



## **Citizens Advisory Committee Minutes**

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

Location: via: Zoom

### **Attendance:**

**New Jersey:** Reggie Haynes, Alan Becker, Daniel Norfleet, Marty King, Pamela Mack-Brooks, Mike Devlin, Straso Jovanovski, Steve Benigno, Joe Russell, Ben Saracco

**Pennsylvania:** Bob Melikian, Larry Davis, Tyrone Wesley, Dan McArdle

**Emeritus Member(s):** John Boyle, Jeff Kessler, Judy Boldurian

### **Potential Member(s):**

**DRPA/PATCO:** John Hanson, CEO; Jim White, CFO; John Rink, GM; Mike Venuto, CE; Barbara Wagner, Executive Assistant

### **Public Member(s):**

### **Call to Order**

A motion was made to approve the March 10, 2021 minutes. The minutes were approved.

### **CEO, John Hanson – DRPA/PATCO**

CEO Hanson addressed an inquiry regarding the PATCO Philadelphia Station Concourse and plan to address the homeless conditions as more commuters return to Philadelphia. He reported that GM Rink has been working with the city of Philadelphia. The encampments are primarily on the city-owned concourses at 12-13<sup>th</sup> Streets and 15-16<sup>th</sup> Streets. CEO Hanson offered his opinion to the committee as he did to Fox News, receiving negative pushback, none of which changed his mind. He opined that the problems with the unsheltered are very complex. The people that are being dealt with are generally affected by sudden extreme poverty, mental health issues, or substance abuse issues. CEO Hanson stated that he believes none of the issues are choices that are made, but things that have happened to them. They are people who have rights and who are entitled to be treated with dignity. So, what is being done is being respectful to their rights and that recognizes their dignity as human beings. The concourses are the safest place

they can go with no one bothering them during the pandemic while ridership is down. For the City, they were out of sight and the problem with them being in the concourses was less than them being anywhere else. Now that commuters are coming back, it's starting to become a concern. The concourses are under the jurisdiction and control of the city of Philadelphia, not PATCO or the DRPA. However, we are collaborative partners with the city of Philadelphia in helping them go forward with their plan. The plan involves cleaning up the concourses, providing services to the unsheltered, and moving them out of the concourse.

GM Rink added that he and Acting Chief Cobbs have been working with the city. The city group that has been leading this effort is the Homeless Service Group. Three times a day they send service workers down to the concourses to meet with the individuals to get them placement in a shelter or get them into a hospital if they have a drug issue. Their main goal is to connect with them and get them the services they need. They have been successful in getting a good portion of the homeless the services they need. Unfortunately, there is a group that has not taken the city up on getting services. Considering their constitutional rights, and what the city had to deal with at the Ben Franklin Parkway, they did develop a plan to close the encampments in the coming weeks.

CEO Hanson also added that there was one reported incident involving harassment between a member of the encampment and commuters. He understands that it is unpleasant, intimidating, and frightening, but the reality is it is mostly between encampment members and not commuters.

GM Rink further reported that the city is routinely sending people down to clean the areas and have custodians down there throughout the day. They also go down to power wash the areas, collect trash, and continue providing services to get them help. They have a plan, they are following the plan, and within the next few weeks the encampments will be closed.

CEO Hanson added that although it is not a part of our jurisdiction or responsibility, we are supporting it and recognize that this is a very complicated issue to deal with. We are hopeful that we will bring it to a resolution in the next few weeks.

GM Rink added that the city of Philadelphia deals with the same issue in multiple areas throughout the city, not just at the concourses at 12/13<sup>th</sup> and 15/16<sup>th</sup> and Locust Streets.

Larry Davis asked CEO Hanson if a specific individual called him after tweeting about a harassment issue that occurred at 15/16<sup>th</sup> and Locust. CEO responded to the individual by putting his direct phone number on Twitter. CEO Hanson said the individual never called. CEO Hanson reported that when he saw the complaints on Twitter, he immediately called the Chief who informed him that there were no complaints reported.

Alan Becker commented that he was in Philadelphia on Sunday, April 11 at the 12/13<sup>th</sup> Street Station and it was very clean. There were some tents and some people, but there were no problems as far as he could see with people being antagonized or coming at you. The people were just hanging out. He added that he also travels to New York where it is a little different.

CEO Hanson stated that he appreciated Mr. Becker's comment, but reported that some people are afraid and intimidated and feel they shouldn't have to deal with this during their commute. Between the city of Philadelphia and the DRPA, we are doing everything we can to move them. Unfortunately, by moving them out of the concourse the problem does not go away. They will be encountered elsewhere in the city because they still have no place to go, but we cannot lose sight that they are people with rights that should be treated with dignity even if they don't belong there. Somehow, they arrive there, and it is public property that complicates things greatly.

Tyrone Wesley added that he was a SEPTA supervisor at Walnut and Locust Streets for six years and recalls when he had problems with the homeless who were very aggressive with the passengers. He feels that when the passenger flow starts picking up the DRPA will have to move them out of there. He stated that he realizes they are drug addicts and homeless, but very they are aggressive. He supervised employees that worked down in the concourse who got sick from E. coli because there was no place to dump the waste. They should have been moved out and put in shelters. I would have to get the SEPTA police involved for people who were moving along the corridor from SEPTA to PATCO.

CEO Hanson added he understood Mr. Wesley's comments, but wants to underscore that there is nothing at this time to suggest that in any of the data or reports that there is aggressive behavior particularly between the people in the encampment and passengers.

Judy Boldurian added that because of COVID-19, the shelters are closed so they move to a place where they feel safe. They used to hang out in the ER but have been unable to do so because of restrictions due to COVID. She stated that she noticed going to work in the morning there are many more homeless people on the streets when she gets off the train but must commend the police force because she's seeing a much bigger presence in the morning on the trains.

GM Rink added that the city's biggest problem was Code Blue where all the beds were filling up, so they did not have enough space for everybody. Now that it is warmer, some of the people have moved out.

CEO Hanson stated that just because we have not seen the aggression yet, doesn't mean it's not going to happen, so he will take all commentary to heart and appreciates the fact that the comments have heightened his sensitivity to the fact that we might face issues with aggression by the homeless.

GM Rink reported that the city is working on a plan for here, the city-owned concourses and SEPTA's concourses. There will be strict language that no one can set up tents or structures in any of the concourse areas throughout the entire city. It will be a police enforcement issue to have them taken down and removed that day. Once the encampments are closed, they will not be able to pop-up again in the same areas.

CEO Hanson addressed a question regarding economic funds loaned to developers Mosaic and Dranoff. He reported there are no outstanding loans at this time.

CEO Hanson addressed a question regarding the proposed supermarket site on Admiral Wilson Boulevard. He reported that there is no proposed supermarket site on Admiral Wilson Boulevard and hasn't been for a long time. At one time, years ago, there was a proposal to construct a supermarket on the property; however, there is an option to the Camden City Redevelopment Authority who is actively involved with a business they are trying to put there. CEO Hanson reported that he does not believe it is a supermarket as the economics simply do not work for supermarkets. It is economically not viable at that location.

CEO Hanson addressed the issue regarding furloughed employees on the payroll unable to work remotely. He reported that the DRPA does not have any furloughed employees. We have employees who work remotely, employees who have to come to work to do their jobs, and employees who do both.

CEO Hanson addressed the issue regarding electric motorized bikes on the bridge walkway. He reported that he is not sure where we are on that issue. CEO Hanson attempted to reach the Chief for a real-time update but was unavailable and will get back to the CAC members.

**Q. Is the DRPA tracking employees who have been vaccinated?**

*Steve Benigno*

A. CEO Hanson reported that the DRPA is not tracking employees who have been vaccinated. He reported that he believes we do not have the right to ask for that information. However, we recently had an executive meeting and finalized our new travel policy. If employees travel outside of the tristate area (PA, NJ, DE), they are required to quarantine for two weeks before returning to work and use their own leave time or not get paid. We are now instituting a volunteer program where employees can travel domestically without having to quarantine, in accordance with the new CDC Guidelines, if they voluntarily provide proof that they were fully vaccinated. Employees do not have to provide that proof, but if they travel and they do not provide proof of vaccination, they will have to quarantine for 14 days using their own time. We expect to get information in that way, but our legal advisors told us that we do not have the right to demand that information.

**Q. Is anyone monitoring the questions during the Board Meetings on YouTube?**

**There have been problems logging into the Board Meetings. Is Mike Williams working on that? Is the DRPA going to archive its meetings?**

*Alan Becker*

A. CEO Hanson reported that the DRPA has no plans to archive its meetings. The meetings are recorded in the minutes, so if someone wanted to review the record, they could review the minutes. Private Sessions are Executive Sessions. CEO Hanson said he would have Mike Williams look at the YouTube side comments, but they are not official channels of communication channels for the DRPA.

Dan McArdle added that anytime he attended a Board Meeting or Committee Meeting there has always been a forum for public comment, and GC Santarelli would submit those comments to the Board. Mr. McArdle reported that you have to send your question or comment to a

monitored e-mail box, or a phone number is provided if you want to call. It's on the website under Board of Commissioners/Board Meetings/Public Comment.

### **CFO, Jim White- Finance**

CFO White reported that we continue to see a nice upward trend in bridge traffic particularly towards the end of March and April. Every one percent change, upward or downward, results in a \$250,000 change in revenue. Looking at unaudited information, it appears that we might be \$5 million ahead of budget because we had a very conservative budget. We thought at the beginning of the year traffic would be at 72.5% (vs. 2019 volumes) for the first three months; however, we exceeded that in January and March. At this time, we are looking at a \$50 million drop vs. where we would normally be.

GM John Rink reported that currently, PATCO ridership is at 26% of normal ridership. During the last three weeks, we had a couple of days with approximately 10 thousand riders. Pre-COVID, we were at 38-39 thousand riders. Other than 6 days in October, we haven't seen that level of ridership since March of last year. Each week, we are starting to see a slight uptick in ridership. GM Rink also reported that ridership seems to drop a little according to weather conditions.

CFO White stated that it is hard to get a trend as one day we are at 84% of 2019 and another day at 79%, but the trend seems to be leveling out for traffic above 80%. PATCO is also seeing something similar, but it looks like the trend it as its highest levels since the beginning of the year.

CFO White reported that thus far we are under budget because we are constraining expenses on the personnel side and non-personnel side. We are holding the reigns on hiring until we have a better sense on where we stand financially. With people getting vaccinated, we will be in pretty good shape in meeting our responsibilities as it related to bond compliance. We still have a fair amount of money in our general fund and project funds in the amount of \$372 million through March 31, 2021. Our capital expenditures are up for the first three months compared to last year because of the major existing projects that have been underway in 2020 and 2021.

CFO White reported that in a couple of months or so, he expects to be doing a bond refunding which will give us more savings going forward to help our budgets over the next couple of years. The bonds would be issued at a much lower interest rate.

### **Q. How to bonds eventually get paid off or do you just keep borrowing money like the Government?**

***Bob Melikian***

A. CFO White stated that he and CEO Hanson strategically looked to pay down the debt since 2013. In 2013, we issued \$470 million in bonds increasing our outstanding bonds to \$1.6 billion. Our current bond debit is now \$1.2 billion. We have paid off \$500 million in the past 7 years. According to an amortization schedule, every year we contribute \$130 million into various debt service accounts. In the beginning of the year, interest and principal payments are made to bond

holders and basically pay off our bonds in accordance with the amortization schedule similar to a mortgage. It is governed by our bond indentures where every month payments are made to our Bond Trustee, roughly \$11 million, which is held in various accounts.

CEO Hanson added that the DRPA has never borrowed money like the US Government. The DRPA borrows money the same way a consumer borrows money through a home equity account. The only way the DRPA can borrow money is if we have an asset to pledge against it. The asset that we pledge for the bonds is a revenue stream. The bonds that we issue are revenue bonds and the way they are issued is when we need additional capital, we increase tolls. That produces a revenue stream which is done through a traffic study to see what it will be. If we increase passenger tolls by \$1.00 and all other fare classes by proportionate percentages, we will generate a revenue stream by approximately \$50 million which could be bonded at approximately 10 times over. If you raise tolls by \$1.00, you get \$50 million in a revenue stream which can be bonded at \$500 million net. So, every time the DRPA is bonded, it is through a revenue stream. CEO Hanson reported that when he was the CFO and Jim White was the Director of Finance, they recognized that the debt service was a huge part of the operating budget at 55%. It is now down a little below 45%. By cutting expenses, focusing on our core mission, being more careful, and reducing expenses, we were able to generate an operating surplus that enable us to put away \$60-80 million toward the capital program. As a result, we paid off a lot of debt. In 2027 we will pay off an enormous amount of debt that will reduce our annual debt service to approximately \$52 million which almost equals the revenues that would be generated by a \$1 toll increase.

CEO Hanson added that he had hoped, pre-pandemic, with our financial performance that we would get to that point without a toll increase. The pandemic has taken us to just above break even in our 2021 budget and we are using up the reserves for capital spending and now forecasting that we may need to increase tolls in 2023.

### **GM, John Rink - PATCO**

GM Rink addressed the issue on the GTFS update. He reported that he talked to Mike Williams and all the changes have been made and updated. The vendor has been very responsive lately with getting the GTFS updated prior to having the schedules go into effect. A few weeks ago, Mike Williams and I met with SEPTA. We met with those who oversee SEPTA's GTFS, and they described how they do it. We looked to see if there was any potential into tying into their system and work together, but unfortunately it would not be practicable because they use a program called Trapeze that when they import their schedules the software creates their GTFS data. We looked at Trapeze before, but it will not work for us because of the way the system is set-up with local and express trains originating from Woodcrest Station. We did get a great insight on how SEPTA operates, and it was nice that they took the time to meet with Mike and I.

After the last meeting, we are exploring with our vendor who is doing the real time train arrival on the signs to see if they can get data from the signal system. We want them to continue with their designs on real time information, so they can submit them for our review.

GM Rink addressed the issue on Everbridge/Nixle push notification update. He reported that he talked to Mike Williams and he stated that the plan we have is SMS only. He said there will be an additional expense if we utilized their mobile app for notifications. He didn't have a dollar amount but said it was very pricey. He said the app utilizes geo-fencing and does a certain mile radius around an event and would not work well for travel alert notification needs. He made an example that if we sent a notification that a bridge was closed, the app to users within a five-mile radius will only receive it, so if anyone is travelling towards the bridge, they would not receive the push notification because they are outside the established radius. In addition, it would require a smart phone, downloading the app and having a data plan.

GM Rink addressed the issue on parking enforcement at the Collingswood Station. He reported that the new signs that were recently installed are at all the other stations with parking lots and for some reason, they were not installed at the Collingswood Station.

### **CE Venuto - Engineering:**

CE Venuto reported that each project has traffic approved plans prior to construction in accordance with the manual and traffic control devices which is a standard that we follow for lane closures. Depending upon the work we do, we will either have permanent lane closures or daily lane closures. Daily lane closures generally go out after the morning rush after 9:00 a.m. and come in before the evening rush at 2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. CE Venuto reported that currently we have projects going on all four bridges, so in many cases we do have permanent lane closures where we can have a full-time work zone and still keep the traffic moving on adjacent lanes.

Presently, we have a long-term closure on the Walt Whitman Bridge. There is a temporary closure on the Commodore Barry Bridge because of the extensive work being done under the bridge, but still doing in-house work. We leave the closure overnight at times because it is a five-lane bridge and find that we can operate with two lanes in each direction. On the Ben Franklin Bridge, there have been intermittent daily lane closures for the suspension span project. At the Betsy Ross Bridge, we have paving going on Route 90, so we have some lane restrictions in place at times.

### **Q. Is there a place where that information is readily available?**

***Bob Melikian***

A. Any time we have lane closures, Mike Williams puts out an aggressive communications plan through corporate communications on Twitter and Facebook and the news organizations. DRPA.org also has a page dedicated to weekly travel advisories for the bridge. We recognize that the more information we put out helps divert traffic when we have major lane closures.

### **Q. Are there Federal funds available to the DRPA for infrastructure?**

***Bob Melikian***

A. CEO Hanson reported that he hopes so, but generally the DRPA falls through the cracks because we are a bi-state authority. The exception to that is for transit as we did receive money for that. CEO Hanson also stated that he would love to get \$100 million from the Federal

Government for an infrastructure project on the Ben Franklin Bridge, but legislation is not helping bi-state tolling authorities. We are keeping a close eye on it and hope that we get infrastructure money for the PATCO line.

CE Venuto added that he is working very closely with the Grants Department and every time there becomes an opportunity to apply for a grant we do apply. Every grant comes with certain criteria and we look to see how our project fits within that criteria. If we meet those qualifications, an application is submitted. We are taking every opportunity to apply for whatever grant money applies to our projects.

CE Venuto provided an elevator construction update at PATCO's City Hall Station. He reported that we had some underground obstructions when we started our initial excavation. An underground duct bank caused us to have to pause our work, slide our stair tower and elevator over, and support that duct bank underneath. We came up with a new design and came to terms with the contractor on a price, and that work continues. The duct bank is supported, the excavation for the new stair tower is complete, so work at the street level is underway. We will form up the walls for the stair tower so we will be able to start demolition for the concourse wall into the new stair tower. At the same time, we are working with the contractor for submittals for the steel structure for the initial elevator at street level down to the concourse and down to the platform level.

**Q. Is there any environmental work to be done at the Franklin Square Station?**

*Steve Beningo*

A. CE Venuto reported that he suspects there will be some environmental work once we get in there. GM Rink reported that the PCBs from the old transformers were removed, and there might be some residual stuff on the floors, mostly lead paint.

**Q. Does the design require any waterproofing?**

*Steve Beningo*

A. GM Rink reported that the new structure of the walls to the headhouse will require waterproofing. There have been crack repairs and leaks in the ceilings. CE Venuto reported that there is not an extensive water problem at Franklin Square like we may have in other stations.

**Larry Davis, Social Media Questions**

**Q. What do you plan on doing with the West Headhouse at Walter Rand with access only on one side? It gets super congested during rush hours.**

A. GM Rink reported there are currently no plans to reopen it. The police had to have officers there throughout the day dealing with issues that were transpiring outside of the building. The building has been temporarily closed so the Chief can deploy his officers elsewhere. He reported that he hasn't seen or heard of any complaints of people crowding on the other side of the station

but right now we are going to keep it closed. If we see an uptick in ridership that demands a reopening, we will reopen it.

**Q. Would PATCO consider opening a stop, without parking, at Kaighn Avenue in Camden?**

A. CEO Hanson reported that right now, we are not planning on opening any new station stops. There was a recent request for a new stop at the Ben Franklin anchorage with the new buildings going up in Camden. With the opening of Franklin Square, we will see what happens there. There are no new plans to open any other stations.

**Q. How are the plans going at Franklin Square?  
Larry Davis**

A. CE Venuto reported that the plans are close to being completed for the design. We are finalizing the work we had to do. When we received the grant money, it came with some stipulations, so we are in the process of getting all that work completed. We are working with the city of Philadelphia, Historic Philadelphia, the local neighborhoods, and Franklin Square to make sure we button-up all the activities that go on there, have our plans and specs, and work with the Water Department to relocate the water line that will be taking out of Franklin Square and put in Race Street. We should be able to bid on the project at the end of the summer. We have advertisements out for construction monitoring services. We will be receiving those in a few weeks and looking to proceed with the project in that way.

**Old Business:**

CEO Hanson reported that he went to the Lindenwold Station on Saturday morning, March 27 by invitation from the South Jersey Food Bank for a presentation of an Appreciation Plaque to the White House Rotary for their many years of volunteer service to the food bank. The food bank hosts a food distribution event at the station on the third Saturday of each month. We have had no other requests for Notices on Public Events.

GM Rink reported that PATCO partnered with SEPTA for Thursday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> for a Mask-Up Awareness Event promoting face coverings on mass transit. The event will be held at the Broadway and Lindenwold Stations, and staff will hand out sanitizer, face masks, and no touch key chain tools to customers.

**New Business:**

Bob Melikian reported that he has had no interest in new membership to the committee.

Reggie Haynes will update active CAC Membership/Emeritus list.

**Next CAC Meeting:** Will be held via Zoom on May 12, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

**Next DRPA Board Meeting:** Will be held virtually on May 19, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.