



MINUTES

Joint Meeting of the Central Maryland Transportation & Mobility Commission and the Central Maryland Transportation & Mobility Consortium

March 22, 2022

Judith Davis called the meeting to order at 1:00pm. Present were:

Commissioner Members:

Judith Davis (Vice Chair)
Christine Wells
John Spencer
Michael Dyer
Robert Love
Ron Skotz
Claudia Barber

Staff:

Jason Quan, RTA
Josh Drucker, RTA
Gabrielle Tibbs, RTA
Shawn O'Meara, RTA
Tammie Noupa, RTA
Victor Jimenez, RTA
Preston Reed, RTA
Bruce Gartner, Howard County
Carrie Anderson-Watters, Howard County
Allison Calkins, Howard County
Vic Weissberg, Prince George's County
Astamay Curtis, RAC Chair

Commissioners Not Present:

Allen Cornell (Chair)

1. Welcome – Judith Davis

2. Open Public Comment Period – None

3. Commission Minutes (12/14/2021) Approval – Judith Davis

- The December 14th, 2021, meeting minutes were approved.

4. RAC Minutes (02/22/2022) – Astamay Curtis

- Went over the quarterly meeting minutes (see attachment).
- Judith expressed appreciation for such RAC members as Astamay, who provide a valuable first-hand experience from the rider's point-of-view. Such involvement helps CMTMC to make RTA rides better.

5. Staff Changes – Jason Quan

- Announcement of the promotion of Josh Drucker, to the new Operations AGM.
- Introduction of new Marketing & Outreach Coordinator, Preston YB Reed

6. General Manager's Report – Jason Quan

- Human Resources
 - Recap of RTA's hiring event held January 25th, which resulted in 20 job offers (drivers, dispatchers, and administrative position)
 - As a result of the hiring event:
 - We had a mixed batch of CDL and Non-CDL folks
 - We've held three CDL classes (two in February), and one is currently in progress
 - The CDL-Trainee program started in February. Tammy N., RTA's safety manager has taken the lead on this program, registering RTA with MVA to be an official CDL trainer.
 - RTA is also in the process of getting registered with MVA to do onsite testing at RTA's facility.
 - RTA is scheduled to be certified by MVA no later than May 2022.
 - RTA needs to 'red-line marker' the lot to comply with MVA testing standards and is in the process of obtaining a vendor for this task.
 - Many drivers have already gone thru the RTA CDL-training program and are awaiting testing by MVA.
 - Meanwhile, these drivers are put on RTA's paratransit service (they don't need a CDL), to get them acclimated with our environment, vehicles, and driving new customers, and once they get their CDL they will move over to the fixed-route side
 - Judith asked if there is a strategy to ensure that we retain the CDL trainees?
 - Jason said that there are two strategies:
 - A hiring bonus which is paid out throughout the year (quarterly), and increase in salary for RTA's drivers
 - RTA's salary increase is a lot more in line with neighboring agencies such as MTA and Metro. RTA is just about \$0.60 off
 - RTA is focusing on creating an environment where drivers would want to stay with RTA
 - Bruce noted that the scheduled arrival of the new RTA buses/equipment aligns with the 'treat them well' environment
 - The CDL-training recruitment program was a partnership with the Workforce Development Office. Because of its success, RTA will replicate it in a couple of months
 - Chris Wells suggested having the Commissioner provide a letter to RTA's CDL graduates for completion of the course
 - Judith suggested that if Chris Wells drafts the letter, and put it by the CMTMC members for their feedback
 - Bruce suggested adding to the letter a note of appreciation for drivers who have stuck with RTA thru the pandemic

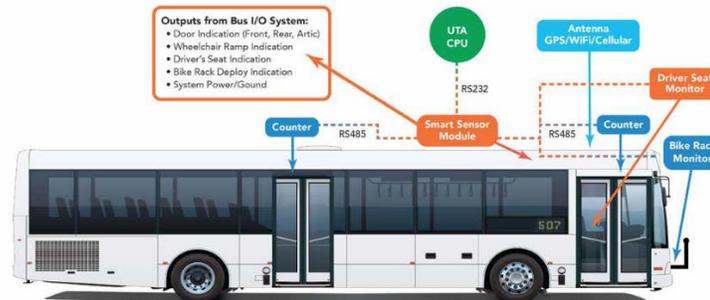
- Judith felt that should be a separate letter, which could be accompanied by some sort of award such as a gift card, certificate, gift, celebration, or bonus
 - Jason noted that RTA did provide riders with a lump sum \$1500 retention bonus
 - A motion was made for Chris Wells to put together two letters to:
 - New hires
 - Those who have stayed loyal through the pandemic
 - Chris Wells made a motion, and it was seconded by Ron Skotz
 - All CMTMC members were in favor of the motion
- Vacancies
 - RTA started out with 30 Driver vacancies, are now down by 8. Resulting in 22 Driver vacancies.
 - Grant Procurement Specialists – 1
 - Planning and Special Project – 1
 - Payroll Administrator - 1
- Service
 - Jason noted that RTA had to reduce services in February because of driver shortage. Now, with more drivers onboard and Joshua’s restructuring of driver assignments for February’s pick, RTA is more reliable on making trips. As a comparison, between October and January, RTA was missing 13.5 trips a day. In February, RTA was missing 3.6 trips a day – a significant drop. RTA remains committed to bringing back services that were reduced in February.
 - Taxi Service
 - RTA now has three vendors that provide supplemental mobility trips. Two of them are cab companies that operate sedans. The third one, which is based in Montgomery County, provides wheelchair transportation service.
 - In January RTA had a huge dip in ridership due to snow closures and omicron. Prior to the snow closures, RTA’s ridership was doing well in December (considering that ridership normally dips in the Winter season). RTA expects its February ridership reports to show a steady increase.
 - On-Time Performance
 - In terms of on-time performance, RTA is at 70.6%, and have been so for the last six months. At one point RTA was at 72-73%. RTA’s goal is to get to 80%. RTA’s criteria to reach this goal is rather aggressive, particularly since RTA’s ‘late’ is set at ‘five minutes or more’, whereas the standard in the industry is ‘seven minutes or more’.
 - Crystal from Anne Arundel County had a few questions:
 - “What is the total number of CDL vs. Non-CDL drivers that RTA has?”
 - Jason answered:
 - CDL drivers for fixed routes is approximately 52-55
 - Non-CDL drivers is approximately 25
 - “Could another regional partner [direct] drivers to the free CDL training?”
 - Jason answered:
 - “The intent is that they would work for RTA.”
 - Judith suggested that the idea of training outside organizations’ new hires should be considered by RTA as an additional source of revenue.

- Regarding On-Time Performance, Jason commented that despite missed trips - for the most part – RTA is running on time.
- Maintenance
 - Now with warmer weather coming, RTA is making sure that all air conditioning systems are properly operating.
 - Road calls continue to drop - from 33 in December, to 28 in January, and to 26 in February.
 - Road tow calls have dropped significantly.
 - With the arrival of 11 new transit buses, RTA will be able to rotate and cycle out some of its aged buses and improve road calls and reliability.
 - Judith asked, “*How is the gas price hikes affecting us?*”
 - Jason answered, “Not good. It is certainly going to impact us.” Jason and Shawn will schedule a draft budget meeting. Jason and Shawn have looked at preliminary impacts of the fuel price hikes on RTA’s budget, and so far, it has taken a pretty good hit.
 - Shawn followed up, noting that for the past two years RTA has based the fuel costs of the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) forecast for 2022 and 2023, and fuel expense looks like it is going to increase about 46% from what RTA used in last year’s budget. That equates to a \$670,000 increase in fuel. As this is a big number, RTA is keeping a close eye on it to see if the U.S. EIA changes their forecast.
 - Bruce pointed out that RTA has access to the federal operating funds from the pandemic relief to cover the gas price increase.
 - Judith noted that she is not sure how long it will continue, and this is limited through FY 23.
 - Ron, that is just gas tax. As for the diesel fuel, there is no holiday for that. Everything is still going to continue to go up, since most of the auto parts...are transferable to diesel engines at the present time. So, it doesn’t look like it’s going to go down anytime soon.
- Planning & Outreach
 - RTA’s ticketing project continues to excel as mobile app ticket passes increased from 1500 to 3000 since Jan. 1, 2022. Each quarter it continues to rise. RTA’s goal is to get people to use the app, rather than paying cash.
 - RTA has received electronic validators, which is hardware that allows passengers to validate their mobile ticket without a driver physically looking at it. The validators also allow for contactless payments (credit cards, mobile, mobile & paper barcodes, and smartcards). The process involves the passenger entering thru the buses front door and putting their phone or credit card in proximity of the scanner. The validator ‘beeps’ as confirmation of a valid electronic ticket. Currently, passengers show the image to the driver for validation. The hardware has arrived, and RTA is currently plotting the installation on RTA buses. RTA’s objective with the validators is to increase payment options for passengers and make it easier to ride.



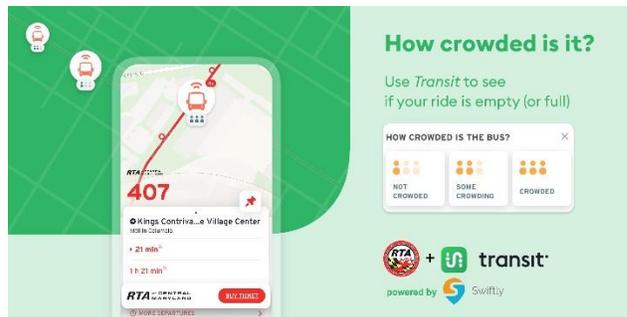
○ Automatic Passenger Counter (APC) Project

- RTA is still in the process of validating its APC process - which involves RTA taking a sample data, manually observing onboardings & exits via it's camera tracking systems and compare it to the data that APC is registering. Jason noted that there will be a slight margin of error. When completed, RTA will submit the data to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for certification of its APC project as an approved process to validate ridership.



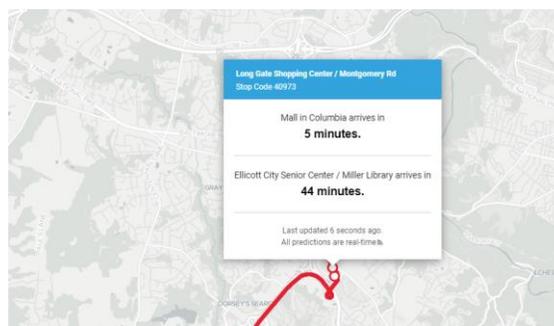
○ Bus Crowding Data

- RTA has performed a beta version and soft launch regarding its Transit App's bus crowding display which indicates with icons a bus's level of crowdedness. RTA has yet to announce it to the general public, as it is looking to see how well it represents the actual crowdedness. This function is tied into RTA's APC and is part of RTA's overarching goal of improving the customer experience.



- Judith asked, “Is there ever a time when you [RTA] cannot take on any new passengers because it is too crowded - Is there a limit?”

- Josh answered that such a situation is addressed from an Operations standpoint, for which RTA operators have procedures to use the head sign indicating “FULL BUS”; and the driver is to make RTA’s dispatcher aware of the full bus and whether they had to pass by any passengers. Josh said that the crowding function of the app is a courtesy way of letting the public know the crowding level so that they can decide if they want to board the bus or wait for the next one. It does not indicate a completely full bus.
- Sam Snead, “Is there a backend that provides the full speed to the transit app, or is it all encompassing? Are they providing backend software for you [RTA], or is it another one...like, you know, a trapeze or route match or pass?”
 - Jason answered that it is all thru Swiftly.
 - Josh explained that Swiftly provides RTA’s real time transit fee and all the information that is on RTA’s real time feeds. Anyone can download RTA’s Transit App. The Transit App is one of those groups that digest that data and then displays it on their app. It’s in RTA’s GPS real-time feature.
- Sam Snead, “Do you [RTA] have a component on each bus or a tablet that links up to Swiftly to provide real time on-time performance?”
 - Josh answered, “Yes, we have GPS units and then we have backup - like computer brains of the buses. We also have tablets. So, we have two to three sources of GPS input for each bus. All that input gets correlated with the static feed, and that’s how on-time performance is generated.”
- Sam Snead, “So Swiftly is the overall application that is fed that data, or is there another one?”
 - Josh answered, “Swiftly helps us produce the data. They take that raw data, or just the GPS points, and formulate it into the accepted general transit feed specifications in real-time format. This then gets published out for a link on our developer page of our website <https://live.goswift.ly/rtamaryland/>. Anyone can go there and download the live link of data. Transit App is one of those Google Maps that also takes our live transit data, our real-time feeds (not just the transit app). So, it’s Google Maps. [Moovit](#) and [Apple Maps](#) has our data as well. A lot of people use our data that way. Our passengers can see it from whatever application they’re using. But Swiftly is the computer aided dispatching software that help us process it.

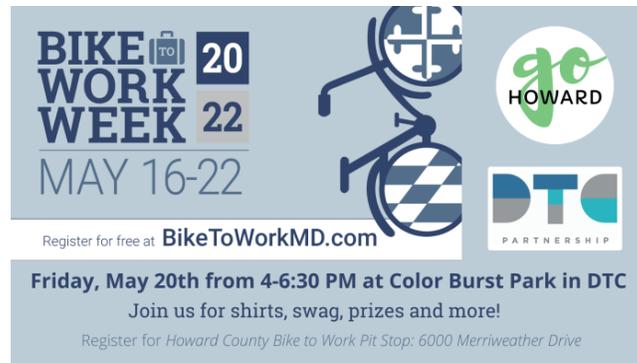


- Jason noted that the main reason that RTA went over to Swiftly, was that they can consume a lot of different data. Prior to Swiftly, RTA used Route Net. Regarding

GPS, RTA had trackers on the buses, but Swiftly can also consume other GPS location devices. There are three different devices that provide location data, and Swiftly can consume them all. Swiftly has helped RTA advance a lot of its technology initiatives.

- Outreach

- On April 2, 2022, RTA will participate in a State sponsored, yearly bus Roadeo.
 - RTA has three drivers who will be competing.
- On April 4, 2022, RTA will be at Hammond High School providing a presentation to students on how to its services and transit app. The objective is part of an ongoing RTA campaign to promote student ridership in Howard County. RTA is preparing plans to go out to other high schools.
 - Chris noted that Howard County started such a program several months ago...the students work with their administrative office in registering and getting a student pass to ride the bus for free. She wanted to know if there an overall marketing program.
 - Jason informed her that RTA’s Marketing and Outreach department Preston will work with Allison over at Howard County to push it out more.
 - Judith wanted to know how is RTA reimbursed for the number of student riders that are allowed to ride free – does it come from the school district or Howard County’s budget?
 - Bruce said that it is coming from the Howard County General Fund budget
 - Judith noted that for years Prince George’s has allowed their students to ride on their little minibuses for free, and it has caused a great deal of problems. For example, a whole mob will get on a bus and ride into town and will invade the city center and cause all sorts of ruckus. While they are waiting on the bus stops, they’re also creating havoc. There can be damage, and other passengers can be annoyed by the kids running up and down the aisle, screaming and yelling. On such days, Judith said, “You wish you hadn’t taken the metro at that time. Has RTA thought about those annoyances?”
 - Jason responded that yes, they have thought about it, and have experience some of it – mainly, in the bigger cities. He noted that RTA has noticed such trouble more from the regular riders, and not necessarily the students. Regular riders often get upset about wearing a mask or paying a fare.
 - Chris commented that it is a good way to cultivate a transit ridership and develop habits in young people and get them familiar with transit. She hopes that RTA will stick with it.
 - Judith agreed that it is a plan to acclimate them. Still, somewhere along the line, courtesy would be something nice for them to learn also.
 - Jason agreed.
- Bike-to-Work week, which RTA is partnering with Howard County is on May 16-22, 2022.



- Judith asked, can bicyclist bring a bike on the bus or does RTA buses have racks?
 - Jason noted that all RTA buses have a bike rack on the front of the bus.
 - John Spencer, wanted to know the bike ridership count.
 - Jason noted that bike ridership is not very high, and that he would get the count. Bike ridership is not tracked with the APC system. Historically, the drivers will make a note on their sheet for bike rides and wheelchair riders.
- Safety
 - RTA has had a lot of accidents of rear-end collision to its buses. RTA is not sure as to why this is happening. To help mitigate the rear-end collision, RTA is using equipment and devices such as reflectors and lights to draw more attention to rear of its buses.
 - Judith suggested that it is most likely due to distracted drivers
 - The total numbers of RTA preventable accidents for third quarter went down; and non-preventable went up.
 - Regarding operator's personal belongings being stolen, Judith wanted to know if there is room on the buses for a locked container where operators can store their belongings?
 - Jason noted that RTA buses do have a container that locks, but it holds a lot of the buses electronic, tracker hardware, etc. RTA operators are encouraged not to bring a lot of personal items while they are on the road. If, however, they do, RTA asks them not to leave it unattended.
- Financial Statement Summary (first six months of FY22)
 - Fare and ticket revenue thru the first half exceeded budget expectations by 49%
 - Fare box and ticket revenues for both the fixed routes and the paratransit beat budget expectations
 - We are still tracking the previous forecast amount of around \$700,000 for the fare box in ticket revenue. For comparison, our budget was at \$460,000.
 - Expenses: RTA's hiring challenges had the biggest impact to the budget with respect expenses, which was down 17% for the first half of this fiscal year.
 - The decline was attributed to the decrease in personnel expenses, fuel cost and maintenance expenses
 - Personnel expenses are about 18% of our budget
 - Fuel expenses are about 23% of our budget
 - Under budget and non-personnel maintenance expenses were up 45% on their budget.

- Net Income with the inclusion of the partner operating subsidy is about \$496,000. It should be noted that the partner operating subsidy was reduced by a total of 1.1 million for the first half of FY22 to allow for the reduced operating expenses.
- Jason will schedule a Draft-FY23 Budget Meeting in May in-person (pending weather conditions)
- The question was posed to the CMTMC group if they wanted to continue virtual or in-person meetings
 - The group preferred in-person meetings to be held on Tuesdays
 - Jason will circle back with Allen to see if he is available on a given Tuesday around 1pm. Jason suggested allowing Allen to pick a particular Tuesday that is convenient for him. Jason will email the group once Allen provides the Tuesday that is convenient for him.

7. Free Fare Holiday (months – fixed routes)

- Develop a ‘Back-to-Normal’ marketing campaign to help jumpstart ridership (we’re here...in business)
 - Using federal funds – May 15th or June timeline
 - Extend to the end of the calendar year
 - Ron Skotz suggested a marketing campaign that thanks masks wearers for staying socially distant ...and extend incentive for those who are wearing masks that otherwise would not wear a mask and consequently would not ride the bus
 - Lady near Judith wants to link it to major employers to promote it to their employees or customers
 - One major destination on each line that is affiliated with the promotion
 - Jason noted that the biggest challenge is when they reinstate the fares that the drivers get the negative response from the public.
 - Allen was in favor for free fare for a couple of years
 - Montgomery County – not charging fees
 - Prince George’s is charging, except for the students (Judith commented); and seniors have a special fee – not sure charging fees
 - Anne Arundel is currently fare free
 - City of Annapolis does charge
 - Judith suggested the free fare occurs from Memorial Day to Labor Day (May 30th – Sept 5th), and to be clear to communicate that it is just for the Summer.
 - Guy with pictures in background noted that there was a lot of controversy a few years back with MTA in giving free fares. He noted that the pandemic is an abnormally bad time to be charging. He wants RTA to get confirmation from MTA for the free fare program.
 - Bruce says that we can do that.
 - MTA believed that some sort of fare had to be charged – even if it was a quarter
 - The taskforce will reconvene to final this decision

Future Meeting Dates:

FY23 Budget Commission Meeting – Tuesday, May 17 @ 12:00 PM at RTA

Next Regular Commission Meeting – Tuesday, June 28 @ 1:00 PM at RTA

RAC Meeting – TBD, 6:00PM, via Zoom

Acronyms

AAC	Anne Arundel County
PGC	Prince George’s County
RTA	Regional Transportation Agency
RAC	Riders Advisory Council
TDP	Transit Development Plan