

Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, Inc.

Special Meeting of the Board of Directors

August 15, 2022 | 5:00pm via Zoom

Attendees

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

TCAT Staff: Susan Brock; Gian Fountain; Taylor Hessler; Patty Poist; Megan Pulver; Mike Smith; Pamela Torelli; Scot Vanderpool; Erik Amos; Jenn Jennings; Gina Lord

Public Attendees: Darryl Hall; Jimmy Jordan; Ron; Jane Glaubman; Karla Garcia Martinez, Clarence Beeks, Bert, Gloria Busse, 'Iphone'; John Monkovic; Sabrina Leddy; Tim Downs; Satish; Derek; 'Jade's Iphone'; Seungmin Lee; Benjamin Hoffman; Bonnie Prunty; Emily Nester; Zach Winn; Carol S. Wilson; Martin Stallone; Janna Lamey; Ethan Hingcoe; Carol Schusler; Jorge Defendini; Lauren Jones; Joyce Oyenedum; Randy Nandlall; Claire S.; Suzanne Burnham; Susan Beckley; Kenneth Glover

Call to Order

Chair L. Lewis called the meeting to order at 5:05pm.

L. Lewis welcomes the public attendees and thanks the board members attending. She is appreciative of the written comments as well. She said the Board is available to hear comments from the public during this public hearing and asked General Manager Scot Vanderpool for comments before board members heard from the public for this public hearing.

S. Vanderpool thanked the public for having the interest in public transit. He said, why the need for reductions? Bus operator shortage, recently labeled a nationwide crisis, has really affected operations at TCAT, been in a position of reduced service for over a year and have held off while other agencies are employing severe reductions. We kept service levels the same, but have continued to scramble to fill the work and provide the service. That has placed a burden on operators and staff. Many operators have been working 6 days a week for months on end and it is just not sustainable. Parts shortage, buses in garage waiting on parts, upwards of 8,9, 10 buses. As an organization the worst thing is to put out a schedule that we can't adhere to. We want to be reliable and as TCAT moves forward, it is important to communicate any adjustments made. Working on solutions, working up our support systems to find better ways for recruiting, retention, and better work-life balances. Will continue into unforeseeable future. The changes are temporary, until we can get positions filled and the parts situation resolved. We don't have a specific timeline. The board is present and has received all feedback.

S. Vanderpool suggests taking comments by route. Four routes are affected in particular: 82, 11, 13, and 20. He asked for comments to be brief, people can put questions into the chat, and

for the public to try not to repeat comments or questions. L. Lewis reiterates S. Vanderpool's statement.

Public comments began with the Route 82 changes.

Gloria Busse: Hi, I just wanted to confirm I am speaking on behalf of Cornell University and I do understand that we did submit our comments, just to confirm you do not want me to reiterate that again verbally. Is that correct?

Laura Lewis: If you've submitted your comments in writing, then we have them already.

Scot Vanderpool: Yes. We got it.

Laura Lewis: If you wanted to give us a one or two-minute summary of what you've said, but we have it already.

Gloria Busse: OK. Well, then I think we're set. Thank you.

Laura Lewis: OK. Thank you.

Scot Vanderpool: Someone put in [Route] 10 to be discussed in the chat. That's fine. We'll watch that as well, and we'll watch for hands raised, and we'll also watch for people under reaction and raise hands as well, so those 3 options will work for everybody.

Laura Lewis: Are there others wishing to speak? Daryl? I see your hand up. Thank you.

Darryl Hall: So, I guess my question is when we refer to Route 82, are we talking about eliminating it, or, I mean what is the discussion here on the 82? is it basically to eliminate it?

Laura Lewis: I'll ask Scot and staff to comment on some of the specifics of the 82.

Erik Amos: Yes, I'll jump in on the 82. No, it's not being eliminated, it is being, yes, someone just summarized it in the chat. Jimmy Jordan added the chat which read: *Route 82 (Cornell Campus): Reduces frequency to every 30 minutes from every 15 minutes.*

Erick Amos: It's being reduced to 30-minute service instead of the 15-minute service, which is has been throughout the day historically.

Darryl Hall: Yeah, I remember when it went into the every-half-hour, and I agree, I think that every 15 minutes is a little overkill for that route, particularly, but I live near the East Hill Plaza where there's loads of students that are my neighbors and I'm sure they utilize it all the time, but I mean again, I really don't know the schedules for the classes and how much these students really need that route, but for every 15 minutes? I would, you know, just every half hour if anything.

Scot Vanderpool: Shall we move on to the next person? Thank you, Darryl. Appreciate it. I see somebody with their hand up - Seungmin - you can go ahead.

Seungmin, Lee: Yes, thank you for this hearing and my name is Lee. I am a Cornell graduate student and I have been living in Maplewood Apartments for 4 years, which 82 passes. So one of the concerns I have is that during the early morning time, usually, 8am or 9am is when people usually go to school, so there is a massive demand by students and it's usually very crowded, especially it is even worse during the bad weather, so I'm actually worried about if the bus frequency is reduced to once every 30 minutes, so I understand the labor shortage, but I would suggest that at least during the peak hours let's say 7, 8 or 9am the frequency remains every 15 minutes to take care of that large demand, and then reduce to 30 minutes after peak hours. That is my suggestion.

Scot Vanderpool: Thank you. We received a lot of comments over the weekend so we will take that into consideration. We appreciate that.

Gloria Busse: Nope, actually, I apologize, I had just checked and apparently the email regarding Cornell's comment did not make it through, so I do need to provide a comment if that's ok...So, I am Gloria Busse and I work in the real estate department at Cornell University. A few years ago, Cornell facilitated the development of the 872-bed graduate and professional student housing project on University-owned land, now called Maplewood, to provide much-needed student housing for the Ithaca and Tompkins market. Located on Maple Avenue, the students living in the complex rely on TCAT transportation to travel to the campus, downtown and other local areas. Reduction in service on the Route 82 bus line will considerably inhibit the ability of approximately 900 students living on this property to travel throughout Ithaca and along with that, the hundreds of other students living along the Maple Avenue apartment corridor. These reductions will adversely impact the retail, the restaurant, hotel and other business located at East Hill Plaza at this time when they are diligently working to recover from the economic impact of the pandemic. So, we respectfully request that you retain the current frequency of the service on the Route 82 bus line. Thank you.

Scot Vanderpool: I appreciate that. Thank you so much. Taylor, we may want to move to the 10. I know somebody had Route 10 in the chat. If there are no additional comments regarding the 82.

Taylor Hessler: So, the one person who put the 10 in the chat was Zach Winn...

Scot Vanderpool: Ok, Zach, you want to start?

Zach Winn: Good evening. Can you hear me?

Scot Vanderpool: Yes, we can. Thank you.

Zach Winn: Thank you. My name is Zach Winn and I believe the driver shortage is at least partially caused by the mask policy in place at TCAT, and drivers are required to wear a mask for their entire shift and they have been turned into the mask police. It should not be a driver's role, nor their job to enforce this policy. Masks are unnecessary, ineffective, and uncomfortable.

TCAT has told drivers that their mask requirement will remain until the end of the school year. The mask policy should be rescinded and prevented from being put in place ever again, and I personally call on the TCAT Board and its Chair Laura Lewis to immediately reverse the mask policy on TCAT, especially in light of the CDC modifying its stance on COVID. Having to wear a mask and enforcing the mask policy is part of the reason why being a TCAT driver is seen as being unattractive. It is time to end the mask and the adversarial relationship that creates between the drivers and the riders. Drivers don't want to be enforcing the mask policy.

Cornell University has showed its willingness to play hardball with TCAT and the City of Ithaca. Cornell's quote "bullying tactics" during negotiation, refusal to increase their payments to TCAT to account for inflation, and stiffing the city during COVID due to the decrease in ridership from their students are evidence that Cornell is acting in its own best interest, and not in the best interest of TCAT. The TCAT Board should be dissolved and reformed without representation from Cornell University. It is time for the City to act in the best interest of its citizens and play hardball back.

I suggest that all routes that serve Cornell's campus be shut down and that the buses that once traversed the Cornell campus be diverted to paths along Stewart Ave and Mitchell Street, continuing around Pine Tree Road around the edge of campus to their final destination. This would serve as a motivator for the University to be a better financial partner to TCAT and the city of Ithaca, or form their own bus service to provide for the needs of their students.

Thank you very much.

Laura Lewis: Thank you, Zach.

Scot Vanderpool: Does anyone else have any suggestions or comments for Route 10? Ok, Jane?

Jane Glaubman: My name is Jane Glaubman and I live in Fall Creek. I rode the 10 every day for many years and I rode it today as a matter of fact, although I don't ride it as often. This is an incredibly used line, but I think the comment I want to insert now is that I am part of the 'FreeCAT' campaign that seeks expansion of mass transit in order to fulfill Ithaca's promise under the Ithaca Green New Deal and we have been talking, I personally have had 2 interviews in the last week with TCAT bus drivers who wanted to talk to me in depth about their experiences and why they believe there is this quote-unquote "shortage". They said that they are short, not only of drivers but also of mechanics and of cleaners. And the problem, it's very apparent from hearing the details of their working conditions and pay, is that they are not paid

enough and that their hours are extraordinarily long, and they are mandated often to work a 6-day week. The driver I was talking to today has not infrequently 14-hour shifts, neither of them was able to afford to live in Ithaca. She has more than a half-hour commute each way, and to do a 14-hour shift with a half-hour commute and the time it takes to feed yourself, to shower and get dressed and everything, it's just not realistic and for that, they are paid 42 thousand a year and it's not enough. So, if TCAT is interested in retaining, not only drivers, but cleaners which, they've told me many stories about people defecating, vomiting, urinating on the bus; during the COVID crisis obviously it was enormously high-pressure problem with keeping things clean, and mechanics as well are all being underpaid and Ithaca is unaffordable, so I think that we need to seriously consider the fact that we are going to need to actually increase the amount of money that we spend and whether that's an internal rearrangement at TCAT or more likely whether more money is put aside for it from the various institutions, and Cornell that are thriving and have plenty of resources I think is the question we should be discussing, not the fact that passengers and people and....and all these drivers also comment on the fact that they notice how much stress their passengers are under; there are people who don't know how to drive, there are people who live in outlying areas; they are under a tremendous amount of pressure, who need to commute to work, and they do not have reliable service. And the 10 was, as I say, as a rider, incredibly heavily used, I don't know how many times I've been on it when it was just absolutely packed. There was not only standing room only but there wasn't even enough room for everyone with everyone standing. So, this is a really high-demand service and it cannot be cut and if people are committed to a capitalist system, they're going to have to pay more for the labor they need. Thank you.

Scot Vanderpool: I just want to say, let's try to stick to service development and what we're talking about. I appreciate what Zach said and I appreciate what Jane said, but let's try to please stick to the service reductions. That's really what we're here to talk about right now, and that's what people are waiting to comment on. Keep your comments short if you could, I appreciate that. Thank you so much.

Laura Lewis: Thanks very much, Scot. I will reiterate this is a public hearing on the service reduction, and I'd like to encourage commenters to keep their comments on that topic. Jorge, I see your hand up.

Jorge Defendini: Wonderful, OK, thank you. Hello everyone, my name is Jorge Defendini. I am a member of the Ithaca Chapter of Democratic Socialists of America, I'm also a member of Common Council representing the 4th Ward. I'm here today because I am concerned about the cuts that are being proposed by the TCAT Board in regards to the labor shortage. I find it very troubling, although I do understand it is very difficult to operate services as they are currently with the amount of drivers and individuals that we have available, but I think that speaks to the conditions that these workers, whether they be drivers, mechanics, cleaners, etc., etc. have to work under and so I think we really need to consider short-term investments for long-term returns in regards to paying drivers more so we can have a stronger retention and we aren't hemorrhaging drivers after training and losing them as they take their licenses and work other places and in other sectors. I think right now the reason why we have these shortages and the

reason why we have to consider these cuts is because we don't have enough drivers, we don't have enough folks in the workforce to maintain TCAT and I think that says more about the conditions that these individuals are finding themselves in than anything about any type of austerity that we might be talking about over here. And so I think it's really important considering climate change, considering the economic conditions that a lot of folks on the outer rim of the city whether it be West Village, Chestnut, etc. will have a difficult time trying to access their job, grocery stores, health services, to be proposing more cuts for these are only going to disadvantage these folks more and it's only going to further gentrification and it's moving us away from our climate objectives to reduce emissions because transportation is such a key part to that, so we need to be moving toward expanding these services and making them more accessible and reducing fares ideally to free. And I think if we want to talk about doing that we need to invest in the system more and be able to retain the drivers that we have and build the ones that we do by making it an attractive place to work at. Higher wages is a really good place to start because we are losing drivers to other areas where that license is more amenable for folks. Right now, it's a difficult job to drive that bus and I imagine nobody here wants to drive it for the wage that is currently being offered for it. And so, we actually need to reassess that and think about why we are losing these drivers, so, I am a big supporter of the FreeCAT movement and I am against these service cuts because I feel like we are not being responsible in how we are managing. You would be retaining these drivers more if we invest in the system more often. That's my time. I really appreciate it. Thank you.

Laura Lewis: Thanks, Jorge. I'll just reiterate a comment Scot made at the outset and that is that driver shortages in public transit are a challenge nationwide. Ithaca is not unique, sadly, in a shortage of drivers and mechanics, so it is a complex challenge to address, it is one that is nationwide and TCAT is interested in addressing the pay, the compensation for our employees.

Scot Vanderpool: I will say that I made an error... on the 10, there is no service reduction on the 10, so the 11 is the one I meant to say. So, I think we can move on to questions about the Route 11. Is anyone here with questions or comments about the Route 11 service reductions? We can take those at this time.

Tim Downs: Hi Scot, this is Tim Downs from Ithaca College. So, we totally appreciate, you know, TCAT is not immune to what's happening in the rest of the world, so, we get it, we want to work together and partner in how to do it. Question is just understanding kind of how the reductions came about you know in terms of, we are looking at ridership, when making the reductions and 2) I think the date was August 21st that would take effect; is there ability later, without increasing service but to pivot and shift, if we find there's better service times to be able to kind of accommodate higher ridership without having the need for more drivers or to run more routes?

Scot Vanderpool: Sure, thanks Tim, glad to address that and I think it was also a question from Bonnie as well and I can let Erik speak after I do, but we've done just about everything, we've looked at everything, we've looked at different shifts, we've looked at all the different factors to try to have a work-life balance for the driver; it's a real concern for us; we're currently in Union

negotiations as well, and that's something we're taking into consideration as some of the conversations here that went beyond the topic today, we're addressing all that and we've been addressing our driver situation. I'm a member of APTA, I'm a member of New York Public Transit Association, I'm on the Board; I've been talking to other transit agencies across the United States trying to figure out what to do and how to solve work-life balance. It's hard when you have to cover AM and PM peaks and bring people to work and take them home, but, to answer your questions, Tim, and you know a lot of the decisions are based on data collection, that I think that's a starting place for us; you know one comment on the Route 11 changes that we've received was thanking us for eliminating the number of trips with the 40' bus carrying 1 or 2 people, so you know that is taken into consideration. Decisions are also based on routes that have more frequent service; it's better to reduce the frequency of a service like we talked about at the Cornell Route 82 then cut out a rural route altogether and have no options for certain community members. So, these are really hard decisions...And one of our intentions was to spread the reductions throughout the system instead of affecting a particular group of people. We want to try to create the least impact as possible. Erik, you want to add on to that?

Erik Amos: Yeah, you covered it pretty well. Basically, we started looking at ridership that was the starting point, but we didn't want to stick just with ridership because you're looking at, you know it's a balancing act when you're talking about Tompkins County. You have-- 75% of the rides are associated with Cornell University, and so if you're just looking at ridership you end up cutting things that's like everything but Cornell and that's not fair to the rest of the community, because we're also serving rural communities, we're serving the town and the City itself and so really, we're trying to find a balancing act. As Scot mentioned, we looked at trips that were running at capacity, and we didn't want to cut ones that were completely full, but if there are certain areas that were served by multiple routes, those are areas where we could cut a little more and so that's for example where the 82 came from, and the 13 was sort of, I hate to say "a by-product of it" but because we are reducing trips overall, the 13 is usually the start of the end of a number of trips and so necessarily the 13 was reduced.

I'm going to answer a question here about the 10 briefly. Someone asked can you clarify the comment about there being no reductions to the Route 10. There are a number of reductions that were done to quite a number of routes, but the significant, meaning more than 20%, cuts were not done to Route 10, but there were a few trips that were cut from the Route 10, going from 10-minute service to 20-minute service at certain points in the day.

Laura Lewis: I'd also like to add a comment on staff efforts on recruitment. We know that there are shortages of drivers and yet our staff have been really diligent at a time of job fairs, putting out information on availability of positions, so we really are trying to recruit staff, recruit drivers, recruit mechanics, as well.

Are there other comments from individuals regarding Route 11? Erik, thank you for clarifying that we're really talking about those with more than 20% reduction.

Tim Downs: Yeah, and I appreciate the data driven aspect of it, just the clarification, is there options to... I know these are temporary... to look at this, and I get how painful that is, after the 21st, if there is, again, without extending or restoring the option, to kind of adjust, to better fit the needs?

Scot Vanderpool: I will say that adjustments are possible and we're going to continue to look at all the feedback that comes in even after this public hearing, so we will take everything into consideration. Thanks, Tim.

Tim Downs: Thank you, Scot, as somebody who's usually in the similar seat to you having to talk about reductions. I know it's not always a popular place to be, so thank you.

Laura Lewis: It looks like Suzanne started to speak and then I see Dr. Stallone has a hand up.

Suzanne Burnham: Thank you, Laura. Hi my name is Suzanne Burnham, and I sit on the TCAT Advisory (Board) and I also work for Ithaca College, and Patty, and just want to make sure you have gotten in your email that I have sent you from some of the college employees regarding the 11...

Patty Poist: I did, Suzanne.

Suzanne Burnham: Super, so I won't repeat any of that. I can say, because I am an 11 rider every day, that summer service there are certainly times when there are two and I have been one on a very long bus. Ridership is way, way down, if not almost non-existent in the summer time, but in the next week, the buses are going to be packed with students and with workers using the 11. I'm super grateful that you guys are not talking about reducing the service any more than it is now from a 1/2 hour. There aren't many students that live off campus that do rely on the bus service as well as workers that rely on that half-hour service so it is not the end of the world, but I do echo Tim Downs's question about you know taking a look at how this is going and making some adjustments as we go along for people that attend and work at Ithaca College that rely on the bus and that would really appreciate it being back to the half hour during peak times, which are the fall and spring semesters. Thank you.

Laura Lewis: Thanks, Suzanne. Dr. Stallone?

Dr. Marty Stallone: Sure. Thank you, Mayor. I just wanted to lend support for that idea. I think it's mainly been covered, but my interest in speaking on behalf of the 11 line is, our relationship with Ithaca College, whereby Cayuga places healthcare workers on campus and would like to, in time, increase health services on South Hill, and so those are our workers, in addition to the notion that the PA program is actually based nicely down at the city and that that is a connection between the campus locations. So, to the extent that this lends any support for IC, and just the caution about the reduction that may need to be necessary based on your present situation, and that if possible you can reconsider that at the earliest occasion, that would be appreciated.

Laura Lewis: Thank you.

Scot Vanderpool: OK for time's sake Laura, can we move to the 13? Any questions regarding the 13 or comments?

Laura Lewis: Yes, I saw someone had a question about the 92 so we'll move to the 13, and then the 92. Those wishing to comment on the 13...

Taylor Hessler: Carol is the one that put it in the chat.

Laura Lewis: Is Carol here?

Carol: Yes. I'm trying to get unmuted. I know I'm not in the majority because you're looking at people that are students or staff or working on other positions rather than the colleges, but I'm a retiree and I don't drive, and I live in the Fall Creek area. I'm concerned you know, it did mention that with the reductions you can ride the 17, but in the past year or so when you're at different changes to the routes, there hasn't been any Route 17 going south to the Commons area in the late morning hours; it's just during the peak times when people are going to work which is difficult for me because I tend to take the 13 to go up to the mall in the late morning and if I missed that bus then I would have to walk a mile into town to get to bus Route 30 to go up to the mall. It's just like the Winter is the worst because I had problems this past Winter where I get stuck and I had to walk through big snow drifts at corners and icy conditions. because I didn't catch the bus. Sometimes it was my fault, sometimes it was a bus driver's. There's also, you know, making these different connections and then you may have to wait an hour in between the different route you're connecting to, a 1/2 hour to an hour, and so which is another thing especially in the Winter or rainy area or times that...you know being a senior citizen you don't want to get sick so...it's a concern trying to get to doctor's appointments and things like that.

Laura Lewis: Thank you, Carol. Commenters on Route 92?

Jade: Hello, first of all I appreciate you taking the time to have this public hearing. For the sake of time I'll keep my comments short. I am a Cornell student and I thought it would be good to open up a conversation on the 92 because I understand that there is a plan to reduce service so that the bus stops running around 10:30-10:45pm. I just thought I would speak on behalf of some other Cornell students...particularly young women, who are freshmen and sophomores and rely on that bus to get to and from Collegetown. On the weekends and on Fridays, most of these freshmen and sophomores who live on North and West [Campus] don't have cars or financially wouldn't be able to afford Ubering, and would instead have to take a 20 minute walk late at night and to be frank, they might be intoxicated; in the winter it might be slippery, going down that slope to West Campus and so those last 2-3 hours where the bus runs from like 10 to 1am or 12:30 would really make a difference in terms of safety for those students. So I just wanted to communicate that seeing, you know, how those needs will be addressed as well. I

understand that there is a shortage and would be difficult, but for safety reasons I think it would be important to consider.

Erik Amos: Good news, we have managed to restore late night service to the 90, and the 92. When we were blocking schedules, we found it was really difficult to schedule with a lot of short pieces that were connected basically...and having some late-night service allowed us to connect it to the afternoon and it turned it into real shifts. So, in short, 90 and 92 service is pretty much fully restored, it may not go until 2[am], but I think it goes until like 1:30[am].

Jade: Okay, thanks so much.

Laura Lewis asks for others who have not had the opportunity to speak.

Sabrina Leddy: Hi, I'm sorry, I just want to clarify, are we still on route-specific comments?

Laura Lewis: We are focusing on route reductions.

Sabrina Leddy: Okay cool, I didn't want a specific comment on the 92 so I didn't want to interrupt that time, but I will be quick. Thanks for the opportunity to speak, I appreciate you all having this public hearing. My name is Sabrina, I live in downtown Ithaca. I would like to ask for clarification on one point. I recognize that you're experiencing a bus driver shortage. Scot, you noted difficulties with retention and I know Jane noted many consistent complaints that have been heard from drivers, I think it's generally accepted this shortage largely isn't due to the lack of qualified workers, so could you all explain from your perspective as management, as executives, why exactly bus drivers aren't satisfied with their working conditions at TCAT and I would argue this is a question regarding the service reductions because it is, as you've noted, a major cause of said reductions and I don't think it's fair to hold a public hearing about a problem, but only want to hear comments on the symptoms of the problem and not its roots; and I'm not disagreeing with Laura's assertion that this is a nationwide problem because this issue is far reaching and systemic. I think the most public transit rich cities are objectively the most expensive to live in, which means most of the operators, who put in long hours for pay that is less than that of the private sector and often less than the cost of living, they can't afford to live in the cities that they serve, so while it may appear to make sense in the short term, I don't personally understand how cutting services will be beneficial and I would appreciate if you all could clarify why drivers have been chronically unsatisfied and why it's gone to the point that service cuts are necessary. Thanks.

Scot Vanderpool and Chair Lewis thank her. Scot Vanderpool: I am not completely sold on the fact that drivers are not satisfied with their working conditions. We have a lot of great drivers who love what they're doing, really, we have a great team here and we are doing everything we can to bring on more people and we can't provide additional service until we can stabilize what we are doing. We've hired a recruiter, she's on this call, and we're trying to do everything we can to try to make the conditions better. There is a nationwide shortage, so you have to understand, I think the thing that everybody has to understand, that this is nationwide and you

know it does have to do with split shifts and it's hard to get away from that. We're trying to find solutions to get away from that. So, a lot of it has to do with the hours, not the conditions, or the treatment of the employees. Certainly not, because we've got great people here and a great team. I really think it's more of a nationwide problem that we're trying to solve and like I've said I'm on a lot of committees and I've talked to a lot of people across the country and trying to figure this out.... We're bringing people to work, we're taking people home from work; we have to cover both of those times. We do have, in our area, we have a lot of drivers, like somebody mentioned are coming in from different counties or different areas, and that makes it a long day...I think that's the piece that's the most difficult, we got people that have to cover the am peak and the pm peak and...for me that's the situation that we're really dealing with here...we've even surveyed people, drivers, and it's not even about the pay necessarily, it really is about the hours that they have to deal with. So we are working on it from several different areas, several different angles, and we're going to hope to get this solved but we can't have, we can't bring that service back until we can get some stability here because like I said right from the onset of this conversation, that we really have to...get to a better place and not have drivers working all these hours, so we have to build our resources before we can get into too much of anything and we're certainly working very hard at that. Sabrina, thank you.

Laura Lewis: Thank you Scot, and I don't want to lose sight of the fact that the supply chain issue is very real, Scot mentioned that at the onset. We have some buses that are not operational because of the parts shortage. We are hoping that that will improve in the near future, but that has also had an impact on our availability...John, you'll have the last comment.

John Monkovic: Sure, I guess I just wanted to respond to Scot's point, I'm also involved with the "Free-CAT" campaign here, I didn't hear; I heard you outline how you saw this problem and I didn't actually hear a plan as to how things were going to be addressed and I was troubled by your suggestion that...things just need to be built up, back to normal, given that through my attendance at TCAT Board meetings over the past couple months, it seems quite clear that...the normal to be built back towards isn't even sufficient to meet people's needs. As Jennifer Dotson has continuously kind of said, particularly around, with reference to...fare collection and whatnot, we already are not meeting demand, and so this...normal we're trying to build back towards isn't even sufficient to meet the demand. Which raises the question of, you know, why we're okay with letting these service reductions continue, and overall I take issue with the framing of this as a labor shortage...when we know that the issues drivers are facing, and I think this whole meeting has been a testament to how essential public service, public transportation is in people's lives and how indispensable it is...I think that should lead us in the direction of actually investing in public transportation and taking the adequate measures in order to get investment from the big economic players in our town. So, thank you.

Laura Lewis: A few of us have said this is a national challenge in terms of shortages, labor shortages, but as Scot mentioned and I also just reiterated, it is also supply chain in terms of parts for our buses. By the way, I am very very pleased that TCAT has made a commitment to electric buses and we anticipate that moving ahead, more in the future.

Bert: I live in Groton and I don't drive and I depend on the TCAT buses to get me from point A to point B, to the doctors, to the grocery stores and what-have-you. I feel even though I'm a senior citizen, I'm 72, I have grand mal seizures, I have afib heart, I have diabetes, I'm a walking drugstore per se because I'm on at least 13 different medications daily and that includes insulin twice a day and ya know, I like the service, and I don't know why everybody is up in arms because you are trying to make ends meet because of the driver shortage, or...can't get the parts to get the buses up and running. You know, I don't know why the people are up in arms; and that's my honest opinion...I've been on the Advisory Board several times with my son Arnold, you probably know him through various conversations we've had in the past, he decided to step out tonight because he's looking forward to [having a medical procedure done at a hospital out of town], so he put me involved talking to you folks tonight...I don't know what else to suggest, you know...I love the service, don't get me wrong, even though I have to walk a half mile to meet the big buses, but I also use Gadabout buses when I have to do the doctors' appointments and what-have-you.

Gina Lord: Hi everyone, Scot I hope you don't mind my jumping in here, everyone I'm the recruiter here at TCAT and I just wanted to talk a little bit about the process of our hiring bus operators... Our recruitment efforts have actually been successful, we have a lot of applications coming in, but what I'd like to remind people is that TCAT invests in all of its drivers. We do all the CDL training. So, whether somebody comes in with the CDL or without one, we bring them onboard, they spend six weeks in our classroom training, you know, on the road; everything they need and all TCAT's way of doing things, so that we can bring people in with the greatest opportunity to succeed and to meet the public's needs. So, because these are six week trainings and we can only have,; we intentionally have small classes, no more than six people, so we can only train so many people, every couple of months before we can bring people onboard and again it's a process and I know it may feel like it's taking a long time to fill spots, but it is the best way for TCAT to know that we're bringing people on board, helping them to be the best that they can be to provide the best, safest service that we can for the community. And to set them up for success, it's a group effort...I just always like to kind of throw that in there as we're, you know, trying to keep everything going and yes, you know, we're having to kind of 'right-size' a little bit for the moment...and yes, there are shortages across the country, but we are bringing people in. We're just not able to bring, you know, twenty people in, at a time next week, because of our training process which is to help our new drivers and support the community and our ridership, so thank you.

Jimmy Jordan: Hi, Jimmy Jordan with The Voice...I'm wondering if, Scot, in previous conversations I think you've told me that in 2018 TCAT had in the upper 80s or perhaps 90 drivers and that is the peak in recent years for number of drivers at TCAT. I'm wondering if you're able to put into a percentage or other easily understood number representation the decline in service we've seen since then? Maybe not off the top of your head now, but, I would be interested to see that decline represented.

Scot Vanderpool: I will just say that it has been significant since the pandemic started. The pandemic is something that needs to be included in this conversation; we've lost a lot of drivers

during the pandemic and they've done a great job, the drivers that have been out there throughout the pandemic but we've had significant loss since 2019 and that's put us behind the 8-ball here, so we're trying to ramp up our efforts like we've said; Gina mentioned, our recruiting efforts...Gina's new actually...we have somebody specific to recruiting and we're going to lots of job fairs. We're going to a lot of things, you know, outside the box to try to bring additional drivers in here and we're doing a great job of it now. So, I really am very optimistic that things are going to change and that we can get the service levels back but somebody said that, we're behind the 8-ball and... you're right, we have cut service and like I said we really tried not to cut service. There's been a lot of transit agencies that have severely cut service during 2020 and 2021 and we have not. We've cut little bits and pieces here and there, and our drivers have done, worked way too much overtime and...that's a safety concern obviously, we don't want that to continue to happen...I don't know if that really answers your question Jimmy, but we are getting to a better place and we need to get to a better place...so that we have the ability to support what we are doing. We could bring more training in, so that we could bring more operators on at one time, we're talking about that now. There's a lot of things that we're doing to try to get to that better place, support for the drivers; talking about realigning some of the schedules the best we can and bringing in more drivers with recruiters...I'm going to be very positive about this, and optimistic about where we're going. It's going to take a little time but we're headed in the right direction.

Jimmy Jordan: It does speak to the question, I'm wondering is it possible to represent that change in service to perhaps represent the mark that TCAT is aiming to return to?

Scot Vanderpool: I've always said returning to 2019 levels,; where we were in 2019, which includes some of the service that we've recently cut before this particular timeframe, before this particular Fall bid period, so I'd like to get back there, to 2019 where we were and still provide the service that is intended for this community...I know it's fairly generic but you know, whatever we drop off here, the service reductions that we're currently making through this public hearing, I'd like to try to bring those back as soon as possible.

L. Lewis thanks everyone that is here and all those who wrote in. She closes the public hearing and moves on with the meeting to bring up the proposed resolution; **Resolution 2022-xx Approval of Major Service Reductions for Fall Service 2022**. She moves the resolution and D. Klein seconds.

D. Thompson mentioned that they heard a lot today. She wondered if it would be beneficial to Scot and the team to go back, take in all the comments, and see if there are any changes they could look at before making this decision. It would make her feel more comfortable to wait on it.

B. Brady supports this idea to take a few days to look it over, and perhaps vote at the next board meeting.

D. Nguyen agrees as well. He appreciates all the comments today, saying TCAT is in a bad spot and he appreciates the sentiments about driver welfare. He thinks without making cuts, their welfare will be worse with more mandates.

L. Lewis points out the next board meeting is August 25, but the fall service is supposed to take effect August 21.

D. Klein inquired about the repercussions of waiting past the point of the expected service change. S. Vanderpool and E. Amos replied that the drivers had already bid on their schedules, so that wouldn't change. Giving a few extra days to look for any potential changes would be okay, and the Service Development team takes all comments into consideration for current and future bids.

The Board decides to table the resolution for this meeting and opt for another special meeting in a few days, on August 17th, in combination with the Budget and Executive committee meetings. L. Lewis then withdraws her motion on the resolution.

D. Klein concludes, the things that got said today, there was talk about macro-issues and structural issues at TCAT, and there's some truth to those things; those are relevant but, from where I'm sitting, I've seen something different. Throughout this pandemic, which I also feel like hit the public transportation industry maybe as hard as any industry you can imagine, from where I'm sitting, I've seen Scot Vanderpool and the team just come up with one solution after another, one trick after another, to keep those buses running, keep those schedules as full as possible. It has been very impressive what they have done over the last couple of years...I was surprised many times by the ideas that were generated to keep things running as well as they could. I think we've run out of tricks, I think that's where we're at right now and it is painful. It will be painful for all of the board members to vote for service reductions; it's painful for the staff to support this. This is not what any of us want to do. We're here to provide public transportation and I know that most of the people making comments today understood that, but I just wanted to state that more clearly, this is *not* something that we *want* to do, it's not fun, it's not what we're here for. You know we did, Scot and his team did everything they could to avoid this moment, but here we are. Thank you.

L. Lewis thanks him for those comments and seconds them.

B. Brady thanks D. Klein and says she completely agrees with all the sentiments saying, in working with Scot and the team for as long as I have, I have always been amazed at what they can pull off, with as little as they have. Not a lot see what happens on the backside of putting all of those buses out, so thank you for the encouragement and Scot, Mike and the rest of the team, thank you all, I know this is very difficult.

S. Vanderpool reiterated that the mask mandate was brought up several times and that it is a NYS mandate and TCAT does not have a choice in that. All transit agencies in NYS have been

mandated by the Governor's office to continue to wear masks on the buses. Everyone hopes it goes away soon.

Next Meeting

The special Board meeting will be held by Zoom on August 17, 2022 at 3 pm.

Executive Session

There was no need for an Executive Session.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:20pm, on a motion by D. Thompson, second by L. Lewis (7-0-0).

Minutes respectfully submitted by Taylor Hessler, Recording Secretary, October 27, 2022.