



## **Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes**

Wednesday, August 9, 2023

Location: via: Zoom

### **Attendance:**

**New Jersey:** Reggie Haynes, Alan Becker, Pamela Mack-Brooks, Judy Boldurian, Steve Benigno, Ben Saracco, Bruce Schwartz

**Pennsylvania:** Scott Cohen, Bob Melikian

**Emeritus Member(s):** John Boyle, Dan McArdle

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

**DRPA/PATCO:** John Hanson, CEO; Jim White, CFO; John Rink, GM, Mike Venuto, CE; Barbara Wagner, Executive Assistant

**Public Member(s):**

### **Call to Order**

A motion was made to approve the June 14, 2023 minutes. The minutes were approved.

### **CEO, John Hanson**

#### **Will DRPA form a partnership with America250PA?**

CEO Hanson reported that we have no plans to form a partnership; however, if they reach out to us, we'll consider their proposition. The two celebrations (250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United States and 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge) that are occurring in 2026 are unrelated and we don't see any synergy in combining the two.

**What are the official hours of Customer Service? (Inquiry was sent at 4:30 p.m. and received a standard message, "We are here 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and will answer your message the next business day.")**

CEO Hanson reported that our Customer Service hours are 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. At One Port Center, we typically get back to people by the next business day. At PATCO, there are Customer Service Associates there 24/7 who answer the calls related to PATCO. The types of issues received at One Port Center are not the types of immediate issues like the PATCO Customer Service Associates handle at Center Tower.

Judy Boldurian stated that she sent a message to Customer Service at One Port Center on July 31, 2023 and is still awaiting a response. She stated that the elevators and escalators have been down for the past 3 days out of 8 at the Collingswood Station. There are 2 disabled people she rides with, 1 has cerebral palsy, but not sure what the other's disability is. Judy stated that it's very hard for him to climb steps, so he's been getting up extra early because he fears the escalator being down. He was told PATCO is waiting on a part for the escalator, and it's been almost one month now.

GM Rink reported that PATCO has been waiting for a part for the elevator but wasn't aware that there was an escalator issue there. Judy Boldurian stated the escalator was down on the July 31<sup>st</sup> when she sent the first message, again on August 1<sup>st</sup>, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, and again this morning, August 9<sup>th</sup>.

CEO Hanson stated that there are two new employees in OPC's Customer Service, and he will find out why there hasn't been a response, to date. These messages are frequently forwarded to me, CAO Brown, GM Rink, CE Venuto, and COO Hicks and it's hard for me to believe they only missed yours, but I will find out what happened.

CEO Hanson further stated that, unfortunately, the supply chain is still not fully back to pre-COVID so we are at their mercy, but we do have a deal with SEPTA, and they are usually very responsive.

**Scott Cohen asked what could be done to minimize the parts shortage. Do you still use a just-in-time format and are you properly stocking parts now?**

CEO Hanson stated that PATCO has never used the "just in time" format because we've always stocked the key parts. The problem occurs when there are too many parts that become obsolete that have to be trashed.

**Are there any positive savings with the Solar Panel Project?**

CEO Hanson reported that Engineering is still working to determine the savings. Hopefully, we will be able to provide the committee with that information in the very near future. The good news is that we do know it's costing less; however, we cannot say how much less at this time. The Authority did not pay for the solar infrastructure, and we've received more than half of the power being generated in a clean renewable way.

### **Are staffing levels acceptable at DRPA?**

CEO Hanson reported that staffing levels at the DRPA and PATCO are acceptable. However, we have a no remote work policy where we lost some people, and it has hampered recruitment. We are down in almost every department – Engineering, Bridge Ops, Finance, Contract Administration, and PATCO. As a result, we have been making creative use of having our retired employees work as consultants, in addition to outsourcing work. I just selected two new employees at PATCO Customer Service. In critical places, we need a Senior Engineer, and Accounting Manager and we are very close to hiring for those positions. We are also in the process of interviewing four applicants for the CFO position. CFO White will be with us until the end of this year and will continue working in a consulting position.

### **Bob Melikian asked about the Police Department.**

CEO Hanson reported that the Police Department is a little low. We have a 160 member police force and we're down about 20. It's not optimal and does limit our ability to run special details and because of the issues at PATCO, our Command Staff, Captains, and Lieutenants typically are not able to earn overtime because they are in managerial functions. CEO Hanson stated that he implemented a new program where they're able to earn limited overtime strictly for patrolling the PATCO line.

### **Are there any planned live evening DRPA Board Meetings that the CAC could attend?**

CEO Hanson reported none at this time.

### **CFO, Jim White**

#### **Finance Update:**

CFO White reported that both PATCO and the DRPA are ahead of last year, but we've settled into a range that hasn't been moving for several months. We were fortunate in the early part of the year as our numbers were up in January and February because we had a mild winter. Through May, we were up around \$5M versus last year which is a 4 percent increase. Traffic is up one million vehicles, so that's up 5 percent; however, in June and July those numbers went down a little.

CFO White reported on the PATCO side, we are up over 400,000 riders through June. Our revenues are up \$1M, so that is a positive trend; however, we're still holding at the 47-50 percent range. Every now and then, the numbers move to 50 percent, but for the most part we are still in the 46-50 percent range.

GM Rink reported that we see an uptick in ridership when concerts and certain events are going on in the city, but we remain at the 47-48 percent.

## **Finances compared to pre-COVID:**

CFO White reported that on the DRPA side, we were up 94 percent of pre-COVID in the January to March timeframe and it's now hovering around 90-92 percent. While we are seeing audited revenue numbers better than last year (up \$5M through May, audited), we are seeing a lull in traffic during the last few months.

CFO White also reported that we finalized our Annual Report which is available on the DRPA Website, and it reflects the good year that we had in 2022.

**Scott Cohen asked how we fare as a percentage compared to the Philadelphia Market because that's the only fair way with other metropolitan areas like New York City, Baltimore. Is volume up at the same percentages, is everyone at the same level, or other metropolitan areas doing better or worse?**

CFO White reported that there may be some data that he hasn't seen in the last six months. GM Rink added that transit agencies, other than New York which has been in the 70 percent range with their Subway, are in the 50-60 percent range of pre-COVID. New Jersey Transit and SEPTA are in the mid-50 range. Other than New York City, all other transit agencies are the same.

Steve Benigno added that SEPTA Regional Rails are in the 50 percent range. The buses and El are in the 70 percent range. We're probably in average of just over 60 percent of the ridership pre-COVID.

**CFO White asked Mr. Benigno if he has seen any trends more recently moving in an upward position as some of the Philadelphia companies have brought employees back to the office?**

Steve Benigno stated that the problem is Comcast wants their employees back in the office in September for a minimum of 4 days per week. He spoke to a Comcast employee last week and she's on hold to come back because Comcast's office does not have enough room in the building to bring everyone back. Accordingly, they are going to bring back people by departments and in phases. He stated that SEPTA has been using the key card to track the number of passengers and rides. He noted that SEPTA has the same number of passengers compared to pre-COVID, but they are not using the system as frequently – more like 3 days per week. SEPTA has seen an uptick on the weekends for events in the city, but overall, ridership is over 60 percent of pre-COVID.

GM Rink reported that Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday are generally the higher days. Monday and Friday lags 5-10 percent behind. Wednesday is our heaviest ridership day and that is up in the mid-50 percent range. Additionally, depending upon the weather and what's going on in the city, we could be anywhere from 50 to 70-75 percent on a weekend.

Steve Benigno added that SEPTA is seeing an increase by a few percentage points each year, so they are, most likely, five years away from where they were pre-COVID.

CFO White reported that PATCO's numbers are better this year than they were last year by \$1M.

CEO Hanson stated that he also attributes the low ridership numbers to the problems we've seen in the city of Philadelphia related to crime. He believes that people are becoming more reluctant to use transit because of the conditions on the concourses. PATCO has been fortunate being a much smaller system and easier to manage in many more ways.

**Bob Melikian asked CFO White if he is concerned or is this the new normal?**

CFO White stated that it's hard to say but it does appear to be the new normal. What helped us during the last two and a half years is the receipt of \$84M in Federal Transit Grants. They were operating grants, not capital related, that helped us to minimize the subsidy over the past two and a half years, and those funds ran out earlier this year. CFO White stated that he is concerned because the deficit, annually, is around \$40M. Fortunately, we are getting decent growth on the traffic side that offsets some of the subsidy. Interest income is up because interest rates are up and that helps offset some of the subsidy costs, as well.

CEO Hanson added that it's obviously not a positive situation to lose approximately \$15M in PATCO revenue; however, we will be proposing in the not-too-distant future to the Board, a bridge toll and PATCO fare increase. We are in our 13<sup>th</sup> year of not raising bridge tolls and fares to ride PATCO and it's time for that to happen. We also have some positive things happening to our debt service in 2026-27 which is going to make it possible for us to maintain the system.

CEO Hanson also added that in terms of major service changes, we may make changes to the overnight schedule to give us better access for capital programs which could save us a significant amount of money. Additionally, we may have to cut the Night Owl Service and some other services like increasing headways in the very late hours to gain revenue advantages. Trying to do significant improvements is hard, but our system, including the bridges, is almost like utility infrastructure. It is critical to the quality and economic life in this region to have a strong and resilient transportation system which includes mass transit like PATCO and SEPTA. Fortunately, because of the work that CFO White has done on the finance side and closely working with engineering and other departments to manage capital spending, we have not been living hand to mouth the way the Authority was doing years ago.

**Bob Melikian asked what the toll and fare increases will be?**

CEO Hanson stated that it's to be determined as the Authority is not there yet. The Board is aware that we have been discussing toll and fare increases, but it has not been taken to the Board for approval.

**Bond Refinancing:**

CFO White reported that the DRPA will be looking to refinance in the fourth quarter and begin the process in the September/October timeframe.

## **CE, Mike Venuto**

### **Engineer Department Update:**

#### **Status of Bridge and Rail Update:**

CE Venuto reported that the suspension span rehabilitation at the Ben Franklin Bridge is the largest project the DRPA has ever undertaken and it's going well. The work is ongoing for the dehumidification of the northside, and we've re-opened that walkway. We are now working on the southside.

CE Venuto reported that the north pedestrian walkway is complete and open, but the southside is closed. The decorative lighting on the northside is also complete, but the southside is down. The southside will be completed by the end of next year. We are also working on structural repairs on both sides of the bridge which includes the rocker links. If you are looking at the bridge, we have two different containments spots where we are painting the structure itself.

#### **Bob Melikian asked if there are different contractors on different projects or is it all one contractor?**

CE Venuto reported that it is one large project that consists of five parts. Due to the way some of the projects lined up and the necessity to coordinate lane closures and track outages, we combined it into one mega project. We have one General Contractor, Skanska, who oversees the whole project, and they have multiple subcontractors, including some structural work, painting, decorative lighting, and electrical work.

#### **Construction updates on the Betsy Ross Bridge:**

CE Venuto reported that at the Betsy Ross Bridge, we are in the final phase of the painting project. The New Jersey side is complete, and we are now working on the Pennsylvania side. The containment will be installed by Allied Construction in the next week or so, then the blasting will begin along with the three-coat paint system. Allied is expected to be working on the bridge for the next few years.

CE Venuto reported that PennDOT's work affecting the Betsy Ross Bridge is nearing completion with several of their projects showing substantial completion within the next few weeks. He reported that we have CM Remington Vernick there when the PennDOT Betsy Ross Bridge I-95 work intersects with our property.

#### **Updates on the Scofflaws?**

CFO Hanson reported that we had a meeting with Chief Cobbs and his Command Staff where they are working with the Legal Department. It remains a pernicious problem because people have re-prioritized the necessity of obeying laws since the pandemic. We have seen petty crime increase and, unfortunately, people have realized there are not enough police officers to stop the speeding and the fare evaders at the toll gates. We are trying to catch-up as we continue to add

to our Police Department. We are taking steps to single out the largest problems in those areas and we're going to be acting in the coming months.

**During a bridge closure for a fundraiser, how does it affect revenue, if at all?**

CEO Hanson reported that it's negligible because it happens early on Sunday mornings when there is not much traffic and people cross somewhere else. He reported that we are not adding any new fundraisers, which is the decision made by the Board some years ago, but not stopping the ones that we've historically done, so those will continue.

**Alan Becker asked if the DRPA keeps flammables under our bridges?**

CE Venuto reported that the DRPA does not keep flammables underneath our bridges as we are very protective of what is kept under there. At times, there are contractors who have areas where they will store materials. When we did the track rehab project across the Ben Franklin Bridge, the contractor stored old timber under the bridge until it was hauled away. We have precautions in place for fuel where it must be in a double-lined container and a containment around it in case of spills. We try to minimize anything placed under the bridges.

**GM, John Rink**

**PATCO update:**

**Franklin Square Station update:**

CE Venuto reported that we are moving along and scheduled for Spring of 2024 for substantial completion. We are still coming out of the ground and have put pictures of our progress out on social media. We are starting to see some of the concrete walls coming up from underground – the elevator shafts, new stairways, and headhouse support foundations. We are also building two exit stairwells along 6<sup>th</sup> Street. The contractor is doing a good job and we are happy with the progress that we have seen so far.

**GCL update:**

CE Venuto reported that in October of last year, we signed a contract for the program management office/preliminary engineering design with a joint venture with STV and AECOM. The joint venture is called South Jersey Transportation Partners. We have been working hard to progress the project. During the EIS Phase, we have a general idea of the alignment, but we are now taking a detailed look at all the intersections, safety and crossings, and the car selection. We are meeting with local stakeholders to inform them of the work status and to get their input. We are also working very closely with Conrail and trying to get a Memorandum of Understanding so we can begin getting their documentation. We reached out to potential car manufacturers and, ultimately, we are expecting to have close to a 30 percent design to put out for a design/build/operate/maintain and, possibly, finance contracts in another two years. Presently, we have a 10 percent preliminary engineering design due in October and they're on schedule to make that deliverable.

## **Bob Melikian asked if last year's Infrastructure Bill gave fund for any of the capital improvements?**

CE Venuto reported that when CFO White gave his financial update, he mentioned that we received significantly more grant funding this year than we've had in the past. We have a dedicated Grants Department, and we supplement that with any outside Consultants that we may need to help write the project need and justification for it. We have been successful in getting additional grant money. For instance, the project we are doing on the Walt Whitman Bridge New Jersey Corridor, we received \$3M a few years ago. We received over \$12M for the PATCO Franklin Square project, so we continue to submit grants for many of our projects. There are a few large build grants that are highly competitive across the country. We applied twice for a grant for the Commodore Barry Bridge because we know, in the future, we have a big project to re-deck the bridge. The barrier wall will also need to be replaced along with some bridge structural modifications. We have an active program, and we continue to go after any money that we believe we are qualified to receive. Engineering meets with the Grants Department on a regular basis with a list of projects to identify any opportunity. Many years ago, we would receive grant money and find a project to use those funds. Now, we take a different approach by finding opportunities for projects that we have on our books. When an opportunity comes up, we find a project that fits and apply for a grant to supplement the funding.

## **Feasibility of extending the hours at City Hall station on concert nights:**

CEO Hanson reported that he doesn't see a reason to extend hours at City Hall.

GM Rink added that each year, we plan out and decide what are the largest concerts that will attract the most Riders. We bring in extra staff for the stations and have trains on standby to move the people out quickly. The police will keep the stations opened, if needed, past the 12:00 a.m. closing if there are still crowds coming back from concerts. Most of the crowds dissipate around 11:30 p.m. If needed; however, there are people on hand to keep the station open until all those leaving a concert are back on the train.

Ben Saracco complimented Engineering on the City Hall elevators. He and others, with bikes and scooters, including older people, have been using the elevators and they are fantastic, they work great, and make the station much better.

Ben Saracco added that he noticed some of the signage has not been updated on the platforms to include stations having an elevator. Additionally, the lower-level elevator at City Hall in Camden is already make a squeaking noise that's loud.

CEO Hanson stated that we will get back to the contractor. GM Rink added, that as part of the Franklin Square project, all route maps are being replaced because of the Franklin Square addition. All the maps will be changed to indicate what PATCO stations are ADA accessible and have an elevator, and we are also including those route maps on the cars.

CEO Hanson thanked Judy Boldurian and Ben Saracco for informing the Chiefs about problems seen at the Stations. He stated that we need to hear it, and that is why we are exceeding the ADA

requirements. We were ADA compliant, but we felt it wasn't enough. We wanted an elevator in every station, but it doesn't do a bit of good if they're not working.

CEO Hanson added that he spoke to a woman who works at the Union League who sent him a message through LinkedIn about concerns she has about PATCO. CEO Hanson scheduled a call with her the following morning at 10:00 a.m. and spoke for a long time about some of the problems but most of them involved the City of Philadelphia. It's important for me to hear from this committee and the passengers who ride the trains.

**Leah Straub asked how often the elevators are cleaned? She stated that she uses PATCO, occasionally, and notices vomit or feces at the elevator at 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> and Locust Streets.**

GM Rink reported that the elevators are cleaned everyday which is part of the daily cleaning. Unfortunately, we clean them and shortly thereafter they're dirty. When that happens, staff is called, and they return to clean it again.

CE Venuto added there are two elevators at City Hall and 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> and Locust – one from ground level to the Concourse and one from the Concourse to the platform level. He will look at the punchlist to see what is still being worked on and work with the contractor to figure out where the squeaking noise is coming from. Both elevators have been inspected and all our active stations are now ADA accessible. Once we complete Franklin Square, we're going to have elevators and an escalator there, as well.

GM Rink reported that he called Center Tower and they have called the elevator company to look at the elevator that squeaks.

CE Venuto added that there has been a Press Release out that we are single tracking Broadway to Ferry Avenue where we are doing rail replacement. This project would have required outages for 27 weekends starting Friday night through Monday morning. It's a collaborate effort between the contractor offering valued engineering ideas and talking to our in-house Engineers, and speaking to GM Rink and his staff about how we can run the trains and what headway we can do and how to manage that. Ultimately, we came up with a plan that was presented to CEO Hanson for his support. We wound up taking single track outages for eight weeks to get all the work done over the summer when our ridership is traditionally lower as opposed to having weekends outages through the end of the year. We finished the first phase within four weeks by taking it out after July 4<sup>th</sup>. We got one track back in service and switched over on August 5<sup>th</sup> to track two and we are on schedule to be done before Labor Day.

CE Venuto reported that while we had the track shut down full time, PATCO was able to take advantage to advance other work that was in our capital budget.

**Leah Straub stated that a few Sundays ago, her 22-year-old daughter was on the train and there was a male passenger on the train across from her pleasuring himself. Her daughter was very upset when she came home. She prefers to take the train rather than drive to the city. There was also another incident where a child sitting a few seats away said to his mother, "look what I found." It was a hypodermic needle. Ms. Straub asked what**

**procedure or protocol should a passenger take when they see a man pleasuring himself on the train?**

GM Rink reported that there are numerous options by either approaching the train operator to report the incident who has direct contact with dispatch and the police. The trains have a passenger emergency intercom, and the stations also have red phones and call boxes throughout the system. In addition, there is an App that could be added to a phone that has direct contact with our police department. GM Rink advised that when reports are submitted, we immediately act. CEO Hanson stated that 911 can also be called which would go to our police department.

Leah Straub stated that the cell service isn't great at some of the Stations. CEO Hanson stated that going directly to the train operator and informing what is happening can be radioed immediately to dispatch.

GM Rink added that from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. weekdays, we have people on social media who report what is happening on the trains. The trains are also cleaned daily, and we do get reports of people leaving needles behind. We either call the police to remove them, our custodians who are trained to handle the waste, or we have the train operator close out or b-zone the car which means we don't allow passengers on the train until we can clean up the area.

GM Rink e-mailed PATCO's Safety Brochure to Barbara Wagner to circulate to the CAC Members which has all the information relative to traveling on PATCO. Barbara Wagner e-mailed the Safety Brochure to all CAC Members when the meeting ended.

**Explain what the calculation is used for the on-time performance:**

GM Rink reported that PATCO uses five minutes from the scheduled departure time. Anything five minutes or later is considered late. Five minutes late is the Transit Standard and for other comparisons, New Jersey Transit uses six minutes, DelMarVa Atlantic uses five, MTA New York uses five, and SEPTA uses six. When we calculate our on-time performance, any train arriving five minutes or later is considered late.

**Social Media, Larry Davis**

**Old Business:**

**Upcoming Advance Notice on Public Events:** None

**New Business:**

**DRPA CAC Board Nominations:**

**Members transitioning to Emeritus Status:**

Bruce Schwartz and Daniel Norfleet were the last members to transition to Emeritus Status in June 2023.

Ben Saracco will be the next member to transition to Emeritus Status in March of 2024.

Dan McArdle will transition from Emeritus Status to an Active Member in September 2023.

Reggie Haynes and Alan Becker will transition to Emeritus Status in 2024 which will make for an interesting election year.

Reggie Haynes reported to the committee that they have 10 voting board members, 6 from New Jersey and 4 from Pennsylvania. Currently, the committee has more members on Emeritus Status than voting members.

**New CAC members:**

Bob Melikian introduced Leah Straub to the CAC members. Leah Straub stated that 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. She feels that PATCO is much easier than driving into work where she spends \$32 to park, \$5.00 to cross the bridge, plus gas money. It's nothing but traffic and aggravation, so PATCO is a breeze. She has been taking PATCO for a little over five years.

Bob Melikian reported that we have a new candidate who lives in New Jersey and works for Penn Neurology. She was not available for tonight's meeting but will attend the September 13<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**For the Good of the Order:**

**Next CAC Meeting:** Will be held on September 13, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. – Zoom Web Conference

**Next DRPA Board Meeting:** Will be held on August 16, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. – Zoom Web Conference