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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 Pace Board of Directors
October 15, 2025

The Board of Directors of Pace, the Suburban Bus Division of the Regional Transportation Authority ("Pace"), met in open session on Wednesday, October 15, 2025 at 9:30 a.m. at Pace corporate headquarters, 550 West Algonquin Road, Arlington Heights, Illinois, pursuant to notice.

Chairman Kwasneski led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Kwasneski called the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m.

Roll Call

Directors physically present: Arfa, Canning, Carr, Guerin, Marcucci, McLeod, Smith, Soto, and Chairman Kwasneski.

Director Soto moved, and Director McLeod seconded a motion, to allow Director Noak to attend via Zoom. The motion passed with a unanimous vote. Director Noak joined the meeting via Zoom immediately following the vote.

Directors absent: Hastings, Schielke, and Wells.

SBD #25-73 – Resolution approving the open session meeting minutes of September 17, 2025.

Director Soto moved, and Director McLeod seconded a motion, to approve the Resolution.
The motion passed with a unanimous vote.

Public Comment

None.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Kwasneski reported on attending the RTA Ad Hoc Committee meetings this past month with Executive Director Melinda Metzger and Director Canning. Pace's 2026 budget is balanced with no cuts in service; however, there is discussion about the budget beyond 2026. The Illinois House Executive Committee is discussing when each of the service boards reaches the fiscal cliff. RTA recently transferred funds, which would normally be allocated to Pace and Metra, to CTA to extend CTA operations further into 2026 and thus give the legislature additional time to find a funding solution. Pace's primary concern is how do we get money for suburban service.

Pace supports TAP and RAP, which are very important programs for the community of people with disabilities. Pace was allocated enough funding to operate TAP and RAP through March 2026 and continues to work with RTA to try to find additional money to continue those programs longer until the legislature resolves transit funding. Pace has extended an offer to RTA to loan money from suburban service to pay for the continuation of TAP and RAP beyond March 2026. RTA responded that it will no longer fund TAP and RAP because they are supplemental ADA programs and not federally required, but Pace can choose to fund TAP and RAP going forward and thus loan money from suburban service to itself to fund TAP and RAP. Pace will not agree to loan money from suburban service for ADA paratransit programs without an agreement for Pace to get that money back, as Pace does not want to inform suburban and collar counties voters that we spent the money that would normally be spent on suburban service elsewhere. Chairman Kwasneski commended Melinda, her staff, and Director Canning for advocating well for Pace.

Chairman Kwasneski invited the Board to attend a ground-breaking for the new Calumet City Paratransit Transfer facility. He praised Pace's infusion of development in the south suburbs.

Director Hastings arrived at the meeting in person at 9:38 a.m.

Directors' Reports

Director Arfa reported on attending an event last month celebrating Director McLeod's 40 years of public service. She was honored to serve on the Pace Board with him and to see him be recognized. She learned so much about his leadership and impact on Hoffman Estates. Director Arfa agrees with the Chairman that Pace should support, prioritize, and advocate for the TAP and RAP programs. She does not think that we have reached a solution yet for how we can best meet the needs of the community of people with disabilities. Thirty rides on TAP and RAP per month is not enough. She hopes we can find a solution through conversations with RTA and our partners. We hear constantly about how the programs have helped the community of people with disabilities throughout our entire region. Director Arfa reported on attending the Northwest Transportation Center ADA Transfer Facility ribbon cutting, saying it was a great example of how transit hubs bring so many more people to the community and that she is looking forward to the transfer facility in Calumet City. She hopes Pace riders and staff stay safe in their communities in light of recent events.

Director Schielke arrived at the meeting in person at 9:39 a.m.

Director Canning reported on attending the RTA Ad Hoc Committee meeting and was impressed with Melinda's presentation. During the meeting, he cited ridership figures to emphasize the success and popularity of TAP and RAP to RTA. Through September, Pace had 1.6 million RAP rides in 2025, which is a 444% increase over last year. RTA really needs to understand that these services are important and come up with an idea to fund the programs for the entire year because the ridership will only keep growing. Director Canning urged anyone who has any interest in TAP and RAP to attend Pace's 2026 budget hearings. The Pace Board reads all the public comments consolidated by staff and takes them seriously. Pace will be more than happy to communicate riders' concerns to RTA.

Director Marcucci commented on how RTA views TAP and RAP as additional ADA programs and is only willing to fund traditional federally required ADA paratransit carrier service. RTA does not recognize that TAP and RAP are the way that ADA paratransit service is delivered today. TAP and RAP should not be viewed as temporary add-ons, and they should be entirely integrated into the family of ADA services. Ridership shows how the programs are being well received. TAP and RAP are the ways that people want to access ADA service. At the DuPage County public hearing on TAP and RAP, he heard how those services are needed and critical. You cannot get to work and back on 30 rides per month because you will lose your job using traditional ADA paratransit. RTA expects Pace to cover the continuation of TAP and RAP for the region with suburban money, but if you look at where the ADA rides are being generated, there is a clear imbalance of where the money is taxed and where the money is going. He asked state legislators to recognize that the suburbs are being asked to raise funds that will not be spent in the suburbs. This is a big issue from Pace's perspective and is causing discomfort for the communities that Pace represents, as RTA is designed to address issues all around the region the best RTA can with the funds available. TAP and RAP are a focal issue along with transit board consolidation. TAP and RAP funding running out in March 2026 will be here fast.

Chairman Kwasneski agreed with Director Marcucci, adding that Melinda put together information on TAP and RAP issues for Representative Delgado. The legislature should figure out a funding source for TAP and RAP, and RTA needs to evaluate and revisit ADA service as a whole. RTA should accept that it has paid for TAP for years, prior to Pace taking over the ADA paratransit program from CTA. RTA concurred that RAP was a good program and initially funded it. Now, because of the great success of TAP and RAP and costs being higher, RTA has said it cannot afford to continue funding those programs. We need to work together with the community of people with disabilities and RTA to figure this out. When you see the community of people with disabilities having the accessibility and availability to travel where and when they want to go, you see that they take advantage of it. We need to acknowledge that RAP and TAP may be the new norm and that there are additional costs to the programs because more people want to use them. RTA will have to fund those ADA programs off the top, no differently than traditional ADA paratransit carrier service.

Director Wells arrived at the meeting in person at 9:50 a.m.

Director McLeod agreed with the prior reports and praised the eloquent comments of the Directors who already spoke. The issues with TAP and RAP speak to a larger issue - that whenever the economy is in trouble, the first thing to get cut is services for people with disabilities. He experienced it firsthand in education with his daughter who has a disability. It is a frustrating trend locally and nationally. He encouraged the community of people with disabilities to peacefully make its voice heard so the public understands that TAP and RAP are programs that finally include people with disabilities in the great American dream and we are now cutting their ability to participate. It is unconscionable. RTA needs to realize the importance of services for people with disabilities.

Director Schielke cited the 800 new senior living units in his community and does not think that legislators realize that there is a strong, increasing need for dial-a-ride service across the region as the population ages. He thinks that legislators have a multitude of varying opinions about the transit funding bill and do not always understand the implications of their positions. For example, if you support dismantling RTA, you had better come up with an idea of how to keep the system going. He observed that we have one of the weakest state legislatures in many years.

Director Smith fully supports the comments of her fellow Directors and asked the state and RTA to prioritize all forms of transportation for the community of people with disabilities.

Director Soto shared that while chairing the Lake County hearing for the TAP and RAP program changes, she was caught off guard by how lifechanging RAP service was for riders, despite the RAP program not being widespread throughout Lake County. She was moved when she heard about how much RAP increased employment opportunities for people with disabilities, giving them access to jobs they could not take using traditional ADA paratransit service. She is amazed at how naïve state and county legislators are about the community of adult people with disabilities, not realizing that people with disabilities work and have full-time jobs to support themselves. She appreciated Director Canning's comments about the percentage increase in RAP ridership. If Pace was a private sector company and had those ridership figures before us, we would be doing cartwheels and saying let's get all our energy behind this because this is a successful program. RTA and the state legislators have said we do not have the funding to support the programs. Keep in mind that Pace has produced many successful programs such as Pulse. However, no one is looking at Pulse and saying, "that is a deluxe service, we can cut that." She encouraged educating legislators on the needs of adults with disabilities, RAP ridership figures, and the need for improved services for people with disabilities.

Executive Director's Report

Melinda reported that October marks a pivotal moment for public transportation in the region as the Illinois General Assembly convenes for veto session. Discussions about the fiscal cliff will determine how we sustain critical mobility options in the years ahead. Pace is proud to demonstrate what responsible stewardship and innovation can achieve, even in uncertain times. Our focus remains on providing service for the people and communities who rely on us daily.

Melinda reported that Pace commemorated Breast Cancer Awareness Month and National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Pace remains committed to inclusion within the workforce and the services we provide, removing barriers and expanding opportunities for independent travel. She appreciated all the Directors' comments today in that regard.

Melinda reported on the second RTA Ad Hoc Committee meeting on transit funding on October 3 where Pace was asked to share details about the potential impact on the fiscal cliff. Pace emphasized that our existing suburban service can operate through 2026 without service reductions. Based on the funding marks provided by RTA, traditional ADA paratransit service will be fully funded for the year, but TAP and RAP program funding will only last through the first quarter of 2026. Pace is committed to operating TAP and RAP service and has offered to loan RTA money to continue the services. RTA has not taken Pace up on that offer and has indicated that Pace is responsible for the extra costs of funding the programs and is welcome to loan itself the money. Melinda's concern and her comment during that meeting was that if Pace loans suburban money to itself for ADA paratransit, Pace needs a guarantee that the money will be paid back to suburban services because we have a responsibility to the suburbs. Further, any loan should not be forgotten if the state legislature comes forth with new transit funding. Pace will continue to discuss the issue and is hopeful we can come to a resolution by March 2026. She thanked the Chairman and particularly Director Canning for his valuable comments regarding the ADA program ridership performance and the importance of TAP and RAP to increase mobility for riders in the region.

Melinda reported that Pace's first hybrid electric bus from Gillig has arrived and is currently under inspection at our South Division garage. Once Pace makes sure it meets specifications, Gillig will continue to build more vehicles at the plant. Pace expects 47 buses to be completed before the end of the year. Pace has another order of 33 vehicles in the pipeline for the first half of next year and looks forward to integrating those buses into the fleet.

Melinda reported on the ground-breaking that occurred in Calumet City for the second ADA paratransit transfer facility, modeled after the new one in Schaumburg. The heated indoor facility with restrooms for operators and riders will be a better location for customers to transfer than the current location at Kenny's Barbeque in Lansing.

Melinda provided an update on the Northwest Wheeling facility. In response to funding constraints and to remain in budget, Pace is updating design plans to the facility. Staff proposes demolishing the existing facility and constructing a new building that will house 150 forty-foot buses and have operations, maintenance, and servicing spaces. The building will accommodate a mix of vehicle propulsion technologies to future proof against an evolving transit vehicle market.

Josh Berger, Department Manager of Capital Infrastructure, provided more detail on the decisions behind Pace's overall goal to replace Pace's current Northwest Division in Des Plaines. He explained that in 2022, as part of Pace's commitment to transition to a zero-emission fixed route bus fleet by 2040 and as a result of challenges faced with Pace's bus manufacturer for CNG vehicles, the CNG renovation project at Wheeling was cancelled. This allowed Pace to complete the zero-emission bus plan and facility transition plan, finalized in December 2022 and March of 2024, respectively. In June 2024, in an effort to save both time and money for the project and request the use of additional federal funding, Pace updated the project description to propose demolishing the existing structure and building a new facility and provided that description to the FTA to review. The FTA advised Pace that the project had not changed with enough significance to support federal funding opportunities. The project has again been revised and scaled back significantly to a smaller 229,300 square foot building that allows for potential future expansion on the 23-acre site. While the plan is to operate hybrid vehicles out of this facility as Pace continues a phased transition to zero emissions, provisions will be made for infrastructure that supports future battery-electric buses. The scaled-back plans reduce the estimated cost from $378 million to $104 million. Pace's print shop would be relocated from lease space to the new facility for additional cost savings. Pace continues to work with the Village of Wheeling and funding has been identified. The project will target the selection of a design builder in 2026 and 2027 and start construction as soon as possible. Drawings and specifications for demolition of the existing building have been created by Pace Capital Infrastructure staff. The next steps will include staff bringing to the Board for approval a contract for demolition of the current building, followed by a contract for design and construction of the new facility at a later date.

Director Canning asked for a demolition contract within a couple months to begin work at the start of 2026 because construction costs will continue to rise. The sooner Pace designs, the sooner we can build, and the more we can keep our costs down. Josh said that the demolition bid will go out as soon as possible, and staff is moving fast on the design-build contract development.

Melinda reported 2.2 million systemwide riders in September 2025, which is a 7.4% increase over 2024. That is the second highest monthly ridership this year and the second highest since January 2024. Fixed route ridership was still very strong even if you factor out TAP and RAP.

Melinda reported on recruitment. Pace hosted 160 prospective candidates and extended 35 offers at Hire-on-the-Spot events at Pace headquarters and South Campus. Pace is getting closer to filling all job vacancies – needing 5% more drivers on the fixed route system and 12% more drivers on the paratransit system.

Melinda reported that through August 2025, suburban service is favorable to budget, and ADA paratransit service is unfavorable by $21 million. The ADA paratransit shortfall is being funded by the changes RTA made to shift ICE funding from the three service boards.

Items removed from the Consent Agenda

None.

Approval of Consent Agenda

SBD #25-74 – Ordinance authorizing Change Order No. 1 to Contract No. 233695 with

OptumRx, Inc. for a health plan pharmacy benefits program for Pace employees. The change order extends the Contract for one year and increases the Contract total from $4,735,900.00 to $6,490,100.00, an increase of $1,754,200.00.

SBD #25-75 – Ordinance authorizing Change Order No. 4 to Contract No. 230822 with Holabird & Root, LLC for architectural and engineering services for the River Division expansion and improvements. The change order increases the Contract total from $6,280,712.89 to $6,354,602.23, an increase of $73,889.34.

Director Smith moved, and Director McLeod seconded a motion, to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion passed with the following roll call vote: Directors Arfa, Canning, Carr, Guerin, Hastings, Marcucci, McLeod, Noak, Schielke, Smith, Soto, Wells, and Chairman Kwasneski. All directors voted aye.

Action Items

SBD #25-76 – Ordinance authorizing Pace's Executive Director to execute the Intergovernmental Agreement for an Invest in Cook grant to provide funding for the pilot expansion of the Arlington Heights-Rolling Meadows On Demand service.

Erik Llewellyn, Chief Planning Officer, presented. This pilot will allow Pace to address requests to provide improved access and one-seat rides to Harper College and downtown Palatine. The pilot will be implemented quickly, with a target date of December 1 of this year.

Director McLeod moved, and Director Schielke seconded a motion, to approve the Ordinance. The motion passed with the following roll call vote: Directors Arfa, Canning, Carr, Guerin, Hastings, Marcucci, McLeod, Noak, Schielke, Smith, Soto, Wells, and Chairman Kwasneski. All directors voted aye.

SBD #25-77 – Ordinance amending the 2025 Suburban Capital Budget (2025 Budget Amendment #4).

Maggie Schilling, Chief Financial Officer, presented. This amendment includes the Invest in Cook grant for the BAT lane along Cermak Road, construction projects at River and North Divisions, replacement paratransit vehicles, and a Ventra upgrade.

Director McLeod moved, and Director Schielke seconded a motion, to approve the Ordinance. The motion passed with the following roll call vote: Directors Arfa, Canning, Carr, Guerin, Hastings, Marcucci, McLeod, Noak, Schielke, Smith, Soto, Wells, and Chairman Kwasneski. All directors voted aye.

SBD #25-78 – Ordinance authorizing the release of the proposed 2026 Operating Budget and Two-Year Financial Plan for Suburban Service and Regional ADA Paratransit Service, and the 2026-2030 Five-Year Capital Program for public hearings.

Melinda presented. Director Marcucci wanted to make clear to RTA and the legislature that Pace is doing our part by meeting funding marks, raising fares, and making unpopular TAP and RAP program changes. Constituents are also doing their part by accepting fare increases, understanding the cost of service. At some hearings in Springfield, it was suggested that Pace is not pulling its weight or working as a team player, but that is not the case.

Director Schielke moved, and Director McLeod seconded a motion, to approve the Ordinance. The motion passed with the following roll call vote: Directors Arfa, Canning, Carr, Guerin, Hastings, Marcucci, McLeod, Noak, Schielke, Smith, Soto, Wells, and Chairman Kwasneski. All directors voted aye.

Director Marcucci left the meeting at 10:28 a.m.

SBD #25-79 – Ordinance authorizing the award of a contract to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois, a division of Health Care Service Corporation, a Mutual Legal Reserve Company, for a health plan medical benefits program for Pace employees in an amount not to exceed $182,672,600.00.

Sandra Gonzalez, Senior Benefits Administrator, presented. Director Smith reinforced that the rate increase and stability over the contract term is highly favorable compared to the medical benefit increases seen around the county and market variability. Director Smith commended Pace and Pace's broker for a great offer that maintains the right level of health insurance at a great rate.

Director Smith moved, and Director McLeod seconded a motion, to approve the Ordinance. The motion passed with the following roll call vote: Directors Arfa, Canning, Carr, Guerin, Hastings, Marcucci, McLeod, Noak, Schielke, Smith, Soto, Wells, and Chairman Kwasneski. All directors voted aye.

SBD #25-80 – Ordinance establishing the 2026 Board Meeting Schedule.

Director Schielke moved, and Director Soto seconded a motion, to approve the Ordinance. The motion passed with the following roll call vote: Directors Arfa, Canning, Carr, Guerin, Hastings, Marcucci, McLeod, Noak, Schielke, Smith, Soto, Wells, and Chairman Kwasneski. All directors voted aye.

Director Marcucci returned to the meeting at 10:35 a.m.

Issues/Discussion/Reports

Doug Sullivan, External Relations Department Manager, presented the results of the 2025 ADA Paratransit Customer Survey conducted this summer by Richard Yao, Senior Market Research Analyst, and a contractor. A sampling plan based on a geographic distribution of ADA ridership was used to send 6,813 surveys to a pool of certified riders who have ridden ADA paratransit in the past year. Nearly 80% of paratransit riders are over 55 years old, 57% have an income below $20,000 per year compared to 73% in 2018, and a majority are African American. The survey was conducted by mail to addresses of riders on file with RTA. Accessible formats were important. All recipients received the survey in English and Spanish and a braille insert with a phone number for help.

Some key findings:

- 89% of 2025 ADA paratransit survey respondents are satisfied with ADA paratransit service overall, up 2% since the last study in 2018.
- Despite recent discussion about an influx of new ADA registrations due to the popularity of RAP, more than 95% of survey respondents have been riding more than one year.
- The highest marks were for paratransit driver performance and vehicle condition.
- The marks were for scheduling, on-time performance, and travel time were lower than other aspects of paratransit service but significantly higher than the last survey in 2018.
- 79% of riders perceive that their pick-up times are generally on time, but the actual percentage of on-time pick-ups is 98%. Pace has improved managing customer expectations through education about the 30-minute pick-up window and other ADA regulations, but we still have some work to do on communication.
- In every category, an overwhelming majority believes that things are as good or better than one year ago. Nearly half of paratransit respondents see improvements in service.
- The survey did not ask riders to rate their satisfaction with TAP and RAP as those are subsidy services not provided by Pace or by Pace contractors. Pace asked about usage and awareness of TAP and RAP. 19% of respondents are not aware of TAP, and 30% are not aware of RAP. Two-thirds of respondents have not used alternative options.
- Considerable percentages of survey respondents are using fixed route some of the time, particularly Pace fixed route, but few are using it weekly.
- The door-to-door aspect of paratransit is the predominant reason why customers choose Pace ADA over fixed route services.

In conclusion, the survey is overwhelmingly positive. The data, including the 89% overall satisfaction, flies in the face of what the Board has been hearing from public commenters about the quality of traditional paratransit service. Even scores on timeliness, which rate lower than other elements of service, still rate pretty high, and they are all significantly higher than in the last survey in 2018. It remains to be seen whether the TAP and RAP changes implemented on October 1 will have an impact on timeliness and satisfaction with service overall.

Chairman Kwasneski asked how Pace can capture the positive feedback that Pace has received about TAP and RAP if we cannot survey them. Doug and Melinda said that people are voting with their feet; the ridership increase demonstrates customer satisfaction. Melinda explained that traditional ADA paratransit requires riders to reserve a day in advance, there is a 30-minute pick-up window, and the pick-up time can be negotiated an hour before or after the requested pick-up time, while the TAP and RAP programs do not have those constraints. Pace can gauge if customers are aware of the programs and using them. Any complaints about TAP or RAP are directed to the service providers or to the City of Chicago Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) which regulates taxis in Chicago.

Director Smith said that the number and percentage of riders that responded gives Pace a lot of confidence in the results, which is not always the case with surveys. Pace was effective in providing accessible means for people to respond, and the survey was well-structured.

Chairman Kwasneski said that it is important for Pace to communicate survey results to the legislature, and the timing is helpful. The more current our data is, the more helpful it will be to support the argument that we are providing good service and getting a good response from our riders.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairman Kwasneski asked for a motion and second to adjourn the meeting. Director Marcucci moved, and Director McLeod seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote; all Directors voted aye. The meeting adjourned at 10:46 a.m.

The next regular meeting of the Pace Board of Directors will be held on Wednesday, November 12, 2025 at 9:30 a.m. at Pace corporate headquarters, 550 West Algonquin Road, Arlington Heights, Illinois.

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Elissa Ledvort
Board Secretary, Board of Directors