

**Board of Directors – Emergency Teleconference Meeting  
Wednesday, March 18, 2020 – by teleconference only  
Meeting Minutes**

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Minutes of the Board of Directors Emergency Teleconference Meeting of Wednesday, March 18, 2020 held at 5:00 p.m. – via Zoom teleconference.

**Board Members Present (via teleconference):**

Belinda Ray – Board President  
Paul Bradbury – Treasurer  
Ed Suslovic  
Jim Violette  
Merrill Barter  
Mike Foley  
Jeff Levine  
Nat Tupper  
Ryan Leighton  
Bill Rixon

**Staff and Others Present:**

Greg Jordan  
Glenn Fenton  
Lauren Shaw  
Kristina Egan, GPCOG  
Rebecca Grover, MTA

**Public:**

Sonia – METRO Rider  
Daniel – Breez Rider, Freeport

**Board Members Absent:**

Hope Cahan  
John Thompson  
Kim Cook

- 1. With a quorum in place (via teleconference), the meeting was called to order at 5:04 p.m. by Belinda Ray, Board President.**

- 2. Temporary Service Reduction**

Greg Jordan presented an overview of the current situation and the reasoning behind Management staff seeking Board approval to reduce weekday service by replacing “Weekday” schedules with “Saturday” schedules. If approved, this temporary reduction would be in effect from Friday, March 20 thru April 17, 2020. Saturday service levels are about 65% of full weekday service levels. Saturday and Sunday schedules will operate normally. The most impacted routes will be monitored closely to determine if a reinstatement of regular service is needed.

Staff also requests that the Board authorize the General Manager to implement further reductions, including full-service elimination, during this period as needed to respond to emergency conditions, or to reinstate full service as conditions warrant. Board action will be required to extend this period beyond April 17, 2020 unless superseded by other local, state or federal legal action.

As with all public transit agencies nationwide, we are working to maintain lifeline mobility and critical job access, yet are seeing more agencies reduce service due to significant ridership reductions and concern over labor availability. Based on weekend and Monday’s figure, Metro anticipates sustained ridership loss of at least 50% going forward and eventual staffing impacts due to possible/actual infections or the need to care for children or relatives. To stay ahead of a potentially escalating staff shortage, we think a prudent step is to reduce service to Saturday levels now, in a proactive and planned manner and in coordination with regional transit partners. Additionally, this move reduces total hours bus operators are driving and helps increase social distancing from passengers. Although actual driving time will decrease for Bus Operators, everyone will be paid for 40 hours per week. Given the reduced ridership, we do not expect this move will create more crowded

conditions on buses. Passengers continuing to use transit will be able maintain appropriate distances from each other.

The alternative is to attempt to maintain “Weekday” schedules and reduce incrementally as we lose bus operators. This approach presents logistical and communication challenges and also puts the different bus transit agencies out of sync with each other. Particularly given reduced demand, we feel the planned-coordinated reduction is the best approach. Reduction in service will also partially offset fare revenue loss.

**Public Comment on Agenda Item 2:**

Kristina Egan, GPCOG: pleased Metro is working in coordination with other transit agencies and being proactive.

Sonia – Metro “Frequent Flyer”: There has been a great turnaround since Greg and Glenn joined Metro and they are keeping things in check and safe.

Mike Foley moved, seconded by Merrill Barter, to approve reducing weekday service by replacing “Weekday” schedules with “Saturday” schedules from Friday, March 20, 2020 thru April 17, 2020 and authorizing the General Manager to implement further reductions, including full-service elimination, during this period as needed to respond to emergency conditions, or to reinstate full service as conditions warrant. Board action will be required to extend this period beyond April 17, 2020, unless superseded by other local, state, or federal legal action.

Following further discussion, an amended motion was made by Nat Tupper, seconded by Mike Foley, to add the option to reinstate an earlier trip on the Breez for commuters, if the need is determined. **The amended motion passed unanimously by all present on the teleconference (Ed Suslovic, Jim Violette, Merrill Barter, Mike Foley, Jeff Levine, Nat Tupper, Ryan Leighton, Bill Rixon, Belinda Ray).**

**3. Temporary Suspension of Fares**

Greg Jordan presented regarding Management staff seeking Board approval to suspend all bus fares effective Friday, March 20, 2020 thru April 30, 2020 and authorize the General Manager to reinstate fares at any time during this period should conditions warrant. Board action will be required to extend this period beyond April 30, 2020 unless superseded by other local, state or federal legal action.

In taking this action, implementation of the Automated Fare Payment System would be deferred until May 1, 2020 at the earliest. At this point, staff do not believe it is wise to introduce a fare increase and major change in fare payment method in the midst of a national health and economic emergency. Our partners at the City of South Portland, Biddeford-Saco-Old Orchard Beach Transit, and the Regional Transportation Program (RTP) agree with this measure and will simultaneously implement along with Metro, pending approval of their governing boards.

The principal reason behind this measure is to eliminate nearly all contact between bus operators and passengers (except assistance for people with disabilities) and maximize social distance. We view the suspension of fares as a measure to help keep Bus Operators safer, and, therefore, staying on the job providing transit service. Finally, Metro’s customer service staff and money counting staff also must handle cash on a daily basis. Based on CDC guidance, Metro staff think it is prudent to eliminate all such contact. This action would extend to suspending fares to those Metro has specific pass programs with, including MMC, Baxter Academy, USM, and Portland Public Schools.

A secondary reason for this measure is that temporarily eliminating fares will provide a financial assist to those being hit hard by the crisis’ economic shocks.

A 50% ridership drop would cause Metro to lose substantial fare revenue, even while maintaining fares at current levels. The temporary reduction in service and associated reduction in costs will offset a portion of the fare revenue loss. Transit agencies nationwide will be experiencing a major fare revenue decline, so Metro is confident supplemental emergency federal funding, FEMA assistance, or state support will be approved to fill the fare revenue gap we will experience this year. We will need your support at all levels to make sure this financial assistance is secured and we can avoid a serious budget deficit or be forced to consider longer-term service reductions. Finally, there is also some limited capacity in the PACTS region's 5307 reserves to help offset a revenue gap. As we turn the corner on the crisis, we would move to implement the automated fare system and fare increase as quickly as possible, without the parallel paper system.

**Public Comment on Agenda Item 3:**

Sonia: I am in favor of this action; it is a great idea.

Daniel, Freeport, Breez rider: He usually takes the 6:00 a.m. Breez for work. Changing to the Saturday schedule removes this option. The return Saturday schedule is fine. (Joined the call after Item 2 was complete). Greg Jordan readdressed this topic for Daniel's benefit and they will speak directly outside this meeting.

Jim Violette moved, seconded by Ed Suslovic, to approve suspension of all bus fares effective Friday, March 20, 2020 thru April 30, 2020 and to authorize the General Manager to reinstate fares at any time during this period should conditions warrant with the understanding that Board action will be required to extend this period beyond April 30, 2020, unless superseded by other local, state, or federal legal action. In taking this action, implementation of the Automated Fare Payment System would be deferred until May 1, 2020 at the earliest. **The motion passed unanimously by all present on the teleconference. (Ed Suslovic, Jim Violette, Merrill Barter, Mike Foley, Jeff Levine, Nat Tupper, Ryan Leighton, Bill Rixon, Paul Bradbury, Belinda Ray).**

**4. Other updates Pertaining to METRO's Response to the COVID-19 Emergency**

- Today is Transit Worker Appreciation Day.
- The Pulse will be closed to the Public as of Friday, March 20, 2020, but customer service staff will be in the office to answer calls.
- Valley St. Administrative staff are working remotely and the office is closed to the public.
- Extra cleaning measures are in place. All buses are being cleaned twice a day.
- Communications are going out to the public and staff regularly about health measures.
- Communicate to the public to use transit services only if they are absolutely needed to get groceries, prescriptions, medical appointments, or to work.

**5. Adjournment**

Motion made by Merrill Barter, seconded by Paul Bradbury, to adjourn. **With unanimous approval by all members present on the teleconference, the meeting adjourned at 5:44 p.m.**