



Thursday, June 5, 2025

ADVISORY BOARD

MERRIMACK VALLEY REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Board Members Attending:

Andover: Jacki Byerley

Groveland: Rebecca Oldham

Merrimac: Mitch Kostoulakos

Newburyport: Christian Cyr

North Reading: Lillian Hartman

West Newbury: Angus Jennings

Boxford: Matt Coogan

Haverhill: Josselyn DeLeón-Estrada

Newbury: Kristen Grubbs

North Andover: Andrew Shapiro

Salisbury: Adrienne Linnell

Mr. Shapiro, Treasurer of the Advisory Board, called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m.

1. **Welcome & Introductions:** Mr. Shapiro welcomed the Board members and everyone in attendance and invited them to introduce themselves.
2. **Approval of Minutes of the Meeting of May 1, 2025:** Mr. Shapiro called for a motion to approve the minutes of the Advisory Board meeting of May 1, 2025. So moved by Ms. Grubbs of Newbury, seconded by Mr. Cyr of Newburyport; Vote to approve: Unanimous.
3. **Governance: Election of New Paratransit Committee Chair:** Mr. Shapiro asked for a motion to nominate Mr. Bob Snow of Rowley as Chair of the Paratransit Committee. So moved by Mr. Coogan of Boxford, seconded by Mr. Cyr of Newburyport; vote to approve: Unanimous.
4. **Finance & Audit Committee Report – Review and Approval of FY2026 Budget:** Mr. Shapiro, Chair of this committee, detailed the committee's review of the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2026. He referred to a memo prepared by Mr. Berger which itemized budget items that had been questioned and discussed by the committee. The result of their review was to recommend to the full Board to adopt the budget as presented. After a period of questions and comments, Mr. Shapiro called for a motion. Mr. Coogan of Boxford moved that the budget be accepted as presented, seconded by Mr. Kostoulakos of Merrimac; vote to adopt: Unanimous.
5. **Fixed Route Service Committee Report:** Mr. Shapiro, Chair of this committee, detailed the proposed route changes which are planned to begin in September. The members were given maps showing the current routes and the proposed changes, along with descriptions of why the changes would be beneficial. Mr. Shapiro then asked for a motion. Ms. DeLeón-Estrada of Haverhill moved to implement the route

changes as shown, seconded by Ms. Byerley of Andover; vote to accept route changes: Unanimous.

6. Administrator Performance and Compensation Committee Report - Annual Review:

The members were given an in-depth summary of Mr. Berger's achievements that was prepared by Ms. Kathleen Colwell, chair of this committee. Ms. Colwell had asked Mr. Berger to supply a list of accomplishments realized by MeVa under his leadership, which was also given to the members. The committee also researched the salaries of the administrators of the other 14 Massachusetts RTAs. After considering all of this information, committee members believed that Mr. Berger should be given the maximum merit increase stipulated in his contract of 5% along with CPI increase of 2.3%. Mr. Shapiro of North Andover asked for a motion to approve the compensation increase as presented by the committee. So moved by Ms. Hartman of North Reading, seconded by Mr. Cyr of Newburyport; vote to approve: Unanimous.

7. Paratransit Service Committee Report: There were no updates to report at this time.

8. McGovern Station Ad Hoc Committee Report: There were no updates from the committee at this time. Mr. Berger will present some updates in his report.

9. Ferryboat Service Committee Report: Updates reported by Mr. Berger were that 1) an RFP is expected to be released June 6th and 2) MVPC is putting together a Business Plan for the ferry operations, being prepared parallel to the actual building of the boats.

10. Administrator's Report: Mr. Berger briefly updated the members on the following:

a. State of Administration:

- i. Staffing Update: In May, two fixed route bus drivers and two paratransit drivers were added. Fix route drivers now total 104, the most we've ever had.
- ii. Celebrating the Driving Force Behind Our Mission! We will do so with our annual employee appreciation BBQ to recognize our drivers, mechanics, fuelers, reservationists, dispatchers and road supervisors. It will be held on Friday June 27 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. here at headquarters. Board members are encouraged to join the fun and show support for the men & women who keep our vehicles rolling every day.
- iii. We Hate to See you Go! This week wraps up our Winter/Spring internship program. 2025 brought us 6 interns – three from Middlesex Community College, and three from Notre Dame Cristo Rey. Middlesex interns Darie and Yiselys were out riding buses and working at the transit hubs interviewing riders and chronicling their stories. Donika, who is now a Middlesex graduate, worked in the office two days a week helping with marketing and outreach. From Note Dame, Kenny was trained by Tim to support IT operations while Daran and Ashley

helped build our database, completed clerical projects around the office and prepared outreach materials for various community events.

b. State of Operations:

- i. Ridership: Mr. Berger presented two graphs each for Fixed Route Ridership and Paratransit Ridership for FY2019-FY2025. One form of the graphs shows Annual Ridership by year in bar graph form, the other compares Annual Ridership by month. Fixed Route ridership through May remains strong and 5% over FY24 and 52.1% over pre-pandemic levels (FY19). Paratransit is up 16.6% over FY24 and 30.6% over pre-pandemic levels (FY19).
- ii. miniMeVa Efficiencies: We now have three vehicle types for our paratransit service: the traditional 12-passenger cutaway, the new SUVs (Honda Pilots) and the soon to be deployed low-floor mini buses. This enables us to match riders and trip types to the proper vehicle, improving operating efficiency. Using the SUVs for 1 or 2 passengers instead of the cutaways results in significant fuel savings.
- iii. 20-Minute Frequencies & a Visit from the Chair: Next week McGovern will be visited by the House Chair of the Joint Committee on Transportation Arciero, who hails from the Lowell Regional Transit Authority's District. With our upcoming 20-minute service connecting Lowell to Haverhill via Lawrence and Methuen, it's a perfect opportunity to showcase not only what we do at MeVa, but the impact relatively small dollars can have on the quality of life for our residents. Chair Arciero will be joined by Leader Frank Moran and members of the Lawrence delegation.

c. State of Finance:

- i. Open Federal Grants: We have \$17 million in unexpended funds available, of which \$5.1 million are COVID-relief grants. All of these funds are obligated and executed in existing grant agreements with FTA, so funding is considered secure.
- ii. FY2026 State Budget: Both House and Senate versions of the FY2026 state budget are in conference committee to resolve differences in the two bills. The House level funds RTAs at the FY2025 amount, the Senate increases funding by \$10 million, allocated to fare-free transit. Both houses passed a supplemental allocation of FY2025 surplus Fair Share amendment funds that includes \$25 million for RTAs. The Senate supplemental also includes an additional \$50 million for RTA capital projects and \$10 million for micro transit initiatives.
- iii. FY 2026 Federal Budget: There have been two developments coming out of Washington DC that warrant cautious optimism. On May 14,

the FTA issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity for its low and no emissions bus discretionary program. We have had great success with deploying hybrid electric buses. Although we have not programmed any discretionary federal funding into our budget, we will pursue a grant for six 40-foot hybrids (larger than we currently operate), hoping that our track record with hybrids might be viewed favorably during the evaluation process. The president's FY2026 budget requests \$21.2 billion for public transit, a \$310 million increase over FY2025, but \$1 billion decrease over what the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill authorized. The Urban Formula program, however, increases by \$154 million over FY2025 which is in line with the Infrastructure Bill.

d. State of Planning and Implementation:

- i. Rumbeamos en la Esplanada: Two community listening sessions were hosted at McGovern to give riders, drivers and community stakeholders an opportunity to share their vision for activating the Esplanada. Both events were a huge success, but the comment period will be open for the next month so that people who could not attend the events have an opportunity to share their ideas.
- ii. MeVa in the Future: Every five years, all RTAs to work with a state contracted consultant to create a Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan (CRTP). This obliges us to assess our current service plan to see what works and what needs another look. We are working with consultants from AECOM to create a plan that reflects MeVa's vision of the future.
- iii. Procurements: Since our last meeting, Bonnie has been preparing three critical procurements for release. The Retaining Wall and Fuel Tank IFB produced two bids that were over budget and wide apart - \$3 Million and \$6.7 Million. That bid was cancelled and reissued with clarifying revisions on May 20th. New bids are due June 11th. The Ferry Boat RFP will be released as a design-build on June 6th with bids due July 7th. Additional work at McGovern to fix concrete issues and faulty rain gutters will be released later this month.
- iv. State Audit: MeVa has been selected for a State Audit. We received notification on May 14th and the Entrance Conference was held on May 19th. This audit will deal with MeVa's ADA Complaint Process, from a previous audit finding and our Safety Training Program. The Auditor's staff will make weekly visits beginning June 5th until they complete their field work. They will interview staff and review relevant documentation. A report will be issued sometime in the future.

- e. State of Outreach: MeVa continues to be active in the community, educating the public about our services, training new riders and listening to what customers and future customers have to say.
- 11. **Update from MVPC:** Elizabeth Maldari from MVPC updated the members on current activities. For planning updates, please see their website at www.mvpc.org
- 12. **Confirm Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be held on Thursday, September 4, 2025, at 8:30 a.m. at MeVa's Bradford headquarters. This is the Annual Meeting. Mr. Berger will send out a full schedule of FY2026 meeting dates by email.
- 13. **Adjournment:** Mr. Shapiro asked for a motion to adjourn at 10:00 a.m. So moved by Mr. Coogan of Boxford; seconded by Mr. Cyr of Newburyport; Vote to adjourn: Unanimous.