



Thursday, March 6, 2025

**ADVISORY BOARD**

**MERRIMACK VALLEY REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY**

**Board Members Attending:**

Amesbury: Mayor Cassandra Gove  
Boxford: Matt Coogan (arrived after votes)  
Haverhill: Josselyn DeLeón-Estrada  
Merrimac: Mitch Kostoulakos  
Newbury: Kristen Grubbs  
North Andover: Andrew Shapiro  
West Newbury: James Blatchford  
Disability Community Representative: Gerard Boucher (on the telephone)

Andover: Jacki Byerly  
Groveland: Rebecca Oldham  
Lawrence: Myra Ortiz (on the telephone)  
Methuen: Kathleen Colwell  
Newburyport: Christian Cyr  
Salisbury: Adrienne Linnell

Mayor Gove, being Chair of the Board, called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m.

1. **Approval of Minutes of the Meeting of February 6, 2025:** Mayor Gove called for a motion to approve the minutes of the Advisory Board meeting of February 6, 2025. So moved by Mr. Blatchford of West Newbury, seconded by Ms. Colwell of Methuen. Advisory Board Secretary, Ms. Colwell of Methuen called the roll: Vote to approve: Unanimous.
2. **FY2024 Annual Audit:** Ms. Gove introduced Mr. Shapiro of North Andover, as Chair of the MeVa Finance & Audit Committee, to present its recommendation to the Board regarding the FY2024 Annual Audit. Mr. Shapiro prepared a summary of the sub-committee's meeting with the Auditor, which was distributed to the Board members. The Audit was found favorable by the sub-committee, which voted to recommend that it be accepted and adopted by the full Board. Mr. Shapiro of North Andover made a motion to accept the Finance & Audit Committee's recommendation to adopt the FY2024 Audit; Seconded by Mr. Blatchford of West Newbury. Ms. Colwell called the roll. Vote to approve: 12 ayes, 1 abstention by Ms. Oldham of Groveland, motion passed.
3. **Administrator's Report:** Mr. Berger briefly updated the members on the following:
  - a. **State of Administration:**
    - i. Staffing Update: Hiring continues to be robust. We now have 90 active bus drivers and another 6 in training.
    - ii. miniMeVa Driver Becomes First MeVa Two-Time Employee of the Month: Kwabena "Kobe" Mensah was recognized a second time for his outstanding customer service. Even a difficult-to-please

passenger called in with positive feedback, instead of her usual list of complaints! Congratulations to Kobe.

- iii. En Route to the C-Suite: Two MeVa Transit employees, Director of Safety and Training Jessenia Fernandes and Comptroller Jasmin Ortega were recently accepted into the 2025 Latinos in Transit Executive Leadership Academy. It's a great opportunity for them to learn from and be mentored by transit leaders from across the country.
- iv. National Transit Employee Appreciation Day: March 18<sup>th</sup> is National Transit Employee Appreciation Day. Mr. Berger invited everyone present to join us as we recognize and honor the men and women who drive, maintain and support our buses here and across the country.

b. State of Operations:

- i. Ridership: Overall, Fixed Route ridership is down 21.6% compared to February of last year. We are speculating the setback is likely due to a colder and icier February than last year, as well as increasing fear in immigrant communities such as Lawrence, where ridership was down 28.5%. Service in Haverhill and Seacoast communities is actually up 6.8%. We are still 26.4% above pre-pandemic ridership. Paratransit (miniMeVa) ridership, however, is 17.1% above February 2024's ridership and 33.5% above pre-pandemic levels.
- ii. Returning to Basics: The Science of Runcutting: MeVa has invited an industry expert, Arthur Gaudet, to come to MeVa in April to offer his training program to our staff, covering the fundamentals of scheduling, service planning, rostering and driver work allocation, and provide guidance on how we can optimize the provision of service so we will be best prepared to introduce scheduling software that meets our needs. Since our service has grown a great deal, Excel is no longer adequate to efficiently accomplish the challenges involved in putting efficient service on the road.

c. State of Finance:

- i. FY24 Variance Report: Through January, we are actually showing a favorable to budget, which is attributable to the lumpiness of when costs and revenues are received. We are actually tracking very close to the budget as projected.
- ii. Open Federal Grants: It is particularly pertinent, as our open Federal Grants are for funds that have already been obligated, which remain available, even as some other Federal funds are being cut or held up. Currently we have \$13.5 Million, of which \$5.2 Million are the balance of our Covid relief funding.

d. State of Planning and Implementation:

- i. Artists on the Bus: Plans are being developed to help residents of the Merrimack Valley use MeVa buses to access arts and culture assets across the region.
- ii. Community Transit Grant Awarded to MeVa: We secured our second Community Transit Grant, in the amount of \$138,000. These funds allow us to train community service providers to educate people in the community as to how to take our free buses around the region.
- iii. MeVa is on the Program at NEPTC: MeVa's Deputy Administrator, Nio Mendez and MeVa Board Secretary Kathleen Colwell will be presenting on a panel entitled "What's Up MeVa??" at the 2025 New England Parking and Transportation Council's Municipal Forum in Somerville today (March 6<sup>th</sup>). They will focus on how MeVa and the City of Methuen have used MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces grant funds to improve the environment for riders and pedestrians in the Merrimack Valley.
- iv. Improvements to Costello and Washington Square Transit Centers: Our facilities crew has been busy cleaning up an area used for storing cleaning supplies in the Costello Center in Amesbury, that will now be used as a Driver's Lounge, off of the Passenger Lounge. At Haverhill Transit, we are adding a wall and a door to prevent passengers from accessing the back corridors in the interest of public safety.

e. State of Outreach: Since our last meeting, we have continued outreach to member cities and towns, community groups, business organizations, activists, stakeholders and multimodal transportation partners.

4. **Update from MVPC:** Elizabeth Maldari from MVPC updated the members on current activities. For planning updates, please see their website at [www.mvpc.org](http://www.mvpc.org)
5. **Confirm Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be held on Thursday, May 1, 2025, at 8:30 a.m. at MeVa's Bradford headquarters.
6. **Executive Session:** Ms. Gove asked for a motion to enter Executive Session. So moved by Mr. Coogan of Boxford; seconded by Mr. Blatchford of West Newbury.
7. **Adjournment:** Ms. Gove announced that the Members would not be returning to Open Session, but would adjourn from Executive Session.