

October 15, 2021 Meeting Minutes – Martha's Vineyard Transit Authority Advisory Board

Ms. Gompert stated in accordance with Governor Baker's emergency modification of the Open Meeting Law this meeting will be held virtually. Remote participation only via Zoom Communications.

Present: Alice Butler, Oak Bluffs; Mark Snider, Edgartown; Elaine Miller, Tisbury; Bob Wasserman, West Tisbury; June Manning,*Aquinnah; Lenny Jason,*Chilmark; Steve Soriano,*Disabled Community Representative – Tisbury; Angela Gompert, VTA; Lauren Thomas, VTA.

9:38 am -Ms. Butler called the meeting to order.

Public Comments: None, no members of the public present.

Minutes: Ms. Miller made a motion to accept the minutes from April 23, 2021. Mr. Snider 2nd. Mr. Wasserman abstained. [MSC]

Old/New Business

Ridership: Ms. Gompert shared the ridership report on-screen, comparing 2021 to 2018. July 2021 ridership was 150,322 riders, compared to 308,245 in July 2018 – a recovery rate of about 50% for both July and August 2021. Ms. Gompert pointed out that September was better, with 91,910 riders – a recovery rate of about 60% from September 2018. Ms. Gompert noted that she does not anticipate ridership to get back to FY18 or FY19 numbers, due to the impacts of rideshare services Uber and Lyft. Rideshare numbers for the summer have not been released yet.

9:42 am Ms. Butler lost remote connection.

9:43 am Ms. Manning joined the meeting.

Summer 2021 Summary: Ms. Gompert stated it was a summer like no other, and there were massive staff shortages. The VTA had housing for 30 seasonal staff, but could have used 15 or 20 more people. Staff shortages were agency wide including drivers – which was the largest, dispatchers, maintenance technicians, fuel/washers, ticket sellers and administrative staff. Ms. Gompert stated the VTA is working on solutions to resolve this issue as we go into the summer of 2022. Ms. Gompert stated that overall safety wise, we did well – there were no major accidents involving the VTA. There was one incident with a teenager getting off the bus and being struck by an oncoming vehicle, but the VTA had no fault in the accident. Ms. Gompert did advise that she expects a possible lawsuit in the future having to do with a confrontation between a driver and a passenger.

FY 22 Financials – 1st Quarter: Ms. Gompert shared the September 30, 2021 draft financials on screen and stated that we can only compare the current numbers to the prior year, as that's all the accounting program allows. Revenue was up due to ridership, and expenses were also up. Ms. Gompert pointed out that Reimbursable Costs are up \$253K over the prior year, but revenue was up \$292K for the same period, so we are still a bit ahead of where we were. Ms. Gompert advised that the Auditor had not released the final audited financial statements yet, and to expect them at the next Board Meeting.

Ms. Gompert reminded the Board that services were significantly reduced in FY 21, therefore expenses were down, closing the year just under \$5.2M, when the budget was set for \$6.2M. CARES funding was not used as much as anticipated in FY 21 due to the rise in revenue in the spring; more CARES funding is set to be used in this current fiscal year. In total, VTA received \$2.9M in the first round of CARES funding; at the close of FY21 there was \$1.178M

remaining. Additionally, the VTA was awarded another \$4.5M in CRRSAA funding that has not been touched yet. Ms. Gompert states the VTA is in good financial shape going forward and VTA weathered the pandemic well by reducing service that wasn't needed at the time; it is expected that FY22 will finish on budget. Ms. Gompert stated that with revenue being up, but overall ridership being down, she believes riders are taking fewer trips. Ms. Miller asked for clarification and Ms. Gompert responded that possibly riders are purchasing a One Day Pass, but using to travel mostly between Oak Bluffs, Vineyard Haven and Edgartown, as the Up-Island ridership is significantly lower. Ms. Gompert also reminded the Board that service Up-Island was reduced during the in-season due to driver shortage.

Mr. Snider asked for clarification on whether the VTA is in the business of receiving grants or bolstering revenues. Ms. Gompert answered that during the pandemic time, the answer would be grants, as VTA has to manage within the funding that's been given from the federal government. Ms. Gompert said that the VTA is doing very well in managing their funding, and historically have been able to generate a good percentage of our own revenue. Mr. Snider asked if the COVID related grants would be drying up or if there were more planned for the future. Ms. Gompert responded that she believes there's a solid five years of grants ahead, and that she is pursuing other competitive grants, as she believes the recovery process will take about ten years. Ms. Gompert stated that the complicated part of the recovery is that the starting driver wage of \$20.50 per hour is not competitive enough in this current job market. Ms. Gompert said the VTA is discussing with the Superintendent of Schools of how to work together to share drivers.

In regard to recovery, Mr. Snider noted that from his personal experience the Route 13, which accounts for over 50% of ridership and revenue, is inefficient due to the lengthy process of purchasing a ticket, boarding the bus, and running the ticket thru the farebox. Mr. Snider asked if this process could become more efficient, which would lead to the need of fewer trips/drivers – Ms. Gompert replied that further along on the Agenda is discussion of an "E-Ticketing" platform that will be launching shortly. Ms. Gompert believes this platform will help expedite this process, but will not completely alleviate it and will not change the amount of drivers needed for this route.

10:04 am Ms. Butler rejoined by phone

10:05 am Mr. Soriano joined the meeting

Ms. Miller brought up the performance MOU with MassDOT and if they could help with some of these inefficiencies or where the system is falling short – Ms. Gompert replied that the MOU on performance is still in place, but it is not punitive on performance - MassDOT will render help to RTA's who under perform.

Mr. Snider asked to go back to the ridership chart shown previously and asked why the dramatic fluctuations on certain routes. Ms. Gompert responded that those routes had reduced service, and weather was also a factor. Ms. Gompert stated that a route by route analysis will be done.

10:11 am Mr. Jason joined the meeting.

Mr. Snider and Ms. Miller commented on mask mandates across the Commonwealth and how that has impacted travel and ridership. Ms. Gompert stated that masks were made available to all passengers on buses.

Project Updates:

Church Street Inductive Charging – Ms. Gompert stated that the project is on track with construction set to begin in late fall/early winter. Tree removal will be done within the next thirty (30) days.

11 A Street – Ms. Gompert reported that all electric bus infrastructures were operating well, except for two battery storage units that were in need of repair.

West Tisbury – Ms. Gompert stated that permission was received from the Historic District Commission for the inductive charger, and is working with an architectural landscaper to hide some of the infrastructure. The project will then go back to the Selectmen one more time. Ms. Gompert anticipates that construction will begin in fall of 2022.

E-Ticketing – Ms. Gompert announced that Electronic Ticketing would soft launch in November for 1, 3 and 7 Day Passes and 31 Day and Annual Passes in December. The platform is the same that is used by the Steamship Authority and will provide a link to purchase bus passes when purchasing ferry tickets. Mr. Jason inquired how much revenue would be lost to fees for using this service – Ms. Gompert responded that the transaction fee varied depending on how many passes are sold, but it averages at about 3%. Mr. Snider asked if the One Day Pass, which had recently been lowered from \$10 to \$8, should go back to \$10 to increase revenue – Ms. Gompert replied not at this time.

Microtransit – Ms. Gompert reported that this year, the VTA allowed more Microtransit usage, as there are some major gaps in the off-season schedule. Ms. Gompert said the service is still accepting reservations by phone, but is hoping to find a company to manage the service in the future, allowing the program to expand.

VTA Lease with Airport Commission – Ms. Gompert reported that the Airport Commission got approval from the FAA. The lease will go up ten cents per square foot initially, and there will be a CPI. Ms. Gompert said she has not signed the lease yet, as it was for a definitive twenty (20) years, but she has asked for ten (10) additional years – which aligns with the useful life of the building.

Ms. Gompert took a moment to introduce the Board’s new West Tisbury Representative, Bob Wasserman.

Ms. Gompert advised she is looking at November 5th for the next meeting, and that the Audit Presentation will take place at that time. Ms. Miller asked about the staffing issues – Ms. Gompert said there is an RFP going out for Management Services, as that contract is set to expire, and that she is going to have put out a bid for a professional position and wage review to be conducted on the VTA side. Ms. Gompert also updated the Board on the new CDL requirements for new drivers, and the increase in training cost that will occur. Ms. Gompert approximates that it will cost \$6,000/driver for training. Ms. Gompert stated the operations department did not do a good job on training last year, and that the VTA would be taking over certain aspects of driver training for the upcoming season.

Ms. Miller made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Manning 2nd. **[MSC]**

Ms. Butler declared the meeting closed at 10:48 AM.

*Indicates joined late or left early

Date

Signed