

Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, Inc.

Meeting of the Board of Directors

July 28, 2022 | 4:00pm via Zoom

Attendees

Board Members: Bridgette Brady; Lisa Holmes; Jennifer Dotson; Dan Klein; Laura Lewis; Ducson Nguyen; Frank Proto; Gary Stewart; Denise Thompson

TCAT Staff: Scot Vanderpool; Taylor Hessler; Gian Fountain; Colleen Marsh; Curt Parish; Megan Pulver; Phil Smith; Mike Smith; Nate Wells; Pamela Torelli; Gina Lord

Public Attendees: John Monkovic, Susan Beckley, Robert Lynch

Call to Order

Chair L. Lewis called the meeting to order at 4:03 pm.

Board Member Items

There were no Board Member items.

Public Comment

Robert Lynch has attended previously and is a member of the Enfield town board. He has lived there for 54 years and seen that for a length of that, that TCAT and its predecessors refused to sell advertising on the side of the buses. It was unsightly and commercializing of service. Beginning in 2009 TCAT began allowing advertising, and it had been tasteful and restrained. A few weeks ago, he relayed that he observed a "rolling billboard" for Simmons Rockwell. He has no personal complaints but, expressed a few concerns and wondered if the decision had been vetted by the Board, and its supporting agencies, and by the riders of TCAT, as he thinks the riders cannot see outside. He wanted to bring it to our attention as he knows we subcontract out with SAGA communications.

Susan Beckley is a member of the Transportation Equity Needs Assessment group. TCAT comes up a lot for underserved communities and she wanted to observe the discussions and maybe relay some information.

Approval of minutes

The minutes from the June 15, 2022 Special Board Meeting and the June 23 Board Meeting were moved together by F. Proto and seconded by D. Klein. Both were passed unanimously with a vote of 9-0-0.

Chair's Report

L. Lewis wanted to state thanks to M. Yarrow, who has now left TCAT. She wanted to thank him for his many years of service and to TCAT for organizing a goodbye lunch with Matt. She acknowledged the good deal of city road construction going on. The benefits are that come Fall and Winter the roads will be in better condition. Some costs are the delays and detours, there have been many exchanges between TCAT and City staff about the detours. She said we will all benefit in the long run and she appreciates the patience of everyone, including drivers and dispatchers. She also wanted to comment on the expected success of the Free-Ryde program. She highlighted the program at a special meeting of Common Council. The meeting was moved from August 3rd to July 27. Three members of the public attended that meeting and encouraged fare-free for TCAT. L. Lewis described the Free-Ryde program for those 17 years and younger in response, and how it addresses equity issues and sustainability issues.

She gave an update on the Transportation Agreement. There was a meeting held July 1, and there will be another meeting soon. The City's negotiation team is made up of City Attorney Ari Lavine, City Controller Steve Thayer, Faith Vavra, who is chief of staff, and herself. The County team includes Legislature Chair Shawna Black, Vice Chair Deborah Dawson, Bridgette Nugent, and Bill Troy, the County Attorney. The Cornell team consists of Jared Pittman, Joel Malina, and Rick Burgess. She also hopes that Susan Brock will be in those discussions. There is a plan to have a draft to be able to take to the City Administration Committee meeting on August 24; to the County Legislature meeting on September 6; and the September 7 meeting of Common Council and then to the TCAT Executive Committee meeting in September; then finally the September 22 TCAT BOD meeting. They are all lined up in order to be able to meet the October 9 expiration of the current Transportation Agreement that was extended for 1 year due to COVID.

GM Report

Systems Report

Ridership June 2022, over 113,000 riders, 55% increase over June last year. A dip in ridership happens every year around this time; this year hovering around 61% of 2019. Preventative maintenance inspections and Brake inspections are down due to the loss of a couple of mechanics and vacations that were planned. Only 2 road calls in June, there were 11 in May, and 14 in April. There were 76 missed trips in June, still due to driver and bus shortage. J. Dotson asked why the bus shortage is so high; a large contributor is waiting for parts. L. Lewis posed the same question and asked if there was a distinction between repair for electric or diesel. C. Parrish said parts ordered 3-4 months ago are starting to trickle in, but with no consistency. L. Hargett and N. Wells are looking for any vendors with available parts. June budget came in \$300,000 over, making the year projected to \$600,00 favorable to budget. Unfortunately fuel prices are still high and for the first half of the year, fuel has cost TCAT about \$670,000. Cost of parts is lower than average due to parts not coming in. Collision, 3 in June, no injuries. HR at 68 full time operators, 3 in training and both of the non-CDL drivers passed their tests July 27. A class of 4 operators is scheduled for August 15, there will be a bus handler and mechanic also attending. Marketing, centered around the Triennial, redesigned the systems map. The biggest struggle for IT is the farebox system.

Frank had a question regarding fuel; he is curious about the ongoing electrification cost analysis with NYPA and NYSEG. Scot said he doesn't have many updates and we are really investigating the demand charges.

Lisa had a question about missed trips, in the case of 'lack of drivers'. She asked S. Vanderpool if the issues were common over the years, or more recently and is it also a contributor to the need for service reductions? S. Vanderpool said we don't normally see this in June/over the summer so it is uncommon. M. Smith said it is normally sporadic to have missed trips due to driver shortage over the summer. More often it is isolated to a larger number of callouts in a single day, it can be difficult in the moment to get the trips covered.

Action Items

L. Lewis introduced the action item for the night, **Resolution 2022-xx Fare-Free Planning Initiative**. D. Klein moves and J. Dotson seconds.

D. Klein starts off the discussion saying, the topic of fare-free has been a topic of discussion for years on and off. Lately been hearing from the public to implement it; instead of having it hovering as an idea, we should get on the record of supporting fare-free and outline the steps we need to implement or find out why we can't. He first submitted the resolution to the board members last week and after email

feedback made a minor change before the meeting. Other board members made suggestions that will need to be moved and discussed during this meeting; G. Stewart suggested in emails to add the word "potentially" to the second Whereas statement to read "WHEREAS, a number of factors would have to be studied and agreed upon to potentially enable the switch to being fare-free such as data collection and a new payment structure from TCAT's underwriters, and". L. Lewis supported this.

J. Dotson supported D. Klein's change of wording to "plan" saying that M. Yarrow's White Paper covers issues and ramifications of going fare-free, even considering the world has changed several times since he wrote it. She acknowledges that going fare-free would increase ridership, and a barrier to this, is we don't want to increase ridership to a level that TCAT cannot serve. However, TCAT is in a situation where we cannot serve even the current ridership. There is a mismatch between demand and it is unavoidable even with the current structure. Knowing that fare-free will increase ridership and for that reason only, it's not possible, she doesn't believe is reflecting the reality.

L. Lewis brought up that this issue may be something that can be put on the agenda for the Planning Committee to work on. D. Klein said he thinks this may require an outside person to do, but he's willing to give a try if there is enough expertise in-house. He recognizes that TCAT staff already has full plates, and thought putting a year timeline would be sufficient to make a plan and isn't sure the Planning Committee is the best place to start because it would require TCAT staff participation. He isn't sure if 3 months is even the right time to start. L. Lewis thought the Planning Committee would be the place to identify what resources would be needed to commence planning. She thinks this resolution moves TCAT, rather than keeping the topic stuck in discussion.

D. Thompson agrees that an outside person would get us moving first. She also said it should be run from the Planning Committee as well, and she explained her proposed changes that are meant to expand. In the second 'Whereas' she thinks it is important to "explore reasonable funding options" and opposed wording about restructuring the underwriter payment structure because we don't have their permission/know if they will want to pay for it. It would give more options for funding and not pigeonhole us into using only the underwriters to cover the costs.

G. Stewart makes a motion to add "Potentially" to the second whereas before "enable the switch," L. Lewis seconds.

L. Holmes discusses working with a consultant and giving a year's time would potentially allow us to find funding for a consultant to help us with the study and/or develop a plan for potentially going fare-free.

J. Dotson would like to give leeway to S. Vanderpool as to whether it would make sense to have a consultant do the work, given the amount of in-house information and expertise that exists. She was hoping TCAT was not going to hire a consultant, she thinks a study in house would be helpful.

S. Vanderpool said that's not a decision that needs to be made today. He informed the board that TCAT has a work study student, Chloe Long, who is currently researching fare-free and talking to other agencies; cataloging case studies; finding agencies with similar situations to TCAT's. We are trying to gather information. There are some financial constraints currently and we don't want to decide on a consultant yet. L. Lewis suggested waiting on the resolution until the next board meeting, and having the Planning Committee meet and discuss with GM Vanderpool, the intern, and other relevant staff, to figure out what can be done in-house and what might need to be looked at from a consultant and the funding needed. D. Klein agrees that the decision of needing a consultant does not to be decided today, and there is no mention of it in the resolution, so he wants to move along the resolution. J. Dotson agrees. L. Lewis takes back her suggestions and agrees to continue with the resolution.

The Board votes on inserting "potentially" into the second Whereas and it is unanimously approved with a vote of 9-0-0.

The second suggestion was made by D. Thompson to strike "a new payment structure from TCAT's underwriters" from the second "Whereas" and replace it with "exploring reasonable funding options". She introduced this change as to not back us into a corner, and expand the possibility of allowing other funding opportunities than just underwriter funding.

D. Thompson moves and D. Klein seconds these changes. The changes are approved with a vote of 9-0-0, so the second Whereas will read as follows:

"WHEREAS, a number of factors would have to be studied and agreed upon to potentially enable the switch to being fare-free such as data collection and exploring reasonable funding options, and"

Denise explains her reasoning to add "...exploring the feasibility of" before "going fare-free" in the first Resolved clause because we can have the goal of going fare-free but it might not be something we could or should do. It would give more flexibility in the case of not being able to go fare-free quite yet. D. Thompson makes a motion for these changes and F. Proto seconds.

D. Klein does not support this amendment, he thinks it changes the meaning. He wants it to show that it is our intention to be fare-free and we are going to take the steps to see how we can do that. J. Dotson agrees with him.

G. Stewart wonders about the funding and where the Town of Ithaca and Ithaca College are and should they be represented on the Board, too. He thinks our funding models is okay but it should be looked at occasionally.

F. Proto thinks it's a noble goal/idea and respects D. Klein's initiative, but he likes the flexibility of D. Thompson's changes, saying, we can all have the goal but once we get into exploring the pieces that it would require to bring to fruition, it may not be feasible. We don't know all the answers to the questions and after all the data we may decide that even though it's in our heart we may not be able to pull this off, and I think that's what her wording allows us to do, is look at it with an open eye.

B. Brady acknowledge the comments from D. Klein and J. Dotson that they want to make a strong statement of intent, and frustrations with the length of time a study will take. She thinks the language in the resolution currently is fine and the Board's will is a strong commitment or strong statement of intent.

D. Thompson noted, if it was feasibly workable, I would 100% support us going fare-free. It's something that I have thought about at length since I got on the TCAT board, so it's not that I don't want us to, I just want it to be more open-ended.

The amendment was voted on and passed 5-4-0, with J. Dotson, D. Klein, L. Lewis, and D. Nguyen voting against.

D. Thompson looks at the final Resolved clause where D. Klein changed "a plan outlining the steps involved", she would amend her own [prior emailed] suggestion to simply add "and viability" to read

"steps involved and viability" before "in going fare-free." D. Thompson moves, and D. Klein seconds, these changes.

F. Proto points out that the current proposed change is only the two words in red, "and viability" and not the version she originally circulated through email. D. Thompson understands she has changed her proposal.

F. Proto thought there should be more discussion on whether to initiate "a study" or "a plan". He said he appreciates the feeling from several board members who want to make the commitment to go ahead and go fare-free, what he's hearing is that we don't have enough info to make the decision. He thought the original provision of "study" made sense. He's not ready to make the decision to go fare-free until he understands what that involves. He argues the underwriters aren't ready to underwrite the cost of it, either. We adopted some wording that doesn't commit [them]. That we would explore other financing options, which makes sense in that we want to explore everything you possibly can, but I think the way you're proposing it in the original, I'm not ready for and need more data.

J. Dotson pointed out that the Board adopted a resolution that also planned for a new facility that didn't pan out. She said it is also reasonable to have a plan, and get further into it, looking at funding options and data collection, and details. We can get partway in and say we had this plan but now we need to shift it. We have done some studies of this, referring back to the intensive work of M. Yarrow's, it's not every staff person that writes a white paper on something that's not even part of his job. We can benefit from that, we have an intern right now that shows that Scot and staff are prioritizing it, and I'd like to back them and say 'Yeah, we really want you to do that'. We want to look into this really seriously but that doesn't mean we can't change our minds.

L. Lewis proposed a potential friendly amendment to insert "TCAT general manager and planning committee to initiate a planning process"...and remove "and viability" from the final Resolved clause, because if we are planning the process, that is also looking at the viability through such a process.

D. Thompson looks to S. Vanderpool for advice on plan vs study. S. Vanderpool replies that he has sent the barriers for going fare-free to the board, and one such is a \$0.30 match that is required to keep STOA funding; and if TCAT had 4 million riders, it would be a \$1.2 million local match, they would have to find funding for that. After considering responses from S. Vanderpool and F. Proto, D. Thompson withdraws her motion, as she would rather it be a study and not a plan.

D. Klein then moves L. Lewis' wording in the last Resolved clause to read:

"RESOLVED, the TCAT board of directors directs the TCAT General Manager and the planning committee to initiate a planning process outlining the steps involved in going fare-free, and that this planning process be commenced within one year." J. Dotson seconds.

F. Proto makes a motion to substitute the previously emailed wording proposed by D. Thompson, who seconds, which would then read:

"RESOLVED, the TCAT Board of Directors directs the TCAT general manager to initiate a study into the logistics and viability involved in going fare-free, and that this planning process be commenced within one year." L. Lewis asked if the planning committee should be added to this wording. F. Proto said the general manager has the prerogative to direct the planning committee and it doesn't need to be added to the resolution, but he would consider that addition a friendly amendment to his motion. D.

Thompson then read the language proposed by the motion to substitute: ""RESOLVED, the TCAT Board of Directors directs the TCAT general manager and the planning committee to initiate a study into the

logistics and viability involved in going fare-free, and that this planning process be commenced within one year.”

J. Dotson, brings up a suggestion to change "commenced within one year" because as various staff have said, the process is already underway. She suggests changing it to "completed". L. Lewis supports that.

D. Klein wants to hear from Scot as he took the staff's time into consideration. S. Vanderpool says that if it changes to "study" TCAT should have the study completed by July 2023. He would support the change. The study should bring viable information that will allow us to make a decision to go fare-free or not. It does not mean we will go fare-free in July 2023, but that the study will be completed by then. L. Lewis verifies that S. Vanderpool is fine with replacing “commenced” with “completed.”

L. Lewis reads the proposed amendment to the last resolved clause:

“RESOLVED, that the TCAT Board of Directors directs the TCAT general manager and the planning committee to initiate a study into the logistics and viability involved in going fare-free, and that this planning process be completed within one year.”

The amendment passes with a vote of 8-1-0, with J. Dotson voting against.

D. Klein moves and D. Thompson seconds a motion on the entire resolution as amended at the meeting. The following resolution was approved with a vote of 9-0-0:

Resolution 2022-08 Fare-Free Planning Initiative

WHEREAS, eliminating the fare on TCAT buses would increase ridership, eliminate a barrier for some individuals to access public transportation, decrease the number of cars on the road, reduce the amount of carbon being released into the atmosphere, eliminate the administrative burden involved in processing cash, and make bus operators’ jobs a little easier, and

WHEREAS, a number of factors would have to be studied and agreed upon to potentially enable the switch to being fare-free such as data collection and exploring reasonable funding options, and

WHEREAS, dozens of bus systems operate in the United States as fare-free, therefore be it

RESOLVED, the TCAT board of directors adopts the goal of exploring the feasibility of going fare-free, and be it further

RESOLVED, the TCAT board of directors directs the TCAT General Manager and the planning committee to initiate a study into the logistics and viability involved in going fare-free, and that this planning process be completed within one year.

Adopted by the TCAT Board of Directors on this the 28th day of July, 2022.

Discussion Items

There were no discussion items

Committee Reports

- **Executive Committee** – S. Vanderpool informs the board that the Electric Mobility Grant was submitted July 14. A 2-minute video that was part of the 10-minute presentation was played for the Board. The award announcements from NYSDOT should come out in August when we will find out if TCAT is awarded the \$7 million grant to help community efforts and better transportation to underserved community members. The Ridelogic farebox issue was discussed during the EC committee and S. Vanderpool will send a Q & A to the Board through email. Completion of Triennial was Friday July 1. Fall service reductions and the public hearing were discussed; with the shortage of drivers recently being labeled a national crisis. TCAT has hung onto current service levels for too long and that has placed a burden on drivers and staff, we are facing a mechanic and parts shortage. He also mentioned the Underwriter Presentation and the Transportation Agreement.
- **Audit Committee** – The Audit Committee did not meet. F. Proto said the audit is proceeding and he is hoping to receive an initial reaction prior to the end of August. The Audit is on track and so far, no red flags have come up. He informed the Board that once the audit is complete a meeting will need to be set up between the auditors and the Board.
- **Budget Committee** – The Budget Committee did not meet in July.
- **Human Resource** – The Human Resource Committee met on July 21 and discussed current recruiting efforts, updates on current and future planned training classes, and leave management.
- **Planning Committee** – The Planning Committee is still on hiatus. D. Klein will get in contact with the committee members to schedule meetings again.
- **Transit Service Committee** – The Transit Service Committee met July 13, and discussed Fall service changes, Public Hearing in August re: service changes, and implementing FreeRide for Youth

Next Meeting

The next Board meeting will be August 25, 2022.

Executive Session

There was no Executive Session needed.

Adjournment

Chair Lewis adjourned the meeting at 5:50 pm, motion by F. Proto, seconded by D. Nguyen.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Taylor Hessler, Recording Secretary, August 25, 2022.