



Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes

January 13, 2021

Location: via: Zoom

Attendance:

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

Pennsylvania: Bob Melikian, Larry Davis, Dan Norfleet, Tyrone Wesley

Emeritus Member(s): Jeff Kessler

Potential Member(s): Joseph Russell

DRPA/PATCO: John Rink, Mike Venuto, Lis Klawunn, Jim White, Barbara Wagner

Public Member(s):

Call to Order

A motion was made to approve the November 10, 2020 Minutes. The Minutes were approved.

CFO, Jim White:

CFO White reported that the impact on operations due to reduced toll revenue was included in the CFO's Report, specifically, the Financial Summary that is submitted to the Board each month. The report included audited toll revenue through October 2020 which is down by \$54 million. CFO White believes that by year's end, toll revenue will be down at approximately \$65 million.

Beginning in March 2020, toll revenues were hit significantly due to the COVID pandemic, as traffic was down by 75 percent. Over time, traffic and revenues began to stabilize at higher levels from May into December. For the last several months of 2020, with the exception of December, traffic was down by 20 percent or 80 percent of traffic in 2019.

CFO White reported that every year we are required to certify to the Bond Trustees, pursuant to the Bond Indentures, that we are able to meet our Net Revenue Requirement (Section 5.09 of our Bond Indenture). The Authority's net revenues (toll revenues and miscellaneous revenues) must equal or exceed our annual debt service and the PATCO subsidy. CFO White was happy to report that we were able to pass the certification by \$25 million. If we are not able to meet these certifications, we would have to perform a toll study with the possibility of raising tolls.

The Board, based on joint recommendations from the CFO and CEO Hanson, was able to postpone a biennial toll increase by \$0.50 cents across the board (based on the CPI calculation that dates back to 2013). Presently, we are working towards holding off the CPI-based toll increase for another year, at which point it will be evaluated. We have been able to postpone this increase largely because of the cost controls we put in effect throughout the year, and the improvement of toll revenues in 2020, unlike other tolling agencies that have already increased tolls.

Additionally, PATCO fares will remain the same even though PATCO fares are down by \$16.2 million through October and likely by \$18 million by the end of 2020. (Unaudited actuals for the year showed a \$17.4 million decrease.)

CFO White reported that the DRPA received a \$41 Million CARES Act transit grant. At this time, DRPA/PATCO has drawn down almost \$30 Million to help the Authority with financial obligations. This has been another factor in the decision not to increase bridge and train fares. Although not verified or confirmed, our Government Relations Department is presently working on getting additional funds, approximately \$10 to \$15 million, from the CARES Act for PATCO as a transit authority. (We learned within the last week that a new transit grant of \$15.7 million is available to the Authority.)

CFO White reported that dramatic measures have been made at the DRPA/PATCO to meet the required financial certifications and cash flow needs. Mr. White thanked Mike Venuto and John Rink for contributing by reducing the Capital Budget for 2021. Currently, we are \$16 million under on the operating budgets for 2021.

In 2013, the DRPA was \$1.6 billion in debt including bonds issued for economic development in the late 1990's. Since then, we have been able to reduce the total debt by \$500 million from the highest total. Our debt is now at our lowest debt level since 2009. Even though our revenue was down in 2020, we were able to pay down our debt by \$71 million, as of January 1, 2021.

Alan Becker congratulated John Hanson, John Rink, Mike Venuto and Jim White for accomplishing what had to be a hard job in reducing the Capital Budget to keep tolls down while all other transit agencies are increasing bridge tolls. Mr. Becker asked if his e-mail response to the Board was included in the Public Comment. John Rink reported that Mr. Becker's e-mail was caught in the Spam filter, has been retrieved, and will be included in the Public Comment for the January 2021 Board Meeting.

Q&A Session:

Q. Have EZ Pass violations spiked up resulting from toll lanes going cashless?

Larry Davis

A. CFO White reported that violations did spike up when the toll lanes went cashless; however, we are not looking into prosecuting anyone now. We are in the process of working with the Department of Motor Vehicles in New Jersey, through legislation, allowing us to suspend registrations. We are also looking into enhancing our toll technology as a part of our strategy. Our present technology is close to 21 years old. A project is underway with specifications to update software to the tolling system. This project is in the Capital Budget and will take about 1-2 years to implement once an RFP is issued and a selection is made. We are hoping the new system will enhance our capability to track violators.

GM, John Rink:

GM Rink responded to the question of feasibility for the installation of Xfinity Wi-Fi hotspots along the Ben Franklin Bridge Walkway. He reported that he will have to discuss the possibility with COO Robert Hicks and the IT Department.

GM Rink also responded to the question regarding the distribution of free masks to PATCO riders. He reported that PATCO purchased masks on December 24, 2020 that are individually wrapped and placed in stands from the Lindenwold Station to Broadway. The Station Supervisor puts the stands out at 6:00 a.m. and it remains in the Station until 2:30 p.m. Station Supervisors offer masks to those who arrive at the stations without a mask. To date, riders have taken masks mostly from the Lindenwold Station.

GM Rink further reported that ridership in 2020 was at 3.9 million compared to 11.1 million in 2019, which is a reduction of 7.1 million riders. Presently, ridership is at 20-21 percent of normal. Before the second wave, ridership was steady at 27-28 percent. Subsequently, we have seen a dramatic drop back to 20-21 percent. We are hoping to see an increase in ridership after people receive vaccinations and restrictions are lifted in Pennsylvania. For 2021, PATCO's budget is fairly conservative as a result. We are hoping to see an increase of 30 percent by April/May and 50 percent by the summer.

Q&A Session:

Q. Is there any update on the carriers connecting to Boingo?

Reggie Haynes

A. John Rink reported that there are no carriers connected to Boingo. Verizon is the only active carrier, on its own system. AT&T was approved by the Board to use a different technology by using a wire conduit system based off a 5G system which is separate from Boingo. To date, John Rink has no word from Boingo regarding T-Mobile or Sprint.

Q. Has there been any challenges with outbreaks of COVID19 throughout the Authority and PATCO?

Jeff Kessler

A. John Rink reported that PATCO and the Authority have been very fortunate as cases have been limited throughout PATCO and the Authority. There have been a limited number of employees who have contracted the virus through family members who were diagnosed with COVID. There have been no outbreaks among employees within PATCO and the Authority.

Q. How about the Crew Rooms?

Jeff Kessler

A. John Rink reported that all precautions have been put in place throughout PATCO and the Authority. All CDC Guidelines have been followed, specifically, social distancing, mask wearing, open areas. Mike Venuto heads all the facilities for COVID compliance and employees are following all the guidelines.

Q. Will there be a schedule change?

Larry Davis

A. The only changes that have been made are to the tail end of the schedule where service matches pre-COVID scheduling to offer social distancing on the trains. The trains continue to be monitored to make sure they are following CDC Guidelines. If ridership increases, a change in scheduling will be considered.

Q. Have surveys been taken from employers to see when employees are forecasted to be brought back to the workplace?

Larry Davis

A. Surveys with employers have not been conducted. GM Rink reported that he meets with Regional Transit groups monthly to discuss ridership throughout the region. Additionally, the Authority produces weekly ridership reports that are used for ridership forecasting. PATCO continuously conducts car checks and can always make changes to the schedule quickly. Presently, we are not printing paper schedules because of COVID19, but the schedules are kept up-to-date on-line.

Q. Is there any status on the Glassboro-Camden Line?

Larry Davis

A. Mike Venuto reported that public hearings were held in November 2020 with the comment period ending on December 17, 2020. Presently, we are in the process of pulling all comments together and enter into an EIS document that should be completed by the end of this month, no later than February 2021. We gathered 400 comments with 230 people attending.

A. When will the turnstiles at PATCO stations be updated to accept EMV payments?

Larry Davis

Q. Presently, we are in the process of upgrading our Windows 10 technology to include fire gates for open payments in the future. We are also in the process of moving everything that is on our system to the Cloud. This change will most likely be three to four projects in the future.

Mike Venuto and Lis Klawunn/Engineering

Bridges:

Lis Klawuun reported on the following DRPA projects:

Walt Whitman Bridge: There are two overnight closures on the Walt Whitman Bridge coming up for the approach work with the possibility of a few more short-term and/or long-term closures. Two sign gantry structures were removed with installation expected.

Ben Franklin Bridge: Continuing work on the north side of the bridge including the main cables and wrapping the cable for the dehumidification system. This work will continue throughout the winter with no shutdowns expected. Steel work rivet replacement is also ongoing on the bridge. The work will cause some lane closures during the week from Monday to Saturday.

Lis Klawuun reported there was work performed during the evening hours installing scaffolding over the trains which has been completed and had no impact on the bordering neighborhoods.

Stations:

Lis Klawuun reported on the following PATCO projects:

Elevator Project: The Elevators at the Westmont Station have been completed with two stations left to go. The elevators are ADA accessible.

City Hall: The work at City Hall is moving forward. We are in the process of working on the street level excavation for the foundation of the elevator.

Solar Project: The Commodore Barry Bridge, Betsey Ross Bridge, Ashland Station and One Port Center are complete and very close to testing and going on-line. We are in the process of obtaining the appropriate permits and testing at each site. The Lindenwold Station is close to 75 percent complete, along with Ferry Avenue which is at 50-60 percent complete.

Q&A Session:

Q. What are the air quality monitors that have been noticed on the Camden side of the Ben Franklin Bridge? They do not have DRPA markings but do have make and model numbers.
Ben Saracco

A. Lis Klawuun reported that she will look into the monitors which most likely are not related to the DRPA. Mike Venuto reported that no other projects are going on but will check with other agencies to see if they are related to other projects that are going on in the area.

Old Business: A motion was made to approve dates for the CAC Meetings for the calendar year 2021. The motion was approved.

Bruce Schwartz would like placed on February's Agenda the January 6, 1922 groundbreaking of the Ben Franklin Bridge and to plan an event in commemoration.

Mike Venuto expanded on Lis Klawuun's report that there will be future bridge closures on the Walt Whitman sometime in early February. Specifically, there will be two 5-hour closures to replace the old gantries that were removed this week with the new gantries. There is also suspension cable work ongoing on the bridge. Additionally, there is a lot of work being performed along the corridor that will also cause intermittent 20-minute closures. Reggie Haynes thanked Mike Venuto for the phone app that provides information related to bridge and road closures.

New Business: Reggie Haynes called for volunteers to fill the Vice Chair position. Alan Becker volunteered to be the next Vice Chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee.

Reggie Haynes will prepare a list of NJ and Pennsylvania Committee Members and their respective status.

Next CAC Meeting: Will be held via Zoom on February 10, 2021 @ 6:00 p.m.

Next DRPA Board Meeting: Will be held virtually on February 17, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.