



## **Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes**

Wednesday, February 8, 2023

Location: via: Zoom

### **Attendance:**

**New Jersey:** Reggie Haynes, Alan Becker, Steve Benigno, Straso Jovanovski, Marty King

**Pennsylvania:** Scott Cohen, Larry Davis, Tyrone Wesley, Bob Melikian

**Emeritus Member(s):** Judy Boldurian, John Boyle

### **Potential Member(s):**

**DRPA/PATCO:** John Hanson, CEO; John Rink, GM; Mike Venuto, Chief Engineer; Robert Hicks, COO; Barbara Wagner, Executive Assistant

### **Public Member(s):**

### **Call to Order**

A motion was made to approve the January 11, 2023 minutes. The minutes were approved.

### **CEO, John Hanson**

#### **Finance Update:**

CEO Hanson reported that toll revenues are at 90 percent of pre-Covid numbers. The numbers we're looking at in January show numbers closer to 95 percent of pre-Covid, but the numbers may have to do with the inclement weather we had during January of 2019 that depressed tolling numbers during that month. CFO White is looking into that possibility, and it will not be a trend if we're right.

PATCO revenues are down about 10 percent compared to pre-Covid numbers. That amounts to between \$30M to \$35M in less revenue when compared to pre-Covid. PATCO ridership is down just over 50 percent compared to pre-Covid. That amounts to approximately \$15M to \$17M in

revenues less than where we were pre-pandemic. All in all, it means \$45M to \$50M less in revenue.

**Reggie Haynes asked, if due to the revenue shortfall on PATCO, and with the minimal increases to staff, what major cost saving initiatives or cost avoidance initiatives, if any, are now underway to make sure spending is in control?**

CEO Hanson reported that he didn't use the word "revenue shortfall," revenues are down compared to pre-pandemic, but the overall revenue picture is sufficient for us to continue to run the service the way we have over the last 10 years or so. I say plan, because there are times when we have not lived up to the plan and that's not a function of dollars. It can be a function of staffing, or other issues that come up.

CEO Hanson reported that we are planning for a fare and toll increase in 2024, however, it has not been approved by the Board, to date. Our budgeting is zero based, so all budgets are required to be done every year and justified, and they are checked against budgeting and spending from the previous year to make sure that we're not out of hand. According to my recollection, our overall budgetary increase this year was less than one percent, so we've been very careful.

Additionally, we have been very careful about filling vacancies so we're saving money on personnel costs. Salaries and benefits are our biggest costs, along with the operating budget. We have been consistently under budget and our salary increases have been 2 percent over the last 7 or 8 years.

On the capital budget side, we are looking hard at what needs to be done and not starting projects until we absolutely need to in order to keep the facility safe, serviceable, and secure.

COO Hicks reported that on the operating side, controlling overtime is on a regular basis almost every week. I've been asked by my staff if they can work overtime and that's something that we have been controlling over the last number of years. CEO Hanson added that COO Hicks keeps a very close eye on the numbers and, particularly, the staffing and the budgetary numbers. CEO Hanson, COO Hicks, the two Bridge Directors, and the Fleet Directors meet almost monthly or sometimes every other month to talk about staffing issues and which ones we can hold off on filling and which ones need to be filled.

GM Rink added that PATCO is spending money on essential maintenance and the operation of our line and to ensure the safety of our customers. We make sure that what we are doing and what we are spending our money on is purely for the mission of safe operation and maintenance of our system and assets.

**Scott Cohen asked, with revenues being down, has there been any promotions considered to customers; for example a show and PATCO transportation because it drops you off at the Theatre District in Philadelphia. Memorial weekend and the summer season is approaching - maybe offer some kind of promotional special to get a boost in summer**

**ridership. Are we exploring any other avenues for promotional opportunities to increase ridership into the City?**

CEO Hanson stated that we do have a PATCO Perks Program and a Pass Program going on currently. GM Rink added that we partnered, through our Community Relations Department, with the Flower Show two years ago. We also partnered with a Dinosaur event at the Convention Center where they ran a video on our trains. We promoted that and it was offered to our customers. We are trying to get new partners in our Perks Program and continue to explore things of that nature. CEO Hanson added that it's a great idea and we will think more about it. Since the inception of the line, PATCO has tried several times to encourage leisure time ridership, and anything will help right now, so we will be looking into that idea.

**Bob Melikian asked if the PATCO subsidy that is being subsidized by the bridges is greater because the ridership is less or is it less because the ridership is less?**

CEO Hanson reported that the subsidy, until very recently, has not grown and the reason is the difference in the subsidy was being made up by the economic support legislation that was passed during Covid. We're nearly out of that money, so the subsidy will double at this level. According to the PATCO budget, the operating side is \$60M and approximately \$30M of it was returned at the fare box and the other \$30M was made up by bridge tolls. The budget is still roughly at \$60M, but now the fare box return is approximately \$15M. The subsidy will be \$45M in round figures, but it's still manageable.

**Bob Melikian asked if PATCO increases its use for leisure, will it help or add to the deficit?**

CEO Hanson reported that it would help as generally the costs to operate PATCO are fixed. We could run less trains and save little on electricity and train operators, but it's not a lot of money. PATCO still has to maintain the infrastructure for safety and repair, maintain the equipment, have people working the signaling system, rails, and electrical third rail, so running less trains doesn't save very much money. Incremental increases on the leisure side will decrease the deficit and we will look into providing promotional ideas. We have looked at this several times during my tenure as CFO and during my tenure as CEO. We have had some success, but it doesn't have a lot of potential to make that big of a difference. The good news is that we're in a decent place with toll revenues, we've done a lot to reduce and stabilize the reduced level of costs, and we're overdue for a toll and fare increase. That revenue augmentation will help.

**New Applicant Search:**

CEO Hanson reported that he will check with Mike Williams to see if he has received any applications. The committee later discussed ways in which to recruit new members.

**CE, Mike Venuto**

**Solar System since system activation:**

CE Venuto reported that this is not expected to be completed until early summer, when we have had a full year of the entire system being online (Woodcrest and Ashland come on at the end of April 2022). We are expected to see a drop in the transmission and generation costs for the large PATCO account (Stoy Avenue) in 2023, which is about 30 percent of the total utility bill. Solar accounted for greater than 50 percent of the total energy consumption for all DRPA and PATCO for the months May through September. As we head into the winter months, the solar generation rate will be reduced.

### **Ben Franklin Bridge:**

CE Venuto discussed the capital budget and reported that we are focusing on priority projects while not doing anything that will compromise the safety, security, or serviceability of our structures. For example, we have an HVAC system at one of the facilities that will be replaced for \$6M in outer budget years. We will continue to maintain the system until we are ready to make that capital expenditure. We have been aggressive in going after smaller grants to supplement the capital program. We also have reallocated some of the grant money to projects that are earlier in the capital budget. CE Venuto reported that we still have an aggressive program and a lot of it has been supplemented with the grant funding for this year.

### **Reggie Haynes asked about the grants that are being secured at this time, and how are they being allocated? Does that violate the rules of the grant?**

CE Venuto reported that the grants are either additional grants, new grants, or grants reallocated. One grant may cover three or four projects, and if we reallocate money within that specific grant for other projects, it's permissible to reorganize. For instance, if we have a project where the grant money is for specific projects and another project arises under that grant, we can take money from one project and move it to another project.

CEO Hanson added that the grants on the capital side are a little different in terms of flexibility than a typical grant. The larger grant money that we receive, annually, in the amount of \$15M from the FTA generally is available for any type of capital spending on the PATCO line. Some of the other grants received for capital spending are generally to supplement the capital program. They are not as specific as traditional grant programs. We do have traditional grants, particularly, in law enforcement. For example, "Click it or Ticket" and "Over The Limit Under Arrest" on the police side. That money is very specific within a certain time period. There's more flexibility in the FTA grants, and other more general capital grants that we receive from non-profits or government on the social services side.

### **Bridge Walkway Switch (from the ramp on the south to the stair tower on the north) contingency with an Eagles Parade:**

CE Venuto reported that we discussed the walkway switchover at last month's meeting. We were looking at early February; however, if there is a parade and considering the significant amount of usage on the Ben Franklin Bridge Walkway from the last parade in 2018, we postponed the switchover to February 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>. Because the 20<sup>th</sup> is a holiday, we may look at doing that work during the evening of the 20<sup>th</sup>.

CE Venuto shared his screen showing pictures of the walkway with Walkway Switch Notices on both side of the Ben Franklin Bridge letting people know that it will take place on February 20<sup>th</sup>. See attached Photographs.

### **COO, Robert Hicks**

#### **Toll Technology Presentation:**

COO Hicks reported that the tolling project has been in the pipeline for approximately five years. We've had a feasibility plan, and now a design plan which is currently in procurement.

COO Hicks shared several of the slides from a presentation (see attached) that he presented to the DRPA's Senior Staff several months ago.

He reported that the DRPA is putting in a new tolling system as our existing system is about 25 years old, and we're trying to meet National Interoperability Standards. US Congress, back 2012, through the MAP 21 legislation, mandated that the whole country have a standard where you can take toll tags across the country. We are hoping to implement the new tolling system by the end of next year if everything goes well.

Several months ago, we performed a classification study. One of the problems with our existing system is the accuracy of reading different types of vehicles. We want to improve the accuracy, so we can charge people the correct toll. We conducted a two-stage, two-step procurement process. We had about nine vendors, initially, and we're down to four now. All four vendors are in the process of working on their proposals and we look forward to receiving those proposals by March 15, 2023, and hoping to have someone onboard by June. We are not doing all electronic or open road tolling, but the attached slide presentation shows some of the proposed features of the new tolling system.

He reported that the likely proposed adjustments to toll classifications and toll schedules are to improve our accuracy. We're looking at more flexibility within our lanes. Presently, we only have E-Z Pass lanes and cash lanes with no flexibility for other options to pay the toll. We are working to approve that in our new system. We are also going to maintain an in-lane customer feedback display that will inform people that they have paid the toll. We also want outside lane payment methods for large trucks that can't fit through the lanes. We still have that problem at the Walt Whitman Bridge.

COO Hicks reported that when we use enhanced reporting and dashboards it's not just the end lanes we're trying to improve, we are also trying to improve our ability to interpret our analytics and business intelligence. We have a lot of personnel hours that are dedicated to delayed transactions, etc. We are trying to get a more accurate reading on what the toll really is. Receipt printing is something we are going to continue.

Mixed mode lane operations – we are in a static position, currently, with our lanes because we want the flexibility to be able to change back and forth when there's a need. The IAG is the E-Z

Pass group where the DRPA is a member that includes over forty agencies. We all have our own interoperability strategy within that group which fits into a larger National Interoperative strategy. He reported that there are three multi-protocol readers: a National Standard of three called 6C, SeeGo and TDM which we use. Different parts of the country use different readers, so when the new system is in place, we want to be able to better read any type of tag that comes through our system. The file exchange is between the DRPA and Conduent which is the vendor used by the New Jersey Customer Service Center. The DRPA is a member of the New Jersey EZ Pass Group, so we use the New Jersey Turnpike's Customer Service Center.

COO Hicks reported that we will maintain our Senior Citizen Discount Application Processing System. Autonomous vehicles are coming, and we want to make sure that we can deal with those vehicles when they come through our lanes.

**Larry Davis asked if there is a toll taking agency that's leading the way that the DRPA is looking to as a model?**

COO Hicks reported that we are looking at all agencies for best practices. The Pennsylvania Turnpike is an agency that tries a lot of innovative things that sometimes cause a lot of problems. In the news, it was reported that they have gone all electronic and lost millions of dollars. A lot of agencies around the country have experienced the same. The DRPA is trying to do what is best for the Authority. Our existing system is 25 years old, the technology is obsolete, and we want to implement innovation where we can, but we're going to play it safe.

CEO Hanson added that the DRPA and PATCO are unique in terms of need and responsiveness to our customer base in the region. Looking at models can help inform us, but we don't usually follow anybody else's example. We went through a process, retained a consultant that worked with COO Hicks and his team, including the Finance Group to determine the DRPA's needs, and that translated into a certain requirements that is now out for bidding.

CEO Hanson added that, unquestionably, the CAC members, past and present, have contributed to improvements and innovations that perhaps we wouldn't have gotten to until now. CEO Hanson thanked everyone who serves/served on the CAC because your points are very well taken and it has made a huge difference within the Authority and PATCO.

**Alan Becker asked if the new toll system will be able to pick up more than one transponder as he has an EZ Pass tag and a Sun Tag?**

COO Hicks reported that, eventually, the new system installed will have the IAG Hub and you will be able to use either tag if both are not on the same car window at the time going through the toll.

**GM, John Rink**

**PATCO update:**

**PATCO plan for service for essential workers should a parade be scheduled:**

GM Rink reported that we are going to run the same parade plan that we did in 2018, running out of four stations directly into the city and back again so everybody can get out. We have provided this information directly to Jefferson regarding the essential workers using the system. We will also have employees go through the lines to make sure the essential workers are escorted to the front to get them on the train right away.

GM Rink informed CAC Member, Steve Benigno, that he reached out to Mr. Webster/SEPTA because there are quite a few SEPTA employees that live in New Jersey and use the PATCO line. We made sure they received the information to ensure that their employees get to the front of the line by showing their badge.

He reported that we will be prepared on Sunday night starting at 10:30 p.m. Our service will be enhanced with a 20-minute headway until 1:30 a.m. We will also have standby trains in case we see significant crowds. The DRPA and Public Safety will have staff working that night, including the Center City Police and the Philadelphia Police. They will allow everyone to congregate for three hours, then push them out like they did after the Championship game, and we will have our trains ready to get people out of the city.

#### **GTFS Data Issue – BASE schedule has not been updated since the August 15, 2022 schedule:**

GM Rink reported that we continue to have issues with the GTFS data. We are working with Mike Williams and our IS Department using the information given to us by Jeff Kessler. GM Rink reached out to Jeff Kessler to see if he could assist as we don't have the staff on hand that can do that type of work. As mentioned in previous meetings, we were waiting for the creation of a dashboard where it's very easy to drop in our schedule PDF file. Jeff Kessler's method takes a little more work where data has to be input into an Excel spreadsheet. The PDF would allow us to do that remotely. The Excel spreadsheet makes it a little more difficult.

#### **Update on backordered parts. How many cars are still out of service due to backordered parts?**

GM Rink reported that the backordered parts continue to arrive, and we have twenty-three traction motors inventoried and expecting more to be delivered. The supply chain issues we reported on a few months ago have improved. We have also implemented some new processes and procedures that have also helped keep our cars in service. Currently, we have been averaging about 66 plus cars daily. Our on-time performance for January was at 92.62 percent for the month, which exceeded any month in 2022.

#### **Larry Davis asked if PATCO anticipates changing the schedule now that more cars are back in service?**

GM Rink reported that he hopes to propose something soon. We want to ensure that what we have been seeing over the last month continues and that includes our on-time service and the

availability of parts. Then, we will consider increasing the car count and putting our headways back to where we were prior to the problems we've been having.

**Straso Jovanovski stated that he regularly sees individuals pushing and forcing the fare gates to open to get out. Is there any way to make the gates a little more flexible to avoid possible damage due to forcing the gates open?**

GM Rink reported that the fare gates have been set at the best rate regarding force. If we increase the force, the motors will break including the parts for the gates. As it is, they break, so if we make the force any lighter it would be much easier to break. Since the installment in 2009, we have adjusted the force to the best possible limit. We monitor the gates through the cameras daily, and that data is given to our Police Department who patrol the areas during certain times when we see the most fare gating.

**Update on Walter Rand Transportation Center changes:**

GM Rink reported that New Jersey Transit continues to work on the preliminary design phase. To date, nothing has been proposed, but they had a public information session on January 30<sup>th</sup>. GM Rink participated in that session with 150 others who had signed up for the event. Polling questions were asked to all who attended including what they would like to see as part of the facility. No changes have been proposed, to date. New Jersey Transit also met, internally, with our stakeholders, Public Safety, and our Fare Collection Department on the workspaces that are currently in use at the building to make sure they are kept in the plans.

**Bob Melikian asked about the Homeless people hanging at the Walter Rand Center and the lack of clean restrooms and dingy lighting.**

GM Rink reported that we pushed out a survey through our Social Media channels which was open to anyone. It was also posted in the stations, and New Jersey Transit has been doing public information sessions where those topics came up regarding cleanliness and security. Questions about retail and other things that people would like to see as part of the facility were also discussed.

**Scott Cohen asked if an analysis was done on the evening's ridership coming into the city to go to Broad Street after the Eagles game two weeks ago?**

GM Rink reported that we saw increased ridership during the entire day. Our ridership was at 108 percent of normal on a Sunday. We had extra trains on standby. Some of the platforms were crowded at 8<sup>th</sup> and Market and 12/13 that coincided with everyone on Broad Street. Public Safety had additional Officers and there were supervisors, so we had no issues that night. It was a good day for PATCO during the championship game on Sunday.

**Bob Melikian asked if the city has advised of a possible parade date?**

GM Rink reported that the information is confidential at this time, but the parade will take place on Thursday the 16<sup>th</sup>, with a rain date on Friday the 17<sup>th</sup> of January. The parade route is the same

as last time starting at the Stadium and ending up at the Art Museum. PATCO will run the same schedule as the last time if the Eagles win the Super Bowl. We shut down around 12:00 p.m., got all the trains lined up in the city and around 1:30 p.m., we started service out of 9/10 to get everyone home which took about 5 hours.

**Bob Melikian asked if there was any reason why they don't have the parade on the weekend?**

GM Rink reported that during the week, PATCO and the city has its full workforce during regular working hours, and if the parade is on the weekend, you would have to bring in mostly everyone on overtime. He added that CEO Hanson allowed DRPA employees to work at the stations and help in the facilities with line control and getting passengers on the trains safely during the 2018 Super Bowl.

**Social Media, Larry Davis**

There are no questions from Social Media.

**Old Business:**

**Upcoming Advance Notice on Public Events:**

CEO Hanson reported that we are nearing the completion of the new lighting system on the northside of the Ben Franklin Bridge. We are going to have a ribbon cutting on that side when it's completed. Unfortunately, the southside is most likely a few years away from completion, but the northside will be active. The DRPA will make sure that all CAC members will be invited to that event.

**Alan Becker asked why the Finance Committee Meeting was postponed for the month?**

CEO Hanson reported that it was postponed for the month because we didn't have any issues other than the financial update that CFO White prepared.

**New Business:**

Bob Melikian discussed having someone from the DRPA talk about the status of Franklin Square Station and if the committee could get a tour of the station during the summer, maybe during a lull in activity.

**Members transitioning to Emeritus Status:**

We do not have members going Emeritus status until June 2023.

**New CAC Members:**

**For the Good of the Order:**

**Next CAC Meeting:** Will be held via Zoom on March 8, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.

**Next DRPA Board Meeting:** Will be held virtually on February 15, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.