

NASHVILLE METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY
Board of Directors Meeting
May 25, 2023

I. **Call to Order:** The regular meeting of the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (Nashville MTA) Board of Directors was held at the Tennessee State Library & Archives, located at 1001 Rep. John Lewis Way N., Nashville, TN 37219, on Thursday, May 25, 2023.

II. **Roll Call of Persons Present:**

Gail Carr Williams, Board Chair	Andy Burke, COO
Janet Miller, Vice Chair	Renuka Christoph, CCO
Walter Searcy, Member	Vince Malone, COSA
Jessica Dauphin, Member	Nick Oldham, CSSO
Margaret Behm, Board Secretary	Ed Oliphant, CFO
Stephen Bland, CEO	Felix Castrodad, Dir. of Planning & Grants
Monica Howse, Sr. Exec. Asst. & Board Liaison	Ewell Crigger, Vehicle Maintenance Manager
	Katie Freudberg, Scheduling & Service Planning Manager

A quorum was established, and Board Chair Carr Williams called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

III. **Approval of Minutes:** Jessica Dauphin moved to approve the April 27, 2023, Nashville MTA Board minutes. Vice Chair Miller seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved the minutes.

IV. **Public Comments:** Board Chair Carr Williams opened the floor for public comments. The public was reminded that comments were limited to three minutes. The following members of the public gave public comments:

- Darius Knight

V. **Informational Items:** The following items were presented for the board members' review. If members had questions, they were asked to ask the staff about the specific item.

a. **Monthly Financial Report Compared to Budget** – No questions

b. **FY2024 Operating Budget Information** – Jessica Dauphin asked CEO Bland if he could provide an update on the budget process. Bland reported that the Mayor's Budget Proposal was strong, as it recommended funding our full baseline request and just under half of our Investment request for Better Bus service expansion. Given the challenges the city faced coming out of the pandemic, this does put WeGo behind schedule in terms of delivering on the expanded services called out in the 2020 Metro Nashville Transportation Plan, but it will allow us to implement changes associated with the Dr. Ernest Rip Patton, Jr. North Nashville Transit Center.

On a very positive note, the Mayor's budget proposal includes \$15 million in one-time funds to support the development of our Murfreesboro Pike Corridor Project. The intent of this project is to develop high-capacity transit in the corridor extending from the proposed SoBro Transit Center to the Global Mall site in Antioch along Murfreesboro Pike, with an extension along Donelson Pike to Nashville International Airport. The proposed funding would simultaneously allow us to advance project development, environment analysis, and preliminary design activities on the project and demonstrate a strong local commitment when we pursue Federal funding.

c. **Monthly Operating Statistics** – No questions.

d. **Upcoming Procurement Projects List** – No questions.

VI. **Consent Agenda Items:**

a. **State WeGo Ride Contract Renewal (M-A-23-010):** Vice Chair Miller made a motion to approve the State WeGo Ride Contract Renewal; Jessica Dauphin seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved this action item.

VII. **Operations & Finance Committee Report:** Committee Chair Searcy presented the following items for discussion:

a. **Quarterly Route Performance Report (OF-D-23-003):** Scheduling & Service Planning Manager Katie Freudberg presented the following report for January – March 2023:

Ridership this quarter continued to rebound from the drops we experienced during the pandemic, at around 89 percent of pre-pandemic ridership. The frequent network has the highest ridership relative to pre-pandemic, carrying more than three-quarters of our total ridership. Among our 29 fixed routes, four exceed pre-pandemic ridership levels – the 23 Dickerson Pike, 52 Nolensville Pike, 55 Murfreesboro Pike, and 8 8th Avenue South. Four additional routes exceed 90 percent.

On-time performance system-wide continues to suffer due to congestion and travel time variation, with some of the busiest corridors (Routes 52 Nolensville Pike and 55 Murfreesboro Pike) dropping under 80 percent on time. When buses on these corridors operate every 10 minutes, bus spacing is more critical than on-time performance relative to the schedule – from a customer's perspective, as long as buses come at regular intervals, the service is performing well. Unfortunately, we commonly see bus bunching and gapping – irregular intervals between buses – on these corridors. We continue to investigate and pursue headway management techniques and infrastructure-based solutions to help address this issue.

From a productivity standpoint, the 8 – 8th Avenue South is second in the system, with only 55 – Murfreesboro Pike showing higher ridership productivity. We plan to add additional service on this route in the upcoming year to improve frequency.

There was no further discussion.

b. **Contract to Rebuild Up to 15 Small Buses (M-A-23-001):** Vehicle Maintenance Manager Ewell Crigger presented the following item for action:

Staff requested that the Board authorize the Chief Executive Officer to enter a contract with Southern Bus & Mobility for remanufacturing up to 15 Glaval shuttle buses at a maximum total value of \$1.1 million (including contingency amount if applicable). The contract shall be for four years with an additional one-year extension to incorporate necessary warranty provisions.

Committee Chair Searcy moved to approve the Contract to Rebuild 15 Small Buses, Vice Chair Miller seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved this action item.

VIII. **New Initiative & Community Engagement Committee Report:** Committee Chair Miller introduced the following item for discussion:

a. **Advertising Program Update (NICE-D-23-004):** Marketing and Sales Manager Rick Rodriguez presented the Advertising Program Updated and considerations for Board discussion. The presentation provided an overview of the current structure of our outside advertising contract – what is allowed and not allowed, advertising contract terms and available advertising opportunities, and current revenue goals and types of advertisers. The review was intended to help guide the program's ongoing evolution as we approach the expiration of the existing

advertising sales contract. The presentation offered considerations for the Board to discuss for advertising moving forward as we:

- Option 1 – Continue advertising as is without changes
- Option 2 – Discontinue outside advertising sales altogether
- Option 3 – Hybrid Approach, where we further constrain inventory and options.
- Option 4 – Transition to Full Community Impact Partnership Model

Committee Chair Miller opened the floor for discussion. In summary, the board members expressed the following areas of concern:

1. Preserving our WeGo brand
2. Community partnerships and making sure that we have a policy that says who we partner with and what those partnerships look like because we have to live under a policy of what we put on a bus if we go that route.
3. Even though advertising sales make up less than one percent of our budget, how could we compensate for the lost revenue?
4. Safety. Specifically, even though we've reduced allowable window coverage significantly, should we completely eliminate covering windows with advertising?

Margaret Behm wanted the record and minutes to note that the statement in the packet, "Over the years, we've turned down some advertisements due to social positions," was inaccurate. She answered the Board's questions and gave an overview regarding advertising by transit agencies.

CEO Bland pointed out that, with respect to the revenue we receive, we also incur expenses against that revenue, like staff time to install advertising signage and the need to remove buses from service when they are wrapped. We also occasionally incur legal expenses in consulting with our General Counsel when a borderline ad with respect to our policy comes to our attention. He indicated that, based on his experience with litigation in these matters with other agencies, one lawsuit could easily wipe out multiple years of profit.

There was some discussion regarding the Community Impact Partnership (CIP) Model and what would constitute a partnership as opposed to an outright sale of advertising. Discussion centered around initiatives like the expansion of our WeGo Ride partner base, the Regional Transportation Authority of Middle Tennessee's (RTA) partnership with the Tennessee Titans for the Titans Express trains, and our emerging partnerships around the Dr. Ernest Rip Patton, Jr. North Nashville Transit Center.

The committee conversation set an overall positive tone toward the CIP Model, but additional information was needed, including the costs we incur to manage the current program and some sense of what other transit agencies are doing.

There was no further discussion.

- b. **Connect Downtown Study Update (NICE-D-23-005)**: Marty Sewell, NDOT's Transportation Planning Director and Connect Downtown Project Manager, and Felix Castrodad, Director of Planning & Grants, presented the study's status and facilitated the following discussion:

Connect Downtown is a comprehensive effort to improve overall mobility in and through Downtown Nashville's core. The project is a joint effort led by the Nashville Department of Transportation and Multimodal Infrastructure (NDOT) in partnership with WeGo Public Transit, the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), and the Nashville Downtown Partnership.

The study will identify and examine options for improving traffic management, transit access, curbside and parking management, and bicycle and pedestrian safety while supporting the anticipated growth in employment, residential and commercial development, and Nashville's primacy as a tourism destination. Sewell indicated that the study recognizes the need to improve transit reliability for the local and regional bus network to make transit more competitive. Downtown traffic is one of the most significant challenges in transit reliability, creating frequent service delays and disruptions. Reliable connectivity in and through Downtown is critical for transit to provide fast and consistent access to more places around Nashville.

During the past months, the project team worked on developing priority solution concepts for recommendations focused on high-impact solutions that include transit priority corridors, mobility lanes, priority loading areas, and traffic operations and congestion management strategies. The concepts have been shared with the public and stakeholder groups in recent weeks to gather feedback on how the improvements fit best into the downtown landscape. An online [Priority Solutions](#) survey is available to help participants share their thoughts about these potential solutions. Future next steps include developing and refining recommendations along with potential costs.

Board Chair Carr Williams thanked Sewell for an excellent presentation. She spoke about the congestion in the downtown area and how our buses have to sit for long periods to go one block and asked what the low-hanging fruit timeline was and how we fix this now. She doesn't believe that the citizens of Nashville have the patience to wait for a 10-year plan for Eastbank; part of the solution may be how we work with Metro Police to bring a little traffic control, maybe one more block.

Sewell said the Chair's comments are consistent with many of the comments he has heard.

CEO Bland said that the lowest hanging fruit to address the issues raised by the Chair would be dedicated bus lanes through the downtown core. This approach does not have to be costly but requires public and political will.

Vice Chair Miller highlighted the sense of urgency around these issues and expressed the need to get solutions in place quickly.

IX. CEO's Report: Steve Bland provided the following report:

1. Tuesday afternoon, CEO Bland said he and Ed Oliphant had the opportunity to appear before the Metro Council Budget and Finance Committee to present a summary of our FY2023-24 Operating Budget request. The session was well attended by Committee members, and we received a lot of good questions. The overall tone was quite positive, and several members spoke highly of recent service and project initiatives.
2. With respect to upcoming elections, we will be hosting a candidates' forum for the Metro Nashville offices. The forums will allow us to provide the candidates with background information on WeGo Public Transit, discuss significant policy issues, and entertain any questions they might have. Based on RSVPs received to date, we anticipate excellent attendance.
3. We have begun to hold virtual interviews with candidates for the Chief Development Officer Position. We expect to narrow down the field to do several panels of in-person interviews over the next two weeks. In the meantime, the staff in the Development Department are doing an outstanding job of keeping our many projects, planning efforts, and service initiatives on track.
4. This past weekend, CEO Bland said he had the opportunity to attend the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) CEO Conference. This session brings together about 100 transit CEO's from around the country to discuss issues of mutual interest.

5. We have initiated planning for our fall service changes. Among the changes are another planned lengthening of our service day to 1:15 a.m. on Frequent Network Routes Monday through Saturday, extending service on the 6 Lebanon Pike and 42 St. Cecilia/Cumberland to 11:15 p.m., improving frequency on the 7 Hillsboro Pike and 8 8th Avenue South, adding midday and Saturday service to the 75 Midtown, adding Sunday service to the 75 Midtown and 77 Thompson/Wedgewood, and adding four new WeGo Link mobility on demand zones in Burton Hills, Rosebank, Brick Church Pike, and Old Hickory.
6. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and its contractor completed their review of materials for our Triennial Review. The purpose of the evaluation is to gauge our level of compliance in more than 20 areas of Federal regulations that are a pre-condition of Federal funding. They anticipated issuing a preliminary report in late June and a Final report by July, at which time we will present their findings to the Board. CEO Bland thanked all staff who participated, which is almost all staff, particularly our Capital Grants Manager Billy Higgins, who led the entire effort and was recognized again by the FTA as superb at what she does.
7. On the RTA side:
 - a. Hatch Consulting continued its work on the Star Future Vision Study, and we are now planning for the public engagement phase of this project.
 - b. We continue to advance work on negotiations for a joint development project at the RTA's Donelson Station site with HG Hill and the Southeast Ventures development team. This past month, we received the initial appraisal for the property.
 - c. We are advancing land acquisition toward a permanent park-and-ride location in Murfreesboro.

X. **Chair's Report:** Board Chair Carr Williams provided the following Chair's report:

Board Chair Carr Williams welcomed WeGo's new employees and the Vanderbilt Summer interns from Dodson Parker Behm & Capparella Law Firm. She also acknowledged and congratulated Ewell Crigger on his upcoming retirement. She thanked him for his contributions at WeGo and wished him well.

The Chair said that Steve had recently asked her to sit on the NNTC Community Advisory Board to select the artists to do the digital and the murals for the Dr. Ernest Rip Patton, Jr. North Nashville Transit Center. She was so glad she agreed to do so. She thanked Rachel Johnson for her exemplary work in organizing the process as she dealt with those who submitted RFPs and their teams and ensured they had what they needed. She also acknowledged Kia Lewis for her involvement and thought she did a fantastic job. She was extraordinarily proud of being the board chair of this team of professionals.

Lastly, she thanked former employees Rita Roberts-Turner and Trey Walker for their contributions to the Dr. Ernest Rip Patton, Jr. Transit Center project and community involvement and Trey Harden and the Harden Group for an incredible job navigating WeGo through the process. Watching Harden's passion for community art has been a big game-changer for WeGo.

Board Chair Carr Williams talked about the incredible artists in Nashville and how young artists want to help WeGo's brand and be a part of what WeGo does. These artists are amazing and use their art to community the needs of Nashville in ways that all of us can be better citizens. WeGo talks a lot about equity in transit, and these projects which engage the community will make a difference for Nashville's community. The Chair was grateful for the opportunity to participate and thanked Steve.

Finally, the Chair thought today's meeting contained a lot of good conversation. She is grateful for the work of WeGo professionals and asked that WeGo employees keep lifting each other up and that we ensure the culture of community at WeGo.

XI. **Other Business**: There was no further business to come before this Board.

XII. **Adjournment**: With no further business, Board Chair Carr Williams moved to adjourn the meeting, which adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

Attested:

Gail Carr Williams
Chair

Margaret L. Behm
Secretary