

Meeting Minutes – July 22, 2021

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
TRANSIT AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF OMAHA
2222 Cuming Street
Omaha, Nebraska, 68102
July 22, 2021
MINUTES

The Transit Authority of the City of Omaha Board met in Regular Session on Thursday, July 22, 2021 at 8:30 a.m., in person at the Authority’s Administration Building, 2222 Cuming Street, Omaha, Nebraska 68102, and virtually due to COVID-19. Notice was given in advance of the meeting by publication in the Omaha World Herald. 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 persons were in attendance at the meeting:

Authority Board:

Ms. Amy Haase, Chair
Mr. Othello Meadows, Vice Chair
Mr. Jay Lund
Mr. Daniel Lawse
Ms. Julia Plucker

Authority Staff:

L. Cencic, CEO/Executive Director
I. Maldonado, Deputy Executive Officer
E. Simpson, Legal/Human Resource Director (Absent)
C. Distefano, Finance Director
L. Barritt, Marketing Director
K. Pendland, IT Director
J. Willoughby, Senior Project Manager (Absent)
J. Rumery, Grant Administrator (Absent)

Others Present:

Other Metro staff
Member of the public

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Agenda Item #1: Call to order

Ms. Haase called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. For the benefit of the public in attendance, a copy of the Open Meetings Law has been posted in the meeting room and is available online at ometro.com, and the Agenda is published on the display in the facility lobby.

Agenda Item #2: Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings

Ms. Haase entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the Board Meeting on June 24, 2021.

Motion by Ms. Plucker; Second by Mr. Lund

ROLL CALL:

MR. LAWSE ABSTAINED; MOTION CARRIES.

Agenda Item #3a: Administrative Reports

(L. Cencic for E. Simpson)

- Metro continues to monitor and provide guidance to employees concerning COVID-19.
- Metro continues to recruit for a number of positions, but applications continue to remain low compared to historic averages. Metro has 1 new bus operator who began training the week of July 12, 2021.
- Metro has received the Certificate of Self-Insurance Renewal from the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles.

Agenda Item # 3b: Administrative Reports

(I. Maldonado)

Mr. Maldonado thanked the Board and Metro for the opportunity to serve the transit system and the Omaha community. The recent storm cost several days of blackouts in our area resulting in the reliance on our power generator system. Due to the age of the power generator system, Metro experienced a few temporary generator failures. However, through the active engagement of our staff, we were always able to get our generator working and managed to prevent interruption of services. We have scheduled a representative from Cummins to service our power generator and are working on procedures to ensure the maintenance personal are familiar with the maintenance and activation of our power generator system.

Our team is working on the revamping of processes and procedures to handle weather-related and unexpected emergencies that can potentially disrupt services for extended periods. Our team has also gathered all obsolete hazardous materials from the Maintenance shop and set them aside for appropriate disposal. We anticipate having an agency that specializes in the disposal of hazardous materials to be here next week and dispose of all items accordingly. Our maintenance team will continue to clean up all shop areas. We have placed proper hazardous material collection pallets throughout the maintenance shop and will continue to clean up the shop to ensure continuous compliance of safety and OSHA regulations.

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Since Mr. Maldonado's arrival 3 weeks ago, he has been pleasantly engaged in all aspects of Operations, has visited the North Omaha Transit Center, the Westroad Transit Center, and the transfer location area in Aksarben. He has also ridden on a few routes, including ORBT. He has reviewed our Transit Asset Management Plan and has been working with Maintenance Supervisors to update many aspects of Metro's maintenance program such as inspection forms as well as Maintenance processes and procedures. Mr. Maldonado is also working with Maintenance Supervisor personnel and our consultant to evaluate staffing schedules for Maintenance personnel. He has reviewed the Public Transit Agency Plan, the Safety Plan, and is now reviewing the emergency reporting processes and the way staff captures that information related to safety hazards and how our teams mitigate safety issues. Mr. Maldonado has scheduled an Operation Manager Supervisory meeting that will take place every Friday for the teams to discuss operational issues, share information, and collaborate on projects that cross into various operational sections. He has also met with the Union to discuss various topics.

During the last 2 days, Mr. Maldonado attended the Nebraska Association of Transportation Providers 2021 Managers Meeting where he learned of various transit initiatives and met many other transportation providers. After only a few weeks here, he is still learning a number of procedures and things Metro is doing, as well as some of the programs and plans. This has been a great learning opportunity and Mr. Maldonado looks forward to identifying where he can potentially assist the agency to continue to improve processes and procedures to provide better services to the community.

Agenda Item # 3c: Administrative Reports

(J. Rose)

Metro continued to gain followers on social media across all three platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) in the month of June. This month, we saw some great traction in a few updates to the Metro system, including our policy change announcement regarding e-bikes on buses and CWS post-game service extension.

We have experienced an uptick in in-person outreach this month – we attended/presented at a Young Professionals event with the Chamber, coordinated how to ride events with the Latino Center of the Midlands and a code camp at the Highlander, and had a table at the Omaha Freedom Festival. We also hosted three Bike + Ride training sessions around the e-bike policy.

We've been working closely with ConnectGO and the Greater Omaha Chamber around earned media, most recently with coverage in the Omaha World Herald on their 10+M Strategy, of which we play a significant role. Our team has been engaging groups with updates to MetroNEXT, with close to 50 meetings with agencies, organizations, elected officials, stakeholders, and more since the beginning of June.

Agenda Item # 3d: Administrative Reports

(E. Schweitz)

Metro has been working feverishly over the last few months on MetroNEXT, which started at the beginning of this year. This project is a way for Metro to apply the recommendations of ConnectGO and explore what that looks like for our agency. The timeline includes 4 phases of outreach. We have wrapped up the first round and have been working behind the scenes preparing for Round 2, although those meetings have not been scheduled yet. The work we have been doing lately is specific to identifying potential future ORBT lines. We have used

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this project to develop the core aspects of ORBT that we want to retain for any future line. These aspects include branding, frequency, span of service, all-door boarding, and corridor length, which can guide us wherever we apply future ORBT service. Potential for bus lanes, transit signal priority, station amenities, station spacing, and pedestrian access are components of ORBT that will vary based on the corridor we select. These factors fed into the work that we did based on the 15 corridors that were recommended as a result of Round 1 public engagement. We have worked over the past few months to go through each of these 15 corridors and screen them for the various criteria. The initial screening process used number of people and jobs served, access to essential services, walkability and the built environment, areas of persistent poverty, and minority population concentration. These 5 factors fed into identifying the top 50% of proposed routes to advance to the next phase that includes a more in-depth screening, which looked at other components such as TSP potential, bus lane potential, travel time savings, and ridership and travel patterns on current routes, to make sure that any ORBT-type of improvement would truly upgrade the experience for people and the way they are using the route and service today. We also looked at cost effectiveness and how it connects with the rest of the transit network. Other components were development potential, right-of-way constraints to ensure that we can have as many full-sized stations as possible, and impacts to on-street parking.

After that technical work was completed, we took those results to the community. At this point, we have had 50 meetings with different organizations and individuals specific to these local areas to get feedback on our findings so far and to ask if we are on the right track. The feedback we have received so far has helped us shape and refine our direction. We have heard a lot of positive feedback about where we are headed. All of this culminated in the selection of 24th Street as our next corridor for further study. The proposed route goes from the North Omaha Transit Center at 30th and Ames, then 24th Street from Ames all the way to Q St, and then terminates at our MCC South Transit Center. Anyone familiar with 24th Street knows there are many organizations and groups that are along that corridor, and we are very excited about the collaboration potential and what this will mean for the community. There is also an alternative section from Dodge to the MCC Fort Campus along 30th Street so with our corridor study, we are planning to include that in our study area knowing there are some constraints on 24th Street, especially when it comes to bus lane potential and other factors, so we want to keep that alternative on the table as we study the corridor. As we proceed through that process, the scope will narrow and we will hone in on our final preferred corridor.

After securing funding and completing procurement for the study, Metro intends to undertake a feasibility assessment and review of alternatives. That will be followed by an environmental and NEPA review, at which point we will make a final selection of the preferred corridor, and then finally about 6 months of preliminary engineering. By the time this study concludes, we will be at about 30% design and ready to go into the next step which would be final design and construction.

Discussion was had.

Agenda Item #4: Request Approval of the 2022 Calendar Year Preliminary Budget (C. Distefano)

Staff is requesting approval of the 2022 preliminary budget in the amount of \$36,988,848. A public hearing was held on Tuesday, July 20, 2021 at 8:00 A.M. at Metro's Administrative Building. The preliminary budget includes an increase of \$3,690,419 or 11% over the approved 2021 final budget. This increase is due in large part to anticipated increase in service levels, higher fuel costs and continued additional costs resulting from the pandemic. A final budget will be presented to the Board for approval in December. The preliminary budget for CY2022 was sent to the Finance Committee for review prior to the Board meeting.

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Discussion was had.

Motion by Mr. Meadows; Second by Mr. Lawse

ROLL CALL:

UNANIMOUS; MOTION CARRIES.

Agenda Item #5: Request Authority to Set Restricted Funds

(C. Distefano)

The Nebraska Budget Act allows political subdivisions to increase their restricted funds authority by a base amount of 2.5% per year. An additional 1% increase is allowed if at least 75% of the governing body votes to approve the increase.

In setting these amounts for the calendar year 2022, the 2.5% base increase amount is \$482,506.28. The additional 1% increase would raise the restricted funds authority by \$193,002.51. When combined with the base amount, the additional 1% increase would increase Metro's total restricted funds authority to \$19,975,759.98 from the 2021 amount of \$19,300,251. This item was sent to the Finance/Procurement Committee for review prior to the Board meeting.

Staff recommends approval of the additional 1% increase.

Discussion was had.

Motion by Mr. Lawse; Second by Mr. Meadows

ROLL CALL:

UNANIMOUS; MOTION CARRIES.

Agenda Item #6: Resolution 419 – Request Approval of the 2022 Preliminary Tax Levy

(C. Distefano)

The Transit Authority must submit a calendar year 2022 preliminary tax levy allocation request to the Omaha City Council and Douglas County Board by August 1, 2020. Resolution No 419 is included in your Board Packet. The total amount of the request is \$19,975,759.98.

The proposed 2022 preliminary mill levy rate is .04733 per \$100.00 of property valuation using an estimated 2021 Certified Property Valuation. The rate will change when the Final Mill Levy Resolution is presented to the Board in August after the Certified Property Valuation is received. The rate is split equally between the City of Omaha and Douglas County. This item was sent to the Finance/Procurement Committee for review prior to the Board meeting.

Staff recommends approval of the Resolution.

Discussion was had.

Motion by Mr. Meadows; Second by Mr. Lawse

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ROLL CALL:

UNANIMOUS; MOTION CARRIES.

Agenda Item #7: Administrative Report

(L. Cencic)

Ms. Cencic informed the Board of additional outreach and engagement that has been occurring. At the Nebraska Association of Transportation Providers Managers Workshop, Ms. Cencic and Mr. Maldonado received updates from the Nebraska Department of Transportation, FTA, and were also able to coordinate with many different agencies throughout the region.

Ms. Cencic updated the Board that Metro is participating as part of a working group that is being organized by MAPA and is a partnership between MAPA, the Omaha Chamber, and Metro. This group will focus on equity and what equity means in our work within transportation. A primary focus of this working group is on equity in the decision making for transit projects as Metro moves forward with MetroNEXT and future studies, which has sparked a lot of good conversation with organizations from the public sector, private sector and non-profit groups in town. This cohort/working group is organized through Act 2 at RailVolution.

Ms. Cencic thanked Metro staff for all of their hard work. Every month, staff continue to step up and go above and beyond. Numerous staff worked hard during the power outages to keep things moving forward. Ms. Cencic also thanked staff who worked on the RAISE Grant application recently, MetroNEXT and the 24th Corridor project.

Ms. Cencic updated the Board that Mr. Shadden has retired from full-time employment, effective last week. Mr. Shadden will continue to work with Metro on a part-time basis and will work with us for the foreseeable future. Ms. Cencic is thankful for Mr. Shadden's willingness to continue to work with Metro.

Ms. Cencic informed the Board that Metro is making process on the TVM installation. Card readers have been installed in all vehicles and Metro staff is currently going through training. Metro is also preparing for the beta test group and expects the beta test to begin in late summer/early fall. Ticket vending machines should start arriving but it will take until sometime in August or September before they are all installed.

Lastly, Ms. Cencic reminded the Board that in terms of MetroNEXT, Metro will be looking at not just the next ORBT corridor or corridors but also the overall system, service types, and the passenger experience in the coming months. We look forward to having more engagement with the community on these topics. Ms. Cencic presented with Mr. Rose and Mr. Schweitz to many of the stakeholders mentioned previously today. The group also met with all City Council members and state Senators as well as non-profits throughout the area.

Discussion was had.

Agenda Item #8: Board Chair Report

(A. Haase)

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Ms. Haase thanked everyone for all efforts last week during the power outages. Many organizations have seen a lot of retirement recently, and while it is sad to say goodbye to those who have so much institutional knowledge, it is exciting to see the new people coming in. Ms. Haase informed the Board that the Program & Policy Committee has nothing additional to report, aside from what Mr. Schweitz covered in his report earlier. The committee members are very excited to see that project moving forward and to see the community outreach along 24th Street. Ms. Haase passed the floor to Ms. Plucker to report on the Finance/Procurement Committee.

Ms. Plucker updated the Board that everything related to the Finance/Procurement Committee has been covered previously in this meeting with the resolutions that were presented. Ms. Plucker passed the floor to Mr. Lund to report on the Operations Committee.

Mr. Lund informed the Board that Operations has nothing additional to add that has not been covered earlier in this meeting.

Agenda Item #9: Date, Time and Place of Next Board Meeting

Tuesday, August 26, 2021, at 8:30 a.m. to be held at Metro Transit Authority’s Administrative Building.

Agenda Item #10: Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Board, a motion was entertained to adjourn the meeting at 9:27 a.m.

Motion by Mr. Meadows; Second by Mr. Lund

**ROLL CALL:
UNANIMOUS; MOTION CARRIES.**

Ms. Amy Haase – Chair

Recording Secretary