

**Meeting of the Ridership Committee – Remote Access only**

Meeting Minutes

May 21, 2020, 4:00 p.m.

<b>Committee Members Present:</b>	<b>Staff:</b>	<b>Others:</b>
Ed Suslovic, Chair	Greg Jordan	
Bill Rixon	Glenn Fenton	
Jeff Levine	Denise Beck	
Ryan Leighton	Lauren Shaw	
<b>Absent:</b>	Joshua Crooker	
Hope Cahan		

1. **With a quorum in place, the meeting was called to order at 4:06 p.m. by Ed Suslovic, Chairman.**
  
2. **Public comment**  
No members of the public were present.
  
3. **Approval of Meeting Minutes**  
Motion made by Jeff Levine, seconded by Bill Rixon, to approve the minutes from the November 21, 2019 Ridership Committee Meeting with a correction to the spelling Jeff Levine’s name under Item 3. A roll call vote was called for by Ed Suslovic, Chair. With approval by Bill Rixon, Jeff Levine, Ryan Leighton, and Ed Suslovic, the **motion passed unanimously by all members present.**
  
4. **General Update on Metro Response to COVID-19 Emergency**
  - Greg Jordan reviewed the numerous precautions in place at Metro. Passengers have been receptive to following the procedures in place.
  - **Ridership** – weekday 1700, Sat. 1344, Sun. 575 – 63-76% decrease from 2019. Nationwide, with no specific size transit agency, Greg has heard of 70-90% decreases in ridership. Have been seeing incremental upticks in the daily ridership average during May, even up to 2,000. Husky, Breez, and Route 7 are at the lower end of the ridership spectrum.
  - Highest density ridership is on Routes 4, 5, and 8 during commuter times. These routes will have to be augmented with more equipment or more robust service until full service is reinstated.
  - Anticipate more ridership increases in June as Phase 2 re-openings begin.
  - **Other agencies:** South Portland just reinstated service. BSOOB resumed reduced service 5/1. RTP ramping up – continue to provide ADA/Paratransit. Casco Bay Lines – reduced service. Downeaster – still suspended.
  
5. **Considerations on Service Resumption**
  - **HQ (Valley St.):** Remote work at least through July. New protocols and components at the office to prepare for return to work – hands free door mechanisms, towel dispensers, and more
  - **Pulse:** Align opening with the opening of the Portland Public Library, though there is not a date at this time. When fares are reinstated, the automated fare system will launch; the Pulse will open in time for that launch, even if the library has not opened. A meeting with an architect is scheduled

for next week to see what changes can be made, including a walk-up window with sidewalk access. There will be some in-building business completed, but at a minimum.

**US CDC recently released new guidelines specific to public transit.** Following a broad overview, Greg listed the following details (all of which Metro is already doing):

- Step 1: Restrict ridership to essential critical infrastructure workers in areas needing significant mitigation and maintain strict social distancing as much as possible.
- Step 2: Maintain social distancing between transit riders and employees as much as possible.
- Step 3: Encourage social distancing as much as possible. Metro's maximum occupancy is 10 riders. Incrementally increasing this will be discussed as higher ridership demands return.
- **Safety Actions for the above steps.**
  - Promote health hygiene practices with appropriate policies, available supplies, and communications. Intensify cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation. Metro is moving toward cleaning and disinfecting bus operator area between each shift.
  - Evaluate and implement improvements to ventilation systems. Facility ventilation system: getting a quote to upgrade air handling system or possibly UV light disinfection through ventilation system. Will at least change filters from dust to HEPA. Buses 2018 or newer have the highest quality HEPA system; older buses have fewer improvement options.
  - Have been training employees and put good signage on buses. Policies have been put into place for the bus operator lounge to limit time, removed chairs, always wear a mask. More dedicated training will be provided as staff returns who have been out.
- **Monitoring & Preparing:** Not yet doing employee health checks, but are encouraging staff who have any symptoms of illness to stay home.
- **Maintain Healthy Operations.** Flexible sick leave, monitor absenteeism, designate primary manager (not done, but Greg has been the point person), robust communication system for employees and customers, support coping and resilience among employees.
- **Adjusting service:** work around hot spots, adjust service as necessary. Continue communication about decision-making with staff and public. May need to lessen service on some routes and increase it on the higher-demand routes in June.
- **Considerations on Resuming Service - Reduction of some Pandemic Response measures:** Rear-door boarding policy, enclosure of bus operator area (expect full install by mid-June), opening windows, reduction of closed-off areas with needed increase in capacity.
- **Additional Considerations:** Status of Governor's phased re-opening, virus transmission in Cumberland Co., balancing capacity restrictions w/ demand, sufficient staff to sustain full-service levels, status of school classes in September. Consideration of mid-level service? Greg has met with USM staff who are planning to resume classes in the fall – subject to change. Will need to be able to allow full capacity on buses, or increase equipment and staff to handle the needs of USM ridership. Meeting scheduled with Portland Public Schools superintendent 5/29.

## 6. Considerations on the Reinstatement of Fares

- Organizational readiness
  - Resume full level of service for some period of time before the reinstatement of fares.

- Operational readiness
  - When fares resume, they will resume under the new system alone, with no passes or grace period. Trainings and tutorials will be on-line and over the phone. The new system can be nearly contactless with the mobile app and the card – so change the focus to the safety of using the new system. Get partners on board with what needs to change before launching.
- Completion of hardware/software training
  - Need to complete operator training and refresh customer service training.
- Consideration for Regional partners
  - Need complete testing of the system – Metro has done, the others have not. SP and BSOOB are fully installed and running again. Testing will need to be done before launch to make sure all systems are working in sync. Once this is complete, a more solid date will be set. The current target is the first week of August, but it will depend on above.
- Fare Revenue/Budget
- Optimal time for public
  - Will the Governor’s plan have a reasonable cue that would make sense to our public for launch.
- Pandemic Response Considerations
  - There is also the consideration of handling cash, given the situation. Perhaps try a period of not accepting cash to see how the public reacts and if it is a good safety measure.
  - Messaging going right from no fares to having to use the automated fare system – plan well, how best to handle. Also have to reevaluate the distribution of cards – were planning events, such as a table at the farmers’ market. Have all this in place before determining a date. Be sensitive to riders – how to get cards, load them, etc.
- Will have more concrete information and policies in place before reporting back to Ridership and the Board in June.

## 7. Future Agenda Items

- Bus stop amenities/improvements, including Pulse improvements.
- Evaluation of summer cooling centers: Greg needs more detail from Hope on this item.
- Evaluation of Route 4 modification in Westbrook: increased noise and trips along Mechanic St. – evaluating a move over to Saco St. Greg will conduct a mini-neighborhood meeting and bring to Ridership in a couple of months.
- Status of all bus stop improvements, including shelters, benches, and lighting.

## 8. Upcoming Meetings – Committee times and dates subject to change after December

- Finance Committee – June 3, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.
- Executive Committee – June 10, 2020 at 4:30 p.m.
- Ridership Committee – June 18, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.
- Board of Directors – June 25, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.

## 9. Adjournment

Jeff Levine moved to adjourn, seconded by Ryan Leighton. Motion to adjourn made by Hope Cahan, seconded by Jeff Levine. A roll call vote was called for by Ed Suslovic, Chair. With approval by Bill Rixon, Jeff Levine, Ryan Leighton, and Ed Suslovic, the **motion passed unanimously by all members present and the meeting adjourned at 5:06 p.m.**