

Ozark Regional Transit  
Board Meeting Minutes April 28, 2022  
10:00 am at Ozark Regional Transit  
Available VIA Zoom Conferencing

**In Attendance**

Board Members:

Ryan Carr  
Rick Barry  
Sharon Lloyd  
Shane Stephens  
John McCurdy  
Chris Brown  
Mike Lanier  
Jesse Hull  
Zachery Birdsong

ORT:

Joel Gardner  
Jeff Hatley  
Kendall Luallen  
Mindy Campbell  
Gail Delancey  
Bobby Tomlin

Legal Counsel:

Tom Kieklak

NWARPC:

Tim Conklin

NWA Council:

Rob Smith

Northwest Arkansas Democrat Gazette:

Ron Wood

Other Guests:

Thomas Brown – ORBTS (Ozark Rail and Bus Transit Society)  
Lakisha Bradley– Crystal Bridges  
Chung Tan – City of Fayetteville  
Mike Peters

The meeting was called to order by Mike Lanier, Chairperson.

**Proxies:** Peter Nierengarten submitted for this meeting requesting Chris Brown as his representative.

**New Board Members:** Joel Gardner introduced two new Board members in attendance: Jesse Hull from Benton County replacing Stu Todd and Zachery Birdsong from the City of Rogers.

**Agenda:** The Meeting Agenda was considered adopted.

**Public Comments:** Thomas Brown, representing ORBTS (Ozark Rail and Bus Transit Society) attended this meeting. He commented on integrating Northwest Arkansas into the State Rail Plan. In response the ORTs Board Chair's Letter, Travis Brooks with ArDOT stated that they would be contacting the NWARPC and other NWA Planning Department to understand how NWA should be incorporated into the State's Rail Plan and the National Plan. ORBTS request the ORT Board to support the incorporation of the appropriate elements of the RPA GRID Vision Goals in the update of the State Rail Plan. Mike Lanier said the Board would take that under advisement.

**February 2022 Board Meeting Minutes:** The February 2022 Board Meeting Minutes were considered adopted.

**Presentation by Rob Smith of the NWA Council:** Rob Smith from the NWA Council presented the Infrastructure Survey that NWA Council had recently completed. This survey had around 4K respondents and focused on needed improvements in NWA. This survey had a diverse group of respondents across the NWA area with no dominant representation from one group. More than 80% of those surveyed said NWA needed more public transportation. More than 48% of those surveyed would ride transit if it was convenient. More than 61% of respondents would support the expansion of ODT service. More than 49% of respondents said they would support a sales tax for expanded public transit. Rob said the NWA Council did this survey to assist with their Infrastructure Workgroup and supporting NWA and obtaining federal grants where they are available and needed.

**Discussion of the Rail Passengers Association Grid and Gateway Vision Map:** Tom Brown, from ORTBTS, brought this information to the Board originally and Mike sent many letters out to support NWA to be included in the State and National Rail Plans. Joel asked if the Board wanted to continue to push for support for this. Mike Lanier felt that we still needed to continue to support this. John McCurdy also felt that we need to continue to support being part of the National Plan.

John McCurdy made the first motion to approve ORT's support of the proposed national Rail Passenger Association Grid and Gateway National Network and being part of National Plan, Shane Stephens made a second motion and all other Board members voted unanimously in agreement.

**March 2022 Financial Reports:** Mindy Campbell, CFO, presented the Financial Notes for March 2022. Revenues at the end of the month were unfavorable at (\$10K), due to unfavorable balances in Charter Revenue and Miscellaneous Revenue. Charter Revenue had an unfavorable balance of (\$6 K) for the month since there were no charters. However, year to date we have a favorable balance of \$44 K in Charter Revenue due to Cyclocross. Miscellaneous Income also had an unfavorable balance of (\$5 K). This is due to timing of expenses related to the WFF Grant and the Olsson Grant, but this should catch up as the year proceeds. Expenditures were at a favorable variance of \$37K. Wages and Fuel were the most significant positive variances. With revenues running unfavorably (\$10 K) and expenditures favorable \$37 K, there is a positive balance of just over \$ 27 K for March. Financial notes were considered accepted as presented.

**March 2022 Ridership Statistics:** Kendall Luallen, Systems Information Director, presented the Ridership Statistics Report for March 2022.

- 15,122 FR passengers, or 657 per day, rode fixed route during March. In April so far, we are up to 740 a day.
- Daily FR ridership is trending up. March is up 5.8% from last year.
- ODT service is increasing. In the last week Bentonville set a record of 93, Rogers set a record of 80 and Fayetteville set a record of 38. About 10 new accounts a day are being created.

The ridership statistics were accepted without objection.

**Social Media/Marketing Near Me Update:** Jeff Hatley updated the Board on ORT's Social Media. Marketing Near Me is continuing to help grow ORT's social media. ORT's Instagram social media account has grown from 278 followers to 372 since the last Board Meeting. Facebook reach has grown 2.1K%. In 2022, we will be doing more videos, dedicated adds on social media and posting on how to benefit from public transit. They have also created direct mail cards that are being completed to send out to ORT riders and give to businesses and marketing materials created to hand out and post at prime locations. Marketing Near Me is also revamping our website.

**Community Engagement Subcommittee:** Joel Gardner brought to the Board the discussion of creating a Community Engagement Subcommittee. Joel stated that at the Board Retreat this idea was brought up. This committee would comprise of at least two board members and one ORT Staff member. We would also like a citizen volunteer from each community. This would add citizen involvement in ORT and provided feedback on changes that we might need to make. This would be an ad hoc committee to bring information to the Board but would not vote on ORT business. However, it would be covered by the Freedom of Information Act. Rick Barry, Jesse Hull, and Zackery Birdsong will be the Board members representatives. Jeff Hatley will be the ORT Staff member. To add community members, we will check with the Cities/Counties to see if there are any interested citizens or see if there are any board member recommendations.

Ryan Carr made the first motion to approve the Community Engagement Subcommittee Creation, Rick Barry made a second motion and all other Board members voted unanimously in agreement.

**Open discussion on Transit Successes/Opportunities in Respective Communities:** Joel brought to the Board a discussion to have with each of the communities of what are the greatest successes and opportunities over the last year. In Fayetteville, ODT vs regular Fixed Route service and shows the success of that. ODT is already doing more work in that area that it is servicing then Fixed Route has done. To get more ridership, at some point we will have to add more vehicles. Springdale has been static, but ODT might work in many areas. However, to convert a full Fixed Route would be too large a service, so a few vehicles might be needed. Rogers has continued to grow. We have found that with ODT in Rogers, quality software is very important. Bentonville's additional money will keep them at the same level of service due to WFF funding this additional service in 2022. However, the ODT conversion has been very successful in Bentonville. We need to start conversations with the counties/cities we service regarding next year's budget. In 2022, with the use of the ARP funding as the additional \$2 per hour attendance premium, we have five new hires training. How do we sustain this through 2023? We can use a portion of the additional funding we are receiving for our 2023 funding to match 50/50 with the city's/county's funds. This would split in half the additional amount of on the spreadsheet required by the cities/counties. We would also look at paying more for higher licensing in 2023. Joel asked the Board members how he should start working with the respective communities on this and for the Board members to get with him in the next month before the budget season starts.

**Executive Director's Report** presented by Joel Gardner:

- Joel gave the Board an update on the Bus Stop Inventory that Olsson is performing. They and ORT have completed the bus stop inventory and will be conducting a series of meetings with each of the cities regarding the bus stop inventory during May 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. They are now in their next phase, which is prioritizing the stops for different levels of improvements. After the city meetings, we should receive the physical documents. So far, the project is on time and budget.
- Joel updated the Board on the 6 Ford Transit Vehicles. We were able to continue our original ordered and we have received 3 of them so far and are expecting the other three by the end of May. The first three are currently getting graphics and plates on them. Hopefully they will be in service by next week.
- Joel informed the Board that the Face Mask Mandate of Transit has been lifted as of April 18, 2022, due to the result of a court order. The CDC will no longer enforce the January 29, 2021, order but still recommends that people wear mask in indoor public transportation settings. In addition, the TSA will not enforce its mask-related security directives.
- Joel gave the Board an update of the Garth Brooks concert that we provide service to on April 23rd. It was a long event, but without incident. It is the highest billed event that we have billed to the University in the amount of \$21,780.

- Joel updated the Board on the Crystal Bridges Partnership. We are the second year into this program. Lakisha Bradley who runs MY-T-BY-DESIGN in Fayetteville is now artist residence on this project due to Octavio Logo moving. The 2022 events have been planned. The first events are Cinco de Mayo event on May 7th at the Jones Center and Touch-a-Truck on May 21st in Rogers.
- Joel asked the Board that with all that is going on, if Board meetings need to be monthly. Mike felt that every other month was sufficient unless something urgent comes up due to the time it would take away from the regular duties of the ORT Staff to prepare for monthly meetings.

The next Board Meeting is on June 30, 2022, at 10:00. Zoom instructions will be forthcoming.

Mike Lanier let the Board know that he was stepping down from the ORT Board of Directors due to his working schedule. He thanked the ORT and the Board for everything and said it had been his honor to serve on the Board.

Meeting was adjourned by Chairperson, Mike Lanier.

**An audio recording of this meeting is available upon request.**