



## **Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes**

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

Location: via: Zoom

### **Attendance:**

**New Jersey:** Reggie Haynes, Alan Becker, Pamela Mack-Brooks, Judy Boldurian, Strasso Jovanovski

**Pennsylvania:** Scott Cohen, Bob Melikian

**Emeritus Member(s):** Steve Benigno, Larry Davis, Dan McArdle, Bruce Schwartz, Tyrone Wesley

**Potential Member(s):** Dr. Grace Shen Kimbaris

**DRPA/PATCO:** John Hanson, CEO; John Rink, GM; Mike Venuto, CE; Rob Finnegan, CSS; Dawn Whiton, Executive Assistant

**Public Member(s):**

### **Call to Order**

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

### **CEO, John Hanson**

#### **Status and Financial update:**

#### **Has bridge revenue increased back to pre-COVID counts?**

CEO Hanson reported that bridge revenue is still just over 90 percent pre-COVID. PATCO ridership and revenues are easing above 50 percent, but probably only in the 52 percent level. We have seen no meaningful changes for a long time and planning as if these numbers are going to be the new normal.

## **CE, Mike Venuto**

CE Venuto reported that the Authority saved \$1,954,873M in solar generation from January to September. During this time, the Authority used approximately 46 million kilowatt hours and we paid approximately \$6M for the power usage. Of the 46-million-kilowatt hours, approximately 20.6 million kilowatt hours were generated from solar. If we paid regular utility rates vs. the discounted rate received for solar, the savings is approximately \$1.9M. The average utility rate is approximately .17 cents or 0.173, our average solar rate is .078. However, these numbers cannot be used as an average generation because later this year we will not be producing the same percentage of solar to power usage because solar production is higher in the summer.

## **Bridge and Highway Update:**

### **Has there been any legislation dealing with Toll Scofflaws?**

CEO Hanson reported that there is no new legislation dealing with toll scofflaws, but we continue to work on the issue and have not implemented any new programs.

### **Is there a timeline schedule available for all the many ongoing projects scheduled – including bridges?**

CE Venuto shared a screen that displays an overview of projects scheduled. Engineering uses this schedule to make sure there is no overlap of projects at any one facility. The Authority also looks at lane outages, PATCO track outages, staff allocation, and budgeting when scheduling capital projects. When looking at the 2024 Capital Budget for next year, you will see how this aligns with the way we lay out the budget.

### **Scott Cohen asked if there are any major projects that will be going on during the America 250 and the Philadelphia World Cup that will obstruct bridge lanes or PATCO during that time?**

CE Venuto reported that we are paying close attention to the World Cup as well as the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ben Franklin Bridge/America 250 from multiple standpoints that includes minimizing any disruption on the roadways and PATCO.

He added that the decorative lighting system on the Ben Franklin Bridge will be lit during that time and there is a masonry rehabilitation project plan in place prior to those events.

CEO Hanson added that we are trying to get a lot of the projects completed before the events, but the work currently being done on the Ben Franklin Bridge is the largest job that has ever been undertaken by the DRPA and we expect to have most of the components of that project substantially complete by then.

### **Will Murphy's mandate for the AC Expressway to go electronic tolling affect the DRPA?**

CEO Hanson reported that it does not impact the DRPA. The Murphy Administration has influence on the DRPA through its appointment of Commissioners and could veto items; however, the DRPA is in a significantly different position as I have outlined many times before. We have no plans to and will not go to electronic tolling in the near and intermediate term unless there is a dramatic change with our finances.

**Besides the 50% Senior E-Z Pass discount, are there any other discounts in place?**

CEO Hanson reported that besides the Senior Citizen Discount, there is also a frequent user discount that is \$1.00 off the toll for frequent users.

**Betsy Ross Bridge construction update.**

CE Venuto reported that painting continues on the PA side. It is a long-range project and work will continue in the winter months as temperatures allow. The concrete and steel work is ongoing and will also continue weather dependent.

**Any safety concerns for PATCO or the Ben Franklin Bridge with the recent protests at 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station?**

CEO Hanson reported that the Authority always has safety concerns at the Ben Franklin Bridge and PATCO. He stated that the protests don't usually affect us. The Authority has the best Police Force in the area and are extremely well trained. We also have a Command Staff that includes Police Chief, Ed Cobb and Chief Safety and Security Officer, Rob Finnegan as well as Captains Gorman, Dougherty, and all the Lieutenants.

**GM, John Rink**

**PATCO Update:**

**How has inflation impacted bridge and PATCO operations?**

CEO Hanson reported that we're trying to develop a reasonable percentage increase in the new budgeting. There have been a lot of cost increases and we'll let you know the results when we finish the budget process.

**Has PATCO ridership increased since Comcast mandated a 4 day a week office attendance?**

CEO Hanson stated that PATCO ridership has not increased with Comcast mandating 4 days a week in the office. We have seen ridership increase from 50 to 53 percent, but not in a way that makes a big difference on revenues or how we manage the organization.

**Was there a significant bump up in PATCO ridership for the Phillies play-off games?**

GM Rink reported that the numbers on Phillies ridership for the play-off games were forwarded by email from Barb Wagner on November 7<sup>th</sup> to all committee members.

**Update on Gloucester to Camden Line (design, construction phasing, environmental issues, and real estate agreements).**

CE Venuto reported that John Hanson made a presentation to the Southern New Jersey Development Council on November 2<sup>nd</sup> to give a status overview. The preliminary engineering design began in 2022 and in October of this year, we completed and submitted the survey work, station renderings, traffic data, updated ridership data, along with a detailed alignment of what we had in the EIS, which is 10 percent of the project. By October 2024, 30 percent design of the project will include concept plans, technical provisions, how we will phase through Conrail, vehicle procurement, and the design build documents.

CE Venuto reported that meetings with elected officials are ongoing, including municipal and county engineers. The team is meeting with town planners to understand the utilities and for us to find out what is important to each town as we want to fit into the fabric of each neighborhood.

CE Venuto reported that we updated the DRPA website where you can find all the station renderings. The website is more user friendly and easier to navigate where you can find more updated information.

CE Venuto also reported that we post updated information on LinkedIn/GCL Page every few weeks. He encouraged the committee to follow the GCL project on social media.

Alan Becker stated that he had an opportunity to visit the new site for the GCL. He thinks it's great, the information is there, and he hopes it stays up.

CEO Hanson stated that it's going to stay up and we're going to continue with updates and improve it throughout the project.

**Homeless individuals on the trains in the morning.**

CEO Hanson reported that PATCO has the homeless issue under control.

GM Rink added that the Chief and Captain continue to address the issues as they arise. They routinely conduct an inspection of each train every morning and overnight. They treat the homeless in a lawful manner, as they still have the right to travel if they purchase a valid ticket. However, if there are homeless people who are sheltering and don't have a valid ticket they are removed.

## **Cleanliness of the PATCO trains.**

Judy Boldurian stated that she raised the question as it seems to be getting worse instead of better. In a couple of the cars, the same spots are there and the floors underneath the windows are sticky and dirty.

GM Rink reported that the cars are taken in each night for cleaning, and certain cars are exterior washed. We also have a custodian at the Lindenwold platform from 7:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. when the trains come into the station. The custodian goes through the trains to pick up trash and clean spills. Cars are B Zones and brought in and there are programs where the floors are stripped and buffed, seats and window wiped down, and the stainless is also cleaned.

CEO Hanson informed Judy Boldurian that the complaint will be passed to John Barrett with a suggestion to look at what's happening and to have someone in supervision to inspect the condition of the cars.

## **Franklin Square update:**

CE Venuto reported that he, CEO Hanson, GM Rink, and Mike Williams had an interview with the website 42 Freeway earlier this week at Franklin Square. The interview should be published on the website soon. During the interview, we gave a tour of Franklin Square and answered questions as we went along. The project is approximately 72 percent complete. It should be fully complete and opened by the summer/fall of 2024. We also discussed the bird friendly glass and showed a mockup and pictures which will be included in the article.

Regarding construction, CE Venuto reported that the foundation walls and concrete stairs are completed, the escalators have been installed, the steel framing for the building is erected, the concrete block walls are being poured, and the electrical and plumbing work has started.

## **When are the PATCO entrance/exits in Philly due for a sanding and fresh coat of paint?**

Scott Cohen stated that he submitted this question. The Locust Street entrances throughout look tired, there are rust spots and it's not looking as PATCO usually does. They look like they need a sanding and fresh coat of paint and lettering with signs of PATCO.

GM Rink reported that the entrance/exits are painted routinely. The entrance/exits at 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> were painted when the elevator was installed. On Monday, he went to 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> for an inspection and the majority seemed in good shape. Some of the stations are scheduled to be repainted in the Spring 2024. We continue to cover over and clean up the graffiti which is a constant battle for PATCO. GM Rink stated that he took pictures and gave them to PATCO's facilities group to have it programmed.

**Issue with special schedule on October 29, the trains weren't following the schedule but followed the Saturday schedule.**

GM Rink reported that on the night of October 28<sup>th</sup> between the hours of 12:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m., corporate communications published the wrong schedule.

**Larry Davis asked if it would affect Chairwoman Cherelle Parker's standing as DRPA Chair after winning Mayor of Philadelphia?**

CEO Hanson stated that it does not affect her standing as the DRPA Chair.

**Social Media, Larry Davis**

**I'd like to know a solution for the Fifth Street Tunnel bike lane to not remove the flex posts for the winter this year.**

CE Venuto stated that we take the flex posts down to allow for snow plowing. He will talk to the Bridge Director to discuss leaving the flex posts intact during the winter months.

Scott Cohen suggested putting a sign in place to let the public know the posts will be removed during the winter months to allow for snow plowing as it is a safety concern.

CEO Hanson added that we have to look into how short we can make the duration. The posts are a safety enhancement and there is an absolute requirement to keep that roadway free of snow for bikes and cars.

**Will PATCO consider actively looking for developers to partner with for projects at its stations, particularly Haddon Township.**

CEO Hanson stated that is not a function of what the DRPA/PATCO does, it's a function for the Municipality but we do support it when it's necessary.

**Bringing back express trains.**

GM Rink reported that if we had express trains that means our ridership is back to pre-COVID status, but our current status doesn't require us to run special express trains.

**Have there been any discussions with the City of Philadelphia about opening the Walnut Locust Concourse?**

CEO Hanson reported that the closing of the Walnut Locust Concourse was the City and SEPTA's solution to the unsheltered population to keep them out of the areas that are being used by the commuters.

**Old Business:**

**Upcoming Advance Notice on Public Events:**

GM Rink reported that Santa will be returning to PATCO on Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>. CEO Hanson and GM Rink will be Santa on the train. Announcements will be coming out shortly

from Mike Williams' group. There will be 3 trains at 9:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and noon. Bruce Schwartz offered to volunteer as Santa, if needed.

### **New Business:**

#### **General CAC Administration**

CEO Hanson asked Chairman Reggie Haynes if he was contacted by Mike Williams about the Spotlight for recruiting. He stated that there were some suggestions that have come up and is advancing them for the committee to consider.

CEO Hanson raised a few By-Laws issues concerning Emeritus Status and doing away with Emeritus Status so that people who wish to continue serving can remain. When the CAC began, we envisioned more people wanting to participate and it was a way to allow members who already served to continue their involvement, but it now appears we could use their continued involvement.

CEO Hanson also stated that the By-Laws state that at least six meetings are required per year and suggested that it might help with recruiting and attendance if there were less meetings than the scheduled ten per year.

Reggie Haynes added that the CAC meets ten times per year taking off in July for summer break and December for the holiday season.

#### **Active member count:**

Reggie Haynes reported there are no members transitioning to Emeritus at this time. Ben Saracco will be transitioning to Emeritus status in March. Alan Becker and Pamela Mack-Brooks will be transitioning to Emeritus status in September 2024. Reggie Haynes will transition in December 2024.

Individuals who can re-apply as active members are Larry Davis and Dan McArdle. Steve Benigno can re-apply for active membership in December 2023. Bruce Schwartz can re-apply in June 2024.

Reggie Haynes stated the committee will discuss making changes to the CAC Bylaws at the next meeting in January 2024.

Reggie Haynes also discussed the Spotlight Campaign, a recruiting idea by Mike Williams having each member of the committee featured for 3-4 weeks on social media, as well as on the PATCO trains and the message boards. Mike Williams shared a sample using a member's photographs and write up showcasing what the committee does. He stated that once he has a template from Mike Williams, he will forward it to each member.

Bob Melikian introduced Grace Karis. Grace Karis stated that she moved to Haddonfield 4 years ago after living in Philadelphia for almost 8 years. She currently works in the city at

Pennsylvania Hospital. She walks to either the Westmont Station or Haddonfield Station and, at times, drives across the bridge. She noticed the ad for the CAC and would like to get more involved in representing the community by either bringing questions to or helping disseminate information.

**For the Good of the Order:**

**Next CAC Meeting:** Will be held on January 10, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. – Zoom Web Conference

**Next DRPA Board Meeting:** Will be held on November 15, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. – Zoom Web Conference