

## VTA Advisory Board

### Meeting Minutes

August 27, 2019

The Martha's Vineyard Transit Authority Advisory Board met Tuesday, August 27, 2019, at 9:00AM at the offices of the Transit Authority, 11 A Street, Edgartown. Present were Alice Butler (Oak Bluffs), John Alley (West Tisbury), Lenny Jason (Chilmark), June Manning (Aquinnah), Elaine Miller (Tisbury), Mark Snider (Edgartown), Carlton Crocker (Rider Community Representative - Chilmark) and Sarah Nevin (Disabled Community Rider Representative – Edgartown) . Also present were Angela Grant (VTA) and Lauren Thomas (VTA).

Guests at the meeting: Richard Townes, Will Sennot – Vineyard Gazette

The meeting was called to order at 9:05AM.

Ms. Butler began the meeting by welcoming the two newly appointed members: Mark Snider as the Edgartown Representative and Sarah Nevin as the Disabled Community Representative-Edgartown.

#### **Off Season Service**

Ms. Grant distributed a historical and current ridership analysis by month and route that included FY19 average daily boardings by route, and service recommendations for the 19-20 off-season that showed different options for service cuts. Ms. Grant stated that it is easily seen that Route 13 carries most of the ridership from April through October. Routes 1 and 10 have also seen substantial growth since FY05. Ridership analysis showed that in the 18-19 off-season Routes 1, 10 and 13 make up 85.8% of ridership, almost the same as in the 2006-2007 off-season, in which those same routes accounted for 85.08% of all ridership. Ms. Grant stated the routes that make up the other 15% of ridership are the ones that will be most impacted by service cuts.

Ms. Grant spoke about the average daily boarding for the FY19 shoulders and off-season, pointing out the significant decrease in boarding in the winter. Ms. Grant stated the point of providing this detailed information was for the Board to be able to make decisions and understand the impacts of those decisions. Ms. Grant pointed out that the ridership data is driven by what route and time the operator puts into the system, therefore, it is tracking from where the trip originates. Discussion followed. Ms. Miller stated that as long as the data is collected consistently in the same manner it should be fine.

Ms. Grant reminded the Board and advised the two new members that the VTA now has a performance agreement with MassDOT, which is tied to funding. With these measures in place, Routes 2, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10A will not meet the performance criteria for boardings per hour, therefore jeopardizing future funding. Discussion followed.

Mr. Snider asked Ms. Grant exactly what she is asking the Board to review and do. Ms. Grant responded that the Board needs to review the off-season service recommendations (on hand out) that have been made based on ridership analysis. Ms. Miller noted that we have two things to conform to: adjustments to the budget, and to meet performance standards for the State so as to not jeopardize funding. Mr. Snider inquired why the budget does not work this year as compared to last year – Ms. Grant replied that we had just settled a collective bargaining agreement which makes a \$650,000 - \$700,000 impact, a 100% increase in insurance costs, and the MV Airport lease renewal. Route by route off-season service recommendations and discussion followed.

Mr. Snider disclosed that he has self-interest in Route 8, as owner of the Winnetu Resort, and that the Edgartown Food & Wine Festival will be hosted there October 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Snider asked if the Route 8 could run through that weekend, as there was a huge demand for the service last year during this event. Ms. Grant replied that it is best to set a base schedule and then add on service for known community events, such as Christmas in Edgartown, as needed. Ms. Grant also recommended starting the winter season after Thanksgiving this year, on December 1, 2019.

Ms. Grant pointed out that one of the main reasons VTA began running Island-wide service many years ago was so ADA service could be offered year round to all towns. With the cutting of the fixed route service, there will most likely be increased cost in Lift services. Discussion followed regarding the Lift services. Ms. Grant introduced the term “microtransit”, and the possible need for exploring a pilot program with it – she explained that it’s basically the first mile and last mile service to get people to fixed route service, however it can be customized for your service area. The advantage of microtransit is that you can charge a premium – with ADA services you can’t charge more than double the fixed route fare. Discussion followed on how microtransit may work on the Island.

Ms. Grant stated that with the State budget that just passed MassDOT had \$4.5M that did not get awarded, as they are holding it for Discretionary Grants. In addition, they are offering Workforce Transportation grants.

Ms. Grant discussed Sunday service and the ridership it represents. Cutting Sunday service during the winter season, approximately 1,800 hours, would save approximately \$125,000. The other savings would come from shaving about 1,200 hours off the shoulder season – from 165

hours per day down to 153 hours per day, saving approximately \$84,000. Mr. Snider asked what the difference is between Winter Option 1 and 2 (handout) – Ms. Grant replied that the difference was in the up-island service – Winter Option 2 cuts most of it and the total savings would be approximately \$174,000. Ms. Grant stated that further hourly analysis needed to be done to finalize service recommendations. Mr. Snider inquired where the rest of the money would come from to cover the deficit. Ms. Grant replied that once the audit is done and financials for 6/30/19 are complete, we will be able to close July and August so we will know where we stand with revenue to offset some of the cost. Also, vehicles will also be taken off the road earlier in the off-season to save on insurance; and she is looking into a pre-buy for diesel fuel, as the price has gone down; recognizing fixed electricity costs from the electric vehicles.

Ms. Miller updated the group that she has hit some stone walls in her quest for funds at the State and Federal level. She reported that all offices she's been speaking with concur that there should be a substantial reduction in our rent payment to the MV Airport since we are a municipal facility, and she is pressing for some short term funding.

Ms. Grant stated that she and Ms. Thomas had met with the new airport manager in July. The Airport had commissioned another appraisal for the VTA lot, which came in lower than previous appraisals and was also lower than other neighbors in the business park.

Mr. Snider commented that based on the low winter ridership of 69 people per day and the cost of that service, the VTA is subsidizing rides by approximately \$29.00 per passenger, after their fare is paid. Mr. Snider felt that Winter Option 2 would affect the least amount of riders and save the most money now that could be put towards next year's in-season, so as to not affect that service.

Ms. Manning commented that there will also be a shift in winter ridership when Chilmark Chocolates closes in December. Discussion followed about ridership in the winter and the demographics that would be affected. Ms. Grant mentioned it may be possible to transport some of the transit dependent winter riders with an advanced reservation van service. Mr. Snider stated it is not the job of the Board to micro-manage each route – it's the Administrator's job, and Ms. Miller agreed.

Mr. Jason made a motion to go with Winter Option 2, Mr. Alley 2<sup>nd</sup>. M/s/c. 8-0-0

Ms. Miller then made a motion to eliminate Sunday service for the winter schedule, effective 12/1/19, with the exception of Route 10 - Ms. Manning seconded. M/s/c. 8-0-0

Ms. Butler asked for validation that the ridership and the effects of these service cuts be tracked, and that VTA remains responsive to customer needs. Mr. Snider asked that we

explain to the public that these cuts were not solely because of the contract that was just negotiated, but because of several things. Mr. Snider inquired of Ms. Grant how the drivers would feel about these cuts – Ms. Grant replied that the full time year round drivers will not lose any hours, and after them is the part time year round and casual year round for work picks, both of those groups would see a loss in hours. Ms. Miller stated she would like a statement made to the public about service cuts and the circumstances leading up to them, and the State's part in it.

Guest Richard Townes addressed the Board in regard to a drivers meeting that was set to take place on the upcoming Saturday evening at 6:00pm. Mr. Townes asked that someone from the Board be present at the meeting to explain these cuts to the drivers. Ms. Grant thought it would be helpful to have several Board members present at the drivers meeting, but be careful to not have a quorum. Ms. Miller volunteered to attend, as well as Ms. Manning and Mr. Snider. Mr. Townes asked for clarification on Sunday service – Ms. Grant responded that Sunday service would only be cut for the winter schedule, beginning 12/1/19 and going through 4/2/20. Ms. Grant stated an hourly ridership by route was underway and that until that was completed, final service recommendations could not be made, as well as until we see where we stand financially in the current fiscal year.

Ms. Miller stated she thought it important for all Board members to take this information back to their Town Administrators and Selectmen. Mr. Snider pointed out that making these cuts avoids the Towns having to contribute more money.

Ms. Butler asked if there was anything else that needed to be discussed. Ms. Grant replied that the VTA's ACES (Advancing the Commonwealth's Energy Storage) requires that she discuss with the Board a safety plan for the on-site battery storage for the electric buses. Ms. Grant explained they are lithium ion and there are three different batteries outside that collectively hold 1,440 kilowatt hours of stored energy. The units have a self-contained fire suppression system, which means that should anything go wrong within the unit, it will stay contained within that unit. There are fire alarms outside of the units that will be wired into the existing building alarm system. Ms. Grant stated that she has met with the Edgartown Fire Chief and there will be a training session with Edgartown Fire Department, all Island Fire Chiefs and the Airport on how to deal with any situation that may arise with the batteries. Ms. Grant stated that should something go awry with the batteries, the area surrounding the unit should be kept cool and most importantly to not open the unit. These units are expected to be commissioned in October 2019. Ms. Grant stated once the written safety plan is finalized she will forward a copy to each Board member. A full safety plan, specific to our project will be written, once the batteries are commissioned.

Ms. Manning said she had several issues that she wanted to discuss. Ms. Manning advised that she and several others were waiting for the Route 5 on Lighthouse Rd at 9:20pm one night, and the bus never came. Ms. Grant stated she was aware of the incident and the driver involved. Ms. Manning stated that the following week, the bus had come down Lighthouse Rd the wrong way, going toward the Cliffs. The last issue Ms. Manning brought up was the lack of lighting at night at the West Tisbury Town Hall and Grange Hall stops. Ms. Manning then inquired if the Tisbury Park n Ride could start pulling into the Martha's Vineyard Museum on its way to the VH SSA – Ms. Grant responded that unfortunately it could not. Ms. Manning also inquired if the VTA had placed an ad in the local papers in regard to the new rate and minimum passenger requirements for the Medivan – Ms. Grant responded that it was in the process.

10:25AM - Mr. Alley made a motion to adjourn; Mr. Jason 2<sup>nd</sup>. M/s/c 8-0-0

Documents:

Off Season Ridership Analysis/Service Recommendations

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Date

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Signed