



Meeting Minutes

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RTA Citizens Advisory Board Meeting 4-22-2024

1. Call to Order

- a. Jackie Forbes, Chairperson, called to order the RTA Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) Meeting on 4/22/2024 at 10:04 AM.

2. Attendance

- a. Voting CAB Members Present In-person:
 - i. Jackie Forbes, Chairperson, Kane County
 - ii. Ryan Ruehle, Vice Chairperson, Suburban Cook County
 - iii. Romina Castillo, Chicago
 - iv. Colin Phillips, Will County
 - v. Adam Kerman, Pace Citizen Advisory Board Committee
 - vi. Rob Hart, Metra Citizen Advisory Board Committee
 - vii. Katanya Raby, CTA Citizen Advisory Board Committee
 - viii. Loren Gutierrez, The Network
- b. Non-Voting CAB Members Present In-Person:
 - i. Michael VanDekreke, RTA
 - ii. Erin Brewster, MOPD

- iii. Libia Bianibi, Chicago
- iv. Terry Kappel, McHenry County
- c. Non-Voting CAB Members Present Virtually:
 - i. Xavier Potts, Chicago
 - ii. Parker Thompson, Kane County
 - iii. Douglas Fowler, Will County
 - iv. Ayesha Akhtar, Suburban Cook County
 - v. Karl Gieseke, DuPage County
- d. Other Individuals Present In-person:
 - i. Steve Andrews, Pace
 - ii. Tyler James, CTA
 - iii. Kyle Whitehead, RTA
 - iv. Tina Fassett Smith, RTA
 - v. Rob Nash, RTA
 - vi. Jill Leary, RTA
 - vii. Maulik Vaishnav, RTA
 - viii. Peter Kersten, RTA
 - ix. Sarah Fettig, RTA
 - x. Kendra Johnson, RTA
- e. Other Individuals Present Virtually:
 - i. Katie Dote, Metra
 - ii. Kevin Bueso, RTA
 - iii. Allison Noback, RTA
 - iv. Scott Hennings, McHenry County

3. Introductions/Ice Breaker

- a. Jackie opened the meeting with an Ice Breaker asking the CAB members what their favorite experience was using transit. The CAB members shared a variety of experiences including traveling on transit with family or

partner to Chicago, their community, and within the US. Other experiences included traveling abroad, on Amtrack, and to school.

4. Approval of the March 6, 2024, Minutes

- a. A motion was made by Ryan Ruehle to approve March 6, 2024 meeting minutes. Romina Castillo seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

5. Planning and Capital Programming Department Overview

- a. Maulik Vaishnav, Senior Deputy Executive Director, introduced the Planning & Capital Programming Overview.
 - i. This department has 6 key functions.
 - 1. Local Planning and Program Management consist of the Community Planning Program which provides funding and technical assistance for planning projects that foster the growth of sustainable, equitable, walkable, and transit-friendly communities. The second program is Access to Transit which helps support communities to improve the infrastructure around their transit stations and stops, making connections for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders safer, more accessible, and more attractive. The third program is the Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP) and Section 5310: Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program. The HSTP is a regional plan that coordinates an approach to improve transportation for older adults, individuals with disabilities and low incomes. The Section 5310 program is a federal funding program for public transit projects that improve

mobility for seniors and people with disabilities.

2. The Strategic and Corridor Planning division supports the implementation of Transit is the Answer through the collection and analysis of data to understand significant trends and emerging issues so that RTA has the tools to help us meet the needs of our region. Additionally, the RTA has administered large-scale customer satisfaction surveys which includes periodic system surveys (every 3 years) and panel surveys (quarterly and online). Strategic Asset Management looks at inventory of what we have and determines what is the quality of life left on the structure then determines the cost of the structure to get it to a state of good repair. Market Research Team supports the work of other departments within the RTA, the Service Boards, and CMAP in providing the data we collect, and with analysis, to help meet their needs and initiatives.
3. Data Services includes the RTAMs website where you can download all kinds of information about ridership, service, etc. They help with project evaluation and performance statistics. Data Service also manages several other data tools we use in planning work. This includes products like Replica and arial photography and our most recently procured Access to Opportunities Platform – Remix.
4. Regional Coordination oversees the Interagency Signage Program. This program has been developed and implemented in conjunction with the CTA,

Metra, and Pace with the purpose of improving access to and facilitating transfer between transit services at locations where buses and trains come together. RTA operates a Transit Benefit Program which uses the IRS allowance of up to \$315 of pre-tax income to pay for transit fares and up to \$315 to pay for parking. Oversight and Coordination with Services Boards where the RTA conducts quarterly service planning coordination meetings with the Service Boards. Lastly, the RTA has implemented several mobility pilots and is currently funding two being implemented by Pace.

- Capital Roles at RTA are strategic planning, capital programming, and project management oversight. The 5-Year Capital Program is ongoing. The Budget Call will begin in May to start building out their capital programs for the next year.
- Ryan Ruehle asked for more information on the Access to Opportunities platform. Maulik Vaishnav responded that the tool will primarily be available to agency staff, but RTA and others would be able to run certain scenarios upon request.
- Rob Hart asked about how the funding works and whether it comes “top down” or “bottom up” with the Service Boards. Maulik stated that the capital budget comes from the RTA, but the capital program development process is a “bottom up” process where the Service Boards can design their own programs. RTA is working on bringing more (15) evaluation measures such as equity, etc.
 5. Plan Implementation was created with adoption of Transit is the Answer in February 2023. Additionally, this group has scoped and tracked several key strategic projects and initiatives as part of implementation, such as the Access Pilot Program and the Safety Summit.

6. Strategic Plan Engagement

- a. Tina Fassett-Smith, Director of Communications, provided an overview of the Communications Department:
 - i. 1st step in engagement is to provide feedback. This department manages the following:
 1. The websites: rtachicago.org and transitistheanswer.org
 2. Connections Blog – 2 to 3 blogs per week
 3. Newsletter – every 2 weeks
 4. Daily posts on social media
 5. Regular communication with reporters
 6. Supports in-person and virtual meetings
 7. Regional outreach such as development of Transit is the Answer coalition.
- b. Rob Nash, Director of Government Affairs, provided a Government Affairs Overview. This department helps communicate the RTA's priorities to local governments, state lawmakers, state agency partners, the federal government and our congressional delegation, and advocacy groups. The recent advocacy focused on how state funding for the RTA's Free and Reduced Fare and ADA Paratransit Programs impacts funding for the system overall and the future budget deficit, which you have heard about before and will continue to hear about. Also, they are working on the global fiscal challenge in 2026.
- c. Peter Kersten, Program Manager of Strategic Plan Implementation, said it was clear that the RTA needed a new vision for the strategic plan and reaching out to more stakeholders, riders, and the public. Additionally, this included convening 5 working groups over the summer of 2022, and they compensated people for their time since it was a big commitment.
 - i. The plan started with a conversation with the RTA Board where the vision for the plan was

created. This grew into working groups and continuous feedback loops. The draft strategic plan went out for public comment. And the RTA Board adopted the plan in 2023.

- ii. The RTA received a lot of input from the Transit is the Answer coalition and believes the RTA CAB is another channel for input on the plan.
- iii. The region is facing \$730M funding gap that will hit in 2026.
 - Terry Kappel asked how the funding gap is split between counties. Peter stated that each Service Board is facing a similar funding gap, but this funding gap is represented for the region.
 - Terry Kappel expressed concerned about the gas tax and how little of it goes to public transit. Kevin Bueso said that his team would be happy to come out to McHenry County and provide a presentation on funding.
 - Tyler James asked if there are language accessibility requirements the RTA must follow. Tina said that materials are translated in Spanish and by request for other languages. Additionally, they must follow an accessible web format and design. Michael stated the RTA uses Multilingual Connections (vendor) to translate their materials. Maulik commented on Title VI and the requirements that the Service Boards must follow.
- iv. Peter continues to discuss the Advocacy Agenda (seven items) and Action Agenda (seven items).
 - Rob Hart asked why securing increased funding is number six on the Advocacy Agenda. Peter said the last strategic plan was focused on capital funding and this plan has more priorities.
- Romina Castillo asked if there is other engagement outside of the coalition that shares how the funding gap will impact lives. Peter stated the RTA attended in-person events throughout the region, many were family events which were a good way

to meet people. This may be harder for the RTA because of its role but are open to engaging and finding a good mix. Tina mentioned that they have changed engagement since she has started with the RTA which began with expanding their teams. Recently, the Transit Advocacy Campaign was completed earlier this year where they talked with Amazon employees, business owners, mayors, etc. The call of action from this campaign was to join the coalition and to know that transit is vital. These campaigns will continue over the next 3 years focusing on a variety of topics including economic development and climate change.

- Katanya Raby asked how they coordinate with the Service Boards. Tina said they communicate with the Service Boards regularly. Maulik and Tina responded about the collaboration with the Service Boards that has transpired. Michael spoke about the Mobility Outreach Program and their outreach throughout communities focusing on older adults and people with disabilities.
1. Rob Nash discussed their engagement with Councils of Governments (COGs), entities, counties, etc. On the Legislative Agenda for 2024, there are four items that focus on funding and fiscal issues. The \$730M funding gap will float and if this gap closes, it gets us back to 2019 and we want more - especially what we heard from our outreach. In the General Assembly, they are working on an outline to address the fiscal funding gap and managing and structuring the service which is a conversation for 2025. The RTA coordinated a joint application with the Service Boards called Transforming

Transit. This application is for \$375M and about a third of it is going to each of the Service Boards. Most funds are for vehicle replacement, including battery electric buses for the CTA and Pace, and battery electric trailer cars that can be used with battery electric locomotives that Metra is already in the process of procuring.

- Doug Fowler asked about the specifics on the tollway reforms. Rob stated that project is large and complex, but they are having a conversation about tolling. Tolling alone will not solve the fiscal issues, but it does help foster and incentivize using transit.
 - Rob Hart said that the state requested CMAP to develop a plan and asked if the RTA coordinating with them. Rob recommended for the CAB members to review the CMAP's Plan of Action for Regional Transit (PART) report as they quote the RTA's Transit Is the Answer. The conversation will need to continue in Springfield.
- Ryan Ruehle asked about the \$1.5B CMAP PART mentions and the \$730M fiscal gap. Rob stated \$730M gets the region back to 2019 service. The other funding would improve services, Service Board goals, etc. Maulik said that they are working with the Service Boards to discuss what benefits riders would see with increased investment.
 - d. Tina asked the CAB members the following:
 - i. How can the RTA best communicate the value of transit in your community?
- Tyler James asked if the RTA could share the agenda with the Service Boards so they can share how they are supporting the agenda items.

- Xavier Potts spoke about the Transit is the Answer website and feels that a lot of important information is hidden. They feel that stakeholder and community involvement pieces should be moved to the top. Also, the RTA should add a section for “what can I do?” Additionally, they expressed support of speaking with students and youth about public transportation because majority will support transit.
 - ii. How can the RTA work with you to advocate for increased investment in service?
- Romina Castillo spoke about working with communities but specifically with youth. Youth have advocated for bikeways in Cook County and less are applying for their driver’s license.
- Katanya Raby asked if CPS was included. Romina recommended gamifying engagement to students. This could help them understand the funding gap and finding solutions.
 - iii. How could climate-friendly transit strategies benefit your community?
- Doug Fowler mentioned focusing on engaging people about last mile options to and from transit – how to use their electric scooters or bike.
- Libia Bianibi mentioned that it feels that the campaigns usually involve people who are active transit users, and wondered if we should be trying to reach non-transit users.
 - iv. The 3 questions will be sent to the RTA CAB members to review and have an opportunity to answer each question.

7. Update on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault RTA Public Transportation Assistance Program

- a. Loren Gutierrez, The Network, is determining the second phase of distributing the Ventra Cards to their agencies. Hopefully in May, they will have the additional cards available. They are going through a firm to receive more data and hopes to share at the next meeting.

- Adam Kerman asked how many people are in their programs. There are 51 programs throughout the RTA region. At the last meeting, they had 1,200 survivors they distributed Ventra Cards to.

8. Service Board CAB Reports

- a. Rob Hart, Metra CAB, stated Metra passed their bike policy on February 1, 2024. They have seen a 70% increase in bikes on Metra. Ridership trends remain positive. The highest ridership day was on March 16, 2024. Majority of riders are purchasing their Metra fare through the Ventra app. Metra believes Access tickets might increase after the previous reduced fare pilot tickets are used up.
 - b. Adam Kerman, Pace CAB, had no update at this time due to the Pace CAB not meeting until July.
 - c. Katanya Raby, CTA CAB, stated the CTA CAB members have a desire to be more connected with the community and funnel it up to the CTA Board. They are working with the CTA to build a new structure and increase the number of meetings.
- Adam Kerman asked who comes to their meetings from the CTA. Katanya stated the CTA's legal team and several other folks attend depending on the topic.

9. Public Comments

- a. No public comments currently.

10. Other Business

- Terry Kappel wanted to address a comment about Metra and the 2 Ventra vending machines in McHenry County. Metra stated that they are rolling a Ventra vending machine out at each station over the next 2 years. He feels that Metra should have phased the ticket agents out with the Ventra vending machine being available at the station.

11. Adjourn

- a. Meeting adjourned at 12:03 PM.

