

**REGULAR BOARD MEETING  
REGIONAL METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY OF OMAHA  
2222 Cuming Street  
Omaha, Nebraska, 68102  
January 23, 2025  
8:30 a.m.**

**MINUTES**

The Regional Metropolitan Transit Authority of Omaha Board met on Tuesday, January 23, 2025, at 8:30 a.m., in person at the Authority's Administration Building, 2222 Cuming Street, Omaha, Nebraska 68102, and virtually. Notice was published in the Omaha Daily Record on January 17, 2025, in advance of the meeting. For the benefit of the public in attendance, a copy of the Open Meetings Law is posted in the meeting room and the Agenda is published on the display in the facility lobby. The following were in attendance at the meeting:

**Authority Board:**

Mr. Curt Simon, Board Chair  
Mr. Daniel Padilla, Vice Chair  
Mr. Josh Corrigan  
Ms. Clarice Dombeck  
Ms. Yanira Garcia  
Mr. Tim Lonergan  
Mr. Cornelius Williams

**Authority Staff:**

L. Cencic, CEO/Executive Director  
K. Pendland, Deputy Executive Officer  
D. Grant, Human Capital, and Talent Development Director  
E. Simpson, Legal Director (Absent)  
W. Clingman, Finance Director  
J. Willoughby, Senior Project Manager  
A. Johnson, Civil Rights & Inclusion Director  
J. Beverage, Maintenance Director (Absent)  
N. Ebat, Sr. Manager of Communications & Community Relations  
S. Perry, Executive Administrator & Board Secretary

**Others Present:**

Other Metro staff  
Members of the public

Metro connects people, places, and opportunities through quality transit services.

**Agenda Item #1 Call to Order at 8:32 am.**

Notice of the Regular Meeting was published in the Omaha Daily Record on January 17, 2025. For the benefit of the public in attendance, a copy of the Open Meetings Law is posted in the meeting room and the Agenda is published on display in the facility lobby and online at ometro.com.

**Agenda Item #2 Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting:**

The first item of business is the approval of minutes from previous meetings.

- a. Regular Meeting: December 19, 2024

**Motioned by Lonergan; Seconded by Dombeck**

**ROLL CALL: UNANIMOUS (Williams Absent), MOTION CARRIES**

- b. Organizational Meeting: January 9, 2025

**Motioned by Lonergan; Seconded by Corrigan**

**ROLL CALL: UNANIMOUS (Williams Absent), MOTION CARRIES**

**Agenda Item #3 General Public Comment Period**

*This is an opportunity for members of the audience to be heard regarding topics related to the Regional Metropolitan Transit Authority of Omaha, not on the agenda for a maximum of 2 minutes.*

Lee Myers, 105 South 9th Street - Mr. Myers expressed he lives near a great place for a bus. It's where the ORBT and several routes turn around i.e. layover point. Mr. Myers' comment was regarding microtransit. He wanted to ask Metro to investigate the geography and demographic considerations of our region and have that drive what's best for the City of Omaha. He also requested that the Coordinated Public Transit Committee and Transportation Technical Advisory Committee review the plan. He commended Metro for looking at it.

**Agenda Item #4 Administrative Report**

(L. Cencic)

Ms. Cencic reported that she would provide an overview of ridership and some of the projects happening at Metro.

Beginning with ridership, in 2024 Metro carried over 3.2 million trips which is about 57,000 more than in 2023, just shy of a 1.8% increase. Ms. Cencic informed the Board that it was noteworthy to mention that ridership was back to pre-COVID numbers, something many other transit agencies cannot say. About 77% of transit agencies are below pre-COVID ridership. Metro is very proud of this accomplishment.

Metro has carried shy of 600,000 riders on ORBT in 2024 which is almost 50,000 more than the prior year. This is about an 8.9% increase.

One of the biggest areas of growth in terms of ridership is the K-12 Rides Free Program which involves students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. This program began in May of 2021. Ms. Cencic reported that in December of 2024, Metro carried over 48,000 students. For the school year, the program has carried 369,000. Overall, since the program began, Metro carried 1.46 million student trips. From 2023 to 2024, the K-12 Rides Free Program saw an increase of 20.7% in ridership.

Ms. Cencic provided an update on Metro's Leadership Academy (MLA), an internally developed program aimed at fostering leadership skills and enhancing transit-specific expertise. Now in its second year, MLA features a competitive application process that ensures diversity across

departments and staff levels. The program is taught by Metro staff and professors from UNO and the University of Pacific's Westgate Center. This year's curriculum is evenly split between leadership training—such as conflict resolution and strategic thinking—and transit-focused topics that highlight the interconnection of Metro's departments. Each cohort concludes with a capstone project that integrates the year's lessons. The MLA 2025 cohort includes fifteen participants from seven Metro departments.

Next, Ms. Cencic updated the Board on the Sustainability Facilities Upgrade Project currently being implemented. The project was awarded by the Board in April of 2024. The extent of the project involves replacing outdated skylights with solar panels and new roofing, redoing the employee parking lot with new pavement, security cameras, and stormwater sewage replacement. The project is also to add air conditioning to the maintenance shop, contractors are currently working on this as well as the installation of a chiller. At this time 41 electrical panels throughout the building have been installed and the replacement of the fire alarm and the fire suppression system will be completed by the end of January.

Ms. Cencic was pleased to announce that 26 new buses have been ordered, which were Board approved and awarded in June of 2024. A typical timeline for receiving a bus is approximately two years from the time it is ordered. Staff work weekly with New Flyer on details and options of the new buses, and they are slated to arrive in the fall/winter of 2025. Many of Metro's current buses have exceeded their useful life so the 26 buses are crucial to providing reliable transportation.

Lastly, Ms. Cencic reported on microtransit, this is a potential three-year pilot project that would be funded philanthropically and operated through a third-party vendor. Last year, staff released a request for proposals in search of the vendor and this month partnering with One Omaha to help extend Metro's reach to the community conducted four public meetings in various areas of the city including one virtually. The pilot project explores servicing the North, South, and West Omaha zones. Three of the in-person meetings had approximately 100 participants and the one virtual had approximately fifty participating. Spanish translation was provided at the four meetings and American Sign Language at two of the public meetings. Of the attendees, Metro received 60 comments regarding the project, which were very positive overall. The comment period will remain available until February 3<sup>rd</sup>. After the public comment period, Metro will complete the finalization of the zones and service characteristics used for inclusion in the contract to select a vendor. Metro will bring these items to the Board in a future meeting, both the Title VI Analysis and contract for approval.

Ms. Cencic concluded her report and opened the floor to the Board for questions.

Board members posed questions regarding the parking lot completion date, whether MLA was an accredited course, the useful life of the buses, the cost associated with the newly ordered buses, and microtransit.

Ms. Cencic responded that the parking lot should be completed by mid-year 2025, weather dependent. She explained that the MLA cohorts are not accredited courses, however, completion of the program will be taken into consideration when a promotion opportunity presents itself counting towards previous management experience. She further provided information regarding current and newly ordered buses as they relate to useful life requirements, stating that FTA historically required twelve years of useful life before a vehicle can be replaced. Staff is currently researching to confirm that the useful life of buses has been changed to fourteen years for new buses. Two-thirds of Metro's

fleet has met or exceeded its useful life, and the cost of the new buses will be 18.7 million. Half of the buses will be diesel and half CNG. Metro currently has 113 buses. In an ideal world, Metro would like to work towards ordering 10-12 new buses per year so that large quantities of buses do not hit their useful life at the same time. The reason for the large order of 26 buses was due to a discretionary grant supporting the larger order. Because there were service reductions and challenges during COVID, there were some logistics to work through with FTA before the new buses could be ordered. The local match is 20% for the buses.

Lastly, she addressed the question regarding microtransit and what feedback is being received. Ms. Cencic explained that since the comment period does not end until February 3<sup>rd</sup>, public feedback is still being collected and will then need to be analyzed. Once completed a full summary will be provided in the equity analysis that will be presented to the Board.

### **Agenda Item #5 Administrative Reports**

#### **Administration/Human Resources**

(D. Grant)

Mr. Grant introduced himself to the Board as the Director of Human Capital and Talent Development, bringing nearly 20 years of experience in Human Resources and three years with Metro. He provided an update on Metro's recruiting efforts and staffing details, noting that the report reflects data from the previous month.

In December, Metro welcomed twelve new hires and promoted one staff member, Eric Koebel, from Scheduling Supervisor to Sr. Operations Manager. Also, ten candidates were identified, nine of those bus operators and one mechanic.

Mr. Simon asked if Metro conducts its own CDL license.

Mr. Grant informed the Board that Metro does conduct their own CDL training which helps with recruitment. This allows for training hours and educates operators about Metro's bus routes. Ms. Cencic informed the Board that all training is conducted in-house by Metro's outstanding team of trainers, with an eight-week training period. Metro currently partners with the DMV for CDL testing but is actively working to certify staff to conduct third-party testing in-house.

#### **Programs/Operation**

(K. Pendland)

Mr. Pendland, Deputy Executive Officer (DEO) for Metro introduced himself to the Board and explained that his key responsibilities include providing leadership for transit operations and administration with a focus on customer service, reliability, and cost-effectiveness. Mr. Pendland's duties include overseeing the tracking and analysis of performance metrics and leading the collaboration with department heads to utilize this data to help improve customer experience and overall service operations.

Mr. Pendland introduced to the Board the Director of Civil Rights & Inclusion, Alicia Johnson, to expound on the Board reports that are found in the monthly packet that she oversees each month with details and context since this is a new Board of Directors for Metro.

Dr. Alicia Johnson provides the customer service and paratransit report data. Her responsibilities are the oversight of Metro's customer service and the overall regulatory compliance of Metro's paratransit service.

In the Customer Service report, Dr. Johnson informed the Board that Metro utilizes a third-party contractor to facilitate the call center. There are two main queues – one for questions, comments, or concerns related to fixed route bus service and one for MOBY trip scheduling, canceling, or status checks and service questions, comments, or concerns. Currently, the customer service representatives are trained and assigned to facilitate both queues. A dedicated queue is available for Spanish-speaking customers, and the center also utilizes language line services for additional support.

Dr. Johnson reported that in December 2024, there were nearly 12,000 calls answered between both the bus service and MOBY queues. Often MOBY calls take more time to handle due to the trip reservation process. MOBY calls on hold are primarily due to confirming a pickup time with dispatch for a client's will-call trip. MOBY allows an open return trip for medical appointments every day of the week. The client calls when they are ready, and they are assigned to an operator's schedule.

Dr. Johnson went on to explain the logged feedback and inquiries chart in the Board packet that Metro receives through the call center, Metro's online comment form, social media, and email. Specific to complaints, it is important to note that not all complaints received are valid. There are many times when the complaint provides an opportunity for educating the public about Metro policies and procedures. The total number of logged inquiries for December 2024 was 175. Metro staff work hard to address all concerns and feedback and meet monthly to review complaints from the prior month.

The next report that's provided in the Board packet that Dr. Johnson discussed was the MOBY Eligibility and Operations Report. MOBY is Metro's ADA-complementary paratransit service that operates alongside the fixed-route system. MOBY service is available to those who have a disability and who, because of that disability, have functional limitations that prevent them from being able to use fixed route service some or all the time. The MOBY service area surrounds a fixed route for three-fourths of a mile on either side and the terminus of the route. The service area hours are the same as the coordinating route hours. Dr. Johnson went on to point out that it is important to remember Metro cannot operate a fixed-route service without also operating a paratransit service – the two services are interdependent.

Dr. Johnson explained that to book a MOBY trip through Metro's call center, individuals must apply for service, which does require a professional's verification of the functional limitations related to the applicant's disability. As of December 31, 2024, there were 1,965 eligible MOBY riders. The number of applications processed each month varies and 66 applications were processed in December, which is one of the slower months. For the entire year of 2024, 746 total applications were processed. The majority of the applications were approved.

Each MOBY trip costs \$2.50. In December 2024, there were 7,856 trips scheduled, and 7,463 trips completed. Metro is obligated to fulfill 100% of the MOBY trips requested. Operators are staffed according to scheduled trips. All MOBY trips must be scheduled no later than 4:30 p.m. prior to the day of travel.

Lastly, Dr. Johnson reported that in 2024, MOBY had 7,711 more passenger trips scheduled than in 2023. The number of scheduled trips has been trending upward, and it is anticipated that the demand for MOBY service will continue to increase in 2025.

Dr. Johnson concluded her portion of the operations report and opened the floor to the Board for questions.

The Board requested more information regarding wait vs hold times, how MOBY is booked for trips and serviced if in a wheelchair, how the application process is handled, and eligibility.

Dr. Johnson explained that wait time is when the call enters the queue, and the hold time is when they are speaking with the operator and placed on hold. MOBY is booked only by contacting the call center. Customer service is handled by a third-party contractor called Transdev, also known as IntelliRide. Applications are reviewed by a Metro contracted nurse, once approved the customer is eligible for three years. At the end of the three years, a recertification is necessary. Metro will notify the client 90 days in advance prior to the end of their eligibility. If an application is denied and being appealed the contracted nurse and a Medical Review Officer will review.

Regarding customers riding MOBY, it is a curb-to-curb paratransit service. Operators may assist customers to the door if needed, and a personal care attendant may accompany the customer during their trip free of charge.

Mr. Pendland next invited Mr. Evan Schweitz to discuss the information included in the revenue hours and passenger trip data.

Mr. Schweitz introduced himself to the Board. He is the Senior Manager of the Planning and Scheduling department and has been with Metro since 2010.

Planning/Scheduling is responsible for system design where routes run and how often, and location of stops, shelters, and stations. This also includes the exploration of the microtransit pilot program. His department consists of a team of five that recommend and implement the above-mentioned changes. This requires both quantitative and qualitative reviews.

A quantitative review involves a demographic analysis of community changes over time and statistics of system performance such as ridership and productivity. This review allows this department to see what routes are performing well and where adjustments are needed to improve the overall service. A qualitative review would include tracking upcoming developments, relocation of major destinations, categorizing and reviewing customer and community suggestions, and hosting staff input sessions every other month. The staff input sessions are to provide any suggestions or feedback they hear while serving the community.

Planning and Scheduling also must monitor agency capacity involving budget, operator staffing, and availability of vehicles. Then all information gathered is distilled into recommended service adjustments and a new schedule for drivers which is called a bid, pick, or signup. The bid provides an opportunity for Metro's operators to pursue a change of shift and route. This is typically done 3 times per year in winter, spring, and fall. The next one is on Feb 9<sup>th</sup>, with no major changes planned but it is being held for operator feedback.

The Board asked about the union's involvement in the bids. Mr. Schweitz informed the Board that the unions are free to attend staff input sessions to provide suggestions or feedback. He further stated that all scheduling changes comply with the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Next, Mr. Schweitz presented an overview of the board reports and noted that month-to-month differences depend on the number of weekdays and weekends. Beginning with the Fixed-Route Revenue Hours report. The report shows the time when the bus is in service. Scheduled service, without any interruptions or scheduled service not fulfilled, has a direct impact on ridership. Running more hours on a route should lead to usage by more people. There was a drop in 2020 due to COVID-19 and added service in 2023 but had to adjust based on constraints in 2024 (-3.6%).

The Fixed- Route Passenger Trips report each time a rider boards a bus so if a person takes 2 buses to reach their destination, it may be 1 person but 2 unlinked passenger trips. There was a drop of 35% in 2020, but as of 2024 trips are almost fully recovered, with more stability than many other transit agencies across the country. Recovery varies by route; express ridership is still about 73% lower than in 2019 and ORBT ridership is 48% higher than Route 2 in 2019.

Lastly, there is the Fixed-Route Passengers per Revenue Hour report that uses industry standards to measure the productivity of service. 'On average, for every one hour, Metro buses ran in December, 11.1 riders were picked up (average of all hours of the day, all days of the week). Productivity drops in the winter and summer months but rises in the spring and fall this can be correlated with area school schedules. Data shows that 2024 has the highest productivity Metro has seen in recent years exceeding 2019. This report indicates that, although Metro is operating less service than in 2019, it continues to serve a comparable number of riders. This demonstrates that buses are being strategically deployed and effectively adapting to evolving travel patterns.

Mr. Schweitz concluded his portion of the operations report and opened the floor to the Board for questions.

The Board asked about the many different pass programs, how many are currently with Metro, and how they are funded. The Board also enquired whether they could obtain a report specific to the district they serve.

Mr. Schweitz, Ms. Cencic, and Mr. Clingman advised that Metro partners pass programs with all the universities in the region including UNO, Metro Community College, and Creighton. Metro also has employee pass programs with First National Bank, Methodist, and other employers. Typically, for employee pass programs, the employer contacts Metro to participate, with payment usually made in a lump sum. Ms. Cencic explained that the payment structure varies by company—some opt for a lump sum payment, while others pay on a per-ride basis.

Mr. Schweitz informed the Board that a report specific to districts would be difficult to generate as most routes run through multiple districts. His department can provide a route-specific report, and the Board can then check which routes run through or in their districts and obtain data in that regard.

Mr. Pendland, returning to the podium, went on to report on the On-Time Performance (OTP) and Service Interruption (SIR) reports.

Mr. Pendland reported that on-time performance is affected by many factors including traffic, road construction, route planning, number of passengers boarding, and whether there are passengers that need assistance when boarding.

As the 2024 OTP system-wide report shows, since midway through the year Mr. Pendland shared that his primary focus has been to reduce the early departures. He conveyed that there are many reasons for arriving and departing late; however, departing early is more within Metro's control. Mr. Pendland's established goals for on-time performance are less than 5% early departures, and to work towards 80% on-time departures. He further explained that being late has many factors that are outside of the bus operators' control, and rushing to make up time can create consequences where passengers are passed up or situations where less-than-safe driving could occur. As such late departures are more acceptable. The data in the OTP report is especially important for Mr. Schweitz's department as it can provide details on where adjustments may need to be made in the route planning and scheduling process. Mr. Pendland also noted that some of the ORBT and express routes are not represented in the Board report which has limited data for on-time performance, and mostly creates anomalous data, which can lead to misinterpretation of the overall information picture.

To close, Mr. Pendland discussed SIRs. Service interruptions represent service hours that were not able to run due to weather, vehicle availability, road calls, operator availability, emergencies that temporarily close access, etc. The SIR report shows monthly totals for 2024, presents a combination of vehicle availability and operator availability that have had an impact on Metro's ability to provide service. Vehicle availability issues were a priority this last year. Metro's Maintenance team was able to identify options to allow more vehicles on the road. The amount of work that the Maintenance team has put into making this a reality is amazing and the results of their efforts are shown in this report. Mr. Pendland went on to report that operator availability is improving, with slight increases in November and December that were expected due to the flu season and holidays falling midweek, which resulted in higher-than-normal operator callouts. Operator availability will remain a primary focus for 2025 as it is difficult to increase service to the levels that are envisioned without having the operators available to fill those runs. He lastly noted that the service interruptions in December represent less than 4% of the total revenue hours.

Mr. Pendland concluded his report and opened the floor to the Board for any additional questions.

The Board asked how time is calculated when developing a route, if service interruptions are comparable to industry standards and if this information is entered into the National Transit Database.

Staff explained that for a route there are various factors considered to help predict distance travel, speed limit number of stops in between, and historical data usually looking at the speed at rush hour. It was also confirmed that service interruptions are up to industry standards and entered into the National Transit Database (NTD). NTD is part of the oversight for the Federal Transit Agency or FTA. It helps inform for allocation of formula funds.

## **Communications**

(N. Ebat)

Ms. Ebat introduced herself as Senior Manager of Communications and Community Relations. She has been with Metro for two and half years with a background in the broadcast journalism industry for more than 15 years in various roles. She is a lifelong transit user who has not owned a vehicle for over 10 years living in several different sized cities.

Ms. Ebat began by explaining various social media and communications channels that are used by Metro and her department to educate and share information. Metro uses the three main social media platforms which are Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram. She further explained the number of followers and likes for each platform. Twitter/X is used for up-to-the-minute information that needs to be shared. Many news stations follow Metro on this platform to help with sharing information with the public.



Ometro.com is used to educate the public about the bus system, bus schedules, events, and weather alerts. The site also has an interactive map. The MyRide OMA app is a platform where riders can plan their trips from point of origin to destination. This allows riders to track their buses and know the time for the next bus. Riders can get an alert sent to their emails regarding information on their choice of route using the MyRide app and can sign up for text or email updates.

Regarding the potential pilot Microtransit program various new pieces have been broadcast on various news airings, Mr. Cencic has participated in some interviews and of course public engagement events at locations to speak to the public regarding this pilot program.

The staff have also participated in events at the schools, one being Central. This is an opportunity to share about the K-12 Rides Free Program and answer questions regarding using the bus system.

Ms. Ebat walked the Board through the steps that her department took when a weather event was expected.

Ms. Ebat concluded her report and opened the floor to the Board for questions.

The Board asked about data regarding riders using UMO (a contactless account-based payment system for bus rides) and for events to be shared for them to possibly attend.

Ms. Ebat currently does not have the UMO data available but plans to review it to assist with the determination of resources. The Communications department is a team of two and Ms. Cencic explained that per Mr. Grant's report, there is a plan to add an additional member to her team.

Ms. Ebat advised the Board that she would share what various events are upcoming during her monthly report which can also be located on the ometro.com website.

**Agenda Item #6 Board Chair Report**

(C. Simon)

During the Board Chair report, Mr. Simon invited attending staff members to stand and introduce themselves. Several directors and staff participated.

**Agenda Item #7 Date, Time, and Place of Next Board Meeting**

Thursday, February 27, 2025, at 8:30 a.m.

Authority's Administrative Building

**Agenda Item # 8 Adjournment at 9:51 am**

**Motioned by Dombeck; Seconded by Lonergan**

**ROLL CALL: UNANIMOUS, MOTION CARRIES**