



Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes

May 12, 2021

Location: via: Zoom

Attendance:

New Jersey: Reggie Haynes, Martin King, Alan Becker, Pamela Mack-Brooks, Mike Devlin, Straso Jovanovski, Bruce Schwartz, Joseph Russell

Pennsylvania: Daniel McArdle, Robert Melikian, Tyrone Wesley,

Emeritus Member(s): Jeff Kessler, John Boyle

Potential Member(s):

DRPA/PATCO: John Hanson, James White, John Rink, Mike Venuto, Dawn Whiton

Public Member(s):

Call to Order

A correction to the previous month's minutes was noted naming Judy Boldurian as an emeritus member. A motion was made to approve the April Minutes as amended. Motion was approved and seconded. The amended Minutes were approved.

CEO John Hanson

John Hanson gave an update on the Glassboro Camden (GCL) Line. We are continuing post Environmental Impact Study (EIS) as the project manager. 200 Million Dollars in funding has been committed to this project by South Jersey Transportation Authority. So we are now working with both NJ Transit and the SJ Transportation Authority on the project. As the project manager we are out in front and have had meetings with the towns along the proposed route of the line including Pitman, Woodbury and Mantua. We also met with the South Jersey Chamber of Commerce and have planned meetings with the Woodbury Chamber of Commerce and the town of Woodbury Heights. We are excited about the project and benefits of the project. We made a change in our presentation from when I gave a presentation to the for NJ Alliance for Action Annual Camden Rising Meeting to the benefits of the project. We have completed our contract STV and are no longer using them on the presentations. A member of our engineering staff, Dr. Nicole Ochroch

and being supported by Principal Engineer Mike Howard who you also know together with our community relations people, Manager Government Relations managers Tonyelle Cook Artis and Darlene Callands along with our Director of Government Relations, Bill Shanahan. It's going well. Most people who come out are in opposition, but at our last one, the town of Mantua, after 40 minutes in, we had asked for just Mantua residents, and no one raised their hands. We went back and asked more questions, and by the time the hour was up we had answered everyone's questions. It's really the same people and one of the criticisms is that we are doing the same presentation over and over again, but it's because we are not anticipating sort of an entourage of the same people. It's not the same presentation with STV, then Dr. Ochroch took over, she changed it. Then when I did the NJ Alliance for Action, I changed it to fit my own personal style, then she changed it again with my additions.

I am sure you are aware we are working on our piece of the Skunkkill expressway, 76 East and West from Broad to Passyunk we completed in 2020. Now we are doing the part of the piece from Broad to Passyunk. We are doing lighting, drainage and geometry of the ramps and overpasses we are jacking out the concrete more than two inches and putting more concrete down. Our engineering department has done a fantastic job in planning the project and also our communications team, Mike Williams and Christina Maroney are doing a great job getting the word out. I just did an interview with KYW and with 6abc and in contact with Steve Keely of Fox News. And because of the great work out engineering department and communications a lot of the issues have really tamped down a lot of the issues. So far we only had one person who called Dawn Whiton and yelled at her and then I called him back and in speaking with him, I found out he doesn't even use the bridge, he just wanted to complain about the traffic, but he was ok at the end of it. We expect to finish the project in 110 to 130 days.

Mr. Russell asked battery trains are we going to use them? Mr. Hanson stated that the technology for battery trains is not there right now for what this project would need. But what we have been saying all along is the best thing that we could think of to make this project even better would be to use the battery trains. Since we are using the Conrail right of way to minimize the disruptions to the environment, there is not room in the infrastructure for change, there is really no room. There is also no significant difference in emissions between the battery and diesel. Especially with the clean diesel that is being used now. The batteries do not have the life that is needed yet. We do have an opportunity to make the change if we need to.

Mr. Melikian, heard you on KYW on the traffic. Is there any reason why we are not given a heads up before it's the public. Any way to give us any advance notice. We have spoken about this as it was planned in 2019 and in 2020. Our Engineering Department attends every meeting. I did not realize we are going to single lane myself. Has been out in the public with our important – would have been a good idea to send you guys something to remind everyone. Probably should have done better at that and we shall work on.

Mr. Melikian also asked about the status of electric bikes on the bridges. Mr. Hanson still have not heard back but I think we are not allowing them because they are motorized vehicles. I think that's where we are but not 100%. I traded called with the Chief. Is it because of a safety issue? Yes, I think so.

Chairman mentioned that there were two questions in the chat: Are there any more presentations scheduled on the GCL. There is nothing listed on the website. Mr. Hanson stated that there are not

public presentations scheduled right now. There is one presentation that may be scheduled with the Woodbury Heights Chamber of Commerce. We are in the process of scheduling with Woodbury Heights, we will notify the CAC on that one which is open to the public. We will let you know once scheduled.

Also, under current plan what's the time frame for when will the vehicle decisions will be made. Closer to two and a half year mark.

CFO Jim White

James White gave an update on traffic is still inching upwards probably close to 85% of 2019 ridership. PATCO exceeded 10K riders and now up to 11K riders. We are in good shape in terms of the budget. We did get S&P did move toll organizations from negative to stable. Which is a good thing with our refunding of some of our bonds.

Alan Becker got to watch Finance Committee, discussion on bonds, these are old bonds and turning them over? JW responded its essential like a mortgage refinance, going out to reduce interest rates on existing bonds.

PATCO General Manager John Rink

Ridership, to continue last week we were up to 27.6% and last weeks was the highest since pandemic. Hoping to hit 11k mark. Right now, our cars are not at 50% capacity and will continue to monitor and if need be will add more cars. Mr. Rink gave an update on the encampments at both 12th and 15th & 16th. The city did place occupants to shelter. They Closed down last Wednesday, and no encampments have come back. Self-service. AT&T is beginning site surveys to begin work on installation and T-Mobile is moving forward and recently attended safety training to start the Boingo system. No time frame yet but both are starting to move forward.

Chairman stated that one of the agenda items is the question about free rides for kids as it is done on SEPTA. JOHN HANSON responded that it is not something we are planning. PATCO is subsidized and in a non paying budget year we budget 65 Million in expenses for PATCO and half of that are revenues. PATCO returns about 50% in budget and does better in actuals, at their costs at the fare box, but on average there is about 30M in capital expenses. Revenue generates about a third of the costs. Based on our financials, our bond covenants, we are in the business of subsidy management because SEPTA is funded entirely by funds by other governments; principally from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, PATCO does not receive any operating money. It receives about 12 M annually in FTA funds for Capital. So, in order to make sure we are able To maintain our bond covenants, we need to maintain this ratio of roughly at 50%. If that is something we would decide to do, CAC and Mr. Davis has been an advocate for frequent user, all things could be accomplished next fares increase. In reality, what that means is that we would have to raise the fares higher to accommodate for the discounts we put in if the idea is to maintain roughly fare box return of 50%. Something we would have to consider frequent user would be to raise tolls 33% and then 25% the last two times and PATCO was 10% each time., goal was to keep fares lower for everyone but the policy makers wish based on the advice of CAC and others to give preferential treatment to a class of people, whether riders under 12 or frequent commuters, someone is going to have to pay for that in terms of our ability to stay at 50%. We would raise tolls higher than we otherwise normally would. Something we could consider but would not be able to until the next fare increase.

Alan Becker thank Ray came through with an explanation, but broadcast fell apart, but it seems like every month one of the meetings, there is difficulty getting into the meeting. Is the Board still come back in September? John Hanson has been my plan and this question came up; I believe that sometime at the end of the summer we should be back. Camden County Superior court is now back in the office, but the NJ Governor's Authority still is not allowing unmasked meetings. My goal is September, but we have to see what Chair and Vice-Chair decides.

Chief Engineer Mike Venuto

The solar project we are substantially complete at the bridges, so the two outer bridges, One Port Center, Ashland, Ferry Avenue and Lindenwold pretty much finished all of the installation at each of those. We are 50% complete at Woodcrest. Right now we are working on final at the other stations with interconnections with the utilities and then to PATCO Sites, then working at the testing at the outer bridges and One Port Center until end of May and working on final interagency agreements, final PPA sign and the interconnection agreements expect those three site to have electricity by the end of June.

Mr. Venuto also gave an update on a project that Mr. Boyle brought to DRPA's attention. Mr. Venuto advised that where the we had the north walkway open, when you came off the bridge, it didn't have a crosswalk or signage to get across and now that project is complete.

Chairman asked if BRB has the capacity to have a dedicated bike lane for electric and unpowered bikes? JOHN HANSON stated that it does not. There is nowhere for the bike to even go once you get to the other side of the bridge.

Another item in the chat, update on real time info? John Rink stated that he responded to the chat that the vendor has submitted for preliminary design for us to review and after that we have communication coms forward and yes the cell phone coverage will be at Franklin Square also.

Alan Becker – ramps and elevators but the signs but the route maps aren't updated. Mr. Rink stated that those will be updated as part of the Franklin Square Project and will also be done in braille.

Dawn Whiton mentioned that pursuant to the request for the new Chairwoman to attend a CAC Meeting, I did reach out but she was unavailable, she will send out the remaining schedule for the year to see if the Chairwoman is available for a future meeting.

Old Business

Chairman asked Daniel McArdle about the active member list. Mr. McArdle will have it ready for next month.

Chairman asked Mr. Melikian about new memberships. Mr. Melikian responded that there were no new applicants. He is hopeful to get some PR about it. Not sure if you get the emails? Chairman affirmed.

Open Forum

Jeff Kessler asked about recruitment as to whether or not CAC could get some sort of message sign on the bridges? Or on the trains? Can we get that back and road signs. Chairman stated he was on the train last week and did not see our advertisement for membership.

Bob Melikian does Alan go to Board Meetings? Chairman stated he not able to attend DRPA Meeting and was going to prepare statement for Alan Becker to attend. Mr. Melikian asked that perhaps we add the membership PR to the list for new applicants. When we do not have controversy and things seem to be calm, there does not seem to be a lot of interest. Perhaps mentioned to DRPA Board for membership. Jeff Kessler do we need editorial independence. Do we really want the Board recommending candidates? Alan Becker stated that perhaps look to Mike Williams and those kind of avenues to get the message out there. Not to go to Board.

Marty King indicated that a lot of people at GCL presentations are perhaps on the hostile side and not exactly on board, do we want to advertise there? Chairman indicated that he did not think that would be the right forum for CAC to be there to solicit members.

Mr. Becker gave his opinion on the cars being used for the GCL and his thoughts on how Franklin Square was handled. He mentioned he would like to sit in on one of these GCL meetings. Are we running this? He believes that Mr. Venuto and his group are doing the engineering and that SJTA will be taking over. Mr. McArdle stated that it is his understanding that we are just the project managers on and providing overall structure. DRPA is not providing funding. We are just coordinating all the pieces, not long term; this will not be a PATCO 2.0. We are not running long term, just handing over to SJTA.

Mr. Schwartz stated that he finds it strange that there is yet another agency that will be running a mass transit operation in South Jersey. NJ transit running the Riverline, PATCO ran by DRPA and now another entity? Should they be all under one roof? Mr. Kessler mentioned that he felt that there wouldn't be a third group per se, right now NJ transit manages the Riverline, but it is contracted out by Bombardier on behalf of NJT and mentioned overseeing possibilities in the future of overseeing after the line is built. Perhaps pool repair facilities and equipment makes sense. Mr. Kessler also made mention to perhaps keep on the radar options between fare integration between the different modes. Like the Riverline, pass needed, the PATCO then SEPTA key card, then new freedom card. Cubic sells and charges validators on platforms or have little validators or at least have one zone from Riverline to GCL Line.

Mr. Becker added new line is all in NJ so why would DRPA be worried about running a NJ event? A study was done on alternatives; it was one of the alternatives. ABC routes? Mr. McArdle mentioned that the reason we are not doing it is that we are not funding it and it extends outside the original charter. Because PATCO is a solely owned entitle, they were grandfathered in, but not repeating. Not going to replicate another PATCO. Focus of our assets, but this was at a time when money was spent. Cleaned up their act and brought John Hanson in.

Mr. Schwartz asked why is it that each agency/state have their own proprietary cards, I can tap my visa card at 100 of thousand of places why do I need separate cards? Mr. Becker stated that once you go to interconnect it becomes a hacker issue. Chair stated that we can bring this up at another meeting.

Meeting adjourned.

Next CAC Meeting: Will be held via Zoom on Wednesday, June 9, 2021 @ 6:00 p.m.

Next DRPA Board Meeting: Will be held virtually on June 16, 2021