



Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes

June 10, 2020

Location: via: Zoom

Attendance:

New Jersey: Reggie Haynes, Steve Benigno, Ben Saracco, Marty King, Alan Becker, Bruce Schwartz, Judy Boldurian, Mike Devlin, Straso Jovanovski, Pamela Mack-Brooks, Dan Norfleet

Pennsylvania: Daniel McArdle, Bob Melikian, Larry Davis, Pamela Mack-Brooks, Tyrone Wesley

Emeritus Member(s) Jeff Kessler, Joe Boyle, Tom Jordon

Potential Member(s):

DRPA/PATCO: John Hanson, John Rink, Jim White, Nicole Ochroch, Barbara Wagner

Public Member(s):

Call to Order

A motion was made to approve the May 13, 2020 Minutes. The Minutes were approved.

A motion was made to schedule a Special Session during the Committee's off month in July. The Motion was approved. The meeting is scheduled for July 8, 2020 at 6:00 P.M. via Zoom.

Updates from CEO, John Hanson:

John Hanson started out by addressing the first topic on the Committee's Agenda related to the DRPA's Corporate Guidance on Employment Practices; specifically, minorities, persons of color, and LGBTQ, police use of force and reporting requirement. Mr. Hanson reported that information in response to this topic will be addressed at the next meeting scheduled in July. Most of the information related to this request has been received from Toni Brown, CAO; Raymond Santarelli, Esquire; and Chief John Stief. Mr. Hanson would like to fully review and assemble the information before circulating to the members at the July 8, 2020 meeting.

John Hanson addressed the second topic on the Agenda regarding the status of DRPA employees ineligible to work from home and whether they are eligible for unemployment compensation. John Hanson reported that no one from the DRPA or PATCO has been placed on unemployment. All employees continue to be on the payroll, either working remotely from home or

a combination of working from home and in the office. Prior to bringing the Toll Collectors back to the lanes, they were placed on standby.

John Hanson addressed the third topic on the Agenda regarding the economic impact and overall financials relating to recent bridge shutdowns and whether it will be covered by insurance or other agencies. John Hanson reported that the recent bridge closures did not have a significant impact on the DRPA's finances. The DRPA received a request to close the Ben Franklin Bridge from the City of Philadelphia for the Black Lives Matter protest. The protestors came close to the bridge but turned around when they saw Police Officers placed at the foot of the bridge. The protest was peaceful and there was no damage made to the bridge. It is the Authority's obligation under the law and the First Amendment Right to allow for a peaceful protest.

Jim White, CFO reported that the DRPA will be taking advantage of the CARE's Act; specifically, the "Employee Retention Credit" which refers to a tax credit attributable for time paid to employees for "unproductive time."

Jim White further reported that, currently, the DRPA has \$500 million set aside for Capital Projects, of which \$300 million can be used for any useful purposes. In the beginning of 2020, the Authority's toll revenues were approximately \$330 million in revenue. On March 13, 2020, the beginning of the Stay at Home Orders in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, revenue started to decline. Between March 13 and April 13, there was a significant drop in both "unaudited" traffic and in revenue. In March, the Authority was 1.3 million vehicles down or roughly a 4.1 million dollar drop in revenues vs. March 2019 year to date. In April, we were 3.3 million vehicles down or roughly a 16.1-million-dollar deficit. And in May, 2.3 million vehicles down or about a 12.6-million-dollar deficit. In June, the bridge tolls increased to 70% of 2019, which is a significant turn-around and better than we thought the actuals would be. Although the Authority will never recoup the 33 million plus dollar loss due to the pandemic, it will receive \$41 million in transit funding from the CARE's Act that will help offset the revenue and operating deficits at PATCO.

Bob Melikian commented on John Hanson's letter dated June 7, 2020 to the Authority's personnel on race discrimination. Bob commented that the letter was very powerful and commended the leadership approach taken by Mr. Hanson. Mr. Hanson emphasized that he is proud of the ideals and shared values of his Executive Leadership Team that was formed when he became CEO, as it is consistent with everything we do internally. Dan McCardle also commented by saying that Mr. Hanson's June 7, 2020 letter was a powerful statement on racism and very true to who Mr. Hanson is as a person. John Hanson said he was very proud of the CAC members as they are very helpful to the Authority with their ideas and recommendations. The CAC helps the Authority communicate with the public, as we are all Stewards of the bridges and trains and provide a great service to the public.

Q&A with CEO and CFO

Q: The lighting on the Ben Franklin Bridge that is captured by the cameras continue to show lights out on the southside of the bridge which is shown on the nightly news every evening. Can the bulbs be replaced?

Bob Melikian

A: John Hanson reported that there are 2 electrical systems on the bridge. One was installed in 1981 and the other was installed at the ‘turn of the century.’ Both systems are integrated and are beyond their useful life. There is not much that can be done. Nicole Ochroch reported that the lighting system on the Ben Franklin Bridge is 30 years old and a part of the Ben Franklin Bridge “Major Project.”

Q: Will the construction on the Ben Franklin Bridge be complete in time for the 100-year celebration?

Bob Melikian

A: John Hanson reported that the celebration is 6 years away on June 20, 2026. Nicole Ochroch reported that the Ben Franklin Bridge Project is a 4-year project and ahead of schedule because traffic has been down. Construction will be done in time for the 2026 celebration.

Q: Does the wiring on the Ben Franklin Bridge have to be replaced?

Bruce Schwartz

A: Nicole Ochroch reported that the electrical system on the Ben Franklin Bridge has to be updated and will be completely overhauled. Currently, the lighting is controlled at the Ben Franklin Bridge, but the DRPA will be moving towards a more progressive system which will enable a designated user to log into the system for updates. Of course, there will be protections to access the system.

Q: Why didn’t the DRPA announce the “Hands Across the Bridge” Rally which closed the Ben Franklin Bridge?

Larry Davis

A: John Hanson reported that the rally was not associated with the DRPA, nor was it something we sponsored. The request was made by the City of Camden. Bridge closure requests are made by the individual City’s Public Safety Department to the Public Safety Department of the City hosting the event. John Hanson reported that he could refuse a request but would not do so if it’s for good reason.

Q: How do you stop people from storming the bridges?

Bob Melikian

A: If absolutely necessary, with police officers, police cars and barriers. However, John Hanson reported that the Authority would never jeopardize the safety of its police officers, riders, pedestrians on the walkways, or protestors. The DRPA has never experienced violence on our bridges. Although there were looters and vigilantes throughout the City during the recent protests, the violence did not come near the Ben Franklin Bridge. If it were the case, our Officers Code of Conduct and Command of Staff starts at the top with our Chief of Police, Jack Stief. The DRPA police are among the best, well trained, dutiful, honorable, and respectful in any given situation.

Q: Did the DRPA Police Officers adopt the policies of the Camden Police?

Ben Saracco

A: John Hanson reported that the DRPA Police are Highway Patrolmen and do not have the same level of interaction with Camden’s community as the Camden Police Force. There is no better

police force than the DRPA and very seldom do we have a problem because it is dealt with immediately. There was an incident at the Lindenwold Station that was videotaped by phone by a passenger who saw a Police Officer talking to a homeless individual. The Police Officer later came back with a pair of boots he purchased for the homeless man, which was also videotaped by the same passenger. That's our DRPA Police Officers. They work with the homeless, non-profits and treat everyone with dignity and respect. John Hanson reported that we are here to serve the public and he is very proud of the conduct of his Police Officers.

Q: PATCO fare evasion and DRPA Police handling of the situation?
Jeff Kessler

A: John Hanson reported that the Authority does not prosecute panhandlers. The Police Officers are very compassionate and at times, approve free rides for people hanging around the stations only if they find it necessary.

Q: Is the \$500 million readily available for Capital Projects?
Alan Becker

A: Jim white reported that the Capital Project Bonds have not been jeopardized by the revenue deficit. Although Moody's and S&P have placed the toll sector on a negative outlook, the Authority has enough liquidity to meet its financial obligations.

Q: What is the forecast projection resulting from COVID19.
Reggie Haynes

A: Jim White reported that currently, it's on a month to month forecast due to many uncertainties. Our forecast is conservative as we are not likely to reach 100%. Our best total estimate for revenues would be at 80% of 2019. Currently, we are averaging at 70% of 2019.

Q: Has the DRPA or PATCO thought about reaching out to customers to participate in a survey to find out if they would come back to PATCO for their means of transportation?
Larry Davis

A: John Hanson reported that it's an interesting idea and something he would discuss with management, internally. PATCO continues to monitor the safety of passengers riding the trains. Currently, the first and last car have been re-opened for riders. PATCO has also gone from a 20-minute headway to a 15-minute headway to ensure the safety of PATCO riders.

Updates from John Rink/PATCO:

John Rink reported that PATCO continues to monitor ridership. Trains are continuously checked for rider safety and social distancing. Since Philadelphia moved from the Red Phase to the Yellow Phase ridership increased. Headways were changed from every 20 minutes to every 15 minutes. Currently, PATCO is at 15% of normal ridership. If ridership continues to increase, additional trains will be added. The Stations at Ashland, Westmont, City Hall and 12th/13th remain closed. In the meantime, construction and clean-up in the closed stations is ongoing. On Tuesday,

PATCO's ridership was at 5,899 riders, while our typical weekday average prior to the pandemic was 39,762 riders.

Q: What is PATCO's position on wearing masks? What if a passenger refuses to wear a mask? Will PATCO provide masks to riders?

Bob Melikian

A: John Rink reported that the CDC recommends that wearing a mask should start once you leave the house. PATCO strongly suggests that riders wear masks on the trains. John Hanson reported that it is not PATCO's obligation to enforce passengers to wear masks, as enforcement could create an increased chance of danger for the police officers. John Rink reported that PATCO will not be providing masks to passengers. All PPE in the possession of PATCO is for employees, only.

Q&A with John Rink

Q: Are there trains on standby?

Jeff Kessler

A: John Rink reported that there are standby trains stationed at Lindenwold and 15th/16th. The trains can be deployed at any time as needed.

Q: Are the Stations going to be monitored for overcrowding?

Jeff Kessler

A: John Rink reported that the passengers do spread out while waiting for the trains. Some passengers stand on the steps until the train arrives at the platform. Observation is that passengers are cognizant of social distancing at the stations. John Hanson reported that if PATCO begins to enforce mask wearing and social distancing on the trains and at the stations, the business model of PATCO will be forced to change. All transit agencies are facing the same problem, so we will have to continue to look for additional solutions.

Q: What about placing decals with positive messaging on the back of seats?

Larry Davis

A: John Hanson reported that he liked the idea; however, he is not making rules that he cannot enforce. He will discuss the idea with management, internally.

Q: How long can PATCO run at 15% capacity?

Bruce Schwartz

A: John Hanson reported that PATCO can run for a long time if bridge revenue remains at 75%-80%. If bridge tolls can no longer sustain revenue, the DRPA may have to look into increasing bridge tolls.

Q: How is ridership going into Philadelphia on the weekends?

Alan Becker

A: John Rink reported that ridership to Philadelphia on the weekends is low.

Q: What's going on at the Ashland Station?
Alan Becker

A: John Rink reported that the water feed to support the sprinkler systems in the elevators was being installed. We are currently taking advantage of the stations being closed for construction, renovation, and cleaning prior to reopening.

Q: Why is there no data for ridership on US Transit Open Data?
Larry Davis

A: John Rink reported that every month a General Manager's Report is submitted to the Board. Ridership is included in that report. There is also open data on the Ride PATCO website. Ridership data also goes to the National Transit Data Base.

Q: Is there any update on the GTFS Data system?

A: No, nothing to report at this time. John Rink will follow-up with Mike Williams. Jeff Kessler said modification should be able to be done in-house and offered to help. John Rink forwarded Jeff Kessler's e-mail address to Mike Williams.

Q: What does GTFS stand for?
Bob Melikian

A: General Transit Feed Specification. Apps use this data to tell you exactly when your train will arrive at the station making it easier for travelers as information is more readily available.

Updates from Nicole Ochroch, Engineering

Nicole Ochroch reported that a limited Notice to Proceed has been issued for the installation of Solar Panels at the Lindenwold Station and Betsy Ross Bridge. The DRPA is also starting the foundation for the Solar Panels at Lindenwold and Betsy Ross Bridge. We are also in the process of wrapping up all Notices to Proceed at all site locations designated for Solar Panels.

At the Betsy Ross Bridge the paving project is moving along.

Q&A with Nicole Ochroch

Q: Were there any delays in construction due to COVID 19?
Ben Saracco

A: Nicole Ochroch reported that the DRPA was able to expedite projects at the Walt Whitman Bridge Corridor project and the Betsy Ross Bridge paving project due to low traffic on the roadways.

Q: What is the status of the Rain Garden Project at the Ben Franklin Bridge?
Ben Saracco

A: Nicole Ochroch reported that the CCMUA is responsible for the Rain Garden Project. They are funding the project and maintaining it.

Q: Is the DRPA involved with the subcutaneous micro grid?
Bob Melikian

A: Nichole Ochroch reported that the DRPA is not a recipient of energy from the micro grid. The DRPA's energy sources will be a combination of utility and solar production.

Q: Do the Solar Panels depend solely on sunlight to power the grid?
Bob Melikian

A: The solar panels rely on sunlight to produce energy. The solar system will be directly connected to the facility. The facility will be powered by both the solar production and utility grid.

Q: Is the Authority paying for the system?
Bob Melikian

A: The Authority has a 20 year 'Power Purchase Agreement' with Sun Power. The DRPA can buyout or extend the agreement at any time throughout the 20-year period and will wait to see if it is worth purchasing. The DRPA will be purchasing power from Sun Power at a set rate. The solar panels will be maintained by Sun Power.

CAC Old Business:

At this time, there are no Public Events scheduled pertaining to the DRPA and PATCO.

The CAC website continues to be updated to include head shots of all members. Please forward your headshot to Dan McArdle.

The CAC continues to look for candidates to become members of the Citizen Advisory Committee. Notice has been placed on Facebook and Twitter by Mike Williams.

A special CAC session will occur on July 8, 2020 at 6:00 PM.

CAC New Business:

A Motion was made and approved certifying the election results nominating Daniel McArdle as Chairman, Reggie Haynes as Vice Chairman and Judy Boldurian as Secretary.

Marty Otremsky officially resigned from the CAC Committee

Meeting Adjourned.

Next CAC Meeting: Will be held via Zoom on July 8, 2020 @ 6:00 p.m.

Next DRPA Board Meeting: Will be held virtually on June 17, 2020