

Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, Inc.
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
September 24, 2020 | 4:00pm via Zoom

Attendees

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

Staff Attendees: Rick Andrascik; Susan Brock; Raymond Lalley; Curt Parrish; Patty Poist; Megan Pulver; Maddy Schafer; Mike Smith; Phil Smith; Pamela Torelli; Scot Vanderpool; Nate Wells; Matt Yarrow

Other Attendees: Karen Brown; Charlie Kruzansky; Dianne Miller; Joel Malina; Susan Riley; Pat Wynn

Call to Order

Chair B. Brady called the meeting to order at 4:01pm, welcoming our guests from Cornell.

Board Member Items

There were no Board Member items discussed.

Public Comment

There was no one present that had a public comment.

Approval of minutes

Motion made by F. Proto, seconded by L. Lewis to approve minutes from the August 27, 2020 meeting. The motion passed unanimously with a vote of 9-0-0.

Chair's Report

Chair B. Brady stated that in lieu of a Chair's Report, we are welcoming folks doing some Cornell Community Outreach. The guests introduced themselves: Joel Malina, VP for University Relations, Dianne Miller from Cornell's Washington Office; Charlie Kruzansky from Cornell's Albany Office; Pat Wynn, Assistant VP of Student and Campus Life; Karen Brown, Sr. Director of Marketing and Communications for Campus Life; and Susan Riley who oversees the University's Communication portfolio.

C. Kruzansky spoke of the pandemic and thanked TCAT for their part in keeping people safe. He spoke about the number of students on campus and the testing results; about 98% of students enrolled for this semester, not all in Ithaca, and not all enrolled in on-campus courses. With just under 33 thousand tests with only six positives, Cornell has a 0.02% prevalence. "Our success only reflects the success of the entire community, and vice versa."

F. Proto asked if there was any word out of Albany on STOA or out of Washington on the Transportation Bill. C. Kruzansky answered the Albany piece by saying, "No." He continued that the Governor has hinted toward a 20% reduction in all or most programs. The State is talking about reducing money from the General Fund by 20%, although that would not affect any federal flow-through money.

D. Miller said in Washington there was deadline pressure to extend the Highway Trust Fund Act. The House passed, and the Senate is on track to pass a government resolution that extends the authority for the Highway Trust Fund to keep operating. Miller believes they will not be able to pull together a comprehensive Transportation Bill before the next meeting on December 11. They did get the CARES Act out quickly, which had

assistance for transportation built in, and subsequently the House passed the Heroes Act. The Senate has not indicated a willingness to put any more emergency assistance into transit programs. There is a lot of uncertainty around all of these programs.

F. Proto asked about 5307 and other federal money through the Tompkins County transit group; "...have you heard anything about reversing funds that we thought were committed?" D. Miller responded she doesn't know anything about those funding streams, so perhaps this is more of a local issue?

General Manager S. Vanderpool thanked Cornell for their efforts in keeping students accountable, and the community safe, then asked what are some of the lessons learned, and will Cornell think of doing anything different for the Spring semester start-up? J. Malina responded what they have experienced is that in about 90% of instances, the Cornell plan in place has worked extraordinarily well. They have learned a lot related to the hybrid approach to instruction. There are still some hurdles in on-line learning that faculty are getting over, but in the end we will be left with a greater ability to engage virtually, and to have hybrid approaches to how we work and learn. We shouldn't wait for times of crisis to have these Town Halls. They should be happening well into the future, as they only result in greater understanding and transparency.

K. Brown shared numbers; there are 4598 students on campus, plus 24 live-in faculty and staff, and they currently have 900 requests for on-campus housing for the Spring, however, they are expecting more than 900. Cornell is currently at 72% of their total possible capacity for on-campus living. In the spring they are expecting 85%. During the Thanksgiving period, 116 students plan to stay through 12/21, and another 63 plan to stay through the winter period, up to January 30. There will be no winter classes offered.

For the move-out process, students will begin to move out on November 14 and continue through November 25. All students will need to be out of Cornell housing by the 29th. At this time, the plan is that move-in will happen on January 30, but with the constant flux of quarantine states, we may have to bump those dates up a couple of weeks to get hot-zone students in and housed and quarantined for 2 weeks before bringing the others in.

D. Klein asked about the MOU between TCAT and Cornell for bulk-ride purchases. "The MOU runs through July 1, 2021. We were told this past July to expect a disruption in those payments either in timing or amount, or maybe both. The August payment came in late, but in full. Can you tell us what we can expect about the payments going forward?"

J. Malina responded he can answer on what a new MOU may look like, and said he is interested in engaging TCAT in a discussion around current ridership and what an appropriate amount might be, because there has certainly been a drop-off in ridership.

L. Lewis thanked Cornell for the great planning they have done, and said that we, as a community, are pleased to see the numbers as low as they are. She then asked about the number of Cornell students living off-campus. D. Thompson responded the last count she had shows about 6-to-7 thousand graduate and professional students, plus another 6-to-7 thousand undergraduate students living off-campus.

M. Yarrow wanted to recognize that Cornell Transportation has been helpful in letting us know what to expect in upcoming semesters. If there are certain data sets that can be shared with TCAT to help plan service, it would be invaluable to him in planning routes. Yarrow says service has changed quite a bit, and we've had a few missteps because we are unaware of all the groups that are using the service, where they need to go, and what time they travel. In order to not have those unknowns, please keep us in mind when information is ready to be shared.

J. Malina left the meeting.

F. Proto asked about last month's report and noticed some of the rural routes had dropped off in ridership and suspects that represents Cornell staff. Any idea how many of those might be expected to return to working on campus? Those numbers may be helpful to M. Yarrow as well. B. Brady said this is the million-dollar question for anyone trying to plan Facilities right now. She doesn't anticipate too many coming back to campus right now.

B. Brady thanked the Cornell guests and said if there were no more questions, they could be excused.

Karen Brown, Charlie Kruzansky, Dianne Miller, Susan Riley and Pat Wynn left the meeting.

General Manager's Report

Mr. Vanderpool provided information and updates; we were not awarded the BUILD Grant. We will get a debrief from the DOT letting us know what we could have done better, so when the next opportunity comes up, we will have a stronger application.

Ridership and service: We carried 55,885 passengers this August, and 274,566 in August of 2019, a decrease of 79.64%. Early results show that things do not seem to be improving, at least not yet, now that school is in session. As a comparison, Centro provides rides to two colleges, Syracuse University and SUNY Oswego; their ridership levels are down 75% compared to 2019.

TDP: Our first of two public hearing meetings will be October 14 from 1 to 3pm and from 5 to 7pm. M. Yarrow added he and P. Poist are setting up some specific focus groups targeting communities or groups around town. We have hired a recent Cornell graduate to be our Ambassador Program Leader, and we have received 20+ applications, have set up 11 interviews and we expect to have those ambassadors on board by late next week. Sam Schwartz is working on some exciting and innovative on-line content that will also encourage people to provide input and feedback on the TDP.

Operations: We have not had many issues with our 25-passenger social distancing limit. We have back-up buses in place and are using them about 6 or 7 times a day.

S. Brock asked if the hearings on the TDP are virtual. Yarrow replied yes, they will be on Zoom. She then told Yarrow all the municipalities including the City and County have a lot of experience with Zoom, so if you have questions, you have a lot of resources available. Municipalities have public hearings where people can submit comments and questions in advance; they can submit them during the meeting, they can phone them in, or they can participate in the Zoom meeting. Brock just wanted Yarrow to know he has resources available if he has any questions or ideas.

We have not missed any trips due to bus or driver shortage since December of 2019. Passengers in general have become compliant with mask-use, and there have been only a few instances of non-compliance reported over the last month.

Maintenance: PM services are currently at 93%. We are about to send our first 2 buses out for mid-life rehab work. Both buses are 2011 buses; we have about 5-6 spare buses during each peak period, so there will be no disruption in sending these 2 buses out for rehab.

Cost of parts for July was around \$46/47 thousand dollars which is not unusual. The splash guards for driver and passenger protection were installed on our buses prior to the September 5 reinstatement of fare collection.

Proto asked if we've had any reaction to reinstating fares. P. Poist responded that she has not seen any complaints.

Safety: Twenty-one collisions year-to-date, 16 were preventable, 4 were not, 1 was undetermined. No major accidents this year. Most of the collisions were with fixed objects inside the TCAT garage. P. Smith elaborated on what we are doing inside the garage to help reduce these instances and noted that fixed object collisions are always a major trend every year.

HR: Eighty-three fulltime operators, with 11 out of work for various reasons (comprising 12% of our total); our retention rate is at 98%, and 3 operators are scheduled to retire by the end of the year. We currently have no intention of hiring additional operators, at least not at this time. In the search for our HR Manager, we ended up with 39 total applications and are currently in the process of phone-screening applicants. The first round of interviews could start as early as next week. The HR Committee will have one member, L. Lewis, sit in on the final interviews.

Marketing and Communications: S. Vanderpool has a concern about the trend of employees working virtually from home; that has the potential to hurt the transit industry in general. In late August, contact tracing resulted in a positive case within our system; P. Poist and team was quick to work with the County Health Department Officials to get the messages out, and Vanderpool received positive feedback from the Health Department, so thank you Patty and group for getting that out very quickly and efficiently. The Riders Advisory Group met on the 14th via Zoom for the first time, which worked out very well.

Information Technology: B. Sherman and team quickly fixed an issue with our email server and the wireless system for Avail when they were upgraded. Our bus camera system, TSI was moved to another server.

Action Items

Resolution 2020-14 – Approve System Safety Program Plan Revisions was moved by D. Dawson, seconded by L. Lewis, and approved with a vote of 9-0-0 as follows:

RESOLUTION 2020-17 APPROVE SYSTEM SAFETY PROGRAM PLAN REVISIONS

WHEREAS, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, Inc. (“TCAT, Inc.”) has developed and implemented a System Safety Program Plan (“SSPP”), which states one of its primary goals is the continued improvement of public transportation safety through the reduction in the number, rate and severity of bus accidents, and

WHEREAS, the New York State Public Transportation Safety Board (“PTSB”) approved TCAT, Inc.’s first SSPP in 2005, and the PTSB has approved subsequent revisions, including the most recent revisions in 2018, and

WHEREAS, certain additional revisions are necessary to reflect current TCAT operations,

NOW, THEREFORE, be it RESOLVED that the TCAT, Inc. Board of Directors hereby approves and adopts the attached System Safety Program Plan, with a revision date of September 2020, and authorizes TCAT staff to send the SSPP to PTSB for its review and approval.

Adopted by the TCAT, Inc. Board of Directors on this 24th day of September, 2020.

Committee Reports

Audit Committee – The Audit is underway and a report is expected by the end of September.

Executive Committee – The Executive Committee met September 16 and discussed Adjusting Budget Plans: Contingency Budget Planning; Presentation to County Legislature (October 14); Presentation to Underwriters (based on 2% ask in 2021) and the TCAT Transit Service Agreement.

Budget Committee – The Budget Committee met on August 18 and discussed Revenue Expenditure Report August 31, 2020; 2021 Operating Budget; 2021 Capital Budget; Tompkins County 2021 Budget Presentation.

Human Resources Committee – The HR Committee did not meet.

Planning Committee – The Planning Committee did not meet, as they were still waiting to hear about the results of the Build Grant application. We have since learned we did not secure the grant.

Transit Service Committee – The Transit Service Committee did not meet.

Next meeting

The next regularly scheduled meeting will be October 22, 2020.

Adjournment

F. Proto made the motion to adjourn, seconded by D. Nguyen. The meeting adjourned at 5:33pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Pamela Torelli, Recording Secretary, October 22, 2020.