



Minutes

NASHVILLE METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

January 22, 2014

- I. **CALL TO ORDER:** The regular meeting of the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority Board of Directors was held in the Music City Central Meeting Room, 400 Charlotte Avenue, on January 22, 2015. Present were: Marian Ott, Chair; Lewis Lavine, Vice-Chair; Janet Miller, member; Thomas F. O'Connell, member; Gail Carr Williams, member; Secretary Margaret Behm, and CEO Stephen G. Bland. A quorum was established and Chair Ott called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Chair Ott welcomed new Board member, Janet Miller.
- II. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Proper motion was made to approve the minutes of the December 18, 2014 Board of Directors meeting. There were no additions or corrections and the vote of approval was unanimous.
- III. **PUBLIC COMMENTS:** Chair Ott stated that the Board is always delighted to have comments from the public and she reminded everyone that it is the Board's practice to limit those comments to three minutes. She noted that the Board does not generally respond to the comments, but of course they listen to them and every once and a while they may ask a question for clarity. If there is anything in the comments that needs a specific follow-up, the staff will take care of that.

Margo Chambers of Nashville:

Ms. Chambers asked that since the project scope has changed on the Amp since August 2013, that we please pull the locally preferred alternative for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and dedicated lanes to save money.

There were things not discussed last week at the Finance Committee regarding the upcoming budget for Metro. The first is a \$20 million dollar anticipated expense to fund the employee benefit pension plan and this year it is a new expense. She hopes that the Board decides to fully fund that. The Davidson Transit Organization (DTO) is a designated sub-recipient and the IRS forms filed each year indicate that DTO receives about \$40 million in unidentified grant revenue and half of that pays for salaries and benefits.

The other finance expense not mentioned would be the duplicate budget expense of \$50 million from last year to provide BRT services. Mr. Oliphant asked for this

amount on the third reading of the Metro budget stating he could not locate the funds in the proposed budget and this was assigned to Public Works in 2013. She would like for them to please work out which department, either MTA or Public Works, needs to return the \$50 million to Metro Council.

Regarding the DTO, Ms. Chambers would like for us to have a search for a chief operating officer as we have been without one for five months. She states that the Board did an excellent job of searching for Mr. Bland, and she hopes they can do the same for bus operations.

Ms. Chambers requests a copy of the DTO bylaws, a copy of the agreement between the MTA and the DTO to provide bus operations, and to identify the names of the contacts of the DTO officers who will negotiate with the bus union regarding their upcoming contract. A new employment draft contract is needed by March and this information will affect your budget which is needed now by February 4.

James Johnston of Nashville:

Mr. Johnston speaks as an advocate for the homeless. The folks who live on 8th Avenue South have to get to work on time and they have to make transfers and are having trouble doing that on the 8th Avenue line. The drivers are very rude and don't seem to take much interest in their job.

Mr. Johnston stated that he has a personal issue with a bus stop on Charlotte that is on the wrong side of the street coming off 20th Avenue onto Charlotte. It is on the left hand corner and should be on the right hand corner where the buses are going out.

On the Murfreesboro route there are too many big buses and not enough small buses. He has been riding the buses here for a couple of months because he is homeless. He gets a monthly pass and this helps him to stay out of the cold. He thanked the Board for letting him speak.

Peter O'Connor of Nashville:

Mr. O'Connor stated that he has already turned in complaints, including Felix Castrodad, who is not in a position to be able to do anything about a lot of the complaints that he has brought to him. Mr. Castrodad has tried to communicate these issues to those people who are able to bring resolution. Operations seems to be the department primarily involved with the complaints that he has, and he is not seeing any results. If Operations is not the department that can take care of these things, then somebody needs to communicate and let him know these things. No one is communicating. He is trying to accomplish something here and results is something he needs to see within a reasonable amount of time. He understands that Mr. Bland is new and is willing to give him a reasonable amount of time to sit down and discuss some of these complaints and get something done.

Steve Reiter of Nashville:

Mr. Reiter thanked Steve Bland who helped work out an issue with a friend who is transit dependent. Several people worked together to find an acceptable solution and

he is very thankful for that. He also asked if they could look into the issues that Mr. O'Connor is having which he thinks may be related to Customer Care.

There were no other public comments.

- IV. TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE:** Committee Chair O'Connell reported that the committee met last week and had some changes. They saw the introduction of some trend reports in the Customer Care and the monthly quality control summary that Ms. Morehead reviewed with us. In Customer Care we saw and as we have seen, that as part of a trend, we exceeded our 95% productivity goal. He thinks the new trend reports are a useful tool in addition to the overall transportation committee report and we will look forward to seeing as those continue to start to have some year-over-year information.

The Passenger Survey this month was from the Route19 Herman and graded better than the last time that route was surveyed. There were surprisingly few comments from riders who completed the survey.

Robert Greene reviewed the monthly operating statistics. Monthly fixed route ridership declined a bit; however, AccessRide continued to grow, and overall ridership is still increasing year-over-year as is the combined regional ridership. There has been a lot of new operator training.

Mr. O'Connell invited new Board member and committee member, Janet Miller, to add anything to the committee report at this point. Ms. Miller stated that she is very interested in what the benchmarks are versus how we are doing. She said that if we don't have a good score card, we can't know how well we are doing. We had some great discussion about how we measure success.

- V. FINANCE COMMITTEE:** Chair Williams welcomed Janet Miller to the Board and to the Finance Committee. She reported that the committee reviewed the monthly financials and they were good. They talked about whether or not they needed to reforecast at this time, but things seem to be on budget as projected. There was a good discussion about the upcoming 2016 budget submission which includes the traditional increases related to inflation and cost of living, and then some specific requests to the Charlotte and Nolensville BRT lite operations, as well as the impact to operations of having 100 new shelters around town that we will have to maintain. We also talked about the need for more opportunities for customer training and it will be a consideration in next year's budget. It was a good conversation with everyone engaged as we discussed what budgets should look like and what are some of the anticipated needs for next year for MTA. Ms. Williams offered the opportunity for Ms. Miller to have input on this report, but she had nothing further to add at this time.
- VI. PLANNING AND MARKETING COMMITTEE REPORT:** Chair Lavine reported that they had a solid meeting and discussed the marketing activities and had a discussion about planning that segues into the CEO's report that is coming up. Planning is of paramount importance to what we are going to be doing this year and we have

already started - there will be public hearings next month; and with that, I will defer to the CEO's report.

VII. CEO'S REPORT: CEO Steve Bland reported that On October 28, 2014, the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), appointed to develop recommendations for the East-West Connector Bus Rapid Transit Project branded as The Amp, concluded their work and released their findings. Without doubt, under the able leadership of Chairman Bert Mathews, this body raised questions and made recommendations that will make any final project in that corridor much stronger than when it began. Perhaps even more importantly, it elevated the debate over public transportation in general, and in the West End/East Nashville Corridor specifically, to a level that our region has never seen in its history and that is all very positive. During the final meeting of the CAC, Mayor Dean directed that I review the findings of the CAC, as well as any other relevant information, and present recommendations with respect to the deployment of higher intensity transit service in this key corridor for Metro Nashville.

During the past 18 months, the Amp project was the focal point for an unprecedented level of public engagement, discussion and debate regarding the future of public transit in Nashville and Middle Tennessee. Thousands of Nashvillians participated in community meetings, business group meetings, "transit talks," "tele-town halls" and the very public process of the CAC. In many ways, people I spoke with who were both for and against the project saw the Amp as representative of much broader issues in the community such as inclusion, shared prosperity, affordable housing, and how our city can retain the uniqueness that is Nashville in the face of very rapid growth. Many of the media accounts I reviewed characterized the Amp debate in its simplest terms – people were either for the project or they were against it. The project should be built, or it shouldn't be built. In truth, it is much more complicated than that. Nashville is discovering for itself what many other cities that have successfully built robust public transit systems have already learned – that it is really hard to do. In truth, these "fights" are not the be-all and end-all, but are part of an overall process for us to collaborate and work toward a better community. In a number of southern cities such as Charlotte, Austin, and Dallas, they have had similar experiences years ago, and they persevered to build transit systems that are now central to the lives of those communities. Even the original opponents could not now imagine life in those cities without those systems.

In terms of a recommendation, the bottom line is this, from my perspective: we should not build the Amp at this time in the manner in which it was designed. This is not to say that Nashville does not need a high-capacity, high-performance, transit system in the West Nashville to East Nashville Corridor and more broadly within the region. To be clear, I define a high performance transit system as one that connects all the citizens of the region to everything that makes Nashville the "It" city, while also providing a greater range of mobility choices to people who do have a car, if they so choose. Such a system will need to include, in my view, high-capacity, high-performance products to handle the city's population growth and traffic congestion. Such a system will also include robust transit services and facilities in the East

Nashville and West End corridors, those corridors that the Amp was originally attempting to connect. To be very clear, in my view, doing nothing from a capital project perspective, and simply stopping this process, is not an option for this region.

Toward this end, I recommend the following specific actions for consideration by Mayor Dean, and the MTA Board of Directors. Today I am not asking the Board to take any official resolution action; these are for your consideration. We will be back at future meetings with specific action items.

1. The detailed design of the Amp intended to develop construction documents should cease.
2. A total of \$750,000 of the remaining Amp design funds should be reallocated toward the MTA's ongoing strategic planning process toward two specific outreach activities: (A) an expanded public engagement process with an overall goal of engaging a minimum of 10,000 people from all neighborhoods and sectors of the community on the broader discussion of public transportation; and (B) support for the exploration of design concepts for high-capacity transit in potential corridors such as West End, Gallatin, Nolensville, Charlotte, Murfreesboro, Hillsboro and Dickerson.
3. Rather than simply updating the MTA's 2009 Strategic Master Plan as was originally intended, we will use this public dialogue for a complete "reimagining" of Nashville's transit system; this effort will be conducted using the findings of the ongoing "Nashville Next" comprehensive plan, and in close coordination with a similar process being undertaken by the Regional Transportation Authority of Middle Tennessee.
4. The "explorations" of design alternatives will thoroughly engage key transportation partners such as Metro Nashville Public Works and the Tennessee Department of Transportation from the beginning, recognizing that any transit project or facility we undertake will take place in a context that needs to incorporate automobile traffic, delivery schedules of businesses, and pedestrian and bicycle access.
5. We will remain engaged with the Federal Transit Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation toward the evaluation of projects in key corridors that may qualify for Federal New Starts/Small Starts funding.
6. For the duration of Mayor Dean's term and beyond, we will continue to advance new products and services that provide improvements in service for customers, and continue our recent trend of record-setting ridership, even in the face of decreasing gasoline prices.

The following is provided as additional background for these recommendations:

1. Cease Construction Design for the Amp – The most straightforward of the recommendations, I am simply recommending the Amp project not be advanced toward construction at this time.

2. Reallocate \$750,000 of Amp design funds toward the MTA's Strategic Plan – One of the strengths of the Amp design process has been the robust public engagement process over the past 18 months. By allocating additional resources in the strategic planning process, we can take advantage of the growing attention to transit as a public policy issue in Nashville, and expand participation in the debate to all sectors of the community and the Middle Tennessee region.

Despite its identification in the 2009 MTA Strategic Master Plan and the Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan, a large number of people (on both sides of the Amp debate) expressed the opinion they did not see how the Amp fit into the broader regional context for public transportation. The recently issued "Vital Signs" report identified that more than 50 percent of the region's population live in a different county from that in which they work. Parallel to the MTA's Strategic Plan, the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) of Middle Tennessee is conducting a similar planning process, and the regional Mayors' Caucus has identified the funding for a robust regional transit system as a key priority of their organization. The members of the Mayors' Caucus have further expressed an understanding that such a system will need to seamlessly connect outer county residents to destinations within Nashville. By coordinating the MTA and RTA Strategic Planning processes, and doing so with outreach to a minimum of 10,000 residents, we would intend to provide people with the opportunity to help build a clear vision as to how all the "pieces of a regional transit puzzle fit together."

In terms of design resources, I heard two interesting comments throughout a series of meetings on the Amp corridor and outside it. Opponents of the Amp along the corridor expressed general support for higher intensity transit, but opposed particular design aspects of the project. In contrast, a number of stakeholders outside the corridor boundaries made statements along the lines of: "We'll take it if they don't want it!" By providing some conceptual design resources for the strategic planning effort, we would hope to both flesh out facility design attributes that meet a number of transportation and community objectives and do so in a manner that is as transferrable as possible to other corridors.

With respect to the West End Corridor, there is no question it warrants a high-capacity transit solution. According to recent travel data generated by the Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Midtown section of this corridor alone generates the second highest level of trip activity (after Downtown Nashville) in the region. As such, significantly improved public transit services in this high growth corridor can help address the dual goals of improving access to economic opportunity for those of limited means, and helping to address growing congestion.

Similarly, it is not difficult to envision high-capacity/high-performance transit corridors in the Gallatin, Charlotte, Murfreesboro, Dickerson, Nolensville and Hillsboro corridors. Cumulatively (along with the West End corridor) these seven corridors make up more than 50 percent of the total ridership on the MTA's 46 routes.

The intent of both an expansive public process and a "vetting" of design options in various corridors would be to place the next mayoral administration in a position to begin making key strategic decisions fairly early in their first term if they so choose.

3. "Reimagine" Nashville's Public Transit System in the Upcoming Strategic Plan – As originally conceived, the MTA's current strategic planning effort was intended to be an update to the 2009 plan. As excellent as this plan and process were, the explosive growth of Nashville in the ensuing years and, maybe more importantly, the much higher visibility of this issue calls for a bolder approach. In large measure, thanks to the aggressive support of Mayor Dean and the Metro Council, the MTA has been extremely successful in carrying out the 2009 plan. Enhancements such as BRT lite services on the Gallatin and Murfreesboro corridors, Music City Circuit free downtown circulator, StrIDe student ridership initiative, and assumption of management responsibilities for the Regional Transportation Authority were crucial precursors to the level of discussion in the community now. Both regional population growth and demographic shifts pointing toward greater transit use all suggest that Nashville is ready to make a huge leap forward with respect to transit. Development of a broadly inclusive plan that explores design options in our key corridors will be a next important step in this journey.
4. As Part of the Strategic Plan, and Well Before Project Advancement, We Should Fully Engage Transportation Partners: TDOT, Metro Public Works, Metro Planning, Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization – In reality, the Amp was not a "transit project," but a "corridor project." That is to say that the financial investment in the project went well beyond the vehicles, stations and dedicated transit lanes, which were integral to transit operations. Investments also included pavement surfaces, sidewalks, streetscaping, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, traffic signals and landscaping along the corridor and extending to adjoining cross streets. By way of comparison, the Euclid Avenue BRT project in Cleveland (now branded as "The Health Line") cost a total of more than \$350 million. However, only about \$70 million of this investment was directly attributable to the specific transit elements of the project including vehicles, station improvements, dedicated lanes, intelligent transportation systems, fare collection equipment, etc.

Given the reality of the above, many (if not most) of the expenditures planned to be associated with the Amp will need to occur, even without the project. Corridor investments such as improved sidewalks and pedestrian facilities, pavement rehabilitation, traffic signal upgrades, etc., will move forward,

regardless of whether or not a significant transit facility is constructed. All of these elements were included within the budgeted \$174 million. On the transit side, there will be public transportation service in the West End corridor with or without the Amp, so investments such as bus purchases also will need to occur.

Given that high-capacity, high-performance transit facilities may well be justified in the West End, Gallatin, Charlotte, Murfreesboro, Nolensville, Dickerson, and Hillsboro corridors – all also major auto and truck travel corridors – it only makes sense to actively engage TDOT and Metro Public Works at the earliest stages of plan development. Further, as pedestrian connections to surrounding neighborhoods will be crucial to the success of any such projects; this element also should be planned by the partners.

5. Continue to Engage with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) of the U.S. Department of Transportation – The Amp project moved through the FTA Small Starts process with unprecedented speed. For significant transit capital investments, FTA Discretionary Capital funding, like Small Starts, can provide crucial leverage toward completing large and more complex projects. FTA staff at both the regional and national levels also can provide an enormous amount of technical assistance and knowledge. Throughout the process of advancing this project, we need to remain in close contact with the FTA and be ever cognizant of their requirements. However, we cannot be so driven to attract federal discretionary funding that we ignore the needs of Nashvillians. Our local requirements should be the dominant consideration in project development, even if it means sacrificing discretionary federal funding. I fully believe good projects find funding. Our focus needs to be on developing a good project, not simply a fundable one.
6. Keep Getting Better, With or Without a Large Project – For the duration of Mayor Dean’s term and beyond, the MTA needs to continue to advance better products and services. Public transportation is alive and well in the Greater Nashville region. Despite recent trends that have reduced gasoline prices to their lowest point in more than six years, both the MTA and RTA systems continue to see record levels of ridership, which continue to increase. Thanks in largest part to the vision of Mayor Dean, the active support of the Metro Council, the stewardship and oversight of the MTA Board of Directors, and the professionalism of the MTA staff, Nashville is better positioned than ever before to have the serious, high-stakes, public discussion that is a necessary precedent to major transit investments and expansion. Recently, we have reported several months of record-breaking ridership in the modern history of the MTA. Since Mayor Dean began his term in office, regional transit ridership has increased by more than 20 percent. Among the many innovations that contributed to this accomplishment and can be credited to Mayor Dean and the Board are:
 - Deployment of BRT lite services on the Gallatin and Murfreesboro Pike corridors

- Design and initiation of the “Music City Circuit” free downtown circulator routes
- Construction of the MTA’s modern and efficient Music City Central transit center in the heart of the central business district
- Introduction of the StrIDe student pass program for Metro Nashville Public School students
- The introduction of the EasyRide program to Metro Government. The program now partners with more than two dozen employers who pay for their workers to ride MTA buses
- Agreement to manage the services of the Regional Transportation Authority of Middle Tennessee in a coordinated manner.

On the horizon, we have numerous other enhancements that can be expected to continue the trend of ever increasing transit usage in the Greater Nashville Region, including:

- Conversion of Music City Circuit buses to all electric operation this summer
- Coordination with Metro Public Works on a project to enhance service on the Murfreesboro Pike Corridor through the improvement of pedestrian connections, bus stops and traffic signal priority for transit
- Additional BRT lite services on the Charlotte and Nolensville Pike corridors during 2015
- Introduction of Automatic Vehicle Location/Real-Time Information systems for our customers through a convenient mobile app
- Installation of 100 additional passenger waiting shelters by the end of this year.

Although not as visible as the Amp, these projects can all be expected to contribute to increasing levels of transit ridership and system acceptance. Through the course of our strategic planning efforts, we need to not only advance large scale capital projects and service increases, but we also need to focus on those incremental improvements in performance and customer service that make a difference to existing and prospective customers.

In my view, great cities have great transit. In becoming the “It” city, Nashville has taken advantage of many characteristics that make it truly unique. In my position as a newcomer, I may have a bit of a different perspective than a long-time resident, but I believe Nashville’s creativity, location, friendliness and attractive business climate are among the many attributes that have caught the attention of people, like me, who want to come here. By the same token, we will have to grapple with two enormous challenges if we are to keep up this momentum. First, we have to make sure that all Nashvillians are connected to the opportunities that growth presents – not just those with cars. Second, we have to make sure that growing traffic congestion, which is a measure of prosperity, does not become a precursor to decline as it becomes more and more difficult to move around the region.

For these reasons, I think this point is really a beginning and not an end. For the advocates of the Amp, if anything, the reasons behind the project's conception and

your support throughout this process are even more present today than they were when you signed on. We need all of you to stay engaged and continue to challenge the MTA and our community leadership to design, fund, and deliver better services. To the opponents of the project, you have articulated many of the challenges inherent in redesigning transit in our community, while accommodating unprecedented growth and maintaining our quality of life. You've told us how strongly you believe that Nashville needs a more robust transit system. It is now time for us to work together to build it. This concluded his report.

Chair Ott asked the Board members for comments. Member Lewis Lavine stated that sometimes you have to hit the reset button and this was a wonderful reset. He thanked CEO Bland, staff, and the team for a wonderful, rational, explanation of where you are and where we are going. Now is the time to start the planning as we said a little bit earlier this afternoon.

Ms. Williams echoed Mr. Lavine's remarks and extended her gratitude to include the Citizens Advisory Committee under the leadership of Bert Mathews for all the work they did.

Ms. Miller commented that she is really enthusiastic about our long-term regional strategic vision. Coming from her economic development background where it is all about growing this region, the fact that we are looking at this from a more global standpoint is really exciting. She believes our economic future as a region is really dependent upon this kind of strategic, long-term vision. Let's go do it!

Mr. O'Connor stated that as a long-term member of the Planning and Marketing Committee for this Board. One of the most striking things from today's remarks is that 10,000 points of input. This is unprecedented for our public process as an authority. One thing that is demonstrative here is we have arrived at this point in part through people participating in this process in bringing appropriate levels of challenge, and encouraging us to use discretion and be judicious. As a Board, as we listen to your recommendations and go forward from this point, allowing this process to become even more public and collaborative as a conversation is critical to the success of the region as viewed through the lens of transit. Thank you for that.

Chair Ott stated that we can conclude from the comments of the Board that while no action is required of us, there is a consensus that the approach you outlined – go for it! We are all behind you.

VIII. CHAIR'S REPORT: Chair Ott thanked the staff, both the current staff and those that also worked on the project that are not here any longer, and the consultant team. This has been an important project for us and it has been a lot of hard work. Frankly, it has been very challenging because of the intensity of the discussion around it, and the Board appreciates the professionalism with which the team has conducted itself.

With project development, there is a reason you have the process. This is not the first time that this Board has, through a public participation process, gotten input that required a significant change in the direction and the way we go about doing business. To that end, she thanked all the people that weighed in on this project, both

supporting it and those that brought some concerns to it. We hope that you will continue to be involved going forward.

Clearly, the excitement and the focus is going to be on this planning process and envisioning what the MTA's piece of a regional transit system will be and she shares that excitement. However, we also cannot lose focus of our current operations. She looks forward to continuing to hear more about the success of the StrIDe program and our Automated Vehicle Locator System (AVL). This is going to be key to lay the groundwork for the system of the future. We will have the technology to manage an ever-growing system both operationally and, from our customer's perspective, to have some real time information. Ms. Ott also looks forward to discussions later this month on the implementation of the BRT lite on Charlotte and she encouraged those present to participate in those public hearings.

IX. Other Business: There was no other business to come before this Board.

X. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 2:12 p.m.