



Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

Location: via: Zoom

Attendance:

New Jersey: Reggie Haynes, Dan Norfleet, Steve Benigno, Joe Russell, Marty King

Pennsylvania: Larry Davis, Tyrone Wesley, Bob Melikian

Emeritus Member(s): Jeff Kessler

Potential Member(s): Scott Cohen

DRPA/PATCO: John Rink, GM; Jim White, CFO; Mike Venuto, Chief Engineer

Public Member(s):

Call to Order

A motion was made to approve the February 9, 2022 minutes. The minutes were approved.

CFO Jim White

Financial Update:

CFO White reported that the DRPA closed 2021 in very good shape in terms of our total revenues. Revenue was up at least 13% higher than 2020, so we had a great recovery of around \$35M in additional toll revenues in 2021.

We did experience a drop off in our traffic in January, but we seem to have recovered in February to the point where we are roughly at 90% of pre-Covid numbers. In the first two months of 2022, it looks like we are on budget or slightly above.

On the PATCO side, we did not see a significant increase in revenue although we did see ridership climb throughout the year. It was around 40-42% at the end of the year vs. pre-Covid numbers. As we approached this year, January was difficult due to inclement weather and, obviously, the Omicron explosion had an impact on revenues in late December and in January.

However, in recent weeks, it looks like the PATCO numbers are now over 40% of pre-Covid numbers.

The DRPA is still constraining costs as we are significantly under budget by around 8% which is largely because of a fair number of unfilled positions at the DRPA and PATCO.

CFO White further reported that we started the year with about \$300M in the General Fund which is slated to fund both the PATCO subsidy and our capital program for the next two years. The number was roughly where we expected it to be. We made our annual reduction in principal of around \$70M on January 1, and we are approaching the point where we may get under \$1.0 billion in total debt at the beginning of 2023, certainly into 2024. So, we've reduced debt over the years from \$1.6 billion to \$1.1 billion, which is a significant achievement on the part of the DRPA in terms of financial management.

The information for 2022 is just coming in; however, it is unaudited but we're seeing some positive things happening, at least from February onward.

Steve Benigno asked if the debt structure is by bonds?

CFO White stated that it is structured by bonds at a fixed rate as we eliminated our variable rate debt exposure in 2018 when we terminated the swaps and converted the variable rate debt to a fixed rate debt.

PATCO General Manager, John Rink

Ridership and Revenue improvements with relaxing Covid climate:

GM Rink reported that yesterday's ridership was the highest weekday ridership since March of 2020. We started to see an uptick in ridership, including this past weekend, with both days at 65% of norm. We believe people were riding to the car show. Today we will probably take a hit because of the rain.

Larry Davis asked if GM Rink saw a spike in ridership due to gas prices and if there is any correlation to a decrease in tolls over the past week.

GM Rink reported that Monday was a new high since mid-November, early December. He reported that last week and the week before he was at a task force meeting with the various groups in Philadelphia. Comcast, large law firms, and other office groups are expecting employees to return in April. Comcast is shooting for three days a week; others are saying three maybe four. Accordingly, we are hoping to see a spike in April.

CFO White reported that he doesn't know if he could really discern a pattern because the numbers we've been seeing over the last few months hover around 90%. Sometimes it's a little higher, sometimes a little lower. He reported that when he looks at the numbers, he primarily focuses on the weekday numbers and we're still around 90%, so he hasn't seen a discernable change in bridge traffic attributable to gas prices at this point.

Reggie Haynes asked about the current budget related to operating expenses, more specifically, around gasoline. Based on what the budget has already allocated and with rising costs, will additional funds have to be moved to other areas or are there contingency funds?

CFO White reported that he doesn't know the numbers for the gas pricing which are based on estimates, but the way we run our budgets, we are so far under. For example, in 2021 we were more than \$10M under the budget. We hold our departments accountable for their budgets including various line items related to personnel and things like gas, etc. We do have some flexibility, e.g., when we run into a situation where we experience more snowstorms than anticipated, we're able to move dollars around after consultation with the CEO and other operations. Consequently, if gas prices continue the way they are, we would cut costs in another area of that budget or we would look to find the funds elsewhere. Most likely, this would fall under our Fleet Budget.

GM Rink added that our fuel costs are with the State Contract and we have a predetermined rate, so he's not sure if there's something in the State Fuel Contract that allows for an increase or decrease based on spikes. He will ask the Fleet Director if we pay X no matter what the price is at the time.

CFO White stated that GM Rinks clarification was good because we would have to get a sense of the impact or a global sense on how we manage situations if we anticipate being over budget in a certain area. We should reach out to Fleet to see how their prices are locked in.

Steve Benigno asked if there were any union contracts coming up?

GM Rink reported that, currently, the FOP; the IS group; PATCO Teamsters; and Bridge Operations are all under negotiations as they all expired on the same date.

Steve Benigno asked if there were any major issues with the unions other than money? GM Rink reported that he can only speak for PATCO and its pretty much economics.

Status update on DRPA staff returning to the office. If not in the office at present, has a date been announced?

GM Rink reported that back on February 28th, for people working remotely, we increased the number of days from three to four days in the office and CEO Hanson recently made the announcement that everyone will be back to a full work week on April 1st.

What is the current policy on Remote Work?

GM Rink reported that, currently, employees are working one day remotely. On April 1st, everyone is back five days, and no one will be working remotely.

Reggie Haynes asked if everyone's back in the office five days a week are there in-person meetings at the office, as well? Has there been any update from the Board on bringing the other groups back for in-person meetings?

GM Rink reported that this month's Board Meeting will be a hybrid meeting for those who want to attend in-person, and a Zoom link is set-up inside the Board Room for those who feel uncomfortable. A large new screen has been installed in the Board Room for that purpose.

CE Venuto added that he's not sure if the screen is up and running and whether the Zoom link is ready, but he is certain it's going to be a hybrid meeting. For those who don't attend in-person, they can call in.

GM Rink added he will ask CEO Hanson if the CAC can go back to having in-person and/or hybrid meetings.

LinkedIn PR Messaging positive feedback.

Bob Melikian stated that the DRPA has great messaging on LinkedIn which is a social media site for businesses.

GM Rink reported that Mike Williams has been promoting all the good things the DRPA and PATCO have been doing, including job openings, etc. He reported that Mike Williams has come up with good campaign ideas for the CAC. He redesigned the screen on Twitter and has been pushing out tweets for the CAC. It's a tool he's using to promote the CAC, its membership, what it's about and what it does, and would like to work with the CAC with regards to recruitment. He added that Mike Williams also wants to promote people to use the Zoom links for Board Meetings when we go live. GM Rink suggested that Bob Melikian get in touch with Mike Williams regarding recruitment.

GM Rink also stated that he often retweets, reposts, or shares those stories on his LinkedIn feed and Mike Venuto does the same. CE Venuto added that in Engineering, as we get project photos, we send them to Mike Williams so he can highlight the projects so our customers can see the work that we're doing when they're driving over the bridges. GM Rink added that for those who don't see the links on your feed to like our pages to receive the posts. There's one page set-up for the DRPA and one for PATCO.

GTFS, Real-Time and Digital Departure Messaging Updates:

GM Rink reported that he had an update and some breaking news! He reported that we've been working hard with our group and created a dashboard where we will be able to update our GTFS data with our track and special work schedule. They have also been testing it. In the meantime, we have submitted our application to Google to update our feed to real time.

GM Rink also reported that a few hours prior to the CAC meeting, Mike Williams told him that we are now updated to real time. We're going to start testing and put everything in so we can do all our schedules in real time with the dashboard we created. Hopefully, we will see results soon and be able to prepare the updates. In the meantime, it's set-up with Intersection who does the software on our LCDs. Once that's ready, we will place at the bottom of the screens a ticker

which will show our real time GTFS on the next scheduled train coming in. If you're inside the headhouses and down below, you will be able to see when the next westbound or eastbound train is scheduled. We've made successful progress and the breaking news is we are now ready with real time!

Jeff Kessler asked if the real time means the current location of where the trains are along the line because that's what the specific term of GTFS real time is. Or if it's an update to the schedule to account for track work. There are two methods, one is where you update the static schedule all the time and the other is when you release the same feed where the trains are. Do you know which approach they're doing?

GM Rink reported that we're doing the static. Jess Kessler stated that is the preferred mechanism. GM Rink added that we are exploring with the real time arrival information which will be the next phase. We have our static timetable, but when we did all our track work and special schedules, it wouldn't update. Now we'll be able to do it ourselves quickly. Our people will be able to load it and it will become instantaneous and static real time.

GM Rink added that we are also working on our digital departure messaging; however, we did find some quirks. They did a lot of updating today – the three-dash line and tagging the trains - so we're hoping that corrects some of those issues. We are also trying to work with the sign vendor because they have the software to see if we could do any kind of font or sizing enhancements to the messages that are displayed.

Jeff Kessler asked who's the vendor doing the backend of the digital signs?

GM Rink reported that our signs are made by Daktronics and the company that did the SCADA system is BNC Transit. Jeff Kessler asked if they are typing it directly to the signs, so you don't have a middleware. GM Rink reported they are using the Daktronics software, but the SCADA uses a system called Nucleus. The information that comes out is what's going to the sign. We are trying to work with the vendors to see if we could use some enhancements to the actual sign software.

GM Rink thanked Jeff Kessler for all the work he did with Mike Williams. We are in a good place with all the work we've done which will be a benefit to all the apps and the signage.

Bob Melikian asked about a story he recently saw on LinkedIn related to the last car remanufactured.

GM Rink reported that our social media team does flashbacks, and the story was a flashback of 11 years ago when the first car left for Hornell. Our social media team has been doing some flashback stories on our assets such as when the Walt Whitman Bridge and the Ben Franklin Bridge were being built.

Bob Melikian asked what is the condition of the cars since it's been 9-11 years since the remanufacture?

GM Rink reported that the stats from our Equipment Department stated that reliability is up. The rehabs have been very beneficial, and the cars are doing well. He added that we should start

thinking about the future and future capital plans before thinking about replacement of the cars in the future. By the time we go through that process, we will have to start coming up with specs and the money to replace everything.

Larry Davis asked if there will be any staffing changes at the PATCO stations due to increased ridership?

GM Rink reported that the same people are still at the stations, but it would be nice when we get to a point where we can bring the Ambassadors back.

CE Mike Venuto

Update on Ben Franklin Walkway and Bridge lighting upgrade:

CE Venuto reported that the dehumidification and suspension span project at the Ben Franklin Bridge have completed a milestone on the project where we replaced the rocker links on the northside of the New Jersey tower. We had temporary support there for several weeks where we took out the 100-year-old rocker links connecting the deck trusses to the tower. We were able to replace the rocker links and remove the temporary supports. During the next few weeks, those temporary supports will be moved onto a barge then shipped across the river. We are working with the Coast Guard to get that clearance and then we will replace the links on the northside of the Pennsylvania tower.

CE Venuto also reported that work is also progressing on the northside of the bridge as expected and, we will provide proper notice when we switch over. Currently, it looks like it will be late July or August time frame.

Bob Melikian asked if the Ben Franklin Bridge walkway project is on time?

CE Venuto reported that the widening on the northside happened simultaneously with the lighting. There are several different crews working, concurrently, and the walkway is progressing. The walkway work on the northside will be completed by late July, early August. He reported that we are currently waiting for materials. The only work that is not progressing now is painting due to the weather.

Scott Cohen asked when walkers are at the heaviest during the summer and with the uptick in crime, are there any considerations for or is there a budget towards extra patrols whether by foot, bike patrols, or by DRPA police, Philly police or Camden police?

CE Venuto stated that he would have to get back to the CAC with an answer about the policing plan and frequency throughout the summer. He stated that we have patrols on the walkway, along with a car that fits on the walkway, and during the better months there are bike patrols. Scott Cohen added that during the summer the bridge becomes a destination for walkers

Social Media, Larry Davis

Larry Davis reported that there were no comments or questions from social media.

Old Business:

GM Rink reported that PATCO partnered with the Borough of Collingswood and Cross County Connection for a demonstration project through the DVRPC. It's a pop-up demonstration pilot that will go on for the month of April. There will be a kick-off event on Saturday, April 9th in Collingswood. We don't know the exact time, but it will be in the morning.

The pop-up project is to promote biking and walking to the station which is beneficial considering current gas prices. There will be restriping on Bilson Avenue for a dual bike lane that will have delineators for a separated bike path from Atlantic and Station Avenues and the station up to Haddon Avenue. We're also closing off the small one-way street directly across from the station, Stiles Avenue, where we are putting concrete barriers. Certain events are going to take place in that area, specifically, on Friday nights. They are also going to have events like a free coffee giveaway and other things to promote walking and biking for the residents of Collingswood. It was a very competitive grant, and we were one of four selected in the whole region. There were 50-60 others, and this project scored the highest in the rankings. A radio station will be out there promoting the project and working through Mike Williams and his group.

Update on CAC Active Membership Drive: Reggie Haynes stated that he sent to each member an Active Membership List and a Term List by e-mail before this evening's meeting. He reported that there is a number of individuals that will be going Emeritus later this year. Larry Davis stated that he believes he should have gone Emeritus this past September 16, 2021. Bob Melikian added that Larry Davis is entitled to re-apply for active membership.

Bob Melikian added that we need new fresh candidates. GM Rink reported that his assistant received an inquiry from an individual to become a CAC member and the information was provided.

New Business:

DRPA CAC Board Nominations: A motion was approved to nominate Reggie Haynes, Chair; Alan Becker, Vice Chair; and Daniel Norfleet, Secretary for a second term. Voting will take place at the next CAC meeting scheduled on April 13, 2022.

CAC Members agreed to have hybrid meetings going forward for members who are uncomfortable meeting in-person and for those who live at a distance.

Next CAC Meeting: Will be held via Zoom on April 13, 2022, at 6:00 p.m.

Next DRPA Board Meeting: Will be held virtually on March 16, 2022, at 9:00 a.m.