

**PIERCE TRANSIT
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

March 14, 2022

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Campbell called the regular board meeting to order at 4:06 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners present:

Marty Campbell, Chair of the Board, Pierce County Councilmember
John Hines, City of Tacoma Councilmember
Ryan Mello, Pierce County Councilmember
John Palmer, Deputy Mayor for City of Puyallup (representing Puyallup and Edgewood)
Kim Roscoe, Mayor of Fife (*representing Fife/Milton/Pacific/Auburn/Gig Harbor
Ruston/Steilacoom*)
Kristina Walker, Vice Chair of the Board, City of Tacoma Councilmember
Jason Whalen, City of Lakewood Mayor

Commissioners excused:

Victoria Woodards, Mayor of the City of Tacoma
Kent Keel, City of University Councilmember (*representing University Place and Fircrest*)

Staff present:

Mike Griffus, Chief Executive Officer
Deanne Jacobson, Clerk of the Board
Brittany Carbullido, Assistant to the CEO/Deputy Clerk of the Board
Aaron Millstein, Counsel from K&L Gates

OPENING REMARKS AND HOUSEKEEPING ITEMS

Chair Campbell welcomed board members, staff, and citizens to the virtual meeting and provided attendees with instructions for meeting participation.

PRESENTATIONS

- 1. ORCA Next Generation Roll Out:** presented by Mark Eldridge, Sr. Program Administrator, ORCA and Brittany Esdaile, Director – Regional Fare Systems

The Board received an overview of the new ORCA program and reviewed the timeline for various product phases that will be rolled out in phases this year. It was noted that the new ORCA program focuses on convenience and speed of boarding and will also involve a new and improved website, more locations selling ORCA cards, and a mobile solution.

The Board was informed of the ORCA features that will remain the same and of the features that will change. It was noted that the ORCA system will move from a card-based system

to an account-based system and that a lot of focus and attention was given to security and privacy issues.

The timeline to convert the Pierce Transit fleet to the new system was reviewed, and it was noted that Pierce Transit will go fare free the week that the new ORCA program is implemented. The customer outreach strategy was reviewed as well as the strategy for internal training of the program.

2. Honoring Lee Trusclair for Operator of the Month for February 2022; presentation by Scott Gaines, Transportation Assistant Manager

Mr. Gaines honored Operator Lee Trusclair for being selected Operator of the Month for February 2022. He spoke about her accomplishments and accolades, noting that she has been an operator since 1988 and a member of the Two Million Miler Club. He read various comment cards from transit customers who commended Ms. Trusclair for her great customer service and level of care that she exemplifies.

On behalf of the Board, Chair Campbell expressed his gratitude to Ms. Lee and recognized her for being a member of the Two Million Miler club.

DISCUSSION

1. Restoration of Pre-Pandemic Fixed Route Service and Staffing Levels; presentations by Lindsey Sehmel, Principal Planner -Scheduling and Amy Cleveland, Executive Director of Administration

Ms. Sehmel reviewed a PowerPoint presentation that showed the operator staffing levels prior to Covid and throughout the pandemic. She informed the Board that if the agency is unable to recover service to certain routes that experienced cuts in November 2021, the agency will need to declare those routes as a Major Service Change in November 2022, per Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) regulations. She detailed the public process that the agency will be required to follow and detailed the net number of operators needed to restore service to a level that would avoid triggering a Major Service Change and to fully restore operator staffing to pre-pandemic levels.

Ms. Cleveland discussed operator readiness, noting that Pierce Transit has 81 fewer drivers now than it had a year ago. She reviewed all the actions/strategies that the agency has implemented to recruit operators and to move them through the training process in an expedient way.

Ms. Cleveland discussed the job market challenges, noting that operator applications peaked in November 2021 and continue to fall, noting that there are 45 percent fewer applications. She cited that an increased trainee failure rate, natural attrition, retirements, illness, and promotion all are contributing to the operator shortage. She reported that there are many uncertainties given the current economic conditions and the overall labor market.

Discussion ensued about the contributory factors that may be causing the operator shortage. Ms. Cleveland noted that the shortage trend started showing up prior to the pandemic, and then became exacerbated by the pandemic.

CEO Griffus reported that staff is working with Sound Transit to transition certain routes to King County Metro for operations, which should increase operator availability for Pierce Transit routes.

2. Consideration to Initiate a Ballot Measure Proposal to Increase the Sales Tax Collection Rate; presentation by Ryan Wheaton, Executive Director of Planning and Community Development

Mr. Wheaton presented on the item, noting that the Board has been considering the ballot question for three years. He reviewed ridership levels pre-recession and a lookback from 2009 to current. He reviewed sales tax collection rates of peer transit agencies.

The Board was presented with two different ballot proposal ideas: 1) a proposal for an additional .03 percent increase implementation, or (2) a graduated approach of an additional .02 percent for the first year, followed by .01 percent beginning in year three. Mr. Wheaton noted that the graduated approach allows the agency to procure vehicles and allows for lead time to gear up for the service and it is the more fiscally responsible approach. Overall, an increase in sales tax collection would increase frequency, increase operating hours, provide late-night service and possible free ridership to youth, seniors, and veterans. In addition, it was noted that increased service would strengthen economic development, reduce congestion, and increase equity.

Mr. Wheaton reviewed a proposed model of an increased service package that would also include Microtransit services and gave examples of improved level of service that could be achieved by an increase in sales tax.

Mr. Wheaton noted that the difficult part of the equation is accounting for the operator staffing shortage and the graduated approach of implementing service and infrastructure to the support the increased service, noting that new service would not start until 2025 should staffing challenges remain what they are today.

Discussion ensued about whether there is a demand for increased transit service given how the Covid pandemic has changed the landscape of the workforce.

A short discussion ensued about the timing and challenges of pursuing an increased sales tax collection rate and expanding Pierce Transit's boundaries to the jurisdictions who left in 2012. It was noted that the agency believes that it is best to obtain the sales tax increase before other jurisdictions rejoin the Public Transportation Benefit Area.

Vice Chair Walker noted that she thinks there are some difficult questions for the Board to decide; however, facts show that people ride transit more when there is reliable frequency and Pierce Transit needs to get there.

Chair Campbell inquired whether there could be service planning to support the needs of homeless, can we quantify the changes in workforce travel habits have impacted transit ridership, and what impacts have higher gas prices have on ridership.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Campbell provided participation instructions to the public and opened public comment.

No public comment was provided. Public comment was closed.

CONSENT AGENDA

(Items listed below were distributed to Commissioners in advance for reading and study and are enacted with one motion. Item(s) may be moved to the Action Agenda at the request of a Commissioner.)

Commissioners Walker and Whalen **moved** and seconded to approve the consent agenda as presented.

Motion **carried**, 7-0.

1. Approval of Vouchers, February 1, 2022 – February 28, 2022
Operating Fund #10
Self-Insurance Fund #40
Capital Fund #90
Payment Nos. 377809 through 377975
Wire Nos. 9751 through 9971
No Advance Travel Checks
Total \$4,928,115.03
2. Approval of Minutes: February 14, 2022, study session meeting; February 14, 2022 regular meeting.

ACTION AGENDA

1. **FS 2022-009, Authorize Amending the 2022 Capital Budget to Add \$1.4 million in Grant Funds and Authorize the Chief Executive Officer to Execute a Contract with KPFF, Contract No. 1278, to Provide Architectural and Engineering Predesign Services for the Spanaway Transit Center & Park-and-Ride-Phase II Design for a Total Contract Spending Authority of \$350,000;** presentation by Hope Gibson, Sr. Construction Manager

Ms. Gibson reported that she was before the Board last month and gave an overview of the Spanaway 1 and 2 projects. She reviewed the scope of work for the Spanaway 2 project and noted the proposed contract would help Pierce Transit collaborate with external agencies to achieve consensus on an egress solution.

It was noted that some of the preliminary egress solutions could require the installation of a round-about and acquisition of land from Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM).

Commissioner Whalen recommended that staff work with JBLM liaison Bill Adamson and noted he offered to help in any way to move the conversations along.

Ms. Gibson reported that once the conceptual work is finalized, staff will return to the full Board to seek approval of the next phase of contract work with KPFF, which will include design work, creating bid documents, assisting with the bid process and helping oversee construction.

Commissioners Walker and Whalen **moved** and seconded to authorize amending the 2022 Capital Budget to add \$1.4 million in grant funds and authorize the Chief Executive Officer to execute a contract with KPFF, Contract No. 1278, to provide architectural and engineering predesign services for the Spanaway Transit Center & Park-and-Ride-Phase II Design for a total contract spending authority of \$350,000.

The motion **carried**, 7-0.

STAFF UPDATES

1. Bus Rapid Transit Update

CEO Griffus reported that the project is moving forward with the Traffic Impact Analysis partners and technical teams working well together and noted that cost fluctuations in the project are expected to occur. He noted that the FTA is hanging in with Pierce Transit with the funding and the funds will be available to us once 60 percent design is achieved.

CEO Griffus shared that the FTA is concerned about mid-term elections. If there is a change in the direction of the current administration some of the money could be withheld.

Commissioner Whalen called on the City of Tacoma members to assist with moving the project forward to achieve 60 percent design.

CEO'S Report

CEO Mike Griffus reported on the following items:

- Provided an update on the public safety model and the agency's partnering efforts with Behavioral Health Partners. He reported that Pierce Transit issued an RFP on March 9 for Public Safety and Security Services. Proposals are due back March 30.

Discussions with Tacoma Police Department are ongoing. Staff will bring the Public Safety Model back to the board in the near future as more information materializes.

- The mask mandate for transit agencies has been extended to April 18, 2022.
- Earlier this month, Pierce Transit employees were recognized during National Employee Appreciation Day and International Women's Day.
- March 18 is National Transit Driver Appreciation Day. This day is set aside to recognize the hard work and public service of transit operators across our nation and here at home.

- Christopher Schuler, the new Executive Director of Finance, was introduced and a short briefing of his background and experience was given.

Mr. Schuler expressed his pleasure to be joining Pierce Transit and that he was impressed with the knowledge and dedication of Pierce Transit employees.

Chair Campbell welcomed Mr. Schuler and complimented him for the good work he provided at the Pierce County Health Department.

INFORMATIONAL BOARD ITEMS

1. Chair's Report

- The next Executive Finance Committee meeting will be held Thursday, March 17, 2022, at 3:00 p.m.

2. Sound Transit Update

- Vice Chair Walker reported that the Sound Transit Board will hold a special meeting on Wednesday, March 16, 2022 to receive an overview of Sound Transit's fare policies.

3. Puget Sound Regional Council Transportation Policy Board Update

Commissioner Mello reported on the work before the Transportation Policy Board and gave a high-level overview of the recommended grant distributions for non-motorized projects and for rural town centers. He reported that the PSRC Executive Board is reviewing comments received from the Regional Transportation Plan.

4. Commissioners' Comments

No comments were provided.

ADJOURNMENT TO CLOSED SESSION MEETING

Commissioners Whalen and Walker **moved** and seconded to adjourn the meeting into closed session at 5:44 p.m. to discuss matters relating to labor negotiations pursuant to RCW 42.30.140(b).

Motion **carried**, 7-0.



Deanne Jacobson
Clerk of the Board



Marty Campbell, Chair
Board of Commissioners