



**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
January 21, 2026**

The Board of Directors of Pace, the Suburban Bus Division of the Regional Transportation Authority (“Pace”), met in open session on Wednesday, January 21, 2026 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 9:30 a.m.

Roll Call

Directors physically present: Arfa, Canning, Carr, Guerin, McLeod, Noak, Schielke, Wells and Acting Chairman Marcucci.

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

Directors absent: Chairman Kwasneski.

SBD #26-01 – Resolution approving the open session meeting minutes of December 10, 2025.

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

Public Comment

Ian Wright, a resident of Plainfield, believes Illinois public transit needs are not being met and described his own community’s lack of public transit options. He said that while Plainfield’s bus on shoulder routes are great options for some, the routes only serve weekday commuters to Chicago. There are no public transit services in downtown Plainfield that connect to neighboring

Richard A. Kwasneski, *Chairman*

Rachel Arfa Christopher S. Canning Terrance M. Carr David B. Guerin Kyle R. Hastings Thomas D. Marcucci
William D. McLeod John D. Noak Jeffery D. Schielke Erin Smith Linda Soto Terry R. Wells

Board of Directors

Melinda J. Metzger, *Executive Director*

communities, and no bus service on weekends at all. He views the creation of the Northern Illinois Transit Authority Act as an opportunity to expand service. He observed that generally, Americans are losing trust in public institutions to solve real problems and asked the Board to shift their focus from sustaining current services to solving more of the State's transit needs.

Stephen Hiatt-Leonard thanked Pace for advocating for ADA paratransit funding and asked if there are plans to expand RAP. Executive Director Melinda Metzger explained that Pace is working with RTA on increasing the monthly ride cap now and hopes RTA discusses it at a future board meeting.

Chairman's Report

Acting Chairman Marcucci thanked the public for their time and effort sharing their comments and observations with Pace, saying that their words are important for the Board to hear.

Acting Chairman Marcucci reported that he is serving as the Acting Chairman for this board meeting while Chairman Kwasneski deals with a family medical issue.

Directors' Reports

Director Arfa thanked Mr. Wright and Mr. Hiatt-Leonard for attending today's meeting to share their thoughts; public comments are an important part of the work that happens in the region.

Director Canning extended his appreciation to drivers, riders, and garage employees and hopes they stay safe during the next month of cold weather.

Director Carr reported on attending a Pace open house in Burr Ridge regarding the extension of the Burr Ridge park-n-ride facility. Several Pace staff and many participants from the Village of Burr Ridge attended. Pace received a lot of positive comments, most of which were submitted via email. It seems like the project is proceeding well.

Director Noak agreed with Mr. Wright's comments that residents need more and better public transit options in the suburbs and all-over northeastern Illinois. Pace's network restructuring project and long-term vision plan, ReVision, proposes improving service in the areas that Mr. Wright referenced. Up until now, funding has been limited. Funding remains a big part of Pace's ability to make service improvements going forward. The Pace Board is committed to making sure that new funding formulas under the NITA Act do not skew funding towards Chicago to a point that we are unable to further expand throughout the suburbs. Instead, the funding formulas under the NITA Act should have a balanced approach to transit funding throughout the region. The Pace Board is committed to providing service not only where it already exists, but also where it is needed. Director Noak looks forward to continuing to work to improve inter-suburban transit connections.

Director Schielke reported on an influx of new residents in Kane County. From 2022 to 2026, Batavia added 800 new living units. Hampshire, which is uniquely situated between Schaumburg

and Rockford and recently added the I-90 and Route 47 interchange, has driven up the market and approved 2800 new single family living units. New senior citizen residents are seeking dial-a-ride service rather than fixed route. He commended Pace for focusing on the right places at the right time in Kane County regarding the type of service that is needed and in demand given the volume of growth the county has experienced.

Director Smith agreed with Director Noak and Director Schielke regarding population growth across the region and the need for more public transit service. She said that the NITA Act provides Pace and municipalities an opportunity to rethink how we provide service and encouraged everyone to review Pace's ongoing work on the ReVision network restructuring study. Pace's challenge is that an increase in population does not necessarily drive increased public transportation. Pace's Board is actively discussing and committed to understanding how the new NITA Act formula to measure ridership will impact remote collar counties.

Director Soto shared her thanks for the ribbon cutting held in December for the new electric bus charging station at North Division. She commended staff, thanked Director Arfa and Director Canning for attending, and reported excellent turnout, including Congressman Brad Schneider, State Senators Adriane Johnson and Michael Simmons, and State Representatives Rita Mayfield and Joyce Mason. Pace has tremendous federal and state support on the project through grants.

Executive Director's Report

Melinda thanked Pace operations and maintenance teams across the region for their work during the cold, snowy, and challenging weather to ensure that Pace vehicles, facilities, and services remain safe and reliable for riders.

Melinda thanked employees for the overwhelming response to the holiday food drive, which made the holidays bright for families in the service area, reinforcing how connected Pace is to the neighborhoods we serve, and demonstrating the values that employees bring to their work.

Melinda reported on how Pace staff honored Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day by attending a celebration breakfast in Waukegan and participating in a DuSable Black History Museum event. Pace used the events as opportunities to share more about Pace services and job opportunities.

Melinda reported that 2025 was a year of strong ridership growth, major capital progress, and historic policy change. Pace delivered visible improvements for riders while laying groundwork for the next decade of service. None of those improvements happened by accident; they reflect the work of staff, the leadership of the Board, and the sustained partnerships that Pace has with regional leaders.

Melinda reported that October 31, 2025 marked a turning point for transit in northeastern Illinois when the Illinois General Assembly passed the Northern Illinois Transit Authority ("NITA") Act, which was enacted into law December 16, 2025. The NITA Act stabilized transit operations and avoided the devastating impacts of the fiscal cliff. For Pace, this means no fare increases in

2026 and the ability to expand service to meet demand, invest with confidence, and complete the ReVision network restructuring plan.

Melinda reviewed Pace's accomplishments in 2025. Even before the passage of the NITA Act, Pace was hard at work securing funds:

- January 2025, Pace celebrated a \$1 million federal community project grant awarded by Congressman Foster for electric paratransit vehicles in McHenry County.
- February 2025, Pace welcomed Governor Pritzker and the Illinois EPA to the new South Campus in Markham to celebrate a \$27 million grant to purchase electric buses.
- April 2025, Pace broke ground on the phase 1 renovation of North Division in Waukegan, which will be the region's first fully electric bus garage. In December, phase 1 was completed. Melinda thanked Directors Arfa, Canning, and Soto and many state and county officials for attending the grand opening. Melinda stated that Pace follows through on completing projects. Pace should start receiving its order of electric buses from 2021 in Q1 this year, which will operate from the newly completed outdoor station.
- April 2025, Pace celebrated the expansion of the Access Will dial-a-ride program to three new townships, improving mobility for seniors and the community of people with disabilities.
- June 2025, Pace joined CTA and Metra to launch the regional day pass, a collaboration funded by RTA that allows riders to use all services with one pass.
- August 2025, Director Wells and Melinda attended an event to accept Invest in Cook grants awarded to Pace for On Demand service expansions in the northwest suburbs and the business access and transit ("BAT") lane on Cermak Road.
- September 2025, Pace opened its first ADA paratransit transfer facility in Schaumburg with improved indoor and outdoor areas for customers. Melinda thanked Directors Canning, Carr, Soto, McLeod and Arfa for attending the event with the Chairman and legislators.
- November 2025, Pace held a groundbreaking for its second ADA paratransit transfer facility in Calumet City. Melinda thanked Chairman Kwasneski, Director Arfa, and Director Carr for attending with Representative Davis and Mayor Jones.
- December 2025, Pace opened its new bigger acceptance facility at South Campus to inspect vehicles before going into service. Within one month of opening, the facility was filled with vehicles being inspected.
- December 2025, Pace launched a new VanGo in Joliet, expanding access to jobs. Melinda thanked Director Noak, Chairman Kwasneski, Representative Walsh, and Mayor D'Arcy for attending.

Melinda reported on Pace's 2026 goals:

- Move sustainability goals forward by integrating more hybrid vehicles into the fleet.
- Modernize our infrastructure to improve accessibility, weather protection, and rider comfort, including expansion of park-n-ride facilities in Bolingbrook and Burr Ridge to support the strong ridership growth on I-55 bus on shoulder express service.
- Invest in thoughtful growth where demand is strongest to meet the region's changing needs. Pace will finalize the ReVision network restructuring plan based on data-driven

analysis and community input. The next phase of public outreach will begin this spring and the final plan will be presented mid-2026.

- As Pulse remains a cornerstone of Pace's future service strategy, continue planning and coordination on key Pulse corridors. Pace will kick off planning for the Pulse Harlem Line in close partnership with local communities and the new NITA Board. Pulse promotes stronger regional connectivity and transforms mobility in the suburbs.

Melinda reported key milestones in 2026 in the NITA Act.

- June 1 – The NITA Act takes effect, officially replacing the RTA Act.
- June 1 – RTA is planning a vote to raise the regional sales tax by a quarter percent to provide a portion of the additional funding outlined in the legislation.
- September 1 – the RTA Board will expire and the new NITA Board will be established.
- By September – Illinois Department of Transportation (“IDOT”) is required to hire a consultant to assist the transition from RTA to NITA. Pace has already had meetings with IDOT regarding the transition.

Melinda reported on tasks that need to be worked out as part of the transition to NITA:

- Assemble a 15-member working group comprised of members from the authority, the service boards, and at least one statewide labor organization.
- Establish a new process for the five-year capital program by January 1, 2027.
- Create a universal fare instrument that must be established by July 1, 2027.
- Coordinate the transition from a NITA law enforcement task force to a sworn law enforcement crime prevention program. Pace has met with the Cook County Sheriff's Office regarding this transition.
- Evaluate procurement, information technology systems, service planning, grant administration, marketing, lobbying, communications, media and graphic design, and governmental and legislative affairs.
- Establish a new budget schedule, advanced by about a month as compared to the traditional budget calendar. Pace will provide the new budget schedule to the Board as soon as it is determined.

Melinda encouraged the Pace Board Directors to review their new appointing authorities.

Melinda reported on the latest ridership figures. In December, Pace provided 1.73 million systemwide rides. In 2025, Pace provided 23.8 million rides, which represents a 3.5% increase systemwide. Current ridership is at 72.7% of 2019 ridership levels over the same period.

Melinda reported that Pace extended 99 job offers since the last board meeting through eight Hire-on-the-Spot events held at Pace Headquarters and South Campus in Markham.

Melinda reported on the latest budget figures. Suburban service is favorable to budget and ADA paratransit is unfavorable to budget. This variance will be eliminated once Pace receives additional funding from RTA, which is expected to be approved by their Board.

Melinda provided context on today's agenda items and noted that each procurement contract going forward will have a termination for convenience clause to provide flexibility as Pace and the service boards continue to work through the NITA transition process.

Director Noak thanked Melinda and the Pace team for their continued work on the transition to under the NITA Act and adapting to the changes that will be required. He wants the Board to be aware that there is a possibility of a trailer bill that may change a few things within the legislation.

Director Canning complimented Pace's ridership recovery post-Covid and requested more information on how Pace ridership changes over time fit in with ReVision.

Director Arfa thanked Melinda for the year of hard work. The review of 2025 events held across the region illustrates the important point that Chairman Kwasneski made in his recent Letter to the Editor of the Chicago Tribune, that people underestimate the impact of Pace and how much service really makes a difference for riders, especially riders with disabilities.

Director Wells commended Pace for quickly making good use of the new acceptance facility at South Campus and asked if Pace has vacated the former South Holland garage. Melinda reported that some staff are still working at the South Holland garage but will relocate to South Campus soon.

Acting Chairman Marcucci reported that DuPage County is interested in the VanGo program. Melinda discussed the current locations at Itasca, Lake Cook, Lake Forest, Palatine, Rosemont, and Joliet. The seventh VanGo will debut next week at University Park. Future VanGo locations are planned for Geneva and Naperville. VanGo is flexible; Pace can place them wherever needed to fill critical first and last mile gaps in areas where traditional fixed route service is not practical.

Items removed from the Consent Agenda

None.

Approval of Consent Agenda

SBD #26-02 – Resolution honoring Pace's 2025 Retirees with over 20 years of service.

SBD #26-03 – Ordinance authorizing the filing and execution of 2026 grant applications and agreements with Pace's funding agencies.

SBD #26-04 – Ordinance authorizing the award of a contract to Door Systems ASSA ABLOY US, Inc. for the replacement of 14 overhead doors at multiple Pace divisions in an amount not to exceed \$678,610.00.

SBD #26-05 – Ordinance authorizing the award of a contract to Carnow, Conibear & Assoc., Ltd. for environmental consulting services in an amount not to exceed \$600,000.00.

SBD #26-06 – Ordinance authorizing the award of a contract to Power & Cronin Ltd. for legal services for workers' compensation matters in an amount not to exceed \$1,625,000.00.

SBD #26-07 – Ordinance authorizing the award of a contract to AMS Industries, Inc. for building automation system and variable frequency drive inspections, calibrations, testing, and repairs at multiple Pace facilities in an amount not to exceed \$898,182.00.

Acting Chairman Marcucci expressed his appreciation for the 2025 Retirees being honored in a resolution. Melinda also expressed her admiration for the longevity of employees' careers.

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

Action Items

SBD #26-08 – Ordinance authorizing the award of a contract to Clarity Partners, LLC for website maintenance, support, and development services in an amount not to exceed \$843,779.64.

Doug Sullivan, External Relations Department Manager, presented. Discussion ensued:

- Director Arfa asked that the contractor help ensure Pace's compliance with the new Web Content Accessibility Guidelines ("WCAG") 2.2 effective in April. Pace's current website meets that standard and will continue to meet it.
- Director Canning asked about website development and adding new functionality that is not currently available on Pace's website. He suggested finding a way to ensure that the Transit app and the Pace website bus tracker provide the same ETAs. He encouraged Directors and staff to pay attention to websites with features they like and brainstorm ways to incorporate those features on the Pace website that would benefit riders. Melinda welcomed Board input on what website features could be improved.
- Acting Chairman Marcucci asked about the age of the current website, suggesting that the graphics and forward-facing look become outdated over time and should be updated periodically. Doug Sullivan and Melinda explained that the current website is five years old, but redoing it was not an easy process. Also, Pace does not know what changes to expect regarding the transition to NITA and if the Pace website would be affected.
- Director Noak agreed that NITA may issue a directive to integrate website platforms with the other service boards; it may be premature to do a complete overhaul of Pace's current website right now. He also wondered if most people are looking at the Pace website on a mobile device, not a web browser. As technology rapidly advances, maybe the website needs to be integrated with other displays, like watches or glasses. He suggested that Pace prioritize website compatibility and the transition to NITA over any other objective. Doug Sullivan confirmed that 75% of Pace website hits are from mobile devices.
- Director Wells asked if the contractor designed websites for any other service board.

Doug confirmed that this contractor also designed Metra's website.

Director Noak 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, McLeod, Noak, Schielke, Smith, Soto, Wells, and Acting Chairman Marcucci. All directors voted aye.

SBD #26-09 – Ordinance authorizing Change Order No. 1 to Contract No. 236351 with Parsons Transportation Group, Inc. for design and deployment of transit signal priority (TSP) systems. The change order increases the Contract total from \$3,119,667.56 to \$4,536,241.38, an increase of \$1,416,573.82.

Lindsey Umek, Chief Operating Officer, presented.

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, McLeod, Noak, Schielke, Smith, Soto, Wells, and Acting Chairman Marcucci. All directors voted aye.

Issues/Discussion/Reports

Transit Signal Priority Program Expansion

Taqhi Mohammed, Pace ITS and Transportation Engineering Supervisor, provided an update on Transit Signal Priority (TSP) expansion. Pace has seen bus travel times drop by 15% and delays fall by 20 minutes for intersections where TSP is deployed. He reviewed the TSP system architecture and software, which was custom designed by Pace, operates within Intelligent Bus System (IBS) software, and allows Pace to collect and analyze data from buses and intersections.

Taqhi Mohammed reported that Pace has deployed TSP at 220 signals along Milwaukee Ave., Cicero Ave., Sibley Blvd., Roosevelt Rd., 95th St., Grand Ave., and Cermak Rd. Around 80 intersections are under construction, to be completed by the end of 2026. Halsted St. and 95th St. are under design. Planning and scoping for TSP on Washington St., Western Ave., and North Ave. are underway. Pace is partnering with IDOT to test innovative centralized TSP along Golf Rd. that does not require equipment to be installed on the street. The test demonstrated that some gaps between location data could potentially be filled by an agentic AI module.

Taqhi Mohammed reported on the work behind TSP deployment, including system design and signal timing optimization, IDOT permitting, field inspections, equipment installation, system integration, testing, and safety reviews. The TSP program requires constant coordination with stakeholders such as IDOT, Chicago Department of Transportation, counties, municipalities, jurisdictional entities, and their traffic engineers. Pace has good relationships with stakeholders and has had success coordinating with them. Pace's TSP program received a federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program grant, an RTA Innovation, Coordination, and Enhancement grant, and community support in the form of 14 congressional earmarks. In total,

Pace has received \$35 million for TSP deployment. Taqhi Mohammed thanked Doug Sullivan for advocating for the TSP program to elected officials, and Melinda for her leadership in supporting the program. Pace hopes to continue TSP progress and expand into the entire fixed route system.

I-290/I-88 Express Bus Study – Final Plan

Erik Llewellyn, Chief Planning Officer, and consultant Greg Osborne from Epstein International presented the results of the I-290/I-88 Express Bus Feasibility Study. Pace proactively partnered with IDOT on this study given that I-290 and I-88 are key corridors in the region. The consultants analyzed demographic and travel data, identified potential routes and station locations, and conducted public outreach activities. The study limits consisted of a 5-mile radius around I-290 and I-88. Online surveys generated over 400 responses and the consultant hosted two public open houses, six focus group meetings, and three steering committee meetings with representatives from RTA, CTA, Metra, IDOT, Illinois Tollway, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Northwest Municipal Conference, the Metropolitan Mayor's Caucus, county level departments of transportation, and local municipalities. As a result of these efforts, the consultant is recommending two routes. First, bus service on I-88 from York Town Center to Oak Brook and Forest Park implemented within three years, which will require \$1.4 million in capital funding and \$4.5 million in annual operating cost beginning in 2029. Second, bus service on I-290 from the Northwest Transportation Center to Forest Park implemented within eight years, which will require \$112 million in capital funding, and \$6.5 million in annual operating cost beginning in 2033.

Eleven stations are recommended, four of which already exist and have the capacity to support the proposed services. Stations may be designed as adjacent stops where buses would exit the expressway, inline stations within the median, or on the side of the expressway allowing buses to remain on the expressway (similar to I-90 and Barrington Road). Inline stations will have an accessible covered ramp leading to the platform. The average travel time between stations is five to nine minutes. Stations will be placed in locations on the public right-of-way, requiring intergovernmental agreements rather than purchasing private rights-of-way. The final report outlines ways that Pace can work with local agencies to fill network gaps for pedestrians and bicyclists, which will require the collaboration and support of local communities.

Director Canning asked about the return on the investment of \$112 million in service on these corridors and the ridership that Pace is projecting. Erik Llewellyn explained that the average ridership per day would be roughly 1,000 riders.

Acting Chairman Marcucci requested more information at a future date about how the stations will be accessed, saying he is a resident of this area, and it is not an easy place to walk around. Erik Llewellyn acknowledged that improvements to pedestrian connections need to take place to link the proposed inline station to the Metra station and surrounding area for this to work.

Rideshare Access Program (RAP) Update

Lindsey Umek, Chief Operating Officer, reported on how changes to the Taxi Access Program (“TAP”) and Rideshare Access Program (“RAP”) mandated by the RTA ADA Action plan have impacted ridership across all ADA paratransit services. She reported that 60,000 riders are currently certified by RTA to use ADA paratransit. Though all are eligible to use TAP or RAP, only 12,000 of the 60,000 riders are enrolled in those programs. Prior to the RTA ADA Action Plan implemented October 1, 2025, about 26% of TAP and RAP riders (3,000 people) were taking at least 30 trips per month.

Lindsey reported on what has been observed with two months of data following the implementation of the 30-ride monthly cap but cautioned that it is a limited amount of data and it is too early to detect trends. There was a 37% decrease in TAP and RAP trips, from 291,000 in September to 183,000 in October. This trend continued in November with 168,000 TAP and RAP trips, a 42% decrease from September. However traditional ADA paratransit ridership fluctuated with 228,000 trips in September, up 11% to 254,000 trips in October, and down to 220,000 trips in November, which was 3% lower than September.

Preliminary data indicates that in October, for every four trips lost on TAP and RAP, Pace saw an additional trip on traditional ADA paratransit. A traditional ADA paratransit trip is three and half times more expensive than a TAP or RAP trip, so the savings quickly level out. In September, the average cost per trip averaging all ADA paratransit services was \$47.76 per trip. In October, the cost per trip went up to \$52.49. If TAP and RAP riders are going back to using traditional ADA paratransit, even if they are using traditional ADA less than they were using TAP and RAP, it is still driving the average cost per trip up across the system.

For October and November, Pace did not observe an increase in traditional ADA paratransit usage towards the end of the month due to riders hitting the monthly cap on TAP and RAP. Riders are all adjusting differently and Pace is not observing clear trends at this time. Some riders may be rationing TAP and RAP trips and using traditional ADA paratransit more. Others may not be riding at all. It will take time to observe how riders will use the services.

The RTA ADA Action Plan required that Pace, Metra, and CTA offer ADA paratransit certified riders free rides on mainline service. In November and December, Pace saw 5,000 rides per month on the fixed route system for ADA certified riders. CTA reported a 40% increase and Metra reported a 50% increase in ADA certified ridership between October and December.

Lindsey reported that there are some provisions within the NITA Act to review various aspects of the regional ADA program; TAP and RAP will certainly continue to be a topic of discussion. Acting Chairman Marcucci agreed that TAP and RAP ride limits are not yet resolved.

Director Arfa appreciated Pace monitoring the impact of the RTA ADA Action Plan. She observed that the past few months have been exceptionally cold, even for Chicago, which effects how riders are navigating ADA program changes. Many of us are not leaving our houses when we might have otherwise. It is interesting that so many ADA certified riders are taking advantage of free rides on Pace, CTA, and Metra. Pace should continue to track what trends emerge. If

mainline service is becoming a more popular option for ADA riders, then the service boards should spend more time understanding what supports people might need to have better access; there may be barriers, even perceived barriers, that people may experience. The ridership report demonstrates that NITA needs to dedicate more funding to the ADA paratransit program as the service boards continue to investigate what service options are the most cost-effective. Lastly, NITA should consider allowing TAP and RAP riders to roll over any unused rides per month so riders can access rides per calendar year, not per month.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Acting Chairman Marcucci asked for a motion and second to adjourn the meeting. Director Schielke moved, and Director Noak seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote; all Directors voted aye. The meeting adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

The next regular meeting of the Pace Board of Directors will be held on Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 9:30 a.m. at Pace corporate headquarters, 550 West Algonquin Road, Arlington Heights, Illinois.

Elissa Ledvort
Board Secretary, Board of Directors