technology, Transit technology and the Association for Commuter Transit. Tim is headed to the PTA or NEPTA Conference at the end of the month to share Vermont's plans and projects and to meet with FDA officials.
- We also have the regional Tri State conference that has been on hold since the pandemic. Having the conference this year seemed a little uncomfortable for enough people where we've decided to reconvene in FY24. We are ready to reengage with our friends in Maine

and New Hampshire and between those two and Vermont, we have a really great working relationship.

*Ross MacDonald; State management review recap*

- A recap of our state management review, this is what constitutes a lot of drama and anxiety for the program. This is a three-year audit by FTA consultants to look under the hood. Our financial processes, safety plan, our oversight, our procurement, Civil rights pieces. Now there's 28 different areas of review and a 700 page guide manual for us to follow along to see what they want.
- It's a several month process we started in December and it completed at the end of April and I'm happy to say that we had one debatable finding. I would say that for state management reviews, the national average is roughly 5 findings for these reviews.
- Tim Bradshaw once again just did a great job of working to get all the documents, and worked with our two providers who were part of the review. Usually they would do site visits on two of our providers, but these were virtual site visits. We think that went pretty well and gave us a little bit more time to respond to questions and responses.
- A re-welcome to Susan Bailey; she took a job at a AHS and we were able to convince her to come back. And since April, Susan Bailey has been on the team and has really gotten our financial footing and foundation in a much better place. So she's doing all the financial work right now, but I just wanted to acknowledge our new staff member and to also acknowledge her incredible value.
- **Van Chesnut**; Thank you Ross and all; you know how to elevate and do better at all of these things in a way that's helpful and not punitive and we really appreciate that.

2:30pm      Member Updates

2:45pm      Adjourn