

MINUTES OF THE BAT ADVISORY BOARD

AUDIT AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

January 12, 2023 - 9:30 AM

In Attendance:

Frank Hegarty, Town of Avon

Michael Dutton, Town of Bridgewater

Dottie Fulginiti, Town of Easton

Michael Lambert, Administrator

Linda Sacchetti, CFO

Kelly Forrester, Manager of Transit Operations

Kathy Riddell, BAT

The virtual meeting was called to order by Mr. Hegarty, for the purpose of discussing business brought before the Audit and Finance Committee in accordance with the agenda presented and the notice sent out on January 9, 2023. The meeting was held virtually and streamed live on BAT's YouTube channel to meet the public meeting engagement requirements.

Mr. Hegarty welcomed the group. He asked if there were any public comments. Seeing as there were none, the group moved to the next item on the agenda.

The minutes from the meeting of October 6, 2022 were reviewed. Ms. Fulginiti made a motion to accept the minutes as presented. Motion was seconded by Mr. Hegarty. Mr. Dutton abstained.

Ms. Sacchetti gave the group a 2023 budget update. She noted that the document provided to the Committee was reflective of BAT's finances as of the end of November. She stated that combined fixed route and paratransit farebox revenues are not favorable to budget and will continue to report under budget through December. An offset will be BAT's share of a \$2.5m state "Try Transit" grant in the amount of \$294,776. This grant will cover fixed route and ADA paratransit fares during the fare-free holidays, November 25th through December 31st. She gave an in-depth overview of the budget line items as outlined in the budget summary. To sum up, Ms. Sacchetti informed the group that BAT has \$14.8m in Federal Operating Assistance through CARES Act, CRRSAA, and ARPA that can be accessed to balance the budget at year end. Ms. Fulginiti made a motion to accept the budget update and motion was seconded by Mr. Dutton.

Mr. Lambert gave an FY24 Budget Outlook summary. He stated that BAT received approval from the state to move forward with its 2024 bus purchase to allow for enough lead time for planning, etc. Five (5) electric buses are on order for late next fiscal year. BAT plans to build solar infrastructure wherever possible to help mitigate the cost of utilities.

Mr. Lambert gave the Committee his Administrator's Report. BAT has a two-part plan. The first being to make sure BAT has stable financial outlook for the next 5 years. The second part is that as things start to improve, BAT would like to offer different elements to increase ridership to exceed pre-COVID levels. The new Rockland Flex service has been "soft" launched. There will be a formal launch later this month once the vehicles have been wrapped with instructions and information. Bridgewater is exploring a micro-transit service similar to the Uber/Lift model as an alternative to paratransit service to fill some of their gaps in service. BAT has added early morning city route trips and doubled the Route 10 frequencies of service. Mr. Lambert asked if there were any questions from the Committee. Ms. Fulginiti asked if BAT was working with any other communities other than Bridgewater and Rockland. She said that Easton might be interested in that type of service for the underserved population in Easton. Mr. Lambert said that the program in Rockland is a Pilot program and will be evaluated once it has some time to be established. BAT is also considering late night and early Sunday service utilizing the same model to see if the service would meet the customer's needs without utilizing a fixed route service.

Mr. Lambert informed the Committee that there was a small increase in ridership for fixed route and paratransit with the implementation of "free fares" from 11/25 to 12/31. December usually shows a drop in ridership over November. There was a 3% - 4% increase but that did not truly capture the whole story. It also takes more than one month to change commuter habits. There was increased ridership on the weekends. Drivers were very happy not to have to collect/monitor fare collection and boardings and alightings were quicker. Both drivers and customers benefitted.

Ms. Fulginiti shared her experience on a ride with her co-workers during the free fare period. She was impressed by the cheerful driver, cleanliness and efficiency of the bus. The bus she rode took them to the VA Hospital and she wished free fares could be implemented more frequently. She was very happy that a safe and reliable transportation service was offered to the community. Mr. Dutton echoed Ms. Fulginiti's comments and asked what percent of total revenue comes from the fare boxes. Ms. Sacchetti said that pre-COVID, farebox revenue was around 20% of total revenues. Mr. Lambert stated that BAT was neutral on free fares. It is customer friendly when no one has to worry about what the fare is or how to use a Charlie Card. He said BAT's main objective is to provide reliable, safe, clean service and free fares can impact a system positively and negatively. BAT's average fare of \$1.00 seems affordable. Mr. Dutton reiterated that it would take multiple months of free fare for people to form a different habit or routine in their commuting habits. Mr. Lambert said that the new Governor will have a discussion on the state level around the topic. Mr. Hegarty brought up Washington, D.C.'s efforts of moving to free fares and some of the challenges they are facing.

Mr. Lambert inform the Committee of the approval of the Public Transit Agency Safety Plan and its approval process. The plan will be presented at the Advisory Board meeting taking place after this meeting. He said the July, 2021 Infrastructure Bill made some changes to the original 2019 program. There were a few small changes and safety targets and plans were added.

Next on the agenda was a discussion by the Compensation Committee, pursuant to 801 CMR 53.04. Mr. Hegarty reminded the group that the Audit and Finance Committee acts as the Compensation Committee to set the salary of the Administrator. After some discussion, he was recommending the Committee grant a 2% increase to Mr. Lambert beginning the first payroll period in February. He stated that last year BAT came out on top of a Triennial review and state audit which showed the level of dedication and efficiency under the leadership of Mr. Lambert. Mr. Hegarty opened the item for discussion. Mr. Dutton made a motion and it was seconded by Ms. Fulginiti to provide Mr. Lambert with a 2% increase beginning the first pay period in February. All were in favor. Motion passed. Ms. Fulginiti added that it is a modest increase and management at BAT is a role model for other RTAs. Mr. Dutton added his consensus. Mr. Lambert thanked the Committee.

There was no Old/New Business to bring before the Committee. Mr. Dutton made a motion to adjourn and it was seconded by Ms. Fulginiti. All were in favor.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Riddell, BAT

List of handouts for 1/13/22 meeting:

1. Agenda
2. Minutes – 10/6/22
3. FY23 Budget
4. FY23 Budget Summary
5. Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP)