



MINUTES

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING

May 7, 2020
ZOOM Virtual Meeting
Livestreamed at [YouTube.com/PRTCtransit](https://www.youtube.com/PRTCtransit)

Members Present

*Victor Angry
*Andrea Bailey, At-Large
*Kenny Boddy (arrived 7:08 p.m.)
*Margaret Franklin, Chair
*Jeanine Lawson
*Yesli Vega
*Cindy Shelton, Secretary
*Tinesha Allen (arrived 7:20 p.m.)
*Pamela Sebesky, Vice Chair
*Jeanette Rishell, At-Large
*Matthew Kelly
*Gary Skinner
*Deborah Frazier, Treasurer

Members Absent

Jennifer Mitchell

Alternates Present

Maggie Hansford
Ralph Smith
*Jennifer DeBruhl

Alternates Absent

Ann Wheeler
Pete Candland
Bennie Smith
Meg Bohmke
Preston Banks
Hector Cendejas
Donald Shuemaker
Jason Graham
Tim McLaughlin
David Ross
Todd Horsley
Steve Pittard

Jurisdiction

Prince William County
Prince William County
Prince William County
Prince William County
Prince William County
Prince William County
Stafford County
Stafford County
City of Manassas
City of Manassas Park
City of Fredericksburg
Spotsylvania County
Spotsylvania County

Department of Rail and Public Transportation

Prince William County
City of Manassas
Department of Rail and Public Transportation

Prince William County
Prince William County
Prince William County
Stafford County
City of Manassas Park
City of Manassas Park
City of Manassas Park
City of Fredericksburg
Spotsylvania County
Spotsylvania County
Department of Rail and Public Transportation
Department of Rail and Public Transportation

Staff and Public on ZOOM

*Voting Member

Arrivals/departures following the commencement of the PRTC Commission Board Meeting are notated with the arrival/departure time.

Dr. Robert A. Schneider, PhD – PRTC
Doris Lookabill – PRTC
Joyce Embrey – PRTC
Christine Rodrigo – PRTC

Becky Merriner – PRTC
Carl Roeser - PRTC
George Barker – Virginia Senate
Sharon Pandak – Greehan, Taves & Pandak

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam issued a stay-at-home order on March 30, 2020 and stated that public gatherings must not exceed 10 people. In compliance with the Governor's orders, this meeting of the PRTC Board of Commissioners was conducted online using ZOOM. Electronic meetings in which a quorum is not physically assembled in one location are permissible when the Governor has declared a state of emergency and it is unsafe to assemble a quorum in a single location. The ZOOM meeting was livestreamed at YouTube.com/PRTCtransit so the public could watch the proceedings.

Chair Franklin called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. and read an announcement detailing procedures for the electronic meeting. Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance, and Roll Call followed.

Commissioner Boddye arrived at 7:08 p.m.

Authorizing the Adoption of Procedures for Electronic Public Meetings and Public Hearings During COVID-19 Pandemic Disaster – 4 [RES 20-05-01]

Commissioner Boddye moved with a second by Commissioner Bailey. In response to a question from Commissioner Skinner, Ms. Pandak said the procedures take into account House Bill 29 and 30. (BODDYE/BAILEY, UNANIMOUS)

Approval of Agenda – 5 [RES 20-05-02]

Commissioner Bailey moved with a second by Commissioner Angry. There was no discussion on the motion. (BAILEY/ANGRY, UNANIMOUS)

Public Comment Time – 6

The Chair explained no public comments would be received during the virtual meeting; however, the public was advised to submit written comments to the Board Clerk by May 6 at 5 p.m. No comments were received.

PRTC Executive Director's Time – 7

Dr. Schneider briefed the Board on the following items of interest:

COVID-19 Response and Update – Dr. Schneider briefed the Board on the impact of COVID-19 on bus services and gave a timeline for steps that have been taken in response to the pandemic.

- Ridership – Within a 10-day span in March, ridership plummeted by 95% on commuter routes and by 65% on local routes; OmniRide lost approximately \$35,000 in fares per day.
- Personal Protective Equipment – The Prince William County Emergency Operations group elevated OmniRide's status to an essential provider and was able to deliver gloves and hand sanitizer to the facility when OmniRide was unable to obtain those items from vendors.
- Cleaning – New procedures include enhanced cleaning of vehicles including mid-day cleaning of commuter buses, swapping out local buses mid-day, and increased frequency of deep cleaning for the facility, especially in the driver's room.
- Other health measures – Physical distancing measures are in place in the building, new hand sanitizing stations were installed, and environmental design and management are being used to protect staff.
- Budget – While re-tooling the entire service plan, staff also shifted to forecasting fare losses as well as losses directly related to reduction in the motor fuels tax. Staff re-cast the entire budget within a week, all without knowing the amount of CARES Act federal funding PRTC would receive.

*Voting Member

Arrivals/departures following the commencement of the PRTC Commission Board Meeting are notated with the arrival/departure time.

- Reduced services – Once it was clear that the stay-at-home order would remain in effect for a longer period to slow the infection rates, OmniRide further reduced services. We maintained 100% of local service but reduced to just four commuter routes. We haven't received any complaints; however, did receive a few compliments from riders who were thankful we were still operating service.
- OmniRide staff – There isn't a single employee who hasn't helped us survive the impacts of this pandemic. One employee made 200 reusable cloth masks for the front line staff. The leadership, energy, and support of this staff is special, Dr. Schneider said.

Commissioner Allen joined the meeting at approximately 7:20 p.m.

CARES Act Funding and Process

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act was passed in several phases at the end of March. The portion for transit was \$25B nationwide with more than \$1B coming to the Metro DC Area. That area includes Maryland's MTA (\$44M), WMATA (\$876M), and PRTC (\$99M). The \$99M is shared by formula with VRE and FRED. OmniRide is eligible for \$9.3M and all spending must conform to very specific uses, primarily:

- Reimbursement for expenses for personal protective equipment & expanded cleaning or associated materials for cleaning.
- Reimbursement for lost revenues as a result of ridership decline, operating fare free, or other tax revenues that would otherwise force service reductions that would cause employee layoffs and shuttering of transit systems.
- Maintaining payroll for direct and contracted employees who might otherwise be furloughed as a result of reduced services and budget impacts.

Enhancement projects, capital purchases, construction projects, etc. may not be funded through CARES Act funds. Without these funds, OmniRide would be in extremely dire circumstances, Dr. Schneider said.

This funding will enable OmniRide to maintain at least six months of operations at our current level, with one month already passed. This does not include OmniRide's reserve fund, any additional action taken by the Commonwealth or the Federal government, or any other ways that expenses can be reduced.

Phased Reopening:

With the governor's orders of expanded business openings next week, OmniRide expects to see an increase in local ridership, but only a limited ridership increase on commuter services which will be driven by the Federal agencies and their policies. We expect to see a blend of continued telework, staggered federal employee schedules, and reduced demand for transit until traffic builds up demand.

OmniRide plans to be ready to restore some commuter services by June 15, but that date can be pushed back as needed. The restored service would put OmniRide at 85% of normal operations. Our budget assumes a return to full service at Labor Day, based upon ridership volumes. Critical in this process will be customer engagement to welcome back riders, but also to share our protocols for keeping employees and passengers safe.

Internally, we have created working groups to help prepare for the return of staff by using environmental design and process. We will examine workspaces, telework options, physical distancing policies, and visitors and gatherings. We are also working with the regional systems to develop protocols for cleaning equipment, working for coordinated service increases, and sharing knowledge and lessons learned.

Following the conclusion of Dr. Schneider's comments, Chair Franklin noted that Dr. Schneider has shared much of this information with the Board in various updates. She asked him to share a written version of the Executive Director's report with the Commissioners so all the information would be in one document.

Chair Franklin said many former transit users will likely want to drive at least initially as the economy reopens and noted that PRTC is taking that into consideration when looking at the economic outlook.

Chair Franklin also thanked front-line workers for doing an "incredible" job during the pandemic.

Commissioner Bailey shared that the Boys and Girls Club on Dale Boulevard is offering daycare for the children of first responders during the pandemic, and that she considers transit workers to be first responders.

Commissioner Vega asked if the bus operators are provided with masks, gloves and other forms of protection during their duties. Dr. Schneider said yes, although some equipment was difficult to find in the early days of the pandemic. Commissioner Vega also asked if there is a restriction on the number of people per bus to comply with physical distancing. Dr. Schneider replied that OmniRide is currently limiting each vehicle to no more than 10 passengers.

Commissioner Shelton complimented all PRTC workers for their professionalism during the crisis. She said OmniRide's services helped keep people employed when the slug lines disappeared. She thanked staff for keeping so many commuter buses operating for so long.

Commissioner Sebesky thanked the transit workers for helping people get to critical jobs and for all staff who made such monumental changes in a short period of time. She asked if transit workers are being paid whether or not they have a route to operate. Dr. Schneider replied that all operators who are available for work are being paid (including insurance) regardless of operational status. If someone chooses to take leave, whether existing leave or leave without pay, that's permitted, Dr. Schneider said.

Commissioner Rishell said all of Manassas Park is proud of the frontline workers and the response of PRTC's staff to this crisis. She asked about a PRTC communication that was shared in April regarding a potential legal issue with requiring face coverings for operators and asked if the legal issue had been clarified. Dr. Schneider said he didn't recall the specifics and would follow-up with a reply.

In response to a question from Commissioner Skinner, Dr. Schneider said no PRTC employees have contracted COVID-19.

Commissioner DeBruhl expressed thanks to Dr. Schneider and the PRTC staff for their work during this challenging time.

Presentations and Information – 8

Chair Franklin noted that the Commissioners would see PRTC's Revised Proposed FY21 Budget presentation tonight, and the Board will take action on the budget at the June meeting.

Director of Finance and Administration, Joyce Embrey, presented the revised proposed FY21 budget. A budget public hearing is scheduled for May 20, 2020.

Following the presentation, Chair Franklin said she will probably push for some restoration of funding for Wheels-to-Wellness, as well as support for the promotion of I-66 slugging, understanding that some Commissioners have reservations about promoting slugging and that the Board is waiting for a legal opinion of liability issues.

Commissioner Boddye asked about provisions for the May 20 budget public hearing in case people aren't able to gather in public. Ms. Embrey said the hearing will be at the Transit Center with no more than 10 people in the room at one time, and that the public can submit comments in advance. Commissioner Boddye said Prince William County plans to review its budget quarterly to stay updated on revenues and expenses as the region begins to re-open.

Commissioner Boddye asked about the status of the bus service contract. Dr. Schneider replied that negotiations are on-going and something should come before the Board at the June meeting. Finally, Commissioner Boddye said he agrees with the Chair about taking a look at Wheels-to-Wellness and added that he also would like to see some form of the equity implementation back in the budget.

Commissioner Angry said he's been a proponent of a long-term solution for Wheels-to-Wellness funding since he joined the PRTC Board. He also expressed his concerns about linking PRTC to slugging and said he wants to hear the legal opinion about liability concerns.

Chair Franklin said the Board will await a legal opinion from Ms. Pandak on promoting I-66 slugging and asked for specifics about how the grant money would be used. She added that her top concern with promoting slugging is making sure that OmniRide continues to get as many passengers as possible.

Ms. Pandak said a confidential memo has been forwarded to the Commission in response to their I-66 slugging concerns and she's available for questions or can address any concerns at a future meeting.

Commissioner Shelton said she agrees with Commissioner Angry's slugging comments, but she isn't sure about Wheels-to-Wellness. She also asked about the risk of a proposed decrease in funding for bus rehabs, engines and transmissions, noting that delayed maintenance can have long-term consequences. Dr. Schneider replied that PRTC buses are rehabbed after 8 years so we're able to get 16 years out of a vehicle instead of 12 years. In this case, some buses would not undergo the rehab and would be retired after 12 years of service. PRTC is not proposing a delay or deferral of maintenance.

Commissioner Rishell said she agrees with Supervisor Angry's slugging comments. She also agreed with the Chair's statements about focusing on bus ridership.

Commissioner Sebesky said she would like to support Wheels-to-Wellness, but the Board must find a way to fund it. She added that her concerns about promoting slugging aren't just legal, but also include potential unforeseen issues. Things are different when it's a documented funded program from the government, she said.

Commissioner Kelly noted that while the Commissioners are looking at putting items back in the budget, Fredericksburg just furloughed 43 employees and will have to pull money from its reserves for this year and next year. The impact of the pandemic won't be a one- or two-year thing, and every dollar counts, he said.

Commissioner Skinner said Spotsylvania County had to pull \$4 million from its reserves and is required to pay the money back over the next two years, so the County will be starting in the hole for the next two years. He asked that the Commissioners keep that in mind during the PRTC budget discussions. Commissioner Skinner asked how PRTC's \$9.3 million in CARES Act funding will affect this budget since it's not reflected in the document. Dr. Schneider said staff didn't know how much money PRTC would receive when the revised budget was completed and shared. He said the CARES funding will be used to cover farebox revenue losses and the reduction in revenues generated by the motor fuels tax, which is projected to fall by 30-to-35 percent.

Chair Franklin asked that figures about the number of people served by Wheels-to-Wellness be provided to the Board. Dr. Schneider said he would include that in the meeting summary that's sent out to all Commissioners.

Commissioner Bailey said she can offer opportunities for funding Wheels-to-Wellness and will share that information with Dr. Schneider.

Commissioner Rishell said she was sad to see that Wheels-to-Wellness had been cut from the budget and was especially concerned because that population may have a high percentage of people with underlying health issues that would place them in a high risk category for COVID-19.

Commissioner Lawson asked if there are other federal programs that could assist Wheels-to-Wellness users so our region could utilize the service but fund it differently. Dr. Schneider replied that historically Wheels-to-Wellness was funded with federal funds, but the program was forced to shrink and grow every year or two depending on which funding was in place. Including the program in PRTC's budget would enable the program to operate, and any federal funds that become available would be used before local funds. As of now, there is no additional federal funding for COVID-19 specifically for health and welfare, Dr. Schneider said, but staff will look for additional funding opportunities.

PRTC Action Items – 9

Adoption of Amended PRTC Bylaws – First Reading [RES 20-05-03]

Ms. Pandak gave an overview of proposed changes to the bylaws. Commissioner Kelly moved, with a second by Commissioner Bailey. Commissioner Bailey said these proposed changes are consistent with other electronic meetings she's been involved in and thanked Ms. Pandak for her work. (KELLY/BAILEY, UNANIMOUS)

Authorization to Submit FTA's Federal FY20 Annual Certifications and Assurances [RES 20-05-04]

Commissioner Kelly moved, with a second by Commissioner Rishell. There was no discussion. (KELLY/RISHELL, UNANIMOUS)

Concurrence with Stafford County's Appointment of Supervisor Gary Snellings to the VRE Operations Board [RES 20-05-05]

Commissioner Shelton moved, with a second by Commissioner Lawson. There was no discussion. (SHELTON/LAWSON, UNANIMOUS)

Chair's Time – 10

Chair Franklin thanked PRTC transit workers. She said she's thankful for federal funding that's coming in, noting that she's been working closely with our Congressional delegation including Representatives Wittman and Connolly along with Senators Warner and Kaine. She thanked the Commissioners for their patience with all the updates that have been sent out. She noted that the transit center is being cleaned as often as possible to help keep transit workers and others healthy.

Other Business/Commissioner's Time – 11

Many Commissioners said they were happy to see everyone at the virtual meeting and looked forward to being together in person soon.

Commissioner Boddie commended Chair Franklin for her leadership and work with Dr. Schneider and the PRTC staff to prevent layoffs during the pandemic. He also noted that the Northern Virginia Regional Commission is pushing for federal funding for our region.

Commissioner Lawson thanked Ms. Pandak for her work through the legal "unchartered waters" and PRTC staff for organizing the ZOOM meeting.

Commissioner Sebesky thanked Chair Franklin and Dr. Schneider for getting a budget together in this difficult time.

Commissioner Rishell said she had found the email that referenced a potential legal issue with requiring the wearing of masks (which she had mentioned during the Executive Director's time) and had forwarded that email to Dr. Schneider. Dr. Schneider replied that the communication was referring to legal issues with requiring passengers to wear masks, not operators. If PRTC denied service to a rider because they were not wearing a mask that wasn't required by the governor or health department, there could be a legal problem, Dr. Schneider said. OmniRide has had a public education campaign to encourage riders to wear face masks and is looking into getting protective barriers for operators. OmniRide is following the recommendations of the CDC, FTA and APTA, Dr. Schneider said.

Commissioner Allen said she appreciates the efforts of Dr. Schneider and Chair Franklin to maintain as much normalcy as possible during this time.

Commissioner Shelton said she's amazed to be able to say that PRTC has had no COVID-19 cases and that it says something good about our operational model.

Commissioner Frazier said she missed the March meeting because her granddaughter was born that week. She thanked Chair Franklin and Dr. Schneider for their work.

Commissioner DeBruhl said Commissioner Horsley will represent DRPT at PRTC's next meeting. She also thanked PRTC's Information Technology staff for arranging a smooth virtual meeting.

Chair Franklin thanked Dr. Schneider for the way he sprang into action, mitigated concerns about the pandemic and revised the budget.

In other business, Senator George Barker said he expects to be reappointed to the PRTC Board soon and he hopes to share good news from Richmond with the Commissioners at the June 2020 meeting.

Adjournment – 12

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Chair Franklin entertained a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Bailey moved, with a second by Commissioner Angry. There was no discussion. (BAILEY/ANGRY, UNANIMOUS)

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Information Items

None