



## BALTIMORE REGIONAL TRANSIT COMMISSION

March 8th, 2024  
Baltimore Metropolitan Council  
10:00 to 12:30 PM.

### MINUTES

Mr. Jon Laria, the elected chair for the Baltimore Regional Transit Commission (BRTC), called the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the BRTC to order at 10:04 AM.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE

##### 1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Laria called the meeting to order. Mr. Don Halligan, lead planning support staff for the Baltimore Regional Transit Commission (BRTC), made opening housekeeping remarks. Specifically, he asked BRTC members joining online to turn on their cameras on during the roll call and for attendance and conversation so that the public is clear about BRTC membership. He also informed attendees that the meeting was being recorded, however due to technical difficulty a video recording is not available.

##### 2. WELCOME AND BACKGROUND

Commission Chair, Mr. Laria, welcomed attendees and offered opening remarks. Mr. Laria expressed his desire to assemble resources as quickly as possible to support the critical tasks ahead for the BRTC. He asked for any feedback from commissioners about desired resources.

Mr. Laria informed attendees that there was a packed agenda with multiple presentations by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA).

Mr. Laria also addressed the frequency of BRTC meetings in the months ahead. The following two BRTC meetings are set for May 3rd and June 7th, and the next meeting currently scheduled meeting after that is on September 27th. He suggested to the Commission that he felt it would be in the best interest of the BRTC to schedule some summer meetings as well.

### **3. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

Chair Laria reminded the BRTC commissioners of the need to elect a vice chair. He recommends balancing the leadership and perspectives of the BRTC by electing a vice chair who is not a representative from Baltimore City and is not from the private sector, in contrast to the himself. He also suggested it'd be very helpful if they have experience and knowledge of the regional transit system, and understand the role of MDOT-MTA and Locally Operated Transit Systems.

Any commissioners interested in the role or would like to make a nomination should inform Mr. Halligan, and he will add the vice chair election as an action item at the next meeting.

The Chair also suggested that Commissioners should begin to consider a subcommittee structure that included potentially budget, workforce/personnel, and perhaps a communications/marketing subcommittee to examine issues. He asked staff and Commission members to consider this as we move forward.

### **4. ROLL CALL & INTRODUCTIONS**

Chair Jon Laria introduced himself and asked commission members to introduce themselves. Commissioners, who represented various jurisdictions and sectors such as transportation, education, and community development, individually spoke. Administrator Arnold also introduced herself.

## **REPORTS**

### **1. MTA ADMINISTRATOR'S UPDATE**

The MTA administrator, Holly Arnold, provided an update and overview presentation to the Commissioners on new developments and projects in the MTA Core Service Area. She began her remarks by acknowledging International Women's Day and noting that the MTA has a larger proportion of women in its workforce than most peer agencies.

Administrator Arnold provided a status update on the LIGHT RAIL, awarded \$213 million in federal dollars for replacing the light rail fleet with modern, low floor vehicles and upgraded stations. The State of Maryland is providing \$90 million in matching funds in addition to \$127.6 million in federal formula funds to complement the federal grant. Replacement of the light rail fleet is a high priority for MTA. It will improve system reliability and allow for higher-frequency service.

Administrator Arnold also highlighted an event on February 27<sup>th</sup> to celebrate the launch of MTA's first zero-emission buses and the plans to convert more of the fleet to electric power in years to come.

Administrator Arnold also shared news about improvements to the Metro system. In January 2024, the MTA completed the Mondawmin elevator replacement. MTA replaced both elevators with more capacity to more reliably handle bicycles, strollers, scooters, and the full range of ADA requirements. In February 2024, the MTA replaced the pedestrian bridge at the Rogers Avenue Station, ensuring safe access to the station from the parking lot and bus bays.

Administrator Arnold stated that MTA's Youth Council is underway. Commissioner Boyd asked if MTA could share the application criteria for Youth Council members.

Administrator Arnold also shared that MTA winter service changes took effect on February 4<sup>th</sup>. The MTA made the schedule and run-time adjustments to decrease cut service and improve on-time performance.

In closing, Administrator Arnold shared recent successful engagement with MTA's customers and employees. Transit Equity Day was celebrated with free fare service on February 4<sup>th</sup>. MTA has recently highlighted its connections to local businesses on its social media channels. Events and programs also celebrate Black History Month in February and National Engineers Week from February 18<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>. This month, from March 8<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>, MTA celebrates Transit Employee Appreciation Week, and MTA leadership is making efforts to visit all MTA locations to celebrate and thank their staff.

***Handout: MTA Presentations to BRTC 03.08.2024***

## **2. MTA CAPITAL BUDGET DISCUSSION**

Administrator Arnold returned to the podium to continue the conversation about MTA's budget from last month, presenting current facts and issues. She first began by distinguishing between capital and operating budgets and then went in-depth on the capital budget.

MTA's capital budget is one portion of the MDOT Capital Program based on the Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) that outlines the State's commitment to transportation funding. MTA's total capital budget for fiscal years 2024 to 2029 is \$4.53 billion, comprising more than 850 projects. Some high visibility projects include expansions of the Purple Line and Red Line and significant enhancement of the Frederick Douglass Tunnel. Locally operated transit systems (LOTS) will receive \$288 million of the current six-year capital budget. Over 60% of that budget goes toward State of Good Repair to keep capital assets in good enough condition to operate at full performance. Various Commissioners asked several questions, What level of grant planning is going on? How does MTA align capital budget with available money? Commissioner Walker asked if the numbers for the budget show include the amounts budgeted for the LOTS Annual Transportation Plan (ATP) process. Administrator told the group that these were not part of the numbers presented in the slide. Commissioner Walker felt that it would be good for the Commission to understand what these were and how they relate to the overall MTA budget.

Administrator Arnold told the group that MTA's Capital Programming team is aggressive in seeking grants and that grants arrive in different ways. One way is via as "formula funds" set by Congress. Funding is predictable for certain categories. Another way is from discretionary grants. MTA can't budget for those in advance as they are harder to predict and rely upon. MTA's capital programming and grants team is supported by consultants as well as MTA staff.

At this point, there is a discussion of how much of the state budget goes to Baltimore vs. other regions. The Chair stated the BRTC's charge is to advocate for the Baltimore region as well as for transit in general. He stated that to better understand how to improve the Baltimore system, the BRTC needs to be able to disaggregate from the whole state budget. Administrator Arnold stated that the MTA is a statewide agency and that the presentation was designed to help the Commission understand their part of what MTA does in the region.

Administrator Arnold discussed the MTA's Transit Asset Management (TAM) Program monitors and manages transit assets to maintain a state of good repair. It performs capital needs prioritization, focusing on data-driven and risk-based decision-making. The Chair asked if there is an auditing report? Administrator Arnold stated there is a plan, but nothing required MTA to stick to it.

The last Capital Needs Inventory (CNI) was published in July 2022 and outlines the unconstrained investment needs between 2022 and 2031 needed to address the state of good repair (SGR) and enhancement needs. It also predicts the condition of MTA's assets in future years under different budget and spending conditions. The CNI is updated every three years, and MTA staff are currently working on the CNI update.

Several slides presented the significant capital budget delivery challenges MTA faces as current funding is insufficient to meet SGR needs, and staff capacity limits MTA's ability to spend all its programmed funds. The MTA faces recruitment and retention challenges tied to compensation packages, which lag behind industry and transit supply chain issues. *A discussion followed about how staffing levels hinder some of this process. MTA wants to increase staff, but structural issues around lower-than-average compensation hindered hiring. The State's Personal system limits the number of positions that can be state employees. Commissioner Spencer asked if MTA was facing a retirement cliff and Administrator Arnold acknowledged that this is an issue. A workaround MTA uses is contracting with consultants to get crucial work done. Embedded contract employees have an average tenure of 5 years, with some having as much as 20-year tenures. Administrator Arnold stated that contractual employees can't fulfill all needs as some of the crucial roles can't be done by outside contractors, citing procurement as one example.*

MTA's proposed operating budget for fiscal year 2025 is \$1.19 billion, 76% of which goes to direct labor and contracted services. LOTS get 11% of the total with \$134 million in operating assistance for the state. MTA's operating costs have increased (overall expenditures have increased by 43%), with significant drivers being increased labor costs and high inflation levels. The ten-year projection for needed operating funds is \$15.2 billion, including no new service besides the Purple Line.

Administrator Arnold then presented a vision of how additional investments could significantly improve the statewide transit system with frequent, reliable transit to support the region's economic growth and equity goals. If additional funding and staff are given, she stated that the MTA can improve service frequency and span of service within three years. A 10-year vision with higher funding and staffing can expand the frequent transit network to 20 routes and other dividends was shown. It is estimated that these goals could be achieved with \$16.5 billion in operating funds, \$25.3 billion in capital funds, and roughly 900 new staff/PINs. The Chair asked the Administrator how MTA manages perceptions of falling ridership, and the fact that the MTA does not manage to fully spend its budget? He asked for talking points that respond to these particular issues. The Administrator acknowledged these are difficult issues and that felt that the narrative is inaccurate as ridership is up, and MTA has a more effective Agency employee to revenue vehicle ratio than its peers and that is a benefit to the system. Effectively communicating these points is critical.

**Handout: MTA Presentations to BRTC 03.08.2024**

### **3. MTA MAJOR PROJECT BRIEFING**

Due to timing the Chair asked that the majority of the Major Projects discussion be delayed until the May meeting. Presentations on some of these took place. Mr. Earl Lewis, staff at MTA, gave the commissioners updates on several major projects.

Mr. Lewis stated that zero-emission buses have been advancing at the MTA to meet Maryland's Greenhouse Reduction Act Plan. He informed the Commission that recently, the MTA put its first seven electric buses into service at the Kirk Division. MTA tracks the impacts of weather, topography, load factor, and operator driving style as part of the pilot of battery electric buses. In upcoming years, MTA expects 20 electric buses to be delivered annually from 2025 to 2029.

Mr. Lewis discussed the MTA plans to reconstruct the Eastern Bus Division facility to support electric buses and update transit facilities. The construction is planned to begin in 2025, with reconstruction completed by 2029.

MTA is also currently funding new railcars for the Metro, with vehicles under construction that are scheduled to begin service in 2025.

Further, MTA has plans to replace vehicles for the Light Rail, as all 53 vehicles will be at the end of their useful life within five years. Mr. Lewis stated that the MTA was recently awarded \$213M in grant funding from the FTA's Rail Vehicle Replacement program for this project, which will be supplemented with \$90M in state matching funds. The existing fleet will be replaced with low-floor vehicles to improve accessibility significantly.

Mr. Lewis informed the Commission that MTA won a \$20 million grant for a \$38.5 million station enhancement project for the transit hub at Mondawmin Mall, which serves the Metro and multiple bus lines. The enhancements will be focused on safety, accessibility, state of good repair, and sustainability improvements. Construction is planned to begin in early 2027 and end in the summer of 2030.

Allison Scott of MTA gave an update presentation on the Red Line that was relaunched by Governor Moore last year, building on previous technical work and community engagement. Six preliminary alternatives are being evaluated that combine the three alignment and two mode options. Key options within the alternatives are vehicle mode and whether to utilize alignments that require tunneling, which increase risk and complexity. The MTA conducted a new public engagement in the fall of 2023 that connected with over 4,000 people who showed significant support and public concerns that need to be addressed and mitigated. Based upon this outreach and other forms of analysis, the MTA will select the mode this spring and identify the locally preferred alternative in the winter of 2024.

### ***Handout: MTA Presentations to BRTC 03.08.2024***

## **4. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

Melissa Einhorn, Director of MTA's Office of Governmental Affairs provided the Commission an update on legislation from the ongoing General Assembly session. The Maryland legislative session is about 2/3 of the way through, with MTA tracking 270 potentially impactful bills. The budget is currently working through the Maryland Senate and will then be considered by the Maryland House of Representatives.

## **INFORMATION ITEMS**

### **1. GOOGLE DRIVE FOR COMMISSION**

Due to time constraints, there was no time for this short presentation. BRTC staff are prototyping an online drive to store digital resources to support the commission.

### **2. LOTS PRIMER**

Due to time constraints, there was no time for this short presentation. BRTC staff are working on summary documents how locally operated transit systems (LOTS) developed and function in Baltimore's regional transit system.

### **3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

- Via online chat Will Fedder of BaltPOP asked: "RE: Bus electrification, The MTA originally testified in 2021 that 'Zero emission bus technology available today reduces trip range between charges, and current range can support only about 50% of MDOT MTA service' – how has that figure changed given the better-than-expected BEB range?"
  - Earl Lewis of MTA responded that the range of the new buses has exceeded their expectation but is dependent upon weather and other factors. They are seeing 100-150 miles per charge.
- Via online chat Hiro Iseki asked: "I would like to know how the alternative plans for the Red Line are presented to the public. Previously, we heard about the 3-year plan and 10-year plan to improve the entire transit system and service. The mode selection for Red Line makes a substantial difference in the capital funding need, as we heard. The discussion of

mode selection for the project is often limited to one project. Is it a right approach? Can we change it? For example, what would people say if we can somehow ensure that a choice of BRT for Red Line leaves some funds for the extension of BRT to other parts of Baltimore with a focus on disadvantaged communities? Of course, things are not this clear as funds come from different sources, including the FTA."

- The current program is to continue the project development process and MTA is receiving feedback like this to define preferences on trade-offs. MTA expects that in the Spring 2024 a Mode selection will be made with an LPA selection in late 2024. At present no mode has been selected but your feedback is important.
- Via online chat Brian O'Malley of the Central Maryland Transit Alliance provided the following comment: "A regional authority would allow the state government to leverage its investment in the Baltimore region transit to achieve greater results, but it would not work if the state government decreases its investment in Baltimore region transit."

#### **4. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Jon Laria adjourned the meeting at 12:40 PM.

#### ***Members present***

Jon Laria, Baltimore City  
Luis Cardona, Baltimore City  
Lester Davis, Baltimore City  
Scot Spencer, Baltimore City  
Dr. Celeste Chavis, Baltimore City  
Simone Johnson, Baltimore City  
Aaron Tomarchio, Baltimore County  
Toni St. John, Baltimore County  
D'Andrea Walker, Baltimore County  
Mike Netzer, Baltimore County  
Markus Moore, Anne Arundel County  
Arjan Van Andel, Anne Arundel County (online)  
Lakey Boyd, Howard County  
Tony Bridges, MDOT  
Mike McMillan, ATU Local 1300

#### ***Staff and Guests***

JWRouse  
Robin Budish  
Asia Williams (MTA)  
Andrea Sherman (HDR)  
Andrew Gena  
ANJones  
Anna Ellis  
Benjamin Groff  
Blake Fisher (BMC)

Bong Delrosario (MDOD)  
Brian O'Malley (MTA)  
Brittany Sink (KLT Group)  
Candace Ifill (BMC)  
Dan Janousek (MDOT)  
Danielle Sweeney (CMTA)  
Della Moore  
Eric Norton (CMTA)  
EWilson  
Greg  
Greg Fitchitt  
Guest  
Hiro Iseki  
Jake Schutt (BMC)  
Jerome Horne (MTA)  
Joe Davis (MTA)  
Jonathan Braymer  
Kate Sylvester (MTA)  
Laura Ruas  
Loretta Shields  
Louisa Glazunova (BMC)  
McGuire Chris (AECOM)  
Meredith Diloia  
Michael Helta (MTA)  
Mini Malhotra  
Monice Haines Benkhedda (BMC)  
Nick Henninger-Ayoub (GBC)  
Patrice Kingsley  
Ryan O'Doherty (Mercy Baltimore)  
Saran Hasco  
Sheila Mahoney (BMC)  
Talya Kravitz  
Todd Lang (BMC)  
Tom Kirby  
Tunji Adenekan  
Will Fedder (BaltPOP)  
Zach Kaufman (BMC)  
R. Earl Lewis, Jr. (MTA)  
Allison Scott (MTA)



Melissa Einhorn (MTA)

Fred Lippert (MTA)

Kelly Nagle (MTA)

James Guillee (MTA)

Daniel Zowaday (Baltimore Banner)

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