

NASHVILLE METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY
Board of Directors Meeting

December 21, 2023

I. Call to Order: The regular meeting of the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (Nashville MTA) Board of Directors was held at the Tennessee State Library & Archives, located at 1001 Rep. John Lewis Way N., Nashville, TN 37219, on Thursday, December 21, 2023.

II. Roll Call of Persons Present:

Janet Miller, Vice Chair	Renuka Christoph, CCO
Jessica Dauphin, Member	Nick Oldham, CSSO
Kathryn Hays Sasser, Member	Ed Oliphant, CFO
Aron Thompson, Member	Felix Castrodad, Director of Planning & Grants
Margaret Behm, Board Secretary	Katie Freudberg, Scheduling & Service Manager
Stephen Bland, CEO	Patrick Hester, Facilities Manager
Monica Howse, Sr. Exec. Asst. & Board Liaison	

A quorum was established, and Vice Chair Miller called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

III. Approval of Minutes: Mr. Aron Thompson moved the approval of the November 16, 2023, Nashville MTA Board minutes. Ms. Jessica Dauphin seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved the minutes.

IV. Public Comments: Vice Chair Miller opened the floor for public comments. The public was reminded that comments were limited to two minutes. The following members of the public gave public comments:

- John Bull
- Steve Rieter

V. Informational Items: The following items were presented for the Board members' review:

- Monthly Financial Report Compared to Budget – No questions
- Monthly Operating Statistics – No questions
- Upcoming Procurement Projects List – No questions

VI. Consent Agenda Items:

- Approval of Agency Safety Plan (M-A-23-044)
- Info. Technology State of Good Repair, Additional Replacement Equipment (M-A-23-045)
- WeGo Central Dunkin Donut Lease Extension (M-A-23-046)
- Property Lease WeGo Central Parking Garage (M-A-23-047)
- Connect Downtown Study Contract Amendment (M-A-23-048)
 - Ms. Dauphin asked Mr. Castrodad if he could talk more about the public engagement on the Connect Downtown (Third Paragraph - Pg. 22). Mr. Castrodad said that the original scope had an extremely robust public engagement component, but through the course of the project, public engagement continued to grow more robust from the original list of stakeholders and more public engagement was requested from many diverse groups. This required more time and consulting effort to be able to reach all of the groups. NDOT wanted to ensure that they reached as many people as possible so that they had enough feedback needed for the project. This was a major reason necessitating a contract increase for the consulting team.

Ms. Hays Sasser made a motion to approve the consent agenda items as presented. Ms. Dauphin seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved the consent agenda items.

VII. **Operations & Finance Committee Report:** Committee Chair Dauphin presented the following items for discussion and action:

a. **Escalator Modernization Update (Nice-D-23-009)** Facilities Manager Patrick Hester presented the following update:

The facility is served by two escalators and one passenger elevator installed in 2008. Repeat mechanical failures, downtime, extensive repair costs, condition assessments, and TAM scoring led to an engineering assessment of the escalators in 2021. The assessment indicated the escalators required extensive rehabilitation to provide reliable, safe service.

In February 2023, the Board approved the Chief Executive Officer to enter a contract with Kone for Escalator Modernization and Vertical Circulation Services.

At WeGo Central, signage was installed the week of November 13th, notifying the public of the escalator project, closure, duration, and alternate routing for navigating the facility. On November 27th, safety barricades were installed in preparation for escalator demolition starting on December 4th. The next phase of work after demolition will be structural and utility improvements.

Ms. Dauphin asked if the original target date for completion was August 2024. Mr. Hester said the original completion target date was October 2024. CEO Bland noted that the work was originally going to start in January 2024, but there was a significant component failure in the Fall that removed the escalator from service, which would have necessitated a significant repair expense. As a result, the project was started in January, two months ahead of schedule.

b. **Nestor Backflow System (M-A-23-049)** Facilities Manager Patrick Hester provided the following item for discussion and action:

Staff requested the Board to provide the Chief Executive Officer the authority to enter into a fixed-price contract with Koorsen Fire & Security to provide fire system backflow and plumbing system repair services for a total contract budget of \$299,720.00, with an additional authorization of \$59,944 (20%) for staff directed changes if unanticipated conditions arise. This creates a total project budget authorization of \$359,664.00. The contract term is one hundred eighty (180) calendar days. Funding for this project is provided in the agency capital plan under the facility state of good repair program utilizing the Federal 5307 funds with matching state and local funds.

Ms. Hays Sasser said she was excited to learn about vertical circulation and backflow systems, which seem very important. She thanked Mr. Hester for his presentation and the work being done on behalf of MTA on those issues.

Ms. Dauphin said all this is about workplace safety, which is a priority. CEO Bland noted that WeGo will also relocate the Backflow System as part of this project. The current location is immediately adjacent to the fueling Island, and this proximity has resulted in several minor accidents where buses have struck the backflow building during the vehicle servicing process, so this project should also make the servicing process safer.

Mr. Thompson asked when the project would start. Mr. Hester said he anticipates that it will begin sometime in February.

Ms. Dauphin made a motion to approve the Nestor Backflow System action item. Ms. Hays Sasser seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved this action item.

VIII. **New Initiative & Community Engagement Committee Report:** Committee Chair Miller introduced the following items for discussion and action:

- a. **FY2025 Operating Budget Discussion Kick-off (NICE-D-23-010):** Chief Executive Officer Steve Bland and Chief Financial Officer Ed Oliphant presented information concerning financial and operating trends and key initiatives entering the FY2025 budget season. The intent was to generate sufficient discussion to provide staff direction in assembling the FY2025 operating budget request to Metro Finance and the Mayor's Office. The feedback will be used to provide an update on the funding request at the January meeting in advance of the anticipated budget submission deadline in February.

Mr. Thompson asked if the inflation number would come down as overall inflation declines nationally. CFO Oliphant said that inflationary numbers should be lower for FY2025 than they have been in recent years and that he's had conversations with Metro Finance, trying to get a feel for where they think and what they are seeing from the other departments. Based on these discussions, the preliminary baseline budget reflects general inflation of 5.2% to 5.3%. This is well below the past two years, but still higher than earlier periods.

Ms. Miller thanked the team for a wonderful presentation.

- b. **Advertising Policy Amendment (M-A-23-050):** Chief Communication Officer Renuka Christoph presented the following item for discussion and action:

The Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (Nashville MTA) Board adopted revised advertising standards and policies that enhance the quality of the customer experience WeGo Public Transit strives to provide. The revised advertising standards eliminated ad types covering some bus windows to improve customer safety, sought to enhance the image of Transit and protect the new WeGo brand, and examined alternate revenue sources to offset income loss from these revisions.

WeGo continues to redefine future advertising to address image and community engagement goals more comprehensively. Beyond the advertising program itself, the overall marketing program has begun to emphasize the development of strategic community partnerships that leverage joint promotional opportunities with other add-ons, such as WeGo Ride participation and service enhancements.

Staff requested that the Board replace the existing advertising policy with a new policy regarding messaging on WeGo Public Transit Assets as presented. The new messaging policy will allow WeGo Public Transit to retain full editorial control over the content of any messaging installed on its assets.

As additional information for newer Board Members, Ms. Miller provided some background on how the Board arrived at this point. Coming out of the nMotion process, the Board's intent was to focus on safety, rider experience, and enhancing the image of public transportation in the community and reduced revenues from the elimination of the traditional advertising program could be largely offset by a greater focus on community partnerships.

CEO Bland reiterated Ms. Miller's comments, indicating that the intent of the Community Impact Partnership program was to focus on building image and ridership through strategic partnerships while focusing on revenue-generating opportunities. It will likely take 2 – 3 years to work through this transition. Mr. Oliphant indicated that this phase-in has been contemplated in operating budget assumptions.

The new policy would eliminate all bus window coverage to Ms. Miller's point about safety.

Ms. Dauphin commended Ms. Christoph on the work done in developing the new policy and likes that WeGo will maintain control over the editorial content and become a great foundational partner with other city departments, organizations, and businesses that want to lift our communities.

Ms. Miller made a motion to approve the new policy regarding messaging on WeGo Public Transit Assets. Mr. Thompson seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved this action item.

- c. **Spring 2024 Service Changes Update (NICE-D-23-051)**: Director of Planning and Grants Felix Castrodad and Scheduling and Service Manager Katie Freudberg presented an update of the proposed changes for Spring 2024.

Ms. Miller asked what the general feedback from the public was. Ms. Freudberg said that many comments focused on a need for greater service levels in parts of the community that were not affected by these recommended changes and that their comments have been duly recorded for future planning efforts.

Specific to the proposed service changes, there have been a few comments about eliminating part of route 42-St. Cecilia is one of the more significant changes, so WeGo is currently looking at strategies to address or minimize the impact. There were other comments in support of increased frequency, especially on the crosstown routes, and comments about portions of routes in Bordeaux that are proposed for elimination. Overall, feedback was mainly positive, particularly with respect to improved frequency on most services and the new Route 71 – Trinity Lane Crosstown service. WeGo is trying to be sensitive to those negatively impacted by these changes and looking at potential mitigation options.

Ms. Dauphin asked how many schools are accessed now and if more schools can access those bus routes. CEO Bland said that Trinity Lane is the only real new coverage area, as most changes are improvements to existing routes. However, with the new Trinity Crosstown and route extensions of the Whites Creek and Metro Center buses, you'll likely have quicker trips for some of the magnet schools; in particular, you'll have different connection alternatives that you don't currently have. There is one middle school on Route 42 - St. Cecilia/Cumberland where we did receive some comments requesting that we maintain service there to a middle school, but this segment of the route had never been recommended for curtailment and would see increased service frequency under these proposals.

Ms. Dauphin thanked Mr. Castrodad and Ms. Freudberg for walking through the changes and all the work and feedback with the public engagements.

Final service change recommendations will be brought before the Board in January 2024 for final action.

- d. **Multimodal Mobility Master Plan Memorandum of Understanding (M-A-23-050)**: Director of Planning and Grants Felix Castrodad presented the following item for discussion and action:

Staff recommended the Board authorize the Chief Executive Officer to execute a Memorandum of Understanding with the Nashville Department of Transportation & Multimodal Infrastructure, the Metro Planning Department, and the Regional Transportation Authority describing the responsibilities of the parties concerning carrying out the work activities of the Multimodal Mobility Master Plan including updating the Transit Strategic Plan. This document has been reviewed and approved by the General Counsel of the Nashville MTA.

WeGo Public Transit is scheduled to update its nMotion Strategic Transit Service Plan. As with nMotion, the intent is to undertake a joint planning effort between the MTA and the RTA. Coincidentally, the Nashville Department of Transportation is scheduled to update its various

modal planning efforts, including (in conjunction with Metro Planning) the Major and Collector Street Plan. As such, the four partner agencies determined that a consolidated effort to coordinate this work into a more comprehensive whole would benefit the people of the region. In this scenario, each agency will retain full control of its service/project elements, while overall public engagement and publication efforts would be consolidated to present a unified mobility plan.

Mr. Thompson asked when the MOU would be in place. CEO Bland indicated that the MOU would take effect upon the execution of all parties and that consultant selection for the planning process would take place in the first quarter of 2024.

Ms. Miller made a motion to approve the Multimodal Mobility Master Plan MOU action item. Ms. Hays Sasser seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved this action item.

- e. **Planning Support Services (M-A-23-052)**: Director of Planning and Grants Felix Castrodad presented the following item for discussion and action:

Staff recommended the Board authorize the Chief Executive Officer to execute task orders for various elements of this effort to HDR Engineering, Inc. in a combined amount not to exceed \$940,000, with a project duration of thirteen (13) months, expiring December 31st, 2024. Funding for this effort is available through previously programmed capital funds to support updating WeGo's long-range plan.

Chair Miller made a motion to approve the Planning Support Services action item. Ms. Dauphin seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved this action item.

IX. CEO's Report: CEO Steve Bland provided the following report:

1. Relative to the MOU just approved with NDOT and Metro Planning for a comprehensive mobility plan, WeGo has issued a Request for Qualifications for these services. Proposals are due in January, and WeGo expects to recommend an award to the Board in March or April. The evaluation committee will consist of WeGo, NDOT, and Metro Planning representatives.
2. CEO Bland acknowledged the Planning and Service Development staff, led by Felix Castrodad and Katie Freudberg, for the level of effort they've put into the service proposals for this Spring. With the opening of the Ernest Rip Patton Jr. North Nashville Center in the Spring and everything else going on, it would have been much simpler to layer new services like the Trinity Lane crosstown onto our existing services. However, they recognized the opportunity presented by the new facility to do a major restructuring of service to expand the reach and effectiveness of our system.
3. This past week, Mayor O'Connell's Office announced the appointment of Tanisha Hall as Director of Transit and Mobility in the Mayor's Office. Ms. Hall is well known for her past work at TDOT and Fairpointe Planning. At Fairpointe, she has been heavily involved in the Connect Downtown Mobility Study reported last month. CEO Bland had the opportunity to meet with her earlier this week to catch her up on our various projects, service initiatives, and activities. WeGo wishes her well in her new role and offers its full support to help her hit the ground running.
4. With respect to the tornado outbreak of December 9th, WeGo narrowly missed significant damage to the system, as the tornado's path passed very close to the Myatt facility in Madison. The building sustained minor roof damage, and two passenger waiting shelters in Madison were destroyed. Otherwise, the agency escaped damage. Routes in the affected areas were on detour for several days. WeGo has been providing transportation through the Office of Emergency Management and Hands-on Nashville to move volunteers in and out of affected areas to help with recovery. Many people have supported the effort, but he particularly thanked

Patrick Hester and the Facilities Group, Rob McElhaney and the IT group, Andy Burke, Carolyn Riggs-Farrar, Gabe Burgess, and the Operations Group for their fast and thorough response.

5. Following up on the mid-year budget review, Metro Finance took WeGo up on the offer to visit and tour its facilities. Last week, they visited the Nestor facility to get a sense of the operations that occur there and a number of the capital projects and challenges necessary to keep that facility up and running. Metro Finance has many new employees, so it was an excellent opportunity to build relationships and help them understand how WeGo functions better.
6. As it relates to Metro Finance, WeGo has been meeting and exchanging information with staff from Finance, Planning, and the Mayor's Office relative to capital funding needs as they consider a potential capital spending plan over the next few months.
7. After last month's Board meeting, CEO Bland attended the alumni reception of the Transit Alliance and had the opportunity to update the alumni on WeGo's various projects and activities. CEO Bland thanked Ms. Dauphin for the invitation to attend and speak. Participants in Alliance programs are undoubtedly knowledgeable and passionate.
8. On November 21st, CEO Bland attended the public release of the Mayors' Transition Teams reports. Dr. Alex Jahangir presented the "How We Move" report. The Committee (which included WeGo's Board Chair, Gail Carr Williams) made specific recommendations. Still, the underlying theme was that the city needs to double down on public transportation to improve the quality of life of Nashville's residents and mitigate challenges associated with its rapid growth. WeGo looks forward to working with the mayor to help support these recommendations.
9. WeGo continues to see growth in the penetration of QuickTicket products. In November 2023, cash transactions represented only 14% of all boarding transactions. This was down significantly from 44% of all transactions in November 2022. WeGo is still seeing slower penetration in neighborhoods with higher populations of non-English speaking people, so WeGo will need to continue to expand outreach efforts in these areas. To support this effort, WeGo is extending the discounts on QuickTicket through January.
10. This past month, CEO Bland said he was pleased to announce the promotion of Lydia Benda to Director of Engineering, Construction, and Project Management and Kia Lewis to Senior Project Manager. Lydia and Kia have been making significant progress on several WeGo projects. They have picked up the slack since Trey Walker left, keeping numerous stops, transit centers, and other capital projects on track. Lydia is in the process of hiring another project manager.
11. This past month, CEO Bland was honored to be named to the Board of Directors of Senior Ride Nashville. Senior Ride Nashville is a non-profit that supports the independent living of older adults through transportation support services. Their mission complements what WeGo does, and they have grown into a valuable community asset over the past few years.
12. WeGo held Holiday Staff Lunches and Dinners this month at the Nestor, Central, and Myatt facilities. The events are always an excellent opportunity to see many employees and enjoy fellowship. Special thanks to the Employee Engagement Committee for pulling it off.
13. CEO Bland relived old times with Ms. Erin Hafkenschiel this month as he participated in a panel discussion about transit and mobility issues moderated by Vice Chair Janet Miller for Nashville's Agenda. Ms. Hafkenschiel is the Executive Director of Think Tennessee and served as the Mobility Director under Mayors Barry and Briley. Nashville's Agenda is a group of business and community leaders that examines big-picture issues that affect Nashville and the region.

14. WeGo continues to work to fill the talent pipeline. This past month, WeGo held another maintenance apprentice signing event, welcoming six new apprentices to the program. The apprenticeship program is state-certified, and the strides that Kym Tucker and the training team have made to build it into a first-rate program have been tremendous.

15. CEO Bland attended the Winter Meeting and Congressional Reception of the Legislative Committee of our National Trade Association in Washington, DC. While in DC, he met with USDOT officials, Congressman Rose, and his staff. Congressman Rose is advancing a Congressional funding effort to support the Donelson Station joint development project of the RTA.

16. On the RTA side:

- a. WeGo continues to advance land acquisition toward a permanent park-and-ride location in Murfreesboro.
- b. Hatch Consulting Group continues to advance the WeGo Star Future Vision Study. Earlier today, WeGo met with Hatch and Rail Operator RJ Corman to examine the operational feasibility of some options.
- c. WeGo continues to work with the development team of HG Hill and Southeast Venture on a joint development project at Donelson Station.

X. **Chair's Report:** Vice Chair Miller presented the following report on behalf of Board Chair Carr Williams:

Vice Chair Miller said she was grateful to all the staff and fellow Board members, especially WeGo's newest Board members, Kathryn and Aron. She said this organization has many moving parts, 24 hours a day. 2024 will be a huge year for Transit, so she encouraged everyone to get a little rest over the holidays because WeGo will hit the ground running in January. She wished everybody a wonderful holiday.

XI. **Other Business:** There was no further business to come before this Board.

XII. **Adjournment:** With no further business, Vice Chair Miller moved to adjourn the meeting, which adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

Attested:

Gail Carr Williams
Chair

Margaret L. Behm
Secretary