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**TRANSIT AND PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY GROUP (TPAG) MINUTES**  
September 15, 2020

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**Members Present:**

Marlene Hendler, Chair  
Astamay Curtis  
Marian Vessels  
David Ramsay  
Christiana Little  
Ben Carlton  
David Zinner  
Paul Walsky

**Staff:**

Bruce Gartner, Office of Transportation  
Chris Eatough, Office of Transportation  
Jason Quan, Office of Transportation  
Kimberly Woods, Office of Transportation  
Molly Nur, Office of Transportation  
David Cookson, Office of Transportation  
Brian Muldoon, Office of Transportation

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**1. Approval of June 15, 2020 Minutes**

Marian Vessels moved to approve the minutes. Marlene Hendler seconded the motion.

**2. Key Topics**

a. MDOT Consolidated Transportation Program-RTAA

Bruce Gartner announced that MDOT has recently released their draft 6-year FY21-26 Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP). The CTP shows a \$2.9 billion reduction.

Key Points from the CTP:

- Cuts are distributed across MDOT modes. Maryland's contribution to WMATA is 100% funded for capital and operating.
- \$150 million in cuts to MTA on top of last year's \$303 million reduction to the 6-year CTP.
- MDOT has proposed a 20% reduction in MTA transit service, including cuts to core bus, MARC (eliminating 3 Camden Line trips), commuter bus, and paratransit services.

- Reductions in bus service by 36%, including discontinuing 25 bus routes, eliminating all the Express Bus Service (including 150 to Howard County), and reducing and modifying 24 other routes.

Bruce encouraged the group to look at the different input options on the MTA website concerning the reductions (specifically the elimination of the 150 buses and the commuter rail reductions) and send concerns to the state delegation.

Marlene Hendler informed the group that earlier in the day she attended a meeting with the MTA. During the meeting MTA mentioned revisiting some of their cuts due to a large outcry over reductions such as the elimination of the 150 buses.

Bruce informed the group that there will be hearings on the reductions beginning in early October where the public can provide input. The schedule for reductions/eliminations are proposed for January 1, 2021. The OOT will send out a link and will prepare some points that could be made regarding the 150 Express Buses.

b. Transit

i. RTA Transit Challenges

Bruce Gartner went over the financial impacts COVID-19 has had on the RTA. Howard County was awarded \$7.6 million in federal grants through the CARES Act. The funding from the CARES act will help offset the lost in fare revenue. The RTA is currently not collecting fare from riders; that is expected to continue until the end of December. The MTA has recently announced that the RTA operating budget will be reduced by 20% in FY 21, and for the foreseeable future including the next three years and during the capital reduction. The RTA is slated to get federal funding for a few new buses, however, the state usually participates in a ten percent match; as the state will be unable to maintain that practice, for next year the OOT must find \$120,000 within the County to cover those costs.

RTA ridership is currently running about a low 30% of what it was in 2019. Current COVID-19 service restrictions include:

- Modified service levels projected through January 1, 2021
- Extra trippers are sometimes used to ensure appropriate social distancing on vehicles
- Protective barriers are being installed in buses between now and November
- Fare collection will resume in January 2021

David Ramsay asked about the average RTA ridership pre-COVID. Jason Quan answered that system-wide the RTA was averaging about 60-70 thousand one-way trips monthly.

ii. RTA Fleet Replacement Plan

Bruce Gartner discussed the RTA Fleet Plan. Howard County was awarded two new buses in FY20. The OOT must redo the order for those two big door buses. Two additional buses will be received in the traditional federal funding through the MTA. The VW Grant is expected to bring in three additional buses. The Bus & Bus Facilities Grant will provide the County with three buses as well as funding for annunciators. While the RTA is expected to receive new buses, it can take 12-18 months to manufacture the buses before they are acquired.

David Ramsay asked about the type of buses that are being purchased under the VW Grant. Bruce said they were clean diesel buses. Due to issues with the RTA's current electric buses, they do not wish to purchase more electric vehicles currently.

Astamay Curtis asked whether the electric buses will still run on the 401 route once they are placed back in service. Jason Quan answered that the electric buses could run on the 406 route, but will be run on the 401 instead, because that route requires a couple of buses to maintain its frequent time schedule.

### iii. RTA Bus Stop Improvements

- New shelters with solar lighting installed at the Columbia Mall
- State Transit Innovation Grant Improvements for CY 2021
  - Assessment of locations for improvements underway
  - Selection of up to 10 sites to be complete by November 1, 2020
  - Construction in CY 2020
  - Procurement of vendor for Smart Digital Display at Columbia Mall in CY 2021

### iv. RTA Technology Improvements

Jason Quan discussed the Transit App Campaign with the group. The official campaign kicks off on Monday, September 21, 2020. RTA has a formal agreement with the Transit App to provide real time information, trip planning information, and especially important, service alerts. The service alerts will notify riders anytime there is a delay, service interruption, or detour. Starting Monday, a few of the buses will have representatives on the bus advertising the Transit App. The app will provide information on 360 stops and all the shelter stops. There will be advertisements mounted on the polls at the shelter to help promote and advertise the Transit App. The app is one of the most popular transit apps across the country. MTA, Metro, Montgomery County and many other large agencies use this app to provide real-time information. This allows riders to plan trips across different operators and different modes. Bike Share is on the Transit App and hopefully the scooters

will be available on the app as well, so that the public can connect to different modes of transportation using one interface.

### **3. Upcoming Events**

- RTA and Transit app official campaign launch – September 21, 2020
- Love to Ride initiatives available through BMC
  - o Bike to Work Week – September 21 – 27
  - o Cycle September
- Complete Streets Community Engagement Plan Workshops - September 23 at 1:00pm and 7:00pm
- Virtual Transportation Town Hall – November 18
- Reinstating fares – January 1, 2021
- Phase 3 of General Paratransit (GPT) fare increase – effective January 1, 2021

### **4. Open Discussion Period**

Bruce announced that in the FY21 budget the OOT adopted the policy that as of July 1 all public-school students can ride the RTA for free.

Q. Astamay Curtis asked what portion of the student population do the OOT believe will be utilizing the RTA since a lot of them will be eligible to ride the bus for free.

A. Bruce answered by telling Astamay that he believes it will be a small portion in the beginning, and it will probably consist of after-school trips (i.e., work). David Ramsay added that students participating in extracurricular activities at the end of the day would also use the bus service.

Q. Marlene Hendler questioned whether the RTA had to make many cuts due to COVID.

A. Bruce Gartner answered that the RTA has not undertaken any service reductions based on finances; it has been more of ensuring the buses have the appropriate spacing match. Due to the low ridership the RTA has not yet had to scale back up, but it is something that is being closely monitored.

Q. Astamay Curtis voiced concerns over the decline in TPAG meeting attendance due to virtual meetings.

A. Bruce Gartner told Astamay Curtis that due to some of the repetition in many of the Board Advisory Groups, he would like to have future discussions about potentially merging the TPAG into the Multimodal Group. The MTB is addressing several transit issues, and, as there are vacancies on the MTB and RAC, perhaps consolidation is the best option.

Q. Marlene Hendler questioned when the 402B would be back in service.

A. Bruce Gartner responded that service adjustments probably will not occur until January 2021 at the earliest.

**5. Adjournment**

This meeting adjourned at 4:54 p.m.



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Bruce Gartner  
Executive Secretary

Date

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