



## MINUTES

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

December 12, 2023

Ron Skotz called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm. Present were:

**Commissioner Members:**

Ron Skotz  
Robert Love  
Christine Wells  
Samuel Snead  
Michael Dyer  
Claudia Barber  
Allen Cornell (Chair)

**RTA Staff:**

Jason Quan, RTA  
Shawn O'Meara, RTA  
Ronaldo Joanis, RTA  
Cole McCarren, RTA  
Ryan Mayers, RTA  
Rushad Dastur, RTA

**Jurisdictional Staff:**

Bruce Gartner, Howard Co.  
Carrie Anderson-Watters, Howard Co.  
Semia Hackett, Prince George's Co.  
Kevin Thornton, Prince George's Co.  
Kevin Hernandez, Prince George's Co.  
Efon Epanty, Prince George's Co.  
Andrew Diehl, Anne Arundel Co.  
Crystal McGill-Belk, Anne Arundel Co.

**Commissioners Not Present:**

Judith Davis (Vice Chair)

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**1. Welcome: Ron Skotz**

**2. Open Public Comment Period**

No comments were provided during the open public comment period.

**3. Approval of the September 26, 2023, Joint Meeting of the Central Maryland  
Transportation & Mobility Commission (CMTMC)**

The September 26, 2023, meeting minutes were approved.

#### **4. General Manager's Report – Jason Quan**

Mr. Quan gave the Quarterly General Manager's Report (see attachment).

##### HUMAN RESOURCES

- Ms. Gabrielle Tibbs will rejoin RTA on December 18th. RTA eagerly anticipates her return.
- RTA's CDL training program typically experiences a winter recruitment slowdown. However, the HR recruitment specialist has maintained a steady flow of recruits during this season. Consequently, classes for November and December are scheduled with recruits.
- Current vacancies: Most of the openings are for drivers, with 27 positions on the fixed-route side and just one or two on RTA's paratransit side.
- Mr. Love asked about RTA's CDL training recruits who, after completing their training, pursue job opportunities elsewhere.
  - Mr. Quan acknowledges historically high turnover, with 45% of recruits leaving RTA. However, 55% retention is better than having no new CDL drivers. The recent CDL Driver pay increase (from \$20/hr. to \$25/hr.) aims to improve retention.
- Mrs. Wells asked about the CDL driver turnover rates in other transportation agencies.
  - Mr. Quan, without immediate data, committed to researching and providing follow-up information. RTA's CDL driver turnover rate is approximately 24%, with most drivers leaving in their second year. Some drivers may transition to the MTA or METRO. Unlike other organizations with ample CDL applicant pools, RTA fosters a family-like environment, potentially contributing to a lower turnover rate.
- Mr. Skotz inquired about the four maintenance vacancies at RTA.
  - Mr. Quan clarified that these vacancies pertain to service-lane positions, including bus fuelers and bus cleaners—not mechanics. All the mechanics (referred to as 'technicians') are filled.
- Mr. Quan discussed recent Union negotiations that align RTA's driving positions' starting wages with other local transit partners, including MTA, to attract more CDL holders. This move aims to reduce reliance on the less reliable CDL program. The operating wage increase, a long-standing RTA goal, took effect on October 1st, with retroactive payments based on the finalized agreement from November 16th.
  - Mr. Snead inquired about the pay increase and whether it necessitates a cap on overtime. Mr. Quan clarified that there is no such cap. However, he believes that as RTA fills its vacancies with competitive starting salaries, overtime will naturally decrease.
  - Mr. Snead asked about drivers' average weekly overtime. Mr. Quan didn't have the exact number but promised to share it with the committee later. He mentioned that federal laws impose a national cap on overtime hours—drivers cannot exceed 14 hours per day.

- Mr. Snead raised concerns about the correlation between overtime and pay increases.
  - Mr. Quan acknowledged similar worries among RTA drivers, particularly related to the addition of new drivers reducing desired overtime hours. While understanding the balance between pay increases and overtime, RTA remains committed to its main objectives and goals.
  - Mr. Skotz observed that vacancies and overtime at RTA tend to balance out over a period with projected budgets. Mr. Quan concurred, noting this common trend within RTA.
- Mr. Skotz inquired about 401(k) and health care contribution benefits for administrative staff. Mr. Quan confirmed that they receive these benefits too. Mr. Quan emphasized the importance of considering administrative staff in such matters.
- Mr. Quan explained that the new pay increase provides top pay after five years. Previously, there was no tenure; instead, drivers received annual pay scale increases. Other transit organizations have adopted a three-to-five-year approach, allowing drivers to anticipate upfront increases.
  - Mr. Love inquired about driver caps for five years. Jason clarified that the current three-year contract may be renegotiated during the next CPA, which concludes before the fifth year of the current approved negotiation.
- Mrs. Wells stated that she was pleased to see the negotiation process being completed with everyone satisfied.

#### OPERATIONS/SERVICE

- Mr. Quan's analysis indicates a **10% increase** in RTA ridership during the **2nd quarter**, surpassing the 1st quarter. Additionally, both fixed-route and paratransit ridership trends have **outperformed previous years**. These robust numbers are encouraging and align with Mr. Skotz's recollection of strong ridership figures from decades ago.
- The new RTA route 505, connecting Ellicott City to Catonsville, is performing strongly.
  - Mrs. Wells inquired about ridership alignment with forecasted numbers, but Mr. Quan couldn't recall those figures. However, based on personal interactions with riders and drivers, Mr. Myers confirmed that the route is well-received by the public.
- Mr. Quan acknowledged the need to improve fixed-route's on-time performance. RTA is exploring various methods, including new technology, to address this. Many of the issues with the new buses stem from poor quality control by the manufacturer.
  - Mr. Skotz inquired about quality control representatives from RTA or MTA on the manufacturer's side.
    - Mr. Quan explained that MTA handles procurement, but the final quality checks by *American* bus company has left RTA dissatisfied. Conversations are ongoing about switching manufacturers for future bus purchases. State contracts now offer more options, whereas in the past, there was only one vendor for transit buses. MTA has issued bids for new vendors, focusing on those known for high-quality heavy-duty buses.
- Paratransit's on-time performance is excellent.

## MAINTENANCE

- In November, there were fewer tows and road calls. New buses, still under warranty, are facing transmission issues, while emission-related problems persist as well. RTA anticipates that resolving these issues will reduce road calls.
- RTA's bus fleet continues to have emission systems malfunctions.

## PLANNING AND OUTREACH

- The 2023 Transit Development Plan (TDP) plan (which is a five-year plan, concluded in 2028) is completed and has been adopted by The Howard County Council.
- RTA will implement Samsara's new vehicle tracking system as a backup to our existing Swiftly system. Samsara's GPS software enhances real-time information, strengthens reliability, and improves on-time performance for its buses.
- RTA has been very active in engaging and educating the community about its services by participating in numerous community events – from high schools, colleges, senior centers, just to name a few. Additionally, RTA is utilizing various marketing outlets for community engagement, awareness, and most recently, RTA's CDL drivers position pay increase (i.e. print ads, mall kiosk advertising, bus shelters, bus ads, etc.).
  - Mrs. Wells praised some of the communication media, stating that the materials are very clear and appealing.
- RTA's Riders Advisory Committee (RAC)
  - Aggressively recruiting for RAC members.
  - The RAC's recent chair and vice-chair resigned due to their new full-time employment and related obligations.
- Motor Vehicle Administration Recruitment Campaign
  - RTA currently has 30-second exclusive commercials running at three MVA locations (Baltimore, Beltsville, and Columbia) advertising CDL hiring opportunities. RTA's human resources reported that they received three applications because of the ads. RTA will continue to track this campaign and report the results to the CMTMC.

## SAFETY

- The RTA experienced 5 preventable vehicle accidents, 5 non-preventable accidents, and 3 workers comp injuries during the quarter.
  - Preventable Vehicle Accident Summary
    - The RTA operator lost control of the bus during the aftermath of a storm, leading to major damage to the bus.
    - The RTA operator attempted to pass a bicyclist but failed to provide enough space, resulting in contact between the bus and the cyclist.
    - The RTA operator's side engine compartment swung open while driving, making contact with two parked cars on the roadside.

- The RTA operator reversed into another vehicle, resulting in minimal damage.
- The RTA operator was too close to the right side and encountered a bus shelter, resulting in damage to the passenger-side mirror.
- Non-Preventable Accident Summary
  - Other vehicle merged into the passenger-side of the bus.
  - Other vehicle was changing lanes and merged right in front of the bus, making contact.
  - Other vehicle rear-ended the RTA vehicle.
  - Other vehicle rear-ended the RTA vehicle.
  - Other vehicle merged in front of RTA vehicle, making contact.

## 5. FY2024 Draft Budget – Shawn O’Meara

- Mr. O’Meara covered the FY2024 forecast, including revenue and expenses, and discussed how RTA is tracking in those financial areas. He also reviewed the assumptions used in the forecast and highlighted the impact of the new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) on FY2024.
  - Revenue:
    - Mr. O’Meara observed that revenue is on track as expected.
    - It is projected to be approximately \$50,000 higher than the budgeted amount.
    - This difference is due to advertising revenue exceeding the budgeted figure.
  - Expenses:
    - RTA’s forecasted expenses are expected to be approximately \$127,000 over budget.
    - Specifically, the increase for the delta and partner operating subsidiary amounts to \$77,000.
  - The Assumptions:
    - Q1: Actual numbers for this forecast.
    - Q2-Q4: Include CBA wage increases, a 25% boost in the 401k employer contribution, and an 85/15 split for the employer medical contribution.
    - Q2: Based on Q1 actuals.
    - Q3: Bridges the gap between the Q4 budget and the actual Q1 and Q2.
- Mr. O’Meara observed that the impact of the CBA on driver’s personnel expenses; specifically, salary, 401k increase, and medical expenses results in the RTA being approximately \$575,000 above the budgeted number, including Q1 and Q2 vacancies.
- Maintenance personnel expenses are projected to exceed the budget by approximately \$150,000. This increase is not influenced by the CBA budget, but rather by overtime, which the RTA is actively addressing.
- For the full FY2024 financial forecast, please refer to the attached RTA FY 2024 Forecast presented during the Maryland Transportation & Mobility Commission Meeting

on December 12, 2023.

## 6. FY2025 Draft Budget – Shawn O’Meara

- Mr. Skotz asked about the advertising client that RTA uses for its bus advertisement sales.
  - Mr. O’Meara clarified that *Vector Media* manages sales for RTA’s bus advertisements. Their major advertisers include The Maryland Health Connection and The University System of Maryland.
- For the full FY2025 Draft Budget, please refer to the attached RTA FY 2025 Operating Budget Draft presented during the Maryland Transportation & Mobility Commission Meeting on December 12, 2023
- Mr. Skotz raised concerns about the MTA’s proposed Fiscal 2025 budget, which aims to reduce operating expenses by 40% and capital expenses by 50%. He inquired whether a revision is possible. In response, Mr. Gartner explained that the recent RTA fiscal discussions, as presented by Mr. O’Meara, provide an initial glimpse into what RTA and its partners can achieve under normal circumstances, accounting for growth and other factors. It’s essential to recognize that counties are just beginning their budget processes, and the RTA’s FY 2025 budget has not yet received official submission.
- Returning to Mr. Skotz’s point about MTA cuts, Mr. Gartner acknowledged the accuracy of Mr. Skotz’s observation. Information regarding these cuts is available in MDOT press releases and various communication channels. Notably, Prince George’s County experienced a substantial reduction due to the allocation of 40% of funds to State resources. However, the same 40% for Howard County amounted to a mere \$50,000, making it a less significant issue for Howard County.
- Conversely, Mr. Gartner expressed that they had hoped for a substantial increase based on conversations with the MTA last year. As the cuts take effect, Howard County faces uncertainty regarding what it can deliver in 2025. The Howard County budget office’s approval remains uncertain. Reduction scenarios, including service cuts to the lowest-performing routes or evaluating the cost per position, are being considered. Mr. Gartner emphasized the importance of such discussions among the RTA partners.
- Additionally, Mr. Gartner briefly touched on the expansion of Route 409, noting that Howard County has not yet committed to this expansion, despite earlier projections.
- Mr. Gartner believed it would be beneficial for Mr. Quan to provide additional clarification to the group regarding the projected increase in expenses for Route 502 in fiscal year 2025. This is especially important since the service is shared among Northern Prince George’s County, Anne Arundel County, and a portion of Howard County.
  - In response, Mr. Quan explained that the RTA established an hourly bus frequency for all routes during business hours. However, Route 502, which adheres to this frequency on weekdays, deviates from it on weekends, operating at an hour and a half interval. RTA aims to align the weekend frequency for Route 502 with its consistent hourly performance, which will require additional work hours and related expenses.

- Subsequently, Mr. Gartner sought the estimated cost for implementing these changes, to which Mr. O’Meara provided an estimate of \$224,000.
- Mr. Skotz raised concerns about transit reduction costs for local jurisdictions, which have drawn backlash from these communities. The proposed budget by Mr. Wiedefeld, Transportation Secretary at MDOT, has been labeled by some as ‘draconian.’ Discussions are underway regarding the possibility of enabling legislation by the General Assembly for local jurisdictions to consider a taxing district, like the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA).
- Many individuals express frustration that Montgomery County and Prince George’s County consistently receive a disproportionate share of resources. The Washington Suburban Transit Commission plays a role in this allocation. Interestingly, Mr. Skotz noticed a specific line item on his property tax bill dedicated solely to transit, supporting mass transit services, debt service, and administrative costs. Unfortunately, over the past four decades, the Maryland Transportation Administration (MTA) has dictated local funding levels, leaving counties to bear any excess costs. Finding a dedicated funding source separate from the general fund and MTA grants remains a challenge—one that local jurisdictions are actively addressing.
  - Adding context, the MTA receives substantial funding from the Federal government, and Maryland stands out as the only state where a single entity serves as the recipient, operator, and designee of these federal funds. Some legislators are now scrutinizing this arrangement. Interestingly, the 40% to 50% of funds designated for localities often end up being absorbed by the MTA for its operations.
    - Mr. Gartner interjected, emphasizing ongoing discussions about increasing federal shares to jurisdictions. However, the situation remains complex.
  - Mr. Snead highlighted the MTA’s proposed cuts, which will significantly impact commuter bus services. These cuts are particularly concerning for Anne Arundel County residents who regularly commute between the D.C. area and Baltimore. Unfortunately, the MTA is not expanding its services or adding extra hours to existing routes.
  - Anne Arundel County currently has only four MTA routes terminating within its boundaries from Baltimore City, while other jurisdictions have more extensive coverage. Mr. Snead believes that the MTA is compelled to make these drastic service reductions.
  - Regarding funding, Mr. Snead pointed out that the Baltimore region receives a disproportionately larger share of funds compared to Anne Arundel County. Despite Anne Arundel County being a significant contributor to the MTA’s ridership, it receives only a small percentage of the Urbanized Area Formula Grants. There have been local arguments advocating for a fairer distribution of these grants to support Anne Arundel County’s local transit system.
  - In essence, Anne Arundel County supplies a substantial portion of the MTA’s ridership, enabling the operation of local county services. However, this

understanding has not been adequately acknowledged by those responsible for funding decisions. Mr. Snead believes that other local counties, including Howard County, Prince George's County, and Baltimore County, have committed substantial operating budget funds to run their transit systems. The impact of these decisions will likely not manifest in the short term due to the current environment.

#### **7. Riders' Advisory Council Update – Ryan Mayers**

- Mr. Ryan reported that at the last RAC meeting on November 9th, they discussed the challenge of maintaining consistent membership involvement. While they have active members, there's room for improvement in their engagement.
- During the last meeting, Mr. Mayers provided updates of the RAC's open discussion board, shared insights from Mrs. Astamay Curtis, who is an RAC member and the previous Chair, and discussed a potential route change in Gainesville.
- Internally, Mr. Mayers is considering RAC membership changes, including nominating new chairpersons.
- Mr. Reed of RTA's Marketing Department has been instrumental in creating a marketing plan for the RAC.
- Next RAC meeting is scheduled for March 8, 2024.

#### **8. Transit Development Plan (TDP) Update – Bruce Gartner**

- Mr. Gartner provided positive feedback regarding the Transit Development Plan (TDP) during the Howard County Council proceedings.
- The TDP, accessible on both the RTA website and the Howard County Office of Transportation website, outlines planning and strategic considerations for various routes.
  - These routes are categorized as short-term, medium-term, or long-term goals.
    - The short-term goals include expanding routes 409 and 501 to the airport and connecting Columbia to the Homewood campus via MD-108 for the school system.
    - However, the longer-term goals extend into Anne Arundel County and Prince George's County.
  - Conversations with officials from these counties are ongoing, focusing on funding and the feasibility of implementing these plans.
  - Notably, the capital cost associated with expanding services is a significant consideration at this stage.
  - Mr. Gartner made the point that Howard County is aware that there might be the need to purchase additional buses to accommodate service expansions.
- Mr. Gartner discussed the inclusion of Bowie, Fort Meade, and Columbia in the Transit Development Plan (TDP).
- Additionally, Mr. Gartner mentioned that the TDP addresses the transition to electric vehicles, drawing from a consultant study conducted by the MTA. While this shift represents a significant investment, it aligns with Howard County's environmental goals.



Colleagues have engaged with Prince George’s County to share insights and challenges related to vendors.

- Mr. Gartner says that the TDP acknowledges this ongoing shift toward electric vehicles. However, recent budget cuts within the MTA may lead to the suspension or delay of legislation mandating an all-electric fleet. Consequently, a more detailed study will be commissioned to explore the feasibility of this transition, considering the ever-evolving technology landscape.
- Mr. Gartner mentioned that Howard County closely monitors the situation, driven by their climate action plan’s aspirational goal of achieving a fully electric fleet by 2035. To achieve this, ongoing dialogue with budget officials, policymakers, and elected representatives is essential.
- During the discussion, Mr. Wells raised concerns about garage space limitations even if the conversion proceeds smoothly.
  - Mr. Gartner emphasized that the current electric vehicle technology falls short in terms of range for most routes, necessitating at least a 2-to-1 replacement ratio.
  - Interestingly, both Howard County and Anne Arundel County have passed an assessment related to Uber, Lyft, and Ride Share services. The revenue generated from this assessment will likely fund the next phase of the electric vehicle investigation.
  - When Mrs. Wells inquired about the revenue collection’s effective date, Bruce clarified that it began in September, although he awaits confirmation from the comptroller’s office.

## **9. Next Commission Meeting – Jason Quan**

The next CMTMC meeting will be held March 26, 2024, p.m.

## **10. Adjournment – Ron Skotz**

The meeting was adjourned at 2 p.m.

### **Future Meeting Dates:**

Next Commission Meeting – Tuesday, March 26, 2024, 1 p.m., via Zoom, details to follow.

RAC Meeting – Thursday, June 6, 2024, 6 p.m, via Zoom.

MDOT	Maryland Department of Transportation
MTA	Maryland Transportation Administration
WMATA	Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
TDP	Transit Development Plan