



Rocky Donahue
Executive Director

**Pace, the Suburban Bus Division of the Regional Transportation Authority
550 West Algonquin Road
Arlington Heights, Illinois
Minutes of the Open Session Meeting of the Planning Committee
April 7, 2021**

The Planning Committee of Pace, the Suburban Bus Division of the Regional Transportation Authority, met virtually in public session on Wednesday April 7, 2021 at 12:00 p.m. pursuant to notice.

Chairman Canning called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m.

Roll Call

Members virtually present: Directors Smith, Soto, and Chairman Canning.

Staff virtually present:

Rocky Donahue, Executive Director
Melinda Metzger, General Manager/Chief Operating Officer
Erik Llewellyn, Chief Planning Officer
David Tomzik, Planning Program Manager
Ryan Ruehle, Priority Project Management Office
James Garner, Department Manager, Research and Analysis
Charlotte Obodzinski, Department Manager, Priority Project Management Office
Karen Kase, Board Secretary

Director Canning stated that this meeting is being conducted virtually in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order.

Approval of Minutes

Director Soto moved, and Director Smith seconded a motion to approve the minutes of the Open Session Planning Committee meeting of February 12, 2021. The motion passed with a unanimous vote.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Issues/Discussions/Reports

Erik Llewellyn provided the committee with an update on post COVID service restoration planning.

Beginning in March, staff began reaching out to the school districts to find out what the reopening plans are for the remainder of this school year as well as the 2021-2022 school year. Given the volume of students served, more detailed discussions took place with Waukegan and Maine township school districts. Beginning in April, many school districts are planning on operating an in-person learning option for the remainder of the school year and most offering an in-person option will be doing so on a hybrid schedule. As vaccinations continue to be administered, conditions in the fall may allow for full in-person learning. It is unknown if social distancing will be required when school year begins. If so, more busses and operators will be needed.

The potential permanent increase in remote working in the future may cause a greater demand during off-peak hours and on the weekends. Remote workers may need fewer travel options during peak hours; however, they will still need to make trips outside the home such as for medical appointments and shopping. It may be possible to increase the frequency and hours of service on weekdays, Saturday, and Sunday, and alternative service models with transportation network companies such as Uber and Lyft are being explored. These alternative services provide more consistent service throughout the day in areas where fixed route service may not be as productive, but where a service need exists.

Chairman Canning inquired if the busses and operators from our reduced feeder routes can be utilized for school trips if Metra does not increase its service. Erik stated space at the divisions is limited. An additional 30 buses and operators at those locations is not feasible.

Chairman Canning asked why there may be increased demand for off-peak and weekend service based on people working from home. Erik stated trips that take place during the middle of the day are necessary for at home workers who need to run errands in the middle of the day. It became clear during the pandemic how essential our service is. The ridership that we maintain throughout the pandemic shows we are being used weekdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. We will always be a critical and essential service.

Director Soto commented on a post from a member of the Metra Board stating that they had just brought back additional service on the Metra Milwaukee District North Line to serve the reverse express commute market to Lake Cook and asked if Pace is aware of that. Erik replied that Pace has had discussions with Metra and the primary reason for this additional train in the morning is for the pharmaceutical companies and other businesses in the Lake Forest area. Several companies in the past had private shuttles that connected with that Metra service.

Director Smith commented that she is assuming Metra is in contact with some of the larger high-rises, like the AON Center and Prudential building downtown. There were some early

discussions about encouraging employees to not take public transportation and negotiating special parking near those large facilities. Erik stated there have been a few discussions involving all the service boards and the Chicago Chamber of Commerce about getting information from the employers, particularly, in the loop, and sharing that with the service boards about their plans on bringing remote workers back into the offices.

Rocky stated that we have not learned of any large-scale company in Chicago's central business district or suburbs who are bringing back workers at 100% capacity. If companies are planning for a hybrid schedule between remote and on-site, we still expect demand to be lower and service to operate at reduced levels.

Director Canning asked about plans for express buses. Erik stated we have seen a slight increase in ridership and will add trips on the Bus on Shoulder service to help maintain social distancing targets.

Charlotte Obodzinski gave an update on the Pulse projects. While the Pulse Milwaukee Line project is in close-out, we experienced some issues over the winter where some of the circuit breakers were tripping on the pavement snow melt systems. The circuit breakers were replaced, and the system was running smoothly at the end of February.

On the Pulse Dempster Line, the contract for the shelters and pylons was awarded and that work is moving forward. The civil work is to be awarded by the end of May. We are in the process of securing easements and intergovernmental agreements for the project. We are planning to award the construction package with the anticipation that we will be finalizing these easement agreements on a rolling basis. Approximately half of the 29 stations do not require an easement so those stations will begin first.

On the Pulse Halsted Line, we are currently in the advanced conceptual design phase and we anticipate a need to expand the scope of work mostly related to the feedback we received from Chicago and Illinois Departments of Transportation on some of our project proposals. This is a joint project with CTA. We are obtaining more information about some sections of the corridor where some of our proposals were flawed. It is anticipated this portion of the project will be completed by the end of this year and then move to the A&E design next year. We have applied for federal CMAQ and STP funds for construction through CMAP for both the Halsted and 95th Street Lines.

For the Pulse 95th Street Line, the project definition report was completed in mid-2019, but has largely remained dormant as our main focus has been on the Halsted line. However, we are now continuing where we left off with the 95th Street line and hope to launch the environmental review and advanced conceptual design phase in the fourth quarter of this year.

Chairman Canning asked when the Pulse Halsted Line will be up and running. Charlotte indicated it will probably be 2024-2025. This requires a higher intensity of improvements and is a more expensive Pulse line than other Pulse projects. The Pulse Milwaukee Line was a \$9.5 million construction project, the Dempster line is about \$10.5 million, and the Halstead line is at

the \$40-\$45 million mark. It will be dependent on funding to build it. One avenue is potentially pursuing small start funding with FTA with the assistance of our PMO who has experience with helping to put together that kind of grant application.

One reason why the Pulse Milwaukee Line was completed first is that we were only working with two communities making it relatively easier to implement. The Pulse Halsted Line runs through several communities—several wards in the city of Chicago. We also believe we have the opportunity for more intense improvements along this line.

Ryan Ruehle gave an update on the I-294 Tri-State Market & Facilities Assessment study, which is being funded in partnership with the RTA and is expected to be wrapped up by the end of June. We have been engaging in coordination meetings with the Tollway throughout this process. We will be scheduling a technical committee of agency partners to review our proposals, and then plan a public release to follow in early to mid-June. Ryan stated that the market analyses and modeling work that has completed shows promise for new service paired with new passenger facilities. While the data used was pre-pandemic, many things we have found will hold true post-pandemic.

Ryan gave an update on the Facilities Plan. The solicitation package is being assembled to prepare to go out for bidding. It will likely go to the Board over the summer for approval. Among the tasks that this study will address, a transition to battery electric bus technology is one that is quickly gaining popularity nationally and will likely be a focal point of this effort.

To Chairman Canning's question on the status of the Wheeling facility, Melinda Metzger replied that the builder is submitting the final construction documents this week and we hope to finalize them quickly and then move to bidding.

On Driving Innovation, Ryan stated the Board members were emailed copies of both the Detailed Plan and Executive Summary versions. Our partner agencies are also reviewing the plan. He expects editing and updating to proceed over the next one to two months, then it will be released to the public by posting on the Pace website in June.

Ryan discussed an article published in the New York Times a couple weeks ago titled "The Holy Grail of Transportation Is Right in Front of Us" with the subtext: "Better bus service would improve millions of Americans' lives." It was circulated among Pace's Board of Directors and Director Canning and Rocky thought it would be useful to assess how well Driving Innovation addresses the issues raised in the article.

Ryan stated that while the goal is to put more buses on the road, hire more bus drivers and, in some places, give buses special privileges on the road, he believes the author appeared to downplay technological innovations and grand infrastructure, i.e., there would be a need for garage space and additional staff. Ryan continued that sidewalks, street crossings, curb cuts, shelters, and other pedestrian infrastructure is needed. Ryan stated that these issues are addressed in Driving Innovation. Overall, it was great to see more national media attention on the need for more bus service in our cities.

Melinda Metzger stated she also read that article with great hopes for transit. Riders knowing that every 15 minutes a bus will arrive will increase the reliability to our customers. On the weekends, we have equipment ready as it already used for weekdays. This will also lead to reliability for riders.

Charlotte stated that we work with communities for support. She cited examples of reminding them to shovel the sidewalks and bus stops. Although our government affairs staff work with communities, snow shoveling is a large issue.

Director Soto stated that Lake County has made a policy that any road improvement project that is handled by Lake County DOT, is automatically reviewed for whether it should include a sidewalk and/or bike path improvement.

Next Meeting Date

The next meeting of the Planning Committee will be June 22, 2021 at 12:00 p.m. and has yet to be determined whether the meeting will be live or virtual.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairman Canning asked for a motion and a second to adjourn the meeting.

Director Soto moved, and Director Smith seconded a motion to adjourn the Pace Planning Committee meeting. The motion passed with a unanimous vote. The meeting adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

Karen Kase
Secretary, Board of Directors