

Via Video  
April 16, 2024 10:00 am

Seth Boyd, called the meeting to order at 10:04am. Those in attendance and constituting a quorum were as follows:

**Board Members:**

Sue Fillion  
Randy Capitani  
Dan Thoemke  
Seth Boyd  
Brenden McNamara  
Chris Company

**Members of the Public:** None

**Staff Present:**

Randy Schoonmaker, CEO, SEVT  
Christine Howe, General Manager, SEVT

**Invited Guests:**

Jeremy Whiting, VTrans

**Public Input:** None

**Amendments to the Agenda:** Randy S. asked to add Proposed Route Changes after the review and vote on FY25 budgets.

**Review March 19, 2024,** Meeting Minutes: Correction needs to be made to Jeremy's last name it should read Whiting, not White.

**Ridership Review:** In Brattleboro the Red, White and Blue Routes are continuing to do great. The Springfield, Bellows Falls, and Route 53 all continue to do well. Route 57 is down 12%. Route 71 has climbed considerably with Route 72 and 73 lagging a bit behind, but overall. Chester 101 is our shopper that's been increasing because we connect to the micro transit in Windsor. The Okemo route is up 54% and Rockingham fixed route is up 17%. Demand response the vans are up because the volunteer rides continue to decrease, so total Rockingham is up 9%.

Wilmington rebounded a little bit over the midwinter from the lackluster summer we had, but it was not a great year overall for weather in a tourist location. The Wilmington-West Dover Route is off 22%. The West Dover Route and Readsboro route have picked up a bit. The Brattleboro and Bennington routes are very affected by school riders. Overall, the year-round routes in Wilmington are down 20%. Greenspring, Kingswood, and parking lots did well. Timber Creek did okay, while Bears Crossing and the Mount Snow route were down more than the others. Winter routes for the Mount Snow area are down 8% overall while the Stratton Manchester route is up 24%. The Wilmington demand response continues to increase, and the total Wilmington is down 10%.

Sue asked if we ever show ridership compared monthly. Randy S explained we do weekly, winter season, summer season, and annually but we can do them in any time period. Sue mentioned there are a couple of routes she may be interested in. Sue will send Randy what she is interested in. Randy C mentioned it might make sense to show the routes that are down to see if the month-to-month data helps isolate any issues.

**Review Finance Committee Summary:** Randy C. said the Finance Committee had an interesting meeting just because we were looking at both ridership and the grant numbers, which we're going to talk about later. Randy C. said it's important to note that Ross has been very clear about planning for a level year for state and federal funding. SEVT needs to keep that in mind. Ross said VTrans is asking for flat funding to the extent possible, understanding there continues to be inflationary pressures. He said VTrans budget isn't appreciably larger than last year's. Randy C said that we appreciate that rather than be surprised.

**VTrans Update:** Ross explained that the focus now is all about the legislature and their bill language to see where that's going to end up. Right now, there's an extra \$1,000,000 in state funds earmarked for GMT urban, which frees up, potentially, funds for rural. He'll be at the House tomorrow to talk about GMT's financial gap planning and that will include efforts on both the urban and rural side. Besides that, it's all about the grant applications. SEVT is part of the Low No application that is trying to either get started with the facility or adjust their facility needs to continue with the scale up of our electrification efforts. Ross noted there are also several vehicles requested through the regular 5339 bus and bus facility program. The whole idea and the justification of that application is to ensure that we can continue our electrification process. The priority of the FTA is we need a slug of internal combustion engines to ensure that the spare ratios can increase their usage as we absorb the electrification issues on the operation side. Ross said he hopes they work in tandem and that VTrans gets both awards. If that happens it eases pressure to allow more for admin and preventative maintenance funding. Ross noted that we are never sure where we are until we unpack all the applications due Friday. If SEVT needed a few more days for the full application let Ross know, but the workbook is crucial for VTrans managers to have a jumping off point. Seth asked Ross what he is seeing across the state for ridership. Ross stated that Brattleboro is a bright spot bounding back so quickly, overall, the state is still down about 17% down from pre-Covid levels. Ross said that the overall down 2% due to the winter routes, nothing SEVT could have done differently especially with the improved signage and communications.

**Review and Vote on FY25 Grant Budgets:** Randy S. explained that there's several budgets we need to look at today. One is an operating budget for next year, one is a capital budget for next year and then we'll take a brief look at the five-year capital plan and the five-year operating budgets. We approached the budget with an increase on the revenue side, we increased all the condo contracts by 10%. We increased the VTrans related federal and state grants 2% over this year's actual grant amounts awarded. We went through every expense line item and made cuts wherever we possibly could. This year's budget was over in Medicaid issue that we will not see, but may not be owed, there was a corresponding underspending of Medicaid volunteer mileage and hardship and Medicaid driver wages, related costs, and fuel. Fuel stayed much lower year to date than what we had budgeted a year ago. We assumed that fuel would be roughly the same price next year with a slight increase. We budgeted a 3% increase in wages. Randy S explained a little bit more revenue on sponsorships, and more interior ad space with electronic monitors. Discussion ensued surrounding expenses including benefits increases. For all the work done on the budget it fell short by eighty-seven thousand dollars, so we added that to the state operating ask for next year to show a break even. For budgeting purposes, we did include Brattleboro microtransit and asked for that in the application. We did apply for Route 30 but did not budget for it, if awarded we would amend the budget.

**Motion 1: Randy C. motioned to approve the budgets and plans as presented by Randy S. seconded by Sue Fillion motion passed 6-0.**

The FY25 capital grant requests were presented. It was noted that the turnaround time for new vehicles is less than it was but is still over a year. Ross would appreciate SEVT utilizing Ford Transits wherever we can. The FY25 non-vehicle capital was presented. Most items are relatively small, with some carryover from this current fiscal year.

The Five-Year Capital Plan was presented, with each year showing a category for vehicle replacements, electric vehicles, non-vehicle, and projects. This is a live document that can be worked

on. Ross commented on the hydrogen report, and the state has already invested hundreds of millions of dollars in electrification. Ross asked what Randy S. saw in the hydrogen plan that made him think that would be a replacement for the electric vehicles. Randy S. explained that hydrogen is readily available due to a plant in Albany and the operation of a hydrogen vehicle versus an electric vehicle, the costs were close, and finally there is no certainty on when the first hydrogen or cutaway will be made. The study would tell SEVT if we should rule hydrogen out or keep it alive and just wanted it to be studied at that point in time. Seth asked what "miscellaneous" category in non-vehicle capital. Randy S. explained just what comes up for facility needs. Seth requested another word instead of miscellaneous. Randy S. presented the five-year operating budget which is really a rough draft for VTrans. Certain percentage increases on both the income and expense levels. Seth asked about how often these five-year budgets get updated. Randy S. said the operating budgets get changed often and this is really for the grant requirement.

**Proposed Route Changes:** Randy S. explained as part of our FY25 budget we need the Board's approval for route changes. We would like to get going on the public information portion before the next Board meeting, which would require the Board's approval conceptually. And as we get into significant detail, VTrans also needs to weigh in. We would not like to wait another month because that's a whole another month or two before we can save money and get these changes underway. Randy S. outlined the changes for the Board to decide if they are comfortable or not comfortable with voting on. The Saturday White and Red lines are an opportunity to make change. We're not going to make any budget savings here, but SIT where the new Americans are housed is not serviced on Saturday and they're stuck there all weekend without access to food, services, and jobs. We would like the White Line to stop there almost every trip. The Red Line is not staying on schedule because of wheelchair riders and traffic. It not only throws the Red Line also the White Line. We propose to reduce the number of Red Line round trips from nine loops to eight and the White Line will stay the same in terms of the number of trips up Putney Road and the number of trips to Walmart. But we will end up with better connections. It will also offer equity to all riders.

Christine showed us that on the 70's routes, the 71 is doing very well, but the 72 and 73 are doing okay. The 71 goes from Bellows Falls to Dartmouth Hitchcock early in the morning, it stops at every park and ride up to Exit 10. The 72 leaves about 70 minutes later serving the exact same stops. The ridership is quite a bit more on the 71 than the 72, but there is a dedicated clientele on the 72 that need to get to work. The 73 goes to the VA Hospital and Dartmouth College and is the lightest of the three routes in terms of ridership. We wouldn't eliminate any stops and we would make sure that the schedule left early enough to get everybody where they needed to go. We've done rider and stop surveys and it's very doable. It will save us an entire bus trip, a pre-trip, the mileage, the fuel, the shift, everything both in the morning and in the afternoon. We would like to move on to that sooner rather than later and start saving money.

At the Finance Committee meeting, the idea was brought up about Route 13 from Wilmington to Bennington. This will be looked at further but there are riders that go back and forth from Brattleboro to Bennington in the morning and in the afternoon. Right now, we go twice in the morning and Green Mountain Community Network goes once in the afternoon from Wilmington to Bennington. That is tied in with the Wilmington to Brattleboro bus so that riders can make cross-state connections. With a little creativity and help from GMCN we can come up with a plan to make that work and cut a loop. That change is not in the budget and would reflect increased savings. Route 57 will be looked at when we have our meeting with Okemo later this year as we changed that schedule to bring them employees on weekends but the ridership increase did not materialize. Sue asked for some clarification on the Red Line changes. Randy S. explained that even though we are dropping one full loop, the schedules will be more efficient and better serving the riders, and this is only the Saturday Schedule. It was also clarified that if these changes are made and we see they are not working, SEVT can present different changes again.

Motion 2: Randy C. motioned to allow Randy S and staff to move ahead with these changes subject to review at the board meeting next month. Dan seconded the motion. Ross was happy to see this discussion happening. Motion passes 6-0.

Randy S gave a quick update on Brattleboro micro transit.

**Executive Session if Necessary: None**

**Motion to adjourn by Randy C adjourned at 11:09AM**