

Lowcountry RTA Board Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: May 26, 2021

Location: Lowcountry Regional Transportation Authority Office 25 Benton Field Rd., Bluffton, SC 29910

I. Call to Order

Chair Susan Zellman called the meeting to order at 2:05 pm.

The invocation was said by Ms. Barbara Childs and Mr. Mark Stanley led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Roll Call

Present:

Ms. Susan Zellman, Chair, Beaufort County

Mr. Rick Hamilton, Beaufort County via Zoom

Ms. Barbara Childs, Vice Chair, Beaufort County

Mr. Chris Bickley, Colleton County

Mr. Darrell Russell, Hampton County via Zoom

Ms. Louise Pinkney, Allendale County via Zoom (joined meeting 2:18pm)

Mr. Charles Mitchell, Jasper County

Ms. Stephanie Rossi, Lowcountry Council of Governments via zoom

Others in attendance:

Ms. Mary Lou Franzoni, LRTA Executive Director

Mr. Detimex Stanley, LRTA Director of Maintenance

Mr. Theodis Jackson, LRTA Director of Operations

Ms. Yazmin Winston Black, LRTA Director of Safety and Training

Mr. Brian Sullivan, LRTA Director of Marketing and Communications

Ms. Kerry Guzman, LRTA Human Resources and Payroll Administrator

Ms. Laura Atkinson, LRTA Mobility Manager

Mr. Henry Criss, LRTA Director of Finance and Administration

Ms. Cavada Russell, LRTA Office Administrator

Mr. Scott Donahue, SCDOT via Zoom

III. Welcome

There were no members of the public present.

IV. Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes from March 24, 2021, April 13, 2021 and April 21, 2021 was made by Mr. Bickley and Ms. Childs second the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

V. Action Items:

1. **Approval of FY22 Budget.** Mr. Criss discussed the budget summary packet which included comparisons of this years and last years budget. Mr. Bickley asked if the Finance Committee reviewed the summary packet. Mr. Hamilton gave a briefing of the Finance Committee meeting and stated that based on the previous and current year the budget was within a reasonable range. Mr. Criss stated that the budget they are proposing represents an increase of \$515,809 over last year’s operating budget which is a 13% increase. Mr. Criss stated that the majority of the increase is due to operations labor as we expand the fixed route service in Bluffton and expansion of trolley services in Hilton Head. We see about a \$300,000 net increase in operations labor. Mr. Criss stated that now we have a consistent way we can account for these things by assigning every general ledger account to one of the line-item categories. Mr. Criss stated that as we transition to the new accounting software, we plan to revise our chart of accounts and map the new accounts to the old ones to have the opportunity to compare individual categorical line items and be able to track it in a more useful way. Mr. Criss concluded by stating he would be glad to answer any questions regarding the budget proposal. Mr. Bickley asked what is happening in the coming year with insurance and employee fringe benefits. Mr. Criss stated that we have an increase effective January 2022 of .8% from PEBA for the health insurance and because its effective January 2022 it’s reflected as .4% for the entire year. Mr. Bickley asked for an update on the property insurance with the insurance reserve fund. Mr. Criss stated that he doesn’t anticipate a significant increase with the premium. Mr. Criss stated that he anticipates that we will be close to where we are with the insurance, with the additional vehicles increasing the bill by \$32,000. Ms. Franzoni pointed out that included in this year’s budget under the operations labor is an additional supervisor. Mr. Bickley asked what the entry level of pay would be for new drivers. Ms. Franzoni stated that the CDL driver would be \$15.00 per hour and non CDL will start at \$13.00 per hour. Right now, the pay rate is at \$14.00 and \$12.00 per hour. Mr. Criss stated that the budget projection for the labor cost was at that CDL driver rate of \$15.00 per hour. Mr. Bickley asked if there would be any Cares Act funds left after July 1, 2021 that could supplement some of the budgeted money included in the budget summary. Mr. Criss answered yes, there is also some additional funding that may come available through some of the subsequent legislation from the American Rescue Plan Act. Chair Zellman asked if Mr. Criss anticipate the money remaining from the municipalities and the jurisdictions to be consistent. Mr. Criss answered that he anticipates it will be consistent as it has been over the past several years. Mr. Criss stated that he bases his revenue projections on a blend of what we asked for and what we expect to get. Mr. Criss also stated that we received assurances from some local governments of where they’re going to come in. Chair Zellman asked for a motion to approve the budget. **Mr. Hamilton made a motion to approve the budget. Ms. Childs second the motion to approve the budget. The motion carried unanimously.**

VI. Informational Items

1. Director’s Report - Highlights for March and April included:

A meeting with the Deputy Chief of the Jasper County fire department which was very productive. Plans are now in place to include Jasper County in our emergency evacuation plan. Jasper County will be given a cutaway vehicle to use so passengers west of I95 will contact the Jasper EOC and they will transport people to the emergency shelter. Ms. Franzoni stated Mr. Sullivan has set up a hurricane evacuation registry for Jasper County on the website.

Ms. Franzoni recognized Ms. Atkinson, Mobility Manager, and staff that conducted surveys of the passengers. The results of the surveys were very positive.

Ms. Franzoni gave Mr. Sullivan, Director of Marketing, recognition for his efforts and especially how he manages the social media as he communicates well with the public and answers their questions within a reasonable amount of time. Ms. Franzoni stated that the way Mr. Sullivan responds to the social media comments makes it relevant and represents a good communication tool. Ms. Franzoni stated that we made 20,000 new brochures for the trolley service and they were gone in three weeks and have since ordered 10,000 more. Dedication of the fourth trolley was conducted on May 20, 2021. The name of the fourth trolley is Harley named after the Clydesdale horse that was the official greeter at the Lawton Stables. Ms. Franzoni stated that Mr. Sullivan sent out the link of the Beaufort County Channel interview of Ms. Franzoni speaking on the trolley services.

Based on the last meeting, Chair Zellman asked about cards with information about the transportation services that could be passed on to others. Mr. Sullivan made story cards and they were presented.

Ms. Franzoni presented the budget and the transit services plan for the town of Bluffton, in March.

Ms. Franzoni acknowledged Mr. Stanley was on a panel at the TASC conference where he represented maintenance and answered questions regarding Covid from the maintenance side. There were no road calls the months of March and April, in a large part due to the 3 new MCI buses.

2. **Finance Report**

Based on the financial statements from the last two months, we are tracking where we expect to be on our budget at this point in time. We are at 180 percent of our projected FTA grants and 21 percent of our SCDOT grants. This is due to the additional funding for the three new buses and less SCDOT funds reimbursed. Chair Zellman ask about the state funding if we don't draw down as much would it impact our future draw downs. Mr. Criss responded that State Mass Transit Funds (SMTF) dollars belong to wherever SCDOT sends them. Mr. Criss stated that we are working very closely with the office of public transit to make sure that we have our needs met and he has full confidence that they are going to do everything that they can to make sure of that.

The balance sheet shows no major surprises. Mr. Criss commended Ms. Steel, the staff accountant, on working diligently to get the balance sheet cleaned up. There were some accounts on the balance sheet accumulating and accruing in different ways. Chair Zellman asked Mr. Hamilton whether he was happy with the format of the balance sheet. Mr. Hamilton replied yes and added that it is the visibility we need while at the same time not being so complex. Mr. Hamilton said that he thinks it's a good depiction of the position

that LRTA finds itself from month-to-month and year to year. Mr. Bickley stated that this is April 30 that's ten months and we are almost through May now and have got June to go. Mr. Bickley asked Mr. Criss how he thinks we will end the fiscal year and where does he think that number will be. Mr. Criss responded that the reserve account is at \$300k and he anticipates that we will probably have \$150k additional. Mr. Criss stated that we have open federal grants that require a match and so a portion of the money is the match for those grants. Chair Zellman ask if we can call it a reserve. Mr. Criss responded that technically he would not call it a reserve because it's obligated to match those grants. Mr. Criss stated that he is working to identify what are the expenses that we absolutely have to pay because there is a chance in the future that we could find ourselves where we are facing a federal government shut down. Chair Zellman stated that it would be good for us to know what would be the bare bones money that we would need to continue operations for 90 days.

3. Chairperson's Report

Chair Zellman welcomed two new staff members; Mr. Theodis Jackson, Operations Director and Mrs. Cavada Russell, Office Administrator.

Chair Zellman discussed the Antioch Express operating out of Ridgeland. She was interested in finding out more about the service and whether they were operating a public transit service. Ms. Franzoni responded that she had not been involved in any of the planning for this service and that the email from Chair Zellman triggered her to go online to find out more about it. Ms. Franzoni said that it's not the same as the service we provide, our service runs in the early morning and late afternoon. Jasper County did not ask if we could do more service. This nonprofit identified a barrier for their folks to get to work and so they started the service for mid-day trips between Ridgeland and Bluffton / Hilton Head. Mr. Mitchell stated that he attended one of their meetings last week. They are going to be transporting local workers from Jasper County to workplaces in Hilton Head and Bluffton. Mr. Mitchell stated that he is not sure of the rates since they didn't discuss that aspect. Ms. O'Bannon is the person in charge. They have two small buses on the premises. Ms. Childs stated that the cost is \$5.00 round trip. Ms. Childs asked if Jasper County is funding the service. Mr. Mitchell responded by saying from what he was told they are getting grant funding. They are also going to help those who have just got released from prison to find jobs. Chair Zellman suggested that Mr. Mitchell would be a great liaison for the Antioch Express services. Chair Zellman stated that the flyer says it's a two-year pilot program and the project depends upon the level of ridership or participation and they plan to work with municipalities and businesses to develop the project. Chair Zellman stated that she thought it would be helpful if we could find out more about it. Chair Zellman asked Mr. Mitchell if he was able to talk to anybody concerning the use of Sgt. Jasper Park. Mr. Mitchell responded by saying yes, he spoke to Ms. Wendy. Mr. Mitchell stated that right now the park is booked for the weekends until October, but the weekdays are available we would just need to give a date. Chair Zellman ask if they could go see the location and Mr. Mitchell said absolutely.

Chair Zellman stated that at some point we need to talk about how to conduct the meetings for the rest of the year. Do we want to continue with live or Zoom meetings? Ms. Franzoni stated that they had talked about having the meetings at the Palmetto Breeze Office when we have committee meetings and do the other meetings as Zoom. Chair Zellman asks how everybody feels about in person and Zoom meetings. Mr. Russell stated that he is unable to drive, and Ms. Pinkney stated that she likes the option of Zoom. Chair Zellman asked about having every other meeting in person. Mr. Russell stated that he will have to ask if he could meet by Zoom at least through August. Chair Zellman responded that it would be okay and that we should always have the option for Zoom.

4. Committee Reports

- **Operations Committee:** Chris Bickley, Rick Hamilton

1. Mr. Bickley stated that the operations committee met, and Chair Zellman sat in and they were glad to have her. They reviewed January through April operations. It was notable that during that four-month period we had only one preventable accident. They discussed the random drug and pre-employment testing and noted that we are in full compliance. They also talked about getting the trolley service going this year and also the challenges with recruiting and retaining employees.

- **Maintenance Committee:** Charles Mitchell, Darrell Russell

1. Mr. Mitchell stated that we had zero road calls for the month of January and three for the month of February. The preventative maintenance inspections were completed at 100 percent. We had no lift failures. Mr. Mitchell stated that he was able to walk around with Mr. Stanley and view the facility and the new buses. One issue we still have going on is the bus wash renovation needs to be completed and that he will step up and do whatever he can to push that along to make sure it gets taken care of.

- **Finance Committee:** Barbara Childs, Rick Hamilton

1. Mr. Hamilton stated that it was their second meeting since mid-2020. The most recent two months is a top end review of documents to demonstrate the process established and then provide a sign off that was accomplished with no issues.
2. Mr. Hamilton stated that it was good to hear that there are efforts being made to include depreciation in the monthly reviews going forward. We are tracking the end of the year items shown on audit. He also mentioned the contingency reserve and how he hopes to introduce Mr. Criss to some of the work that had previously been done and that it might be beneficial going forward.
3. Mr. Hamilton stated that they discussed auditor selection and ask the board to approve a motion for an auditor going forward in the meeting. Chair Zellman stated that there was nothing with the auditor planned on the agenda.

VII. Old Business

1. **Bluffton Breeze:**

Ms. Franzoni stated that we are struggling to have enough employees and we're no different than anybody else that employs people in the area. She stated that some of the difficulty we're having is the Beaufort County schools are in session until June 17 and we

use their school bus drivers to help cover the seasonal work. The plan for starting up the Bluffton Breeze was to begin July 1st, but we don't have enough drivers. She stated we have a training class today and Mr. Jackson interviewed thirteen people since he's been here in four weeks. She also stated that we have ads everywhere and we are getting applicants in but it's not fast. She stated that she talked to Heather Colin at the Town of Bluffton and they rescheduled the start date to September 7, 2021. Ms. Franzoni said that the Bluffton service is year-round so once we get drivers in those positions, she believes they will be here to stay and next spring just like every spring we'll be looking for trolley drivers.

2. **By Laws and Signatures:**

Ms. Franzoni stated that we have been meeting virtually since the revised By Laws were approved and she only has Chair Zellman and Ms. Childs signature on them. She stated that she needs everyone's signature.

3. **5339 Grant Opportunity:**

Ms. Franzoni stated that we did have one of our special meetings to talk about this opportunity from the state. She stated that the SCDOT had close to 5 million of lapsing funds and they put a call out for projects. Ms. Franzoni stated that we did get funded for two buses not three for 1.2 million dollars from SCDOT. They would like for us to obligate the money by September.

4. **Sale of Property on Argent Road:**

Ms. Franzoni stated that we are under contract and the original contract had a ninety-day inspection period. We sold the property for \$425,000. She also stated that they put \$10,000.00 into escrow and if they decide during the inspection period that this is not going to work the deal cancels and they get their money back. If they go past the inspection period date and cancel, we keep the escrow money. Ms. Franzoni stated that they asked for sixty more days of inspection time which is not a long inspection time on a commercial property. They want enough time for their engineers to produce a stormwater plan for Jasper County. Our realtor and attorney recommend saying yes to the extension of time but whatever documents or studies they produce we get at the end if they do not follow through with the sale. Ms. Franzoni stated that she did find the original documents for the land and we bought for \$104,000 in 1997.

5. **Second Shift Bus:**

Ms. Franzoni stated that she was approached by the Chamber regarding a second shift bus to come from Northern Beaufort County to serve Bluffton and Hilton Head. They wanted to start Memorial Day weekend and run through Labor Day. Ms. Franzoni told them that she can't do it right now due to manpower issues. She said that they will revisit this and get back with them in June and hopefully we will have enough drivers.

6. **LATS Update:**

Ms. Rossi stated that we have an executed contract for the consultants that will be updating the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and that we will be kicking things off in June. Ms. Rossi stated that the 5339 money will be on the agenda for June, and it's been out for public comment for several weeks now and will be approved. Ms. Rossi stated that for the June 4th meeting they will be attempting a hybrid version and they are having it at the

Rotary Community Center in Bluffton. Hopefully in August the meeting will be back at TCL.

VIII. New Business

1. RTAP Grant Opportunity: Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP):

Ms. Franzoni stated that we applied for a Community Rides grant through RTAP. The grant projects are for sustainable projects that improve transportation in a rural area and can be easily duplicated. The project that LRTA submitted for grant funding is for the planning of improved transportation services for Northern Beaufort County. The project name is ReBeaut- Reimagining Beaufort Transportation. We would like to see our ridership in Beaufort increase and be of more use to the community. There are a lot of unmet needs for transportation including medical, education, employment, and grocery shopping. Our current network is not conducive to a lot of these activities. Ms. Franzoni stated that she is really hopeful that we will get this grant. Ms. Franzoni said that it's a great project and we would have a lot of support from the community. She went on to say that our issue is we don't have a lot of planning money on the rural side, and this grant could go a long way to help with the project.

2. Survey Results:

Ms. Atkinson stated that our goal was to get at least 100 surveys and we got 132. We had a breakdown of demand response and commuter responses. Ms. Atkinson stated that we did end up getting about a 60/40 percent split. One of the interesting questions was how long you have been riding, and the majority of our riders are more than three years. We did have two long term passengers; an almost twenty-year rider and a thirty-year rider both from the Walterboro area. Eighty three percent use the bus for work and the majority were daily riders. Ms. Atkinson stated that, she found it interesting that most of our passengers were between 51 and 60 years of age and the second highest group was from 31 to 40 years of age. Ms. Atkinson stated that only four passengers who took the survey were 20 years of age or younger and 20 were over 65. The helpfulness of the staff was broken down between the call center staff and the drivers. Those results were overwhelmingly positive. The percentage for the drivers being excellent or good was 80 percent. There was only one that gave a bad rating, and everything he answered was negative. The buses being cleaned and maintained and on time was 94 percent positive. Sixty seven percent of passengers refused to answer the question about barriers. Their biggest barrier was the fear of being stranded. Ms. Atkinson stated that hopefully we can overcome that barrier. Sixty four percent of people said they would like to have the demand response service offered on Saturday and Sunday. The overall satisfaction of the service in general was fantastic. In conclusion 84 percent of the passengers thought we were either excellent or good. Ms. Atkinson said that the survey will become an annual thing.

IX. Next Steps/Summary of To Do Items Resulting from this Meeting:

1. Chair Zellman stated that she, Ms. Franzoni and Mr. Mitchell will take a look at the location for the retreat.
2. Mr. Criss is going to calculate the amount of reserve we will need for 90 days of operation.

3. Finalize on future meetings with the next one on Zoom. September's meeting will be at Palmetto Breeze Transit office with Zoom available. Ms. Franzoni stated that every other meeting will be conducted via Zoom until further notice.
4. Make copies of Antioch Express flyer.
5. TV donation
6. Clarify the role of the board as far as the auditor's selection.

There was an ongoing discussion about whether to change or keep the current auditing company. Mr. Hamilton stated that he had sent a draft motion to Ms. Franzoni on discussing the issue of auditor selection. Mr. Hamilton also stated that he doesn't think that in the nonprofit or government world that you should change your auditor, he goes on to say that you should at least have an RFP that is substantial and have a review that is a real review with the opportunity to address the issues as a team. Mr. Bickley expressed that he is not comfortable having the same auditing company for 10 years. Mr. Bickley also stated that an auditing policy needs to be created by the finance committee before the end to the 2020-2021 calendar year. Mr. Hamilton made a motion to award contract to the current auditor Mauldin & Jenkins for the FY 2020-2021. Ms. Childs second the motion. Chair Zellman called for discussion. Mr. Russell responded by saying that this is not on the agenda and that it needed to be discussed at a Special Meeting. All board members agreed to have a Special Meeting on May 28, 2021 to discuss the auditor selection for FY 2020-2021.

X. Announcements:

1. Mr. Russell stated that he has a suggestion that the board should recognize the driver of the month at the beginning of each meeting. Chair Zellman called on Ms. Franzoni to comment and Ms. Franzoni stated that it's included in her monthly report and if the board wants to recognize the driver of the month that is fine. It was suggested and agreed to have the recognition of drivers at the beginning of each meeting as part of the welcome.
2. Mr. Criss stated that he had read a press release from Beaufort County and found out that we were a part of a task force to figure out how to spend the American Rescue Act funding. Palmetto Breeze representatives will participate in these meetings.

XI. Adjournment:

Ms. Childs motioned to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Mitchell seconded. There was a unanimous vote to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 4:12 pm.