

Ozark Regional Transit Authority
April 23, 2026, Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
10:00 am at Ozark Regional Transit and VIA Teams

In Attendance:

Board Members

Ryan Carr
Peter Nierengarten
Dane Eifling
Marlee Stark
Tristan Hill
Dan Weese
Kent Laughlin
Juliet Richey
John McCurdy (online)
Jesse Hull (online)

ORT

Joel Gardner
Mindy Campbell
Tayler Clark
Lakisha Bradley
Franco Tompeterini
Savannah Earnest
Bobby Tomlin
Tina Bowers
Jeff Hatley
Christian Batres
Gail DeLancey

NWARPC

Tim Reavis

Legal

Tom Kieklak

Other

Monique Jones
Ashley Wardlow – Botanical Garden of the Ozarks

Proxies – John McCurdy was announced as the proxy for Clay Kendall. Dan Weese was announced as the proxy for Tim Stachowiak.

The **agenda** was accepted as adopted.

Public Comments – no public comments were made.

NWARPC Update/ WSP Presentation – Tim Reavis presented their update. The Regional Planning Commission 5307 and 5339 split has been approved for next year with no changes. Their board also accepted a couple grants. One was the Operational Capacity Grant to do assist with an organizational strategic plan. The other one is Regional Collaborations Grant that includes a capital improvements program.

February 2026 Board Meeting Minutes were approved for adoption.

Updated Passenger Behavior Policy – Joel and his team have made updates to the passenger behavior policy. Their goal was to make it easier to use and understand. One of the changes includes a standard of conduct regarding bugs, odors, and bodily fluids. Another change that was made was to the Category A offense and it results in a seven-day suspension. There was discussion about whether to change that wording to ‘up to seven-days’. There were also questions about whether a transit agency had the authority to uphold these policies and if these policies infringed on anybody’s rights. Tom Kieklak provided his professional opinion that upholding these policies would not infringe on rights. With the clarification of the ‘up to seven-days’ language, Dan made the first motion to approve. Tristan made the second motion. All in favor.

Executive Director’s 2025 Annual Review – In March, the Executive Committee conducted the annual review of the Executive Director. This included things that Joel and his team are doing well and other areas that may need improvement. Overall, the committee agreed that Joel and ORT are exceeding expectations in quality of service, financial responsibility, and integrity. They would like to see ORT continue to grow in terms of community outreach and public awareness. The committee and Joel agree that one of the next steps for ORT is to use regional routes with a dedicated source of funding. There was also discussion about whether the Board of Directors should change to monthly meetings rather than biweekly. Dane suggested that instead of a formal board meeting every month, they could participate in an online agenda session in the months between regular board meetings. The Board agrees to implement these meetings going forward, beginning in May.

Mindy presented the **Financial Report** for March 2026. Revenue had a favorable balance of \$36 K as compared to the budget. This was primarily due to Contract Revenue, which exceeded budget by \$52K due to additional outside work completed during the month. This was offset by unfavorable variances in 5311 Rural Revenue (\$4K), Charter Revenue (\$7K), and Advertising Revenue (\$5K). Rural Revenue is lower than expected due to Benton County’s decision to stop funding ORT. Expenditures had an unfavorable variance of (\$73K). This was largely due to Professional Fees exceeding budget by (\$70K) from outsourcing one of the Wal-Mart routes. Overall, there is a net negative balance of (\$37K). Year-to-date, the overall variance stands at an unfavorable (\$98K).

Joel presented **Ridership Statistics**. Some key points from his presentation:

- ORT has seen an 18.6% overall increase in ridership
- Each of the four cities has seen an increase in ridership so far this year
- In the upcoming months, there will be various route changes in the cities

Franco presented the **TAMS Update** for approval by the board. The only change that needs to be made is to the list of board members where Dan Weese needs to be added as a member for the city of Bentonville. With that change to be made, Tristan made the first motion to approve the updated TAM plan. Peter made the second motion. All in favor.

Lakisha presented a brief **Communications Update**. The communications team has continued its efforts to engage in the community through attending events and through social media outlets. They are also working on producing marketing materials to help raise awareness for public transit. Recently they have worked in coordination with the ADA department at ORT to develop a bookmark that provides quick access to the ADA/Paratransit app as well as a QR code that goes to a video link that demonstrates how to book a ride. Dane suggested that in future updates, the Communications team could provide more quantitative data such as social media activity and engagement, number of events, etc.

Open Discussion on Transit Successes/Opportunities – Tristan shared his experience going on a ride along on Route 61. He spoke highly of the bus driver, Julios William, and his positive engagement with riders. Peter spoke about his excitement for additional buses coming to Fayetteville routes in the coming months. Dane shared that the Fayetteville mayor has set a goal to have a shelter at every Fayetteville bus stop by the end of 2028.

Executive Director's Report was given by Joel.

Congressionally Designated Spending Request – ORT submitted a request for 8.8M in CDS in 2026 and the request did not make it through to the 2026 budget. ORT has been asked to submit a request for the 2027 budget. The request includes 30 additional shelters and small and large transit vehicles for a total of \$8.7 million.

ADA/ Para Transit Software – The transition from ParaPlan to Via paratransit software is complete. So far, the new software is easy to work with and there have been no complaints from passengers. Joel praised the new software for allowing paratransit riders the option to book their own rides through the app.

ORT Shelters – ORT still has 13 shelters available for installation.

ORT Route Adjustments – ORT is in the process of making route adjustments to streamline services.

In Bentonville, ORT has completed the transition from ODT to Route 17 and is planning promotional events with Walmart and Crystal Bridges.

In Rogers, they are adjusting the line of route for Routes 53 and 54 to better serve Uptown Rogers and the Home Office Campus.

In Springdale, they are working on plans to replace ODT with fixed routes. This is expected to take effect in June.

In Fayetteville, they are converting ODT F3 to a second Route 10.

Joel also shared that ORT is currently working on reporting to the National Transit Database.

The Executive Director's report was accepted by the Board.

ORT Upcoming Events

May 25, 2026 – ORT Closed for Memorial Day

ORT Upcoming Meeting Schedule:

May 28, 2026 – Agenda Session

June 25, 2026 – Regular Board Meeting

Ryan adjourned the meeting. The next Board Meeting will be on June 25, 2026.

AN AUDIO/VIDEO OF THIS MEETING IS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST