
Meeting Minutes

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RTA Citizens Advisory Board Meeting 7-22-2024

Call to Order

- a. Jackie Forbes, Chairperson, called to order the RTA Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) Meeting on 7/22/2024 at 10:01 AM.

1. Roll Call

- 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. Adam Kerman, Pace Citizen Advisory Board Committee
 - v. Jazmin Vega, McHenry County
 - vi. Joe Surdam, Lake County
- b. Non-Voting CAB Members Present In-Person:
 - i. Michael VanDekreke, RTA
 - ii. Libia Bianibi, Chicago
 - iii. Terry Kappel, McHenry County
 - iv. Parker Thompson, Kane County
 - v. Karl Gieseke, DuPage County Rider

- c. Other Individuals Present In-person:
 - i. Kyle Whitehead, RTA
 - ii. Peter Kersten, RTA
 - iii. Felisha Barbee, RTA
 - iv. Kendra Johnson, RTA
 - v. Bill Lachman, RTA
 - vi. Sarah Rubino, RTA
 - vii. Beatrice Yan
 - viii. Steve Andrew, Pace
- d. Voting CAB Members Present Virtually:
 - i. John Loper, DuPage County
 - ii. Loren Gutierrez, The Network
- e. Non-Voting CAB Members Present Virtually:
 - i. Xavier Potts, Chicago
 - ii. Douglas Fowler, Will County
 - iii. Ayesha Akhtar, Suburban Cook County
 - iv. Victoria Zimmerman, Lake County
- f. Other Individuals Present Virtually:
 - i. Leanne Redden, RTA Executive Director
 - ii. Kathleen Woodruff, CTA
 - iii. Scott Hennings, McHenry County DOT
 - iv. Melissa Meyer, RTA
 - v. Kevin Bueso, RTA
 - vi. Lukas Bettich, McHenry County DOT Intern
- g. Public: Present Virtually:
 - i. Garland Armstrong

2. Welcome

- a. Welcome address provided by RTA Executive Director, Leanne Redden. Leanne thanked everyone for their commitment to transit, RTACAB, and provided a brief synopsis of the topics on the agenda.

3. Approval of the April 22, 2024, Minutes

- a. Adam Kerman, Pace Citizen Advisory Board Committee Member, requested to add speakers' names to the meeting minutes and asked that adoption of the minutes be delayed until the next meeting. Michael VanDekreke stated we can still adopt the meeting minutes as amended with the commitment of the RTA to add the speaker names.
- b. John Loper, from DuPage County requested a correction on page 10, paragraph C of the minutes that states "CAB member asked about the \$1.8B CMAP Part mention and \$7.3M fiscal gap" to "1.5B and \$730M."

Ryan Ruehle made motion to approve April 22, 2024, minutes as amended. Karl Gieskek seconded the motion to approve minutes as amended.

The adoption of the meeting minutes passed. 5 "yes" votes by voting members present and 1 "no" vote by Adam Kerman. Voting Members present virtually also voted yes.

4. Topics requested by RTACAB Members

- a. Michael VanDekreke, Director, Mobility Services, reviewed list of topics for future CAB meetings identified from brainstorming sessions in previous meetings and asked members for additional topics to add to the list. Michael will send list of topics to all members.
 - Exploring changes to the structure of suburban transit to focus less on suburb to downtown travel and more on suburb-to-suburb travel

- Learn more about transportation funding – including paratransit funding
 - A focus on how to improve transportation access for all, with a priority of transit for people with disabilities
 - A discussion of the activities the RTA will participate in to solve the fiscal cliff situation in 2025-2026
 - Expanding services for people experiencing lower income
 - Exploring the system to make it more accessible for young families with children
 - Advocacy for more veteran benefits on transit
 - Presentation on sustainability of the regional system
 - How to improve intermodal transportation
 - Transit's impact on public health equity
 - Encouraging the RTA do more outreach in the community at a grassroots level to solicit feedback and ideas for the future on transit
 - Recommendation for the RTA to engage youth in actively supporting transit initiatives
- b. Additional topics added during meeting
- Adam Kerman suggested, Housing, near transit
 - Xavier Potts, suggested, investigating why there are so many vacant newsstands, bodega, etc., around stations/stops and what can be done
 - Karl Gieske, suggested, how to improve the communications of equipment failure to riders and other infrastructure improvements on Metra.

5. Funding and Regional Budget Process Briefing, Bill Lachman, Division Manager, Budget & Treasury, Pension Trustee and Sarah Rubino, Principal Analyst, Budget

The RTA is responsible for the development of the regional budget for the RTA, CTA, Metra and Pace. Bill Lachman and Sarah Rubino provided a presentation to provide a breakdown of transit funding sources and timeline for budget adoption. In the presentation, Bill Lachman and Sarah Rubino answered the following questions:

a. What is transit Operations funding?

- i. Transit operation funding is funding subsidies provided by taxpayers. Operations funding supports the ongoing cost of running public transit (salaries, benefits, insurance, utilities, etc.) and capital funding supports long term investments (tracks, stations, buses and trains). System generate revenue also helps pay for transit operation and a large portion of generate revenue comes from fares that transit riders pay.

b. Largest Operations funding sources?

- i. The largest source for operation funding is RTA Sales Tax, which includes anything purchased from brick-and-mortar stores within the RTA region and online purchases for delivery to any Illinois address since 2021. In 2023, the Illinois sales tax receipts exceeded \$1.6B. Additionally, a portion of the real estate transfer tax levied in the City of Chicago supports the CTA, which totaled \$53M in 2023. The State of Illinois provides a 30% match of the proceeds of the RTA sales tax and the real estate transfer tax. This match comes from the public transportation fund (PTF). In 2023, PTF funding totaled \$515M. The State of Illinois also helps fund ADA Paratransit. In the States fiscal year 2025, funding will increase 10% to \$10M. Also, the State of Illinois helps offset the discounted fares required by statue. In the States fiscal year 2025, this funding will increase by 10% to \$21M. **Note:** State funding only covers a small portion of ADA Paratransit and discounted fares.

When RTA receives funds, they are dispersed to the service boards in accordance with RTA Act and the current budget. For example, in April, the RTA received the sales tax on retail purchases made in January. During the depth of the state fiscal crisis, this three-month lag was never extended. On the other hand, the state PTF payment and other state funding did encounter extended delays during the financial crisis, which created operation challenges for the RTA and service boards. The RTA needed to borrow \$400M to keep transit operation running until the RTA received PTF and other funding from the State.

As far as Federal COVID relief funding, the RTA was awarded about \$3.5B in funding. To date the RTA and service boards have drawn down \$2.2B or 63% of those fundings to fill the gap caused by the reduction in system generated revenue, resulting from reduced ridership. In 2026, RTA is expected to exhaust the remaining balance of the relief fund, which will leave a gap in of \$730M in 2026.

ii. Budget Calendar

- 1) May 16, Board Adoption of budget Call
- 2) Early Jul, Release of Preparatory Funding Amounts
- 3) Jul 12, Service Board Submittals of Capital Funding Estimates
- 4) Aug 15, RTA Board Considers Adoption of 2025-2029 Funding Amounts
- 5) Oct 4, Deadline for Service Board Capital Budgets to RTA
- 6) Oct 11, Deadline for Service Board Operating Budgets to RTA

- 7) Oct/Nov, Service Board Budget, and Capital Program Public Hearings
 - 8) Nov 22, Service Boards Present Budgets at RTA Board Meeting
 - 9) Early Dec, RTA Regional Budget and Capital Program Public Hearing
 - 10) Dec 19 Budget and Capital Program Considered for Adoption
- iii. Questions and Responses:
- 1) Adam Kerman, Pace CAB Committee, requested a copy of the funding estimates. Bill Lachman informed Adam that it would be made available after the marks have been adopted by the RTA Board.
 - 2) Terry Kappel, McHenry County, asked if there was a drop in people driving to the city on highways or if this is shift from occurred from public transportation to cars or less people coming to City because they are using Zoom? Sarah Rubino instructed Terry to save question for Peter Kersten, RTA Program Manager, Strategic Plan Implementation.
 - 3) Terry Kappel, McHenry County, asked if the public wants to have input in the budget hearing process what is the best time to reach out? The Service boards hearings are held in Oct/Nov. RTA budget hearing is early Dec.
 - 4) Karl Gieseke, DuPage, County asked if the real estate transfer tax was only for the City of Chicago? RTA Bill Lachman responded that the real estate transfer tax raised in 2008 is only for the City of Chicago and it only supports the CTA.

6. Building a More Equitable Fare Structure Report, Peter Kersten, Program Manager, strategic Plan

Peter Kersten reviewed the highlights of the Building a More Equitable Fare Structure Report. Before discussing the highlights, Peter provided background on RTA's strategic plan goal and commitment to making paying for transit more seamless and affordable, and why the report was written. Last year, the State instructed RTA to develop a report quantifying the cost of all existing fare programs and chart a course for expansion to offer income-based year-round reduced fares, resulting in this report being shared with the General Assembly in the Governor's Office on July 1.

There are more than 14 specialized fare programs between the RTA and the service boards with RTA Ride Free and Reduced Fare program being the largest. Between the service boards, there are students, military and other fare programs offered by the services boards. Combining the RTA and the service board programs, the annual cost to administer and implement was approximately \$180M in 2019. During the Pandemic the total cost was reduced, but these programs are rebounding, and the anticipated cost is expected to be back to pre-pandemic levels soon. Currently there are approximately 317,000 people enrolled in RTA Fare programs and thousands utilizing the service board programs.

The State appropriated \$21M to cover the cost, which is an increase from last year but still below the total cost to cover the programs. However, the region continues to expand programs. For example, the Access Pilot Program is a partnership between RTA and Metra, that began in February of 2024. The program is offered to residents living within the RTA six-county region who receive SNAP benefits. To date, over 3,000 people have enrolled and since May over 33,000 rides have been taken with the majority being on the Metric Electric and Rock Island Lines. The Access Pilot Program is designed to be scalable with sustainable funding. It can be expanded to include CTA and Pace Riders and dramatically increase affordability for residents that rely on transit.

Overall, the report continues support the significant budget gap in 2026 and continues show that full funding is a mean to expand and a first step towards solving the fiscal Cliff.

i. Questions and Responses:

- 1) Terry Kappel, how is Access ridership tracked? Peter Kersten stated that riders purchase their access pass through the Ventra app and show their access pass to the conductor. Once it is verified then that gets reported back to us.
- 2) Terry Kappel are people choosing cars over public transportation or are people coming into the city less due to switching to virtual meetings? Peter Kersten stated that this complicated to answer because there many factors to look at, but generally transportation measure cars through VMT (Vehicle Miles Traveled). Service boards share ridership data, and you can see the system serves about the same unique number of riders in each week. For example, Transit ridership on the weekends has been a really strong market segment where we're actually back to pre-pandemic levels or exceeding pre-pandemic levels on certain weekends.
- 3) Terry Kappel, are there plan for excess capacity for the convention coming up? Peter Kresten, the service board can speak more directly to service-oriented questions, so I would direct you to look at their press release for specific information.
- 4) Libia Bianibi, What is in the way of the regional Access program moving forward? Is it really about the funding that is stopping the consolidation of these programs or are the service boards still trying to find their way to the table on the idea of the regional pass? Peter Kersten, there is no specific pot of

money to fund regional access. A fully mature system would cost 150M in lost revenue. We are facing a 730M gap and the CTA and Pace would be quick to partner if there was funding available.

- 5) Libia Bianibi, Is there an estimate of the costs to make the transit system more accessible? Peter Kersten, this is a question that we could follow up on. There is lot of information on the number of accessible stations and the funding needed to improving accessibility, but I am not sure if there is information on increased ridership on fixed route and decreased ridership on ADA Paratransit based only on making accessibility improvements to fixed route.
- 6) Libia Bianibi, Do we know where Illinois stands in terms of the amount of funding that is provided to transit in comparison to other states? Peter Kersten, you can make some comparison to other big regions as to how much the States puts into public transit funding. The CMAP report, Plan of Action for Regional Transportation does a comparison to New York, PA, California and a few other States. That report shows that Illinois lags other states.
- 7) Romina Castillo, Chicago, how long is the Access Pilot Program? What would be the next steps to make it a permanent program? Peter Kersten, 18 months and began it in February 2024. To keep the program and expand the program would require funding. The goal is to expand the program to CTA and Pace after the pilot is completed, but only if funding is identified.
- 8) Romina Castillo, Chicago, has there been any action from officials since the report has

been released? Peter Kersten, the report was transmitted on July 1st. There are hearings this summer about transit funding and there will be elements of the report discuss during those hearings.

- 9) Ayesha Akhtar, Suburban Cook County, Often people with Epilepsy feel that they will never qualify for ADA paratransit because of some of the parameters around eligibility. Also, people living outside of the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile perimeter of fixed route also need ADA paratransit. Will there ever be an opportunity to revisit the $\frac{3}{4}$ miles guidelines for ADA Paratransit because some fall outside that radius but still need the service? Michael VanDekreke, RTA, the $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile perimeter around fixed route is outlined in the federal regulations that set the guidelines for ADA paratransit service. We could make a local decision to change this policy, but this would require more funding. He indicated that he is open to talking further about other perceived barriers to access to ADA Paratransit.
- 10) Karl Gieseke, DuPage County, are there plans to standardize the fare across the system? Peter Kersten, there are ongoing conversations on fare policy.
- 11) Xavier Potts, Chicago, would there be a merit to pushing the multi-passes to have bigger bucket of revenue to fill in some of those gaps? Peter Kersten, Metra has realigned their zones to match the way riders are riding today. The cost of monthly passes has decreased, so we hope to start to see more monthly passes being purchased.
- 12) Parker Thompson, the \$150M is the additional funding needed to run Access alone, not for all of the fare programs? Peter

Kersten, yes, the \$150M is needed to just fund a regional expanded Access program. The bulk of the cost is due to lost revenue that the service boards do not collect because they are charging a 50% fare.

- 13) Parker Thompson, Kane County, what percent of the funding for Access goes towards administrative cost? Peter Kersten, the administrative cost is very small in comparison to the revenue side.
- 14) Jazmin Vega, McHenry County, reported that McHenry County launched a new program called MCRide Connect that allows eligible residents to use TNCs subsidized by the county. One of the requirements to participant in the program is that residents must be enrolled in the RTA's Ride Free or Reduced Fare program. Jazmin also thanked the RTA and Mobility Outreach Coordinator, Bianca Diaz for doing great work in McHenry County.

7. Expanding Outreach Efforts – Brainstorming Session, Kyle Whitehead, Principal, Government Affairs

This portion of the meeting consisted of a 10-minute breakout session to identify organizations that RTACAB members feel the RTA should include in their outreach efforts. After rejoining the meeting, each group shared the name of one organization. The members were asked to send the rest of their breakout session notes to the RTA .

The exercise included the following questions:

- a. Who else should be engaged?
 - i. How can we best reach them?
- b. Which messages resonate most with people in your community?

- c. What RTA programs/services are most important to highlight?

8. Update on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault RTA Public Transportation Assistance Program, Loren Gutierrez, Managing Attorney, Safety & Family Practice Group, Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services representing The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence on the RTACAB.

Loren Gutierrez, The Network, reported that 11,277 Ventra cards have been distributed to approximately 3,311 clients. On average each client received 3.6 cards. The Network plans on distributing the remainder of the Ventra cards by October. Loren also shared stories about how the cards has help people get back and forth to medical court, and therapy appointments.

i. Questions and Responses:

- 1) Adam Kerman, are you going to ask for the program to continue? Loren Gutierrez, yes, the plan is to work with legislators to determine how we could keep this program going.

9. Service Board CAB Report

- a. Adam Kerman, Pace, reported that the Pace connect O'Hare and the Harvey Pilot program were not successful and ended in June. The Pace O'Hare Program was replaced with a service on the 332, so riders will be able to switch over to the bus. However, there is not replacement for the Harvey Pilot Program. The 318-service expansion took effect at the beginning of June. Pace extended the hours and frequency. In August, they will expand the 331-West Suburban NS routes.

10. Public Comment

- a. Garland Armstrong, asked has there been any improvement in Joliet to ensure sidewalks are

accessible especially at bus stops for those using mobility devices? Jacket Forbes stated that his concerns would be shared with the services board. Doug Fowler also shared that the Joliet Metra station has been revamped and made it more accessible.

11. Other Business

- a. Terry Kappel asked if the meeting recording would be made available to the public since it was recorded. Michael VanDekreke reported that the meeting minutes for each meeting are posted on the RTA website and the link to join the meeting is also posted for anyone to participate virtually.

12. Adjourn

- a. Meeting adjourned at 12:03 PM.
- b. Next meeting October 28, 2024, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Meeting minutes completed by Felisha Barbee, RTA Manager
Mobility Management.