

# **RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC TRANSIT AUTHORITY**

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

### **MINUTES OF Monday, February 25, 2008 MEETING**

**Board Members Present: Thomas Deller, Chairperson; Robert Batting, Vice-Chair; DOT Director Jerome Williams; Edward Field; William Kennedy; John MacDonald; and John Rupp.**

**Also Present: Alfred J. Moscola (General Manager); Lori Caron Silveira (Outside General Counsel); Henry Kinch; Deborah Dawson; Maureen Neira; Mark Therrien; Ellen Mandly, and other members of RIPTA's senior staff and members of the public whose names are listed on the meeting sign-in sheet.**

#### **Agenda Item 1: Approval of Minutes of January 28, 2008 Meeting**

**Mr. Deller opened the meeting by introducing and welcoming the new members of RIPTA's Board, Edward Field, John MacDonald and John Rupp. Mr. Deller said that he is looking forward to working with the new members.**

**Mr. Deller then requested comments regarding the minutes of the January 28, 2008 meeting. Hearing none, a motion was made by Mr. Kennedy for approval of the minutes as presented. Mr. Batting**

**seconded Mr. Kennedy's motion and the minutes were unanimously approved.**

## **Agenda Item 2: General Manager's Report**

**The General Manager also welcomed the new Board members and began his monthly report by discussing fuel costs. Mr. Moscola reported that fuel costs remain high and reached \$3.15 per gallon in February, noting that was the highest cost RIPTA has ever paid. The yearly fiscal average fuel cost is currently \$2.76 per gallon versus a budgeted amount of \$2.40. He continued that fuel is budgeted for \$2.68 per gallon in the FY 2009 budget, however that amount may require an adjustment.**

**The General Manager continued that he and his staff would be making a presentation on RIPTA's FY 2009 budget to the House Finance Committee on March 5th. He invited the Board members to attend the session, and informed them that it was scheduled between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m. Mr. Deller asked Mr. Moscola to remind the Board members as the day of the presentation draws nearer and also asked if he could ascertain a more definite timeframe. Mr. Moscola said he would make sure the Board members were called and reminded, but could not provide a more definite time for the meeting since a number of presentations are scheduled and the time of RIPTA's presentation is contingent upon when others end. He continued by saying that a**

meeting with the Senate Finance Committee has not yet been scheduled and he would inform the Board when it is.

Mr. Moscola then discussed the difficulty of balancing the budget with fuel costs rising to over a \$100 dollars per barrel as they did last week. He said that this week the per barrel price was \$90 and he and staff are working on a presentation to the Board for the March 17th meeting which will address the possibility of a fare increase. The presentation will discuss the implications of the high cost of fuel, a possible fare increase and the implementation, timelines and procedures if such an increase were to be approved by the Board.

Mr. Deller moved on to questions and asked why revenue was down \$442,000 and if this was related to losing a penny on the gas tax. Ms. Neira said the amount of gas tax revenue has slowed down because people are driving less due to the high cost of fuel. She added that all fare products are down. Mr. Batting noted that the gas tax subsidy in Rhode Island is down as illustrated on page B5 in the General Manager's report. He said the effects of the high fuel costs also influence a number of other things.

### **Agenda Item 3: Rlte Care Update**

The General Manager next discussed the anticipated changes to the Rlte Care transportation program. He said that RIPTA receives approximately \$14 million in revenue annually from the program, as it

currently exists. RIPTA has been informed that changes will be instituted to the program beginning July 1, 2008.

On February 15, 2008, the General Manager and staff met with Rosemary Gallogly, State Budget Officer. Ms. Gallogly informed Mr. Moscola that RIPTA funding would remain intact for FY 2008 and FY 2009. Mr. Moscola directed the Board members' attention to a document forwarded to them, entitled Rite Care Transportation Service Reduction Program, which addresses actions and timelines for reductions to the program. Mr. Deller asked Ms. Neira to provide the new board members with a brief overview of the Rite Care Transportation Program. She advised the Board that the program was designed to provide Rite Care recipients with transportation to medical appointments. The program currently provides recipients with a monthly bus pass to use to get to the medical appointments, but as the result of a federal audit, the Department of Human Services has informed RIPTA that it will be necessary to make changes to the program.

Mr. Batting interjected that the Rite Care Program represents 56% of RIPTA's passenger revenue. Mr. Deller said that the funds to cover the loss of Rite Care revenue would be given to RIPTA from the state's general fund for FY 2008 and FY 2009, but there are a number of issues that must be addressed by RIPTA. Specifically, RIPTA must address the loss of revenue from the bus passes and consider if those riders who previously received a free pass will purchase

passes on their own. Mr. Deller said that RIPTA and the Board members must watch this issue closely and decide how to address it, especially given RIPTA's increased ridership. Director Williams asked if passengers would be reimbursed for transportation for specific doctors visits and Mr. Therrien said that RIPTA has been informed that DHS will probably still purchase approximately 8,000 passes through the family independence program. He said that DHS anticipates that it will purchase and distribute 10-packs of Riptiks but is uncertain as to the number that will be purchased. Mr. Moscola added that RIPTA has not received exact information on the remaining recipients.

Mr. Moscola said that RIPTA has the summer, fall and winter to analyze the data received from the new electronic fareboxes, approximately six months worth, to closely examine the ridership statistics. After analyzing the data, a presentation will be made to the Board in January with a plan, which could include such things as raising fares, selling property and adjusting or eliminating routes. After the plan is presented and approved by the Board, it may be necessary to conduct public hearings to make such changes. Mr. Moscola continued to review with the Board the process and timeline that would be required to make changes to the system. Director Williams commented that obtaining good information from DHS would be key for RIPTA in order to make appropriate changes to the system. Henry Kinch interjected that based on preliminary conversations with DHS, RIPTA may be facing a \$5 - \$7 million-dollar deficit. Mr. Moscola added that this is a significant deficit amount

and went through a number of issues that will remain unknown and subject to change based on the outcome of the changes to the Rlte Care Transportation program.

Mr. MacDonald asked if the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) had approved the Department of Human Services (DHS) purchasing other fare products, and Mr. Therrien replied that DHS has filed for approval of such, but has not heard back from CMS yet.

Mr. Kennedy asked if the new electronic fare system would cut down on abuse that was experienced in the past citing the example of members of a family receiving multiple passes from multiple sources.

Mr. Therrien responded that the problem should be resolved by the changes. Mr. Batting asked what percentage of Rlte Care riders do not use swipe cards and Mr. Therrien said he did not know because the system is still being tested. Mr. Kennedy asked if there would be any change to the \$44 monthly pass and Mr. Moscola replied that if the Board approves a fare increase, the price of the pass would increase.

Mr. Deller then noticed Board nominee Rochelle Bates Lee in the audience and asked that she stand so he could recognize her and welcome her to the meeting.

**Agenda Item 4: FY 2008/2009 Budget**

**Maureen Neira reported that at the six-month mark in the fiscal year, the FY 2008/2009 budget is on target. She noted slightly higher revenue than budgeted from Rite Care, and noted that on the whole revenue is up, but noted that expenditures for some items such as fuel, wages, and heat are above budget as well. She continued that the cost of fuel is the most disconcerting item in the budget. .**

**Regarding the FY 2009 budget, Ms. Neira said that the budget was initially submitted in September, and a revised budget was submitted in December. Both versions of the budget were balanced. She continued that she needs to make one or two minor adjustments to it, and said that she is re-considering the fuel budget. Mr. Moscola interjected that fuel cost the previous Friday was \$3.12 per gallon. Mr. Deller asked what the difference was between the current price of fuel and the budgeted amount, to which Ms. Neira replied \$0.44 cents per gallon. She continued that there could be a change to the gas tax yield, which would be determined at the May estimating conference. Mr. Deller asked how much money RIPTA receives per gas tax penny and Ms. Neira replied that at the current yield, RIPTA receives \$4.68 million per penny. Director Williams and Mr. Rupp both commented on the increase in ridership and Mr. Moscola opined that it is a catch-22, when fuel prices rise ridership increases yet RIPTA loses revenue from the gas tax because public usage goes down.**

**Agenda Item 5: Trolley Replacements**

**Mr. Deller moved on to the next agenda item, a presentation on trolley replacements. Mr. Moscola began his comments on his Trolley Powerpoint presentation by saying RIPTA currently has 20 trolleys manufactured by Chance Coach which are 30' long and run on compressed natural gas (CNG). The trolleys, which were purchased in 1999, are approaching 10 years old and are due to be retired in FY 2010. The trolleys travel through the historic neighborhoods of Providence and Newport. In Providence, RIPTA's regular customers mainly use the trolleys with only 20% of the riders being tourists. In Newport, 92% of riders are Salve Regina University students who ride from September to May. From the months of June to August, 90% of the riders are tourists. When RIPTA changed from regular fixed route buses to trolleys in 2000, ridership in Newport increased by 25%.**

**Mr. Moscola said that the trolleys need to be replaced because they have reached their 10-year life expectancy and the question is what to replace them with. He said the trolleys are special because they are distinctive and blend in with the historic neighborhoods they serve. The current trolleys run on compressed natural gas, however Mr. Moscola is an advocate of purchasing clean diesel technology engines saying they meet or exceed CNG as far as emissions. Additionally, Mr. Moscola continued that it is wise to standardize the fleet to achieve efficiencies, reduce maintenance costs and to become more environmentally friendly and comply with 2007 emissions standards and new standards, which will be implemented**

by the EPA in 2010. Mr. Moscola said the current diesel engines with diesel particulate filters utilize ultra low sulfur fuel and meet all federal emissions standards.

Mr. Moscola discussed fueling of the trolleys stating that RIPTA does not have a CNG facility and must fuel the vehicles at the stations owned either by the State of RI or National Grid. The state owned facility in Newport is in need of repairs that will cost approximately \$100,000, and RIPTA would have to pay for the repairs. Mr. Moscola noted that the CNG vehicles are labor intensive in terms of fueling and overall maintenance.

Mr. Moscola then answered questions from the board about pricing of new vehicles, emissions, future emissions standards, size of trolleys and the estimated time to retire the current fleet.

Mr. Moscola then discussed the amount of wood on the current trolleys, informing the Board that the wood is very difficult to maintain. He noted that while the wooden seats look nice, they are a maintenance nightmare and unsafe because passengers slide off them. He will make sure that the replacement vehicles have no wood and provide safe and comfortable seating. Mr. Moscola said the Chance trolleys currently in service are rear wheel drive with engines in the front and loose traction in wet, cold, icy conditions and snow. During inclement weather it is necessary to remove them from the road and replace them with buses. Mr. Deller asked if Chance offers

an alternative trolley and Mr. Moscola replied that Chance Trolley has been purchased by NABI (North American Bus Industries). Mr. Deller summed it up saying there are two issues to consider, CNG and safety. Mr. Rupp asked the cost of CNG per gallon and Mr. Moscola said it is currently less than ultra low sulfur diesel, but miles per gallon is not equivalent. He said in the future hybrid technology will be the best, but currently those vehicles are cost prohibitive. Director Williams stated that it makes sense to standardize the vehicles to achieve efficiency. Mr. Moscola agreed saying it would reduce the need for special tools and training. Mr. Rupp said that 2010 emissions standards are already being used in California. Following these questions and comments Mr. Moscola concluded his presentation and said he would continue researching available trolleys and develop bus specifications and then bring the matter back before the board.

Mr. Deller acknowledged representatives from the public present at the meeting to discuss this issue and recognized John Rodman from the Preservation Society of Newport County. Mr. Rodman began by complimenting RIPTA on its high level of service and then spoke at length in support of keeping the current trolleys. Mr. Rodman submitted written comments for the record, which are attached hereto as Attachment 1.

Next, Mr. Deller recognized Lawrence Kestler, Transportation Services Coordinator for Salve Regina University who noted that

**Salve was the first university to sign up for RIPTA's UPass Program. He said Salve's ridership is 92% strong and their concern was not only for their students, but the environment because Salve University is located in such an historic neighborhood. Mr. Kestler said Salve would like RIPTA to maintain the "trolley look" and put out an environmentally friendly vehicle that fits in with the historic neighborhood. He added that the students also patronize the regular RIPTA bus service to Providence and that Salve Regina University is also a tourist destination via the trolleys in the summer months.**

**Next Paige Bronk, Director of Planning, Zoning & Development for the City of Newport spoke. He said the City of Newport also appreciates the good service provided by RIPTA in their city and statewide and he understands the difficulty servicing Newport which is so densely populated and has such a high number of tourists. He noted however that 3 million plus tourists a year benefit the entire state. He complemented Mr. Moscola on his presentation saying he learned a lot. Mr. Bronk said he wishes to see environmentally friendly "trolley-like" service continue and that the new vehicles should be able to maneuver through Newport's narrow streets.**

**Mr. Field then asked the commentators from the public if they had considered some type of quid pro quo arrangement, assistance from the chamber of commerce or the university to help the Authority support the continuation of the trolley service. Mr. Bronk replied that the City of Newport currently supports RIPTA with advertising, but**

they would be interested in sitting down to discuss other possibilities.

Next Evan Smith the President & CEO of the Newport Convention and Visitors Bureau spoke. He said RIPTA has been an outstanding community partner to the six towns within Newport County and that the hospitality industry on the whole works to promote RIPTA's services. He noted the long-term partnership at the Gateway Center where up until last year they sold RIPTA tickets to the public. He said RIPTA trolleys get people out of their cars who come to town to visit Salve, the beach and the numerous other tourist sites. Mr. Smith said he is "seeking balance" and agrees with the previous speakers that a modern bus design would be a disaster and that the selection of the design is critical.

Mr. Deller noted that the Board was running out of time and recognized speaker, C. Michael Blake. Mr. Blake said he is a RIPTA bus rider and a public transit advocate from Woonsocket. Mr. Blake spoke at great length about the bus service in Hartford, CT, which he maintains is provided for free by the convention bureau. He suggested RIPTA work with other New England transit agencies and also look into light rail service.

Next Christine Walsh from the Providence Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau spoke saying it's the bureau's job to sell Rhode Island to the country and the world and the trolley is a large part of

what makes RIPTA special. She said they would commit to promoting the use of the trolleys.

Finally, Barry Schiller a transit advocate, RIPTA rider and former RIPTA Board member spoke. Mr. Schiller said he agrees with the General Manager that the trolleys are uncomfortable and a little dangerous. He said they look good, but are not good to ride.

Mr. Rupp asked the General Manager if a 30' bus is the same as a Chance Trolley and he replied it is not the same, but close. Mr. Field said his impression is that the constituency needs to be addressed and maybe the board should appoint a subcommittee to work with the public. Mr. Deller said in the past the Board composition was too small for subcommittees, but since that is no longer the case, he would like to create a special subcommittee to study the trolley issue and asked Mr. Batting if he would serve as a member. Mr. Batting agreed to serve and said staff did a good job with the presentation. Mr. Deller asked Messrs Rupp and Field to also serve on the trolley subcommittee and they agreed.

#### **Agenda Item 6: Ferry Discussion**

Henry Kinch addressed the Board and introduced Michael Glassfeld from New England Fast Ferry, which operates RIPTA's ferry service. Mr. Kinch said that since 2000 the RIPTA ferry has operated with 100% federal funding. He said the total 2007 operating revenue was

**\$802,589, which included a \$450,000 federal subsidy, while the total cost to New England Fast Ferry to operate the ferry was \$902,259. On May 16, 2008 RIPTA's ferry service from Providence to Newport will resume for its final season in spite of the fact that 2007 was the most successful year for the ferry with over 47,002 passengers. The cause for the conclusion of the ferry service is the expiration of the federal operating grants that funded it. Mr. Kinch said the primary cost to RIPTA for ferry operations is due to parking, trailer and support for ferry passengers, which last year totaled \$162,990. The only asset RIPTA owns in support of the ferry is the dock, which was acquired from National Grid and has an estimated value of \$165,000.**

**Mr. Batting made an observation that RIPTA had compiled and disseminated to the board a ferry survey and he would like staff to give that document to the Board again. Mr. Batting said the ferry service is problematic because federal funding supports it and RIPTA will require a tremendous infusion of cash in order to continue its operation. He noted that virtually all ferry passengers are tourists.**

**Mr. Kennedy asked for clarification of the dates of operation and Mr. Moscola replied that the ferry season runs from May 16 to October 16.**

**Mr. Deller asked how much money would be required to continue to operate the ferry and Mr. Kinch replied a minimum of \$450,000. Mr. Batting asked where the ferry goes in the winter and Mr. Glassfeld said it has gone to New Bedford, New York and the Caribbean in past winters, but has not been used in the past two years due to the bad economy. Director Williams asked if there was any other way to**

subsidize the ferry and Mr. MacDonald wondered if partnering with tourism and private companies would be a way to raise some of the funds needed. Mr. Deller noted that the grant money received to operate the ferry came from CMAC funds, but commuters do not use the ferry, tourists use it. Mr. Deller suggested discussing the continuation of ferry service with state legislators, if they believe its operation is important to tourism then they will need to make a commitment to funding its operation.

Mr. Deller asked for public comment on the ferry issue and Evan Smith, President & CEO of the Newport Convention and Visitors Bureau said that the visitors bureau would join with RIPTA staff to lobby state house officials to find the funds to continue ferry service commenting that Rhode Island is known as the Ocean State. C. Michael Blake commented that suggested more prominent marketing and thinking outside the box.

#### **Agenda Item 7: RFP 08-19 RIPTA's Property Insurance Coverages**

Roger Mencarini addressed the Board to discuss the next agenda item RIPTA's property insurance coverages. Mr. Mencarini explained that this is a recurring expense for a policy that covers all RIPTA's buildings and their contents such as computer equipment, dispatch equipment and risks associated with things such as fire, windstorm, water damage, lightening, vandalism, theft, earthquake and flood. RIPTA's insurance broker contacted vendors for price proposals and

staff evaluated the proposals and now recommends the award of the contract to One Beacon Insurance Company to provide the insurance coverage at a yearly cost of \$68,562, which represents an \$832 decrease from last year's premium. Mr. Deller asked how many proposals were received and Mr. Mencarini replied three. Director Williams then moved to award the contract to One Beacon Insurance Company as recommended by staff. Mr. Kennedy seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

#### **Agenda Item 8: RFP 08-19 Fare Media**

Next Mr. Mencarini discussed the proposed award of a contract for fare media products. He said the scope of the work includes the supply and delivery of products utilized in RIPTA's electronic fareboxes such as monthly passes, 15 ride passes, Riptiks and trim stock. Mr. Mencarini said the RFP was issued and two proposals were received. Staff evaluated the proposals and they recommend the award of a one-year contract with up to four annual renewal options to Magnetic Ticket and Label Corp of Dallas, Texas. This contract will be paid for out of RIPTA's operating funds. Mr. Batting requested a white paper be prepared for the next Board meeting that addressed the dollar amount of capital expenses for the new farebox/swipe card system, including the percentage of ridership who are not using the farebox/swipe system. Mr. Batting requested that the information include the amount that was previously spent on fare media compared with what is anticipated to stock the new farebox

**system. Mr. Deller would like to know what is spent per annum.**

**Mr. Field asked what happens if purchase projections are either over or under what is anticipated, and Mr. Mencarini responded that RIPTA has the right to limit purchases. Mr. Rupp asked for background information on the fareboxes and fare media. After this discussion Mr. Kennedy voted to award the contract to Magnetic Ticket and Label Corp as recommended by staff. Mr. Rupp seconded the motion, which passed unanimously**

### **Agenda Item 9: Public Comment**

**Mr. Deller moved on to public comments. He revisited the topic of a subcommittee to research the trolley issue and said that the meetings should be posted and advertised consistent with the prevailing public meetings laws. Next, Mr. Deller reminded the Board that RIPTA's by-laws call for election of officers at the April meeting which is fast approaching. He noted that the Board has a full compliment of members and as such, now has the members needed to staff long dormant subcommittees such as the Finance Committee. He suggested the Board members consider this for discussion at the April meeting.**

**Mr. Deller asked if there were further public comments and again recognized C. Michael Blake. Mr. Blake spoke at great length about a variety of issues. He complained that the Woonsocket terminal has**

been closed to RIPTA passengers yet he believes a production company currently filming a movie in that city is using it. Mr. Blake would like this issue investigated and would like to know who gave the production company permission to use the facility. Mr. Blake would like to see more outlets available for the purchase of RIPTA fare media and to obtain bus schedules. Finally, Mr. Blake asked that commuter lots have more and better bus shelters and Woonsocket as well as other areas need more bus service on Saturdays. Mr. Moscola said he would address all of Mr. Blake's concerns and would have staff speak with him further to address his many concerns and complaints.

#### **Agenda Item 8: Adjournment**

Mr. Kennedy moved to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Batting seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

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Ellen M. Mandly

Secretary to the Board