



Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes

Wednesday, March 8, 2023

Location: via: Zoom

Attendance:

New Jersey: Reggie Haynes, Alan Becker, Steve Benigno, Straso Jovanovski, Marty King, Pamela Mack-Brooks, Bruce Schwartz

Pennsylvania: Daniel Norfleet, Scott Cohen, Tyrone Wesley, Bob Melikian

Emeritus Member(s): Judy Boldurian, Larry Davis, Jeff Kessler, Dan McArdle

Potential Member(s):

DRPA/PATCO: John Hanson, CEO; Jim White, CFO; John Rink, GM; Mike Venuto, CE; Rob Finnegan, Chief of Safety and Security; Dawn Whiton, Executive Assistant

Public Member(s):

Call to Order

A motion was made to approve the March 8, 2023 minutes. The minutes were approved.

CEO, John Hanson

CEO Hanson announced to the Committee that CFO White will be retiring from the DRPA and transitioning into a consulting role. CEO Hanson will be stepping into that position as the Authority figures out how to fill the position. He stated that he preceded CFO White as CFO for a little over nine years and it is a great loss to the Authority because of his dedication, efforts, knowledge, and his ability.

Finance Update:

CFO White reported that the Authority is preparing for our annual audit. If you read my CFO Report that is in the Board Package you can get more information. In 2022, our traffic increased by 1.5 million vehicles at \$8.2M over the 2021 figure which is a growth in the revenues of

around three percent. In 2022, we are still around 90 to 92 percent of pre-Covid numbers. If you compare that against 2019, we are five million vehicles below and \$21M under in revenues. The gap seems to be closing because in 2020, our revenues dropped by around \$64M just in that one year. We have closed the gap over the last couple of years, but we still have a way to go.

CFO White reported that as we entered 2023, we saw nice numbers in January and February compared to last year. Last year, 2021, we had some inclement weather that probably impacted the numbers; however, in January and February 2023, we are around 600,000 to 700,000 vehicles (unaudited) higher than 2022. We have seen commercial vehicles go up so we could easily be around \$3-4M in toll revenues ahead of where we were in February. If you take 663,000 vehicles times the average toll, that comes to somewhere in the \$3-4M range. We also have a high General Fund which is around \$260M which helps us to fund the Capital Program and the PATCO subsidy.

On the PATCO side, CFO White reported that numbers through February show a nice improvement versus 2022 numbers. Ridership is up 611,000 and revenues are around \$2.1M, so it is a nice jump from where we were last year. Passenger revenues and ridership exceeded 40 percent of where it was year-to-date in February. We are somewhere between 48-50 percent pre-Covid numbers. We had nice numbers because of the Eagles play-offs and because of the lack of snow.

CFO White reported that, in 2022, we continue to contain our expenses and we are significantly under budget at around 7 percent, which are unaudited numbers. We also worked hard refunding two bond issues which will save the Authority around \$60M over the next number of years. Overall, 2022 was a good year for the Authority.

Scott Cohen asked if there is expected increased ridership on PATCO for St. Patrick's Day because people do not want to drink and drive?

GM Rink reported that since it is on a Friday, PATCO will be running our normal Friday service of six car trains. On Sunday, we will have extra staff and custodians working due to the St. Patrick's Parade in Philadelphia, including bar crawls.

Steve Benigno asked if all the funding was secured for the Gloucester-Camden line?

CFO White reported that the funding for the GCL is largely coming from other sources not the DRPA. CEO Hanson added that the funding is entirely from other sources. The first \$200M was received from the South Jersey Transportation Authority and we continue to look for sources of funding; however, the State of New Jersey is ultimately responsible for the funding. The DRPA works as the Project Manager and has awarded a contract for preliminary engineering design and program management office.

Steve Benigno asked if there is any type of guarantee that the Project is going to happen?

CEO Hanson stated that maybe Steve Benigno's experience is a little different, but he has never seen anyone give a guarantee. There is no written guarantee, but what we know is that we are

working with New Jersey Transit and the South Jersey Transportation Authority as collaborative partners. We have received the first \$200M and we are spending it. We just met with the team to discuss funding and we are looking for additional direction from New Jersey Transit, but the project is underway. The program management activities are happening, the preliminary design is happening, and the project manager from the program management office, as well as the staff, are co-located with us at One Port Center. Therefore, it is hard for me to believe that we would have been given the \$200M from New Jersey Transit and the South Jersey Transportation Authority would have signed off if there was not a plan or commitment to go forward, but anything is possible.

CE Venuto added that we signed a contract that was over \$57M for PMO and PED Team. We attended outreach meetings with some key stakeholders, and we are starting to identify property needs. We have a Memorandum of Understanding that is in discussion with Conrail. We are moving full steam ahead on the project.

Steve Benigno asked if there was any FTA oversight?

CE Venuto reported that we are not in the FTA process. When we did the EIS, we followed EO215 under New Jersey regulations, so we were out of the FTA process. If there was a large Federal Grant, we would have to go through the NEPA process to be eligible. We are not in the FTA process, so we do not have FTA oversight.

Steve Benigno asked when the line is up and running, who will have oversight, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)?

CE Venuto reported that the FRA will be our next Outreach. We are going to meet with the FRA and New Jersey DOT and are pursuing those meetings now to talk about the types of cars we would need with the 25-foot track centers, the temporal separation, and quiet zones.

Larry Davis stated that Steve Benigno was a little cryptic while asking his questions. Do you (Steve) have any information or reason to doubt that the GCL would not go on at this point?

Steve Benigno stated that we have a similar process going on with our King of Prussia rail extension which is mostly FTA oversight. Last month our Board approved a 60 percent design, and the project is moving.

Has bridge toll revenue returned to pre-Covid levels?

CEO Hanson reported that bridge tolls have not returned to pre-Covid levels yet; however, it looks promising. My bigger worry is if Congress fails to approve raising the debt ceiling, and the FED raises the interest rates, it could be a disaster for the economy. For a normal recession, I do not think that will hurt us but if the debt ceiling limit is not raised, I think we could be in a catastrophic situation.

Inflationary pressure on wages and especially new hires?

CEO Hanson reported that we expanded our salary ranges at the beginning of the year by about three percent, which has given us a little more latitude in making offers. We have been able to get enough qualified candidates for all the jobs that we need within our salary structure. The big exception to that is police officers. We have taken steps where we are offering signing bonuses and other things to try and increase recruitment. It did payoff with our last posting, but that is the only position where we are struggling.

He reported that we do have a few challenges with respect to staffing right now, but indications that we have been hearing from economists in both public sector and private sector is that the labor market is loosening up. There was an article in the Wall Street Journal last week that talked about the dealignment between the government and economists. They are reporting that the job market is loosening up nationally, but they are not showing it as loose as some of the private forecasters like Zip Recruiters who are indicating that the number of job seekers is rising relative to available jobs.

CE, Mike Venuto

Update on Solar Savings:

CEO Hanson reported that until we have one year's worth of data, we cannot really provide valuable information on the savings. We know that we are getting energy below what we would have paid otherwise.

CE Venuto added that we will have better information by the summer after the system has been on-line for a year. We did see particularly good energy production during the previous summer months.

Bridge and highway construction timetable updates?

CE Venuto reported that at the Betsy Ross Bridge, Allied Painting is expected to receive a Notice to Proceed in the coming weeks. We anticipate them to mobilize on site in May and construction should last through the end of 2027.

At the Ben Franklin Bridge, work is ongoing on the rehabilitation of the suspension spans and anchorages. The work is approximately 60% complete. The contract includes painting, steel repairs, and cable dehumidification on the south side of the bridge. We will have both off-peak daytime lane closures and night lane closures, as necessary.

The southside decorative lighting has been de-energized and work is underway to upgrade the southside decorative lights. Decorative lighting on the northside is on and functioning. We anticipate the southside decorative lights will be turned off by winter of 2024.

He reported that the project is currently on schedule to be completed December 2024.

Commodore Barry Bridge – What is the planned timeline on re-decking the Commodore Barry Bridge ramp entrance on the PA side?

CE Venuto reported that the DRPA has limited jurisdiction and maintenance responsibilities on the Chester, PA side of the bridge. The DRPA property ends approximately seventy feet north on Route 13 in Chester, PA. PennDOT is responsible for the section between Route 13 and I-95. Our jurisdiction does include the two on/off ramps leading into Chester but does not include the I-95 ramps or the ramps from Route 291.

As far as the Commodore Barry Bridge deck, we are including deck repairs in our upcoming Structural Steel Rehabilitation Project.

He reported that we did notify PennDOT regarding the complaints we received on the condition of the roadway between Route 13 and I-95.

See attached document showing Commodore Barry Bridge Jurisdiction.

Straso Jovanovski asked about the north walkway at the Ben Franklin Bridge.

CE Venuto reported that the plan is to have the north walkway open and in service through the end of next year and during that time the south walkway will be closed. He added that the north walkway has been improved and widened on the Camden side.

Bob Melikian asked if there were any complaints about the walkways.

CEO Hanson reported that the walkway has been widened. There was an issue with the police vehicle being able to get through because it was narrow, so we came up with a solution. It is now functional, and it has been improved.

CE Venuto added that we only switched sides on Monday and already received an e-mail complimenting the fact that we widened the walkway and made additional improvements. There was also an “ask” about the stairs on the Camden side to have a metal plate so people can walk their bikes down on the PA side to get into the tunnel.

Bob Melikian asked if there are walkways on any other bridges?

CEO Hanson reported no, not any of the DRPA bridges, and people are not permitted to walk on the highway nor are they allowed the use of a bicycle across the bridges.

GM, John Rink

PATCO update:

Triggered by an Inquirer story about SEPTA's problems with Chinese rail cars, does PATCO use the same vendor?

CE Venuto reported that the Philadelphia Inquirer article identifies the issues which SEPTA and Boston are having with work performed by China Railway Stock Corporation. PATCO's transit car overhaul was performed by Alstom Transportation, Inc. China Railway Stock Corporation was not involved in any portion of PATCO's Transit Car Overhaul as a subcontractor.

Did PATCO settle delays caused by its rail car refurbisher?

CE Venuto reported that the DRPA entered into a Settlement Agreement on July 1, 2018, with Alstom Transportation, Inc. to address issues and delays.

Did PATCO get any funding that was subject to the Buy American requirements?

CE Venuto reported that all PATCO projects which receive FTA funding are subject to Buy America requirements. Current projects include Franklin Square Stations re-opening and installation of elevators in remaining PATCO stations. The PATCO Transit car overhaul was an FTA funded project and was subject to the Buy America requirements.

Is reduced PATCO use helping finances – due to needed subsidies from bridge toll revenue?

CEO Hanson reported that reduced PATCO use does not help our finances, it hurts our finances. The PATCO costs are largely fixed costs. There is not much that goes away in terms of costs. When PATCO runs less trains or has less riders, you may use a little bit less electricity and save a little bit on train operator costs, but generally, all the same levels of maintenance need to be done including the same level of safety and planning. So, it is mostly a fixed cost operation. The variable costs are not significant.

Update on the PATCO monthly Weekend Pilot Pass.

GM Rink reported that at the end of January, PATCO sold 212 passes, to date, so what we have decided is to extend the program through May 31, 2023, with the hope of getting more additional data to analyze to see if we continue with the program permanently. We are working with our corporate communications for marketing.

Is there a vaccine mandate for new hires?

GM Rink reported that there never was a mandate for Covid vaccinations at the DRPA or PATCO. CEO Hanson added that we have never mandated the vaccinations but did offer incentives. Incentives were offered from time to time for people who received the vaccine and then received the booster, which was close to 75% of employee vaccination. We have not offered any incentives recently, but we never had a mandate.

GTFS update/Countdown Clock:

GM Rink reported that Jeff Kessler spent over an hour plus with me and Mike Williams going through his GTFS equation and software. We believe we will be in a good place. We are still working with IS to have python installed on our computers. Mike Williams tried to do the plug-in at home to upload the schedule, but we need our IS Department to get us the Python. The goal is to have it as soon as possible because we will be pushing out shortly on March 25th. We will have a new schedule where we are adding additional trains back into the AM and PM peak, so we want to have it up and running by the time the new schedule gets published. We believe this will be a good solution moving forward.

Jeff Kessler added that if GM Rink and Mike Williams would like him to take a quick look at it before it goes live on March 25th, he is happy to do so.

Larry Davis asked if the new schedule coincides with more cars being in service?

GM Rink reported that it does. He reported that last month, we were over 97% on-time performance and in February, we were also 97% on-time performance.

Larry Davis asked about the number of cars out of service at this time.

GM Rink reported that we are over seventy cars in service at this time.

Larry Davis asked if there is an update on the platform emergency call boxes and the amount that are in service.

Chief Finnegan reported that we have all but five that are running and functional. Those five are out, three in one location and two in another location which is due to construction. The emergency call boxes will be back on-line as soon as construction in that immediate area has concluded.

Larry Davis asked if there was anything in place for emergency assistance, where there are three out if a rider needs assistance?

Chief Finnegan reported that it is the emergency call boxes that are in the parking lots.

Steve Benigno asked if the video cameras at the PATCO paid areas inside the stations and platforms have video recording?

Chief Finnegan reported that all the video cameras at the PATCO paid areas inside the stations and platforms have video recordings.

Steve Benigno asked what resources do you have for the vulnerable population such as the homeless?

Chief Finnegan reported that on both sides of the river, the city of Philadelphia, as well as Camden County, partner with Human Services. As recently as last week, we had an event in

Camden for Human Services to come out and address the homeless issues. We partner with those agencies, as well as shelters, and provide hand-out cards to the unsheltered to try to get them help. As you know, there are some who are receptive and many are not, but we continue to do our best.

Social Media, Larry Davis

Larry Davis reported that there was nothing from social media.

Old Business:

Upcoming Advance Notice on Public Events:

CEO Hanson reported that we are getting close to rescheduling the Bridge Lighting/Ribbon Cutting on the northside.

New Business:

DRPA CAC Board Nominations:

Reggie Haynes was nominated for another one-year term as Chair of the CAC.

Alan Becker was nominated for another one-year term as Vice Chair of the CAC.

Pamela Mack-Brooks was nominated for a one-year term as Secretary of the CAC.

Voting will take place at the next CAC Meeting that is currently scheduled for April 19, 2023.

New CAC Members:

Bob Melikian reported that he received two applications for CAC Membership as follows:

Leah Straub who resides in Laurel Springs, NJ. Ms. Straub is an educational coordinator at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital.

Thomas Hofacker who resides in Laurel Springs, NJ. Mr. Hofacker runs the IT Help Desk at Montgomery McCracken Law Firm.

The Committee agreed to invite Leah Straub and Thomas Hofacker to the next CAC meeting.

Members transitioning to Emeritus Status:

Reggie Haynes will be transitioning to Emeritus Status next year, 2024.

Alan Becker will be transitioning to Emeritus Status in September 2024.

Daniel Norfleet will be transitioning to Emeritus Status in June 2023.

Pamela Mack-Brooks will be transitioning to Emeritus Status in September 2024.

For the Good of the Order:

Jeff Kessler reported that there is an event happening in Philadelphia next Saturday, March 18, called Transportation Camp Philly who has been involved with the group for the past 5-6 years. The event is a conference for people who are interested in transportation issues in and around the Philadelphia area and beyond. Registration is \$29.00 that includes breakfast and lunch. You can go to transportationcamp.org to register. It is an in-person event and Jeff Kessler will be in attendance.

Next CAC Meeting: Will be held via Zoom on May 10, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.

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