



## **Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes**

Wednesday, June 14, 2023

Location: via: Zoom

### **Attendance:**

**New Jersey:** Reggie Haynes, Alan Becker, Pamela Mack-Brooks, Bruce Schwartz, Strasso Jovanovski

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

**Emeritus Member(s):** John Boyle, Larry Davis, Jeff Kessler

**Potential Member(s):** Leah Straub

**DRPA/PATCO:** John Hanson, CEO; Jim White, CFO; John Rink, CE; Ed Cobbs, Chief of Police; John Santry, Police Lieutenant; Adam Jacurak, Engineering; Barbara Wagner, Executive Assistant

**Public Member(s):**

### **Call to Order**

A motion was made to approve the May 10, 2023 minutes. The minutes were approved.

### **CFO, Jim White**

#### **Finance Update (Ridership, Toll Revenue as compared to pre-COVID):**

CFO White reported that our numbers are stable, and traffic is about 92-93 percent of pre-Covid. The numbers have declined a bit from earlier this year but, essentially, they are stable, and I believe these numbers will be the new normal going forward. We forecasted the budget conservatively and currently we are above budget by a couple million dollars.

On the PATCO side, the good news is that during the past two weeks ridership has been slightly up at 50 percent of pre-Covid. We haven't seen those numbers in a while as they were running

between 46 and 49 percent, however, at 50 percent of pre-Covid, we are still experiencing a fair amount of revenue loss.

CFO White reported that being under budget helps to build up our General Fund. He presented an SS&R to the Board to create a bond pool to select Underwriters for another refunding. This will be the third refunding in the past 2 years. We will refund the remaining 2013 revenue bonds which is close to \$250M. The rates are advantageous, and from some of the proposals we've seen, we may save another \$30 to \$40M in debt service over the life of the bonds. We are in good financial shape and under budget as we typically are.

GM Rink added that two weekends ago, we ran service on the weekend for the Pride Event and our Saturday ridership rose to 70 percent. We increased service on Sunday and our ridership was 120 percent of pre-Covid, but later that week, we saw a dip in ridership when the wildfires were burning, and the air quality was poor. Since the I-95 collapse, Monday's ridership was down over 5 percent and yesterday there was a small uptick, but we haven't seen riders decide to take PATCO into the city to avoid I-95. Wednesdays are typically our highest day, and after checking our cameras today, our lots seem fuller than during the week.

**Bob Melikian asked CFO White if he saw a toll revenue spike in the last few days because of the I-95 problem?**

CFO White reported that he is still looking at data. He had the opportunity to look at Monday's numbers but didn't have the chance to look at Tuesday's.

**Scott Cohen asked if the Betsy Ross Bridge was impacted?**

CFO White reported that it has been impacted. If you're coming South, you're trying to continue on I-95 and there are one or two options. You can snake through Philadelphia or go over the Burlington Bristol Bridge. If you go over the Burlington Bristol Bridge, we lose revenue. If you go down Route 130 and want to go back over the bridge to Philadelphia, we gain some revenues through the Ben Franklin Bridge or the Betsy Ross Bridge. It's going to take more time before we can make a judgment about increased traffic on the Betsy Ross Bridge.

GM Rink added that CE Venuto advised that, on Monday and Tuesday, they suspended the lane closures on the Ben Franklin and Betsy Ross Bridge for construction. They didn't find any issues or problems, so they went back to allowing contractors take the lanes out and went back to their normal course. There were no backups, or any issues associated with the lane closures.

CFO White reported that he uses Route 130 going south and was expecting to see more traffic but didn't. He believes that we are going to see people adjusting their travel patterns for the next several months until I-95 is back to normal traffic.

GM Rink stated that the Ben Franklin Bridge was closed on Sunday due to a bike race that took place early Sunday morning.

CFO White added that the numbers for the Betsy Ross Bridge, when compared to last year at this time, are up a little bit but not by a significant amount – approximately 1,000 vehicles more. To date, CFO White reported that he's not seeing any discernable patterns on the Betsy Ross Bridge.

**Bob Melikian asked what the comparison is to last week?**

CFO White reported that the numbers are down on the Betsy Ross depending upon the day. Typically, there maybe 11K transactions a day, but we were down last week by approximately 400 vehicles and approximately 800 on the Tuesday. More than likely, it's related to the I-95 situation. We will continue to monitor the traffic to see what the impact will be on revenue.

**Bob Melikian asked if there's any chance that the CAC can receive a schedule of when the bridges are closed ahead of the scheduled date instead of hearing about it on KYW?**

GM Rink reported that Mike Williams pushes that information out on the social media channels when bridges are closed, and traffic is diverted. He will follow-up with Mike Williams.

**Engineer Department**

**Update on Solar Savings:**

GM Rink reported that he received an update on Solar savings from Engineering. They advised that the full analysis of the solar savings will be available later this summer when we have a full year of the entire system being online. As any generation of transmission costs, they're aggregated annually by the utility. However, for example, we saw a significant drop of 49 percent in the transmission costs in January for the main PATCO PSE&G account which is the third rail in New Jersey. We expect further adjustments for the generation cost in July.

So far, solar has accounted for a little better than 50 percent of the total energy consumed by all DRPA and PATCO for the months of May through September in 2022. They will continue to monitor the progress this summer. Engineering also noted that they hope to hire an energy analyst sometime this year that will be responsible for preparing comprehensive reporting on all the utilities for the DRPA and PATCO.

**Bob Melikian asked if comparing the energy cost with solar, is it less, the same, more, or don't you know?**

GM Rink reported that our bill from last month showed the total aggregate cost of what we still have to pay PSE&G and PECO, and he believes there was a reduction in what we had budgeted and what we had seen before. We're purchasing power at a set rate and the costs are associated with solar. What we've been paying to PSE&G and PECO has dropped dramatically, and that is offset by the cost of solar which is dramatically less. After a full year, we will have a greater analysis of that information.

## **GM, John Rink**

### **PATCO update:**

GM Rink reported that our on-time performance for May was 97.52 percent and for the year overall our on-time performance is at 97.59 percent. Our goal is 98 percent, so we have five more months to get to that limit, but we are providing good service to our customers. PATCO is proud to be that high in 2023 and to provide that kind of service to our customers.

### **Possibility of adding bike stair ramps to PATCO stations including Franklin Square:**

GM Rink reported that years ago, we looked at that possibility and decided not to add bike stair ramps because we felt that elevators worked best for our customers as most of those riding bikes utilized the elevators. The elevators at 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> and City Hall passed their State Certification Test and, hopefully, they will be online by the end of the month so all 13 stations will be fully wheelchair accessible.

### **Larry Davis asked if bike ramps could be incorporated at Franklin Square considering the station is being built from scratch. Is that something that could be drawn up quickly?**

GM Rink reported that they already built the structure for the stairwell. We looked at it before and the ramps stick out too far from the edge of the wall which leads to other maintenance issues. That is why we have the elevators at the stations. It's much easier for bike riders to take their bikes on the elevators; however, GM Rink stated he will pass on the request to Engineering.

**John Boyle asked if the DRPA can move the trash can that's by the bike ramps on the northside at the bottom of the bridge 20 feet back because it's too close to where you descend the steps and try to negotiate with your bicycle. The same with the Fifth Street pedestrian tunnel on the Philly side, the grates are too close to the side to negotiate a bike. The trash can is chained locked to the fence 3 feet from the base of the stairs.**

GM Rink reported that he will send that message to the Ben Franklin Bridge Director and have him address the problem.

### **GTFS/Signs – Status of updating GTFS data with ongoing track work:**

GM Rink reported that he reached out to Mike Williams but had no update on the GTFS data incorporating track work.

### **New Control Facility at Lindenwold:**

**How does the construction of this new control center overlap with the recent dispatch system upgrade?**

**Will certain features only be deployed after the new facility is constructed?**

**Is the migration of the underlying dispatch system included in the scope of the recent contract for the facility's creation, or will that need to be a different contract with the existing dispatch vendor?**

**Will the existing Center Tower facility be retained as a redundant backup facility? Does any such backup facility exist today?**

**Will the new PATCO Control Center have any provision for additional desks (i.e., should the DRPA ever operate the GCL)?**

GM Rink reported that we don't have a system or dispatch upgrade presently. Office Manager and the Scada System was installed years ago, and we will continue to use those to run our signal system and our train dispatching.

Jeff Kessler added that he recalls the Scada System being upgraded but there was an update to the existing system for the real-time data to be available on the website and other sources. **Is there anything blocking the sharing of that data on the website? Can that be included in the scope to build out the network at the new dispatch facility to allow a one-way share of the data from the dispatch system onto something that can be relayed over the internet?**

GM Rink reported that it won't be part of the building but separate since we're using the real-time information and the signal system to drive the location of the trains. It is a closed loop network that's not tied to any network to protect our signal data from ever being hacked. There are some things that we were looking at and I will report back at a future meeting.

**Jeff Kessler asked if the IT Infrastructure and network of the studio building is all going to be handled in-house by the DRPA staff and is not being done by a contractor under the scope?**

GM Rink reported that the contractor will be wiring the building and then bring back the company that installed our Scada System to perform any upgrades which was added to the contract. Once the new facility is built, the old Center Tower will become our redundant back-up facility and we'll provide a provision to exercise that building to run service on a predetermined schedule. We currently have back-up capabilities at Lindenwold. It's a small classroom where we have the entire Scada System, including phone lines, and radio transmissions. If we ever have an issue or lose our Center Tower Facility, we can run the system from Lindenwold. We do exercise that capability and our staff maintains and addresses any Scada issues used to access the system. They also perform any of the software change upgrades and anything else required at Lindenwold.

GM Rink added that if we ever take over the GCL, we didn't include any provisions for additional space in that building. The only difference is the new facility will have a conference room/war room type situation with glass windows so when issues occur on the line, we have a room adjacent to the Control Center. It's a short walk instead of getting to Camden if there's an issue.

## **Freedom Card Load Amounts:**

**Is there a reason the minimum load on a freedom Card is \$20.00? Can this be reduced to allow the rider to select the reload amount? Can the PATCO Senior Freedom Card have a lower load amount?**

GM Rink reported that the information he received from Kathy Imperatore, Director of Fare Collections, is that there are eight options for load amounts at the ATM for the Freedom Card. It goes from 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 75, 100 and 125 and then the reload automatic threshold amount is \$30.00. Thresholds are pre-authorized, meaning \$30.00 will load automatically on the card when the balance reaches \$5.00. It's almost like an EZ-Pass where it will automatically re-load once you get to a certain level. When transactions are created, they automatically go to our processor, and it takes 24 hours for that amount to settle with PATCO.

GM Rink reported that our website offers a minimum load of \$20.00 for the card. In addition, the web portal also allows you to load increments from \$20 to \$125. Prior to the Freedom Card, we didn't accept cash and the minimum load covered about four round trip rides per week. Our bank card fees run about 2.5 to 3 percent of the low transaction, and the fee also depends on which card is used as American Express charges a lot more, so we try to limit the amount of times we process a fee to keep our credit card fees low. When you purchase a paper ticket, you can use your credit card or debit card and pay a fee for each of those transactions. That is what determines the minimum low and what it was based on.

Bob Melikian stated that GoDaddy, a domain search company, bought a credit card processing company and offers credit card processing for a fixed flat rate of 2.3 percent on all credit cards including Amex, Visa, Mastercard, and Discover. Maybe Mr. White should investigate that as the fees really add up to a lot of money.

GM Rink stated that, pre-Covid, in 2019, we spent \$521K in credit card fees which comes out of our operating budget. In 2022, we spent over \$307K in credit card fees.

**Larry Davis asked if PATCO looked into other credit card processing companies or banking that could lower those fees? When was the last time that was explored? When I was in business, I used Stripe that has a fixed rate, and it doesn't matter what card is used. There are other options out there to be explored for fixed rate processing fees such as PayPal that could lower credit card processing fees.**

Jeff Kessler stated that there are companies that take a fixed fee of \$5K upfront and cover all credit card transaction fees with no percentage fees. He added that his father is now a Senior Citizen Freedom Card holder and when he loaded money onto the card, it was a \$20.00 minimum for a Senior Card. As a rider who uses PATCO infrequently, the 26 trips that's required to be loaded on the card seems excessive. **Can that be lowered, and can the value on buttons be increased in increments rather than predetermined values?**

GM Rink reported that Seniors can go to the Freedom Center where they can use cash or credit to add a minimum of \$10.00. We don't have the ability to change the fare options for that type of card.

GM Rink stated that he heard from Kathy Imperatore and the credit card fees are comprised of a processor fee, an interchange fee, and an assessment fee, and they are wired through our bank. The interchange fee and the assessment fee or percentages of the sale amount is based on the type of credit card or debit card used. PATCO has an interchange plus pricing model which is the least expensive pricing option. It's a card network because the grace amount is between the rate and other factors, including the card network Visa rates which are different. It depends upon the type of card used and how the card is processed. An in-person transaction at a TVM is less expensive, so our pricing structure consists of the interchange card rate by the credit card network, plus a defined markup or the fee that our company charges. We recently started the process with Cubic to change our whole system. We'll be adding Google, Apple Wallet, and you'll be able to use your cell phones so the whole structure of our fare system will be changing over the next two to three years.

Larry Davis stated that it's a perfect time to explore different credit card processing companies to see if there are lower rates out there. When you add up all the fees, it's still 3 percent based on people using credit card companies that gives them rewards, mileage, and money back. It's being paid out of that small fee they are charging and we're starting to see it in the restaurant business where they are charging patrons a credit card fee for adding a tip. GM Rink added that some of the restaurants he goes to adds 3.5 or 3.8 percent if you don't pay cash and they're definitely passing the fee along to the customer.

**Scott Cohen asked if there are any considerations for using a Cash App like Venmo or PayPal for customers to send money? Bob Melikian stated that PayPal has fees.**

GM Rink stated that he will discuss the possibility with PATCO's Collection Director to see if that will be a possibility in the future when we change out our entire system.

**Alan Becker asked GM Rink if he talked to other agencies or fare collectors like SEPTA or the MTA New Jersey Transit if they're looking at something different?**

GM Rink reported that Kathy Imperatore is a part of a group where she talks to SEPTA people often about SEPTA's fare card and other various agencies. SEPTA is replacing their system and we were told that CUBIC is going after that project. He stated that there are not many systems like CUBIC, and we are basing our new system off changes made in Minneapolis and Miami.

GM Rink added that CUBIC is also a defense contractor doing a lot of work on systems for the Defense Department. There's a rumor that they are going to split their defense work and fare collection. They are presently finishing work on the New York City system.

Bruce Schwartz stated that he had a problem with E-Z Pass. In January, he noticed that he was being billed by his license plate rather than his transponder. He figured it was due to the transponder being old and possibly stopped working. He reached out to New Jersey E-Z Pass, and they sent out two new transponders but put the wrong transponder into the system. **He asked if he should contact DRPA's Customer Service or E-Z Pass Customer Service?**

CFO White requested that Bruce Schwartz send him the information and he will check with our E-Z Pass group to see how we can help.

**John Boyle asked if the West Headhouse will reopen?**

GM Rink reported that considering the current ridership, we have no plans to re-open the station at this time. For PATCO, it is a 24/7 public safety dilemma, and will take a significant number of resources to address those issues at that facility.

John Boyle added that safety crossing at the Broadway intersection is poorly controlled with New Jersey Transit Police putting up barricades between the PATCO station and the New Jersey Transit bus terminal. He doesn't know how anybody in a wheelchair negotiates that, as he had to walk into the street. He is also waiting for the elevator to open at City Hall because he's had it with the Walter Rand station.

**Jeff Kessler stated that he was reading through the Procurement RFP for the Lindenwold Yard and noticed that there was a stipulation for a preference for vendors who had employees with a Transport Worker Identification Card (TWIC). He asked if we require all DRPA and/or PATCO employees to acquire a TWIC?**

GM Rink reported that we don't require a TWIC for our employees. However, any contractor that comes onsite, a TWIC is required. It comes through our Homeland Security; however, we did hear that TSA is proposing a new rule that new hires will have a different level of check when they're hired. Presently, we have certain background checks when hired, but TSA is proposing new changes, especially for safety sensitive positions.

Jeff Kessler added, for those who do not know what a TWIC card is, the TSA administers a card that is like a pre-check for trusted travelers who work on Transportation Infrastructure assets. Scott Cohen added that he has a TWIC card. He stated that after 911, TWIC was required for transportation workers to get on critical infrastructures, Port Authorities, and oil well plants unescorted. A person is required to work for a company that does business that would qualify a person for a TWIC card.

**Alan Becker asked about the bridge on Evesham Road that was hit. Will the bridge be fixed relatively soon?**

GM Rink reported that Engineering is using the on-call construction contract to do the work. The limits were raised at last month's Board meeting in May. The vendor has to be a specialized contractor and the price to do those repairs are being finalized. All costs associated with the repairs will be passed onto the insurance company who insured the truck.

**Alan Becker asked if adding a holiday to the monthly pass could be done and is the monthly pass going to be permanent?**

GM Rink reported that we are considering offering 3 day passes around the 4<sup>th</sup> of July to attract more riders. So far, our data shows that it's more our current riders who are purchasing the monthly pass which works more to their benefit than for new people. More than 50 percent of the people are current riders who are taking advantage of that benefit, so it didn't attract as many people as we thought.

**Social Media, Larry Davis**

**Are there any plans for increased Sunday or weekend services?**

GM Rink reported that PATCO's typical Sunday headway is 30 minutes, and depending on the events that are happening and the construction that is going on, it may be changed.

**What's the plan when Camden County begins the reconstruction of the White Horse Road Bridge? Do you anticipate any service interruptions?**

GM Rink reported that Engineering has been working with the County. The work being performed will be over our tracks, so it will have to take place during the overnight hours or on weekends. Nothing will impact our weekday ridership, but on nights and weekends we will work with them to provide the outages and hold trains when they're installing the beams and working on the bridge over the tracks.

**Old Business:**

**Upcoming Advance Notice on Public Events:**

GM Rink reported that our Community Relations Group will be out at the Woodcrest Station and 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Station next Wednesday, June 21, to give out 100 VIP WaWa Welcome America tickets. It is in the process of being finalized.

**New Business:**

**DRPA CAC Board Nominations:**

**Members transitioning to Emeritus Status:**

Bruce Schwartz and Daniel Norfleet will be moving to Emeritus Status at the end of June 2023.

**New CAC members:**

Bob Melikian introduced Leah Straub to the CAC members. Leah Straub stated that she found the meeting very interesting, but not exactly what she thought. She has experience on the Board of Education in her town and Camden County Educational Commission. She is no longer on any of those committees as she served her time of nine years. She stated that this is something new and

interesting and she would like to stay on. She lives in Laurel Springs, NJ. She works at Jefferson Hospital and takes the train to work every day getting off at the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> station.

**For the Good of the Order:**

**Next CAC Meeting:** Will be held on August 9, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. – Zoom Web Conference

**Next DRPA Board Meeting:** Will be held on June 14, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. – Zoom Web Conference