

## **Planning and Stakeholder Relations Committee**

### **Minutes**

**June 18, 2020**

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 am in Port Authority's Neal H. Holmes Board Room at 345 Sixth Avenue, Fifth Floor, Pittsburgh, with the following in attendance:

Via WebEx Board Committee Members

John Tague, Jr., Chairman

Jessica Walls-Lavelle – via Conference Call

Ann Ogoreuc

Stephanie Turman

Board Members and Solicitor

Jeff Letwin

Representative Austin Davis

### **Opening Remarks**

Mr. Tague, Committee Chair, opened the meeting and welcomed those in attendance.

### **Approval of Minutes from the May 21, 2020 Planning and Stakeholder Relations Committee Meeting**

Mr. Tague asked Committee members if there were any corrections to the minutes. There were none and members approved the minutes.

### **Service Planning and Delivery Updates (D. Huffaker, A. Silbermann and P. St. Pierre)**

Mr. Huffaker, Chief Development Officer, provided a brief overview of the Service Planning and Delivery updates. The Authority is using true time to provide real time passenger capacity to riders.

During this time period we did reinstate normal service on four routes to help to assist with social distancing. There were some trips, the Route 51 Carrick ridership did not decline as much as the rest of the system, needed to provide closer to normal schedule.

In May, we moved to the yellow phase and service level. We knew that companies and businesses would be continuing to telework and we didn't think we would see a huge increase on demand as customers started to return downtown and other parts of the county. We monitored the ridership during this phase, and noted this was the case, that ridership continued to decline a little bit during the first week of the yellow phase. We also considered what was going to happen in Oakland. The universities did not come back to in person classes. Students have

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already gone home, and we continued to have limited service going through the Oakland corridor which enabled us to meet our daily ridership demands as well as the cleaning demands for the fleet.

As I said, we were at 71 routes reduced service in the red level and went down to 32 routes with reduced service during the yellow level. That represents about a 12 percent reduction in hours and miles. Just about half of the service that we had cut back was returned.

We noted no increase in ridership on our commuter route and in fact that still has been quite slow to recover. Light Rail ridership was down about 90% at the start of the pandemic and has continued to lag. Quite quickly after two weeks we moved into the Green phase and again the telework is still encouraged and companies are asked to continue to encourage employees to stay home if possible. We started looking at what we could do for green service and had meant that were starting to monitor what was happening with downtown and talking to some of our partners at Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership and The Allegheny Conference to determine what they are hearing about employers Downtown and if workers were going to be coming back. We expected that the demand at least Downtown has been very slow to ramp back up.

We have maintained the same level of service in Yellow that we did in Green, but we do monitor the ridership and have been trying to look at the data. If need be, we will add service back. We are planning on a return to a full level of service on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, which would be our next pick, that is somewhat dependent on the manpower being available, we still have a number of employees who are out for precautionary reasons and getting those employees back to work will be important.

We continue to step up our protocol and got more streamlined with the cleaning service. We feel comfortable that we will have a clean product out. We also during the green phase returned to front door boarding, after the first week we allowed customers to board through the front door but did not require exchange of fares, the second week starting June 8<sup>th</sup> we started having customers paying their fares using the ConnectCard or paying cash through the front. Ridership has maintained steady through the Green phase we have not seen a large influx of riders.

Looking at ridership charts: the stats for last year during this time currently we would see ridership on bus was 190,000/day people on a typical weekday. In early March just as the pandemic was starting to hit, we were close to those levels of this year both voluntary shutdown and the red phase, the ridership in the red dropped significantly we were down 85% at first on the bus side. We did see some recovery

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we were at 70% of normal ridership now, ridership has gradually increased as weeks go by. We are still down about 70% from normal the good news if you want to play with statistics, we are up 60% from our lows during the pandemic but that still represents a huge drop. The LRV ridership has dropped and stayed down 90% from our normal levels and we are still down 80% from normal. As we go into the green phase there was a small recovery, but it hasn't been as pronounced as the bus side. We continue to talk to Downtown employers to get a sense of what is happening there and see what is happening there, as the riders start coming back, we will look at the need of going back to normal service on the LRV.

Access was also of course significantly impacted by the pandemic, while the ridership is still lower than other modes still increasingly important during this time. We saw about 75% decline in ridership during the pandemic however there were still several of riders that who had to continue to ride for medical reasons, possible dialysis or some other medical treatment that they needed. Access stepped up and continue to provide that service for customers. They also implemented masks and daily vehicle disinfection and they also implemented some physical distancing rules that required more space on the vehicles themselves. They also came up with a couple creative solutions to use some of their resources in an efficient way and effective way during the pandemic, they got a grant through the Pittsburgh Foundation and through United Way to sponsor food deliveries throughout the region. Some areas of the county where Access provided essential service to customers who could not get out to a grocery store to get groceries. PennDOT also allowed Access to go to same day service, typically you must call ahead and make a reservation for Access service. On a space available basis, customers were able to request service on the day of. Just like other modes Access ridership dropped significantly a normal month would see just over 4,000 riders during the red phase we were down to 1,000 riders a day, we are starting to creep up to 1600 a day and were up 60% from where we were. What are we doing now with the recovery, we worked frequently with our partners downtown and throughout the County?

City of Pittsburgh DOMI has an initiative called REOPEN PGH, that brought leaders from various disciplines to talk about how best to restart the economy and how do you get workers and customers feeling safe about coming downtown and about being able to dine downtown or workout deliveries and pickup of their goods they want to buy. Mr. Huffaker participated on this panel looked at and you will start seeing over the summer some creative initiatives to enable more outdoor dining to enable those businesses to get back on their feet, which is critical for Allegheny County.

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We are also working with Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership on some of our downtown bus stops, we are coordinating signage and coordinating activities to ensure that we can provide to the extent possible social distancing opportunities for customers and give them a consistent look and feel when they are moving through downtown and moving through other parts of the community, do they know what to expect. For those of you that have been downtown you will see the arrows on the sidewalks and arrows in buildings, it has the similar look and feel, and this will be provided for some of our downtown bus stops as well. We are also working with the Oakland TMA dining opportunities in the Oakland area as well.

We are in a new world. We are talking to businesses, talking to PDP and DOMI and other groups to understand how the ridership is changing and how will telecommuting impact the demand for transit. We're talking to those businesses and this is part of the NEXT Transit Long-Range Plan to identify what does the new rule for transit play and how will transit serve the community in the future. We are also seeing some national lessons, just this weekend the Atlantic had an article about how transit was unfairly maligned as a super cedar of COVID 19 cases and the article faulted some of the research that was done by a major University in the Northeast. Riders have quite a bit of safety that is provided by transit, for some cases it is the only way some people can get to work and it certainly is the most efficient way for people to get to work.

NEXTransit: Our Long-Range Planning process, earlier this month we started a website ([nextransit.network](http://nextransit.network)), this will be hub for people to provide public comments and to activate some of their thought process so we can incorporate that into our transit planning for the future. We also have a valued survey and a gap analysis that will begin next month. We are doing some engagements internally with PAAC Stakeholders and our Steering Committee but that will be going broader next month. We also have some station and Park N Ride improvement planning that will kick off over the next few months particularly at Wilkinsburg Station and at Carnegie Station, we had some opportunities there to coordinate with some local development and rethink how those park n rides interact with their surrounding communities and both supportive of the community as well as increase ridership. Planning Department recently received an FDA grant of nearly \$700,000 that will help support our TOD community staff. As we look at some of the transit access improvements focused on the East Busway particularly as it overlaps on our BRT corridor between Oakland and Wilkinsburg but will give us an opportunity to work with the communities and identify where TOD maybe supportive of both community development and transit. This happened a day before the board meeting last month but just to give you an update, we did receive a tweet from the

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President of United States talking about our small starts grant for the BRT project. That announced that \$99.95MM has been allocated from the federal budget, what that means is the grant has not been awarded but once the project does meet all the project readiness requirements, we will be first in line an essentially guaranteed of that funding. Requirements readiness review the FDA hires in their standard process a project management oversight consultant. PMOC will come in evaluate the project plan, evaluate the resourcing, evaluate the communications plan and right away plan to ensure the project is ready to receive the funding and meet the local match will be obtained and obtained efficiently. We will continue to work on the readiness on our current plan and hopefully we will receive the grant next year.

Mr. St. Pierre gave a brief update on two major service development projects and talk about potential changes for next year service. The first project the Bus Stop Consolidation project this project has been placed on hold due to the COVID 19 situation. Prior to the COVID 19 situation we have been working on incorporating more public outreach efforts that would require us to get out into the community and more face to face discussions with the communities, more pop up events at bus stops to talk to passengers, due to social distancing guidelines we put this placed this project on hold. We have not stopped working on improving our bus stop infrastructure and signage out into the communities. Our focus has mainly been the COVID 19 situation we have transitioned our service development associate staff to accomplish route reviews, they have been out there evaluating every single route in the system, looking at signage and looking at shelters and seeing things that need to be taking care of. To date over 480 work orders have been developed and currently in the process of being worked on. Those work orders include bus stop signs that are missing, they maybe faded or leaning or an obstructive view such as tree branches. This will be very helpful to our customers and our operators that rely on these signs to make sure they pull up to the stop and this should prevent pass ups.

Second project is the Shelter replacement project: This project has been impacted due to the COVID 19 situation. vendor is in Michigan and they had a more aggressive shutdown plan in that state and had to shut down their operations for some time. That impacted our timeline, but they did resume operations and we are looking at completing the next phase, the third phase of shelter replacement program in late September or late October. We are in track to replace approximately 30 to 35 shelters during that timeframe.

In addition to those major projects we are also looking at what service additions that we can we do for next Fiscal year. Earlier last year we brought to the board an updated FY19 update to Transit Service Standards. We are still

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progressing on that timeline of those new Transit Service Standards and so all those service requests that have been collected in FY20 and before are currently in the evaluation phase. For the Annual Service Report is planned to be updated this upcoming November for public release and those will have all the rankings of all the projects and those projects are slated to be implemented in FY22. While that is a longer timeline of getting new projects implemented in FY22, we want to look at what projects that could implement in FY21. So, we evaluated what could we do and a lot of the projects that we implemented even this year was weekend service. We want to put an emphasis on getting seven-day network comprised of Local, Coverage and Rapid routes and that is what we requested in our budget for next Fiscal year. On the list of all the routes, these are routes that are operating maybe five to six days of the week, we would like to get those routes up to seven days daily service for those routes. This was an emphasis prior to COVID 19 situation, but the COVID 19 situation also emphasized the need for community to have daily service. Note to crowding during the weekdays and the peaks, folks and communities can't get around on a Saturday or Sunday rather than Monday – Friday it could help elevate some of those crowding concerns in the future. This is what we plan to achieve in FY21 and will require a minor update to the Transit Service Standards. The only route not on this list that we are going to place on hold currently is Route 71, we are delaying that initiative right now due to the Kenmawr Bridge project. After the completion of that project we will be looking to add weekend service for that route.

One of the next steps to implementing that seven-day service, we are looking to bring to the board, we are going to develop board adopted updated Transit Service Standards in July. Basically, we are going to update the language to say we are going to put up an emphasis and priority on Local and Coverage routes to operate with daily service. Right now, Rapid routes are operating on a daily service, but they are as on that previous slide there are Local and Coverage routes that do not operate on a Saturday or Sunday schedule or both. Upon the budget and Transit Service Standards adoption we will be able to implement these proposed FY21 additions next year. Tentatively we are planning to implement that in November 2020.

Next steps to Title VI, we will formally present to ACTC and Port Authority Planning and Stakeholder Relations Committee and the board in July a brief update on the Title VI because they are all service additions just like last year service additions that we implemented in FY20. We do not anticipate that there is going to be any adverse impact expected on minority or low-income persons because these are all service additions.

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**Questions from Board Members and Others**

1. Ms. Ogoreuc asked what other routes that were reinstated in the yellow phase.
  - a. Mr. St. Pierre answered the other routes returned service on in pre-yellow phase the Route 16, Route 51, Route P1 and additional various trips on the red line during that phase. At the Yellow phase we brought back all the local and coverage routes to normal schedule.
  
2. Ms. Wiens (Stakeholder PPT) as PPT we are very excited that the report that Mr. Phillip just gave on weekend service, we are grateful and think that it is very important for local routes to have access to service on weekends and we celebrate that decision.
  
3. Ms. Wiens asked Mr. Huffaker what indications you have that makes sense to return to normal service levels rather than enhancing service on routes that seem to be regularly experiencing overcrowding. Is there any consideration given to increasing frequency higher than pre-COVID 19 levels because of the diminished capacity on buses?
  - a. Mr. Huffaker answered we are somewhat limited in what we could do so far as adding frequencies on some of these routes. I think we are monitoring and trying to react as quickly as possible on balancing between what is happening on commuter routes and what is happening with some of the other local service. I think that is one we are continuing to study and we must be careful because once we put into a pick than it is ratified for the next several months. We need to make sure that we got added capacity knowing what we know about people coming back to Downtown and what we know about our ability to staying in the Green level or move beyond post green, whatever color that might look like. We may still need to have capacity available for commuters to come back Downtown, it is a big unknown right now. Were also looking at what other agencies are doing as well. I think what I am seeing primarily is people are maintaining that capacity for commuters, but it is an outstanding question, I do not have the answer.

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4. Ms. Wiens asked will the Port Authority start releasing data, a report on crowding by route and can we see whether the trajectory around crowding has changed or improved on pass ups? Because anecdotally we are talking to riders at bus-stops very regularly and hearing that people are regularly being passed up, particularly in communities that are further along in the service. Routes will get crowded towards the origin of the service and by the time it gets to their community people are regularly getting passed up. Will we see that data so we can see that were moving in a trajectory were that want to be as consistently happening?
  - a. Mr. Huffaker stated we do have True Time which shows the real time capacity and demand on that route. I do recognize that does not allow for a lot of planning that just tells you right in that moment. We are working on a tool that will allow customers to see typical crowding on trips so that we can provide some better information for trip planning. I think you will hear about that within the next week or so. We hope that will provide some benefit, we do monitor Mr. St. Pierre's team the complaints and notifications about pass-ups, so that is something that is being considered. This will be one of those driving forces that will help us evaluate where we have the service properly placed.
  
5. Ms. Wiens asked about fare impacts – have you seen any data around reinstating the fares on ridership by route as well as impact on cash usage on buses.
  - a. Ms. Kelleman answered we have about a week of data on that, but we don't have enough data to be able to say anything well informed at this point. We will keep the board posted and come back to our Committee meetings next month and we will have included this information on what we are seeing on the impacts of ridership on our next committee meeting.