The Regular Meeting of the Board of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority was held on Thursday, December 17, 2020 at 3:08 p.m. via teleconference, with the Chairman in the Chair.

Present

Attending the meeting and present in the Board Room was the following Board Member:

Pasquale T. Deon, Sr., Chairman

Attending the meeting via teleconference were the following Board Members:

Kenneth Lawrence, Vice Chairman
Thomas E. Babcock
Joseph E. Brion, Esquire
Michael A. Carroll, P.E.
John F. Cordisco, Esquire
Mark H. Dambly
Robert D. Fox, Esquire
Honorable Stewart J. Greenleaf
Kevin L. Johnson, P.E.
Honorable John I. Kane
Obra S. Kernodle, IV
William J. Leonard, Esquire
Deborah Mahler

Present in the Board Room were the following Staff Members:

Leslie S. Richards - General Manager
Richard Burnfield - Deputy General Manager/Treasurer
Robert L. Lund, P.E. - Deputy General Manager
Gino Benedetti, Esquire - General Counsel
Carol R. Looby - Secretary
Stephanie Deiger - AGM, Employee Development/Relations
Jody Holton - AGM, Planning
Francis E. Kelly - AGM, Government & Public Affairs
Scott A. Sauer - AGM, Operations
William Webster - AGM, Communications

Chairman Deon called the Regular Meeting of the Board to order. He said the Special Meeting, which was noticed, was canceled. He then conducted a roll call of the Board.

The Pledge of Allegiance was observed. Chairman Deon stated that the Board had met in Executive Session prior to the Board Meeting to discuss legal matters.
Chairman Deon commented that SEPTA employees were working tirelessly to make sure residents have access to essential jobs and services, and while these efforts get more challenging by the day, he said he has been inspired by SEPTA’s frontline workers and their commitment to serving the riders who need transit the most. He announced that because we know how difficult this year has been for our customers, the Board would be delaying the proposed fare increase and would be voting today to delay it until at least July.

Chairman Deon said that SEPTA was doing everything possible to make sure that the transit system was ready to support our region’s eventual recovery, but we would be facing unprecedented long-range financial challenges heading into 2021. He said that we need to be extremely careful with our finances, including the federal CARES Act funds. However, without more emergency assistance, he noted that we would have to make some extremely difficult decisions in the coming months.

Chairman Deon said that we greatly appreciate everyone’s participation in these virtual meetings, and requested that people would continue to stay engaged, and to let everyone know how critical SEPTA is to this city, region and Commonwealth.

Chairman Deon closed by wishing a happy retirement to Blue Cross CEO Dan Hilferty. Dan has been a great leader in this region over his career and has always been civic-minded, and focused on giving back to the community. He and Blue Cross have also been great partners to this Authority. Chairman Deon mentioned that under Mr. Hilferty’s leadership, Blue Cross generously contributed to the Hub of Hope, which was instrumental in efforts to help our vulnerable population. Blue Cross has also sponsored free ride programs on several occasions, most notably, on the day of the Eagles Super Bowl Championship parade. He said Mr. Hilferty had also been a trusted voice for our region throughout this pandemic, offering calm reassurances when we all needed it and that it has been his honor to work with him. He said he hopes Mr. Hilferty enjoys a well-earned retirement.

Chairman Deon then wished everyone Happy Holidays and said “let’s all continue working together and look forward to better things in 2021.”

Approval of the Minutes

Chairman Deon stated that the Minutes of the November 19th Regular Board Meeting had been circulated. He entertained a Motion to Approve the Minutes. Mr. Brion moved, Mr. Carroll seconded and the Minutes of the October Regular Board Meeting were unanimously approved.

Financial Report

Richard Burnfield reported that for the month operating revenue was $34.4 million under budget, with transit ridership remaining at 30 percent of pre-Covid levels and regional rail ridership at less than 15 percent of pre-Covid ridership levels.
Mr. Burnfield stated that operating expenses were under budget for the month by $9.5 million due to labor and fuel costs running under budget. With allocation of Federal CARES funding, there was a balanced budget for the month and that year-to-date there was a budget surplus of $300,000.

Chairman Deon then entertained a Motion to Adopt the Financial Report. Mr. Brion moved, Mr. Johnson seconded and it was unanimously adopted that the Financial Report be received and filed. The November Financial Report is attached to these Minutes as Exhibit "A."

Chairman Deon mentioned that there was a speaker on the Board agenda. He then called upon Benjamin She.

**Speaker**

Benjamin She

Mr. She said he was from 5th Square. He commended SEPTA for selecting Nelson/Nygaard as SEPTA’s contractor for the Comprehensive Bus Network Redesign. He then noted the following items which he said were pertinent in its long effort in order to rebuild SEPTA’s bus ridership and its network: (1) SEPTA and Nelson/Nygaard must look at the comments of the Choices Report produced by Jarrett Walker’s firm in 2018 saying the report was very pertinent, and still was timely today, illustrating the issues regarding the bus network; (2) SEPTA must partner with the City of Philadelphia and their own pending transit plan to provide a true structural bus lane network that could combine with automatic enforcements and provide a report so that SEPTA’s network could operate much more efficiently and spread more service hours to more underserved neighborhoods; and (3) SEPTA must keep in mind regional rail and aim to provide a long-term plan to better connect regional rail with the bus network and provide timed transfers which would greatly increase mobility.

Mr. She concluded by congratulating SEPTA for redesigning the country’s fourth biggest bus network and stated that 5th Square hopes for increased cooperation in the future.

Chairman Deon called several times for the next speaker, Daniel Trubman, but there were no responses. It appeared that Mr. Trubman was having technical difficulties. The Chairman then called for Kevin Dy, who was not present on the WebEx.

**Consent Calendar**

Chairman Deon then presented the Consent Calendar, which consisted of the following:

"Deferral of the Fare Increases Associated with the Adoption of the Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget;"

"Purchase from Chubb Insurance of Directors and Officers Liability Insurance;"
“Authorization for the Administration of SEPTA’s Employee Medical Benefit Programs with Independence Blue Cross;”

“Award of Contract Pursuant to a Request for Proposal;”

“Authorization to Award Contracts for Various Procurements;”

“Award of Contract for a Sole Source Procurement;” and

“Authorization to Execute Change Orders and Amendments.”

Chairman Deon noted that Item II.A. “Purchase from Chubb Insurance of Directors and Officers Liability Insurance” was revised and that a copy of the Revised Resolution was provided to the Board. He also noted that the remaining items on the Consent Calendar have been reviewed by the appropriate Board Committees in public session.

Chairman Deon entertained a Motion to Adopt the Resolutions. Mr. Brion moved, Mr. Johnson seconded and the Resolutions were unanimously adopted.

Report of General Manager

Ms. Richards commented that as it was true to form for 2020 we could not go out with a whimper. She thanked every SEPTA employee who had battled the recent weather to keep service running, as well as thanking the customers for their patience and understanding. She said that between Covid and the weather, employees were doing the very best they could in trying circumstances which has definitely been the theme for this year.

Ms. Richards stated that as cases have risen across the country and region, we experienced significant number of call outs due to Covid, which has been challenging, but said we continue to provide regular service in attempt to minimize missed runs. She added that mask compliance for both customers and employees remains critical, and she was thrilled to see high compliance. She said that we continued to test with the Black Doctors Consortium, and that more employees were taking advantage of that opportunity. Ms. Richards said that she continues to advocate that our employees be among the first to get the vaccine in order to keep them and our customers safe.

Ms. Richards stated that the previous day there was an announcement of a partnership with Drexel University regarding the Authority’s cleaning efforts and best practices. She explained that with partnering with Drexel, we are able to insure that all surfaces are clean as possible, as well as the Authority’s air quality. She said that we were seeing that as we learn more and more about the virus that air quality was extremely important.

Ms. Richards commented that the Authority’s challenges do not end with Covid and the weather. She said that we continue to advocate for funding and said that even if we receive another round of funding which SEPTA desperately needs. She announced that the Authority continues to lose a
million dollars a day and that we would keep an eye on the pace of our recovery and our needs and would report back to our customers and the public. Ms. Richards said that we need to think about how we would survive in the long term and we would be sharing our ideas with everyone.

Ms. Richards stated that in the meantime, we were doing all we can to support our customers by delaying the fare increase. She said there were other efforts that focus on equity as we move forward on SEPTA’s free transfer; kids riding for free; a three-day convenience pass; and the bus network redesign, which would best accommodate our riders’ needs.

Ms. Richards said that as much as we are all ready to turn the page on 2020, she was so appreciative of what SEPTA has been able to accomplish over this past year in truly the worst of times, with our employees driving Philly forward, providing essential service to connect people to work, school, to healthcare, and to other life-sustaining services.

Ms. Richards closed by wishing all of our employees and our customers a wonderful holiday with their families and a chance to rest, regroup and recharge.

Chairman Deon thanked Ms. Richards and called for the first speaker, Jack Calhoun.

Speakers

Jack Calhoun

Mr. Calhoun stated that he was from Philadelphia Transit Riders Union. He spoke about the recent service change that decreased trips by 29 percent on the Route 112 from 69th Street to Delaware Community College. He said he was a student at the college, which he noted was barely open, but said that the Route 112 provides service to the college and that it also provides essential service along the West Chester Pike corridor from Upper Darby to Havertown to Broomall. Mr. Calhoun noted specifically that it was an important resource for seniors and students of other schools along that corridor. He then asked what was being done to offset the service cuts on the Route 112 as it provides essential service to three major towns and has a high number of transit riders.

In response to Chairman Deon, Mr. Burnfield stated that the service planning staff constantly reviews all routes, including service changes and reductions. He said that the service planning staff would review some the specific ridership on the Route 112.

Chairman Deon then called upon John Flaherty but there was no response. He called for the next speaker, Kelvin Carrington and there was also no response. He then asked for Rhonda Lancaster.

Rhonda Lancaster

Ms. Lancaster stated that she lives in Germantown and has spoken at a previous Board Meeting about the Chestnut Hill West Line. She then
provided an update and stated that there was a rumor on this Line that the trains were running again. She mentioned that people have seen commuter trains going up and back on that Line from Queen Lane between 5:30 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. She indicated that riders were on the platforms and trains were flying by without stopping. Ms. Lancaster stated that there were calls to SEPTA’s Customer Service but no one there knew what was happening. She suggested that SEPTA could put something in the press with an update concerning the Chestnut Hill West Line. Ms. Lancaster then discussed her own personal experience and the cost of using Lyft every time she goes into Center City.

Ms. Lancaster said that there was a lot of confusion and said she was attempting to get a synopsis of what was occurring. She then mentioned that there was a locomotive that was operating on the tracks and then sitting for two hours and blowing smoke and that no one knows what was going on.

In response to Chairman Deon, Mr. Sauer explained that Amtrak was still completing its work around the interlocking that leads out onto the Chestnut Hill West branch and that there were a number of work trains and diesel locomotives that were running along that Line. Ms. Lancaster then asked if there was a timeline of when this work was going to stop and the Line would reopen again. Mr. Sauer responded that the Amtrak work was slated to be completed sometime in January and then the Line would be reassessed for whether or not it would reopen immediately. Ms. Lancaster then asked what the protocol would be for the reopening, with Ms. Sauer replying that there were a number of factors, including ridership as well as the demand for service on the Chestnut Hill West Line. Ms. Lancaster stated that Ms. Richards had stated at the last meeting that there may be an opening in January. She then asked if we were still on target for that date.

Chairman Deon thanked Ms. Lancaster and said that it was exorbitantly expensive to operate service while ridership was down. He said that all the Lines were being reviewed on a regular basis. He then called upon the next registered speaker, Benjamin Aitoumeziane.

Benjamin Aitoumeziane

Mr. Aitoumeziane introduced himself stating that he was with the Youth Advisory Council and a coalition member of Transit Forward Philadelphia (TFP). He shared TFP’s goals for the Bus Network Redesign. He said that for the redesign to support Philadelphia, SEPTA needs to really start over and redesign routes for today’s needs, and make the bus network understandable and easy to use. Mr. Aitoumeziane stated that many of the SEPTA buses follow the same path once traveled by streetcars and trolleys, which he said was built over a hundred years ago in an era of legalized racial discrimination and red-lining. He said that part of the network that was impacted by convenience, which may inadvertently reinforce the City’s discriminatory social geography. He said that by starting over, the bus network could meet today’s needs and not yesterday’s decisions.

Mr. Aitoumeziane said that the redesign must make the bus network easy
to understand and better connected to SEPTA’s trolleys, trains, and subways. He then asked how many from the Board could draw SEPTA’s frequent bus network from memory, which he said that he certainly would not be able to do. He said it could be twisty, turny, and it often does not conform to Philadelphia’s directional grid. Mr. Aitoumeziane said the redesign must change this and make the bus network easier to understand for riders and therefore more efficient, shifting more riders onto SEPTA’s high-capacity system of trolleys, trains and subways.

Mr. Aitoumeziane closed by stating that it was essential for young people like himself and his peers to have a bus system ready to meet the possibilities that his generation hopes to experience right in the Greater Philadelphia area. He said that the Youth Advisory Counsel and Transit Forward Philadelphia look forward to working with SEPTA and achieving these goals.

Cameron Adamez

Cameron Adamez stated that he was a transit committee member of 5th Square and a coalition member of Transit Forward Philadelphia. He said 5th Square believes that a redesign that supports Philadelphia hinges on SEPTA’s ability to increase opportunities for all Philadelphians and enhance bus service reliability. Cameron stated that the redesign must increase the number of opportunities available for communities of color, and low-income Philadelphians within the frequent service network. He said SEPTA would be able to measure this quantitatively by building a network where more riders experience frequent service and by making the difficult trade-off of serving more rides rather than greater coverage. Mr. Adamez also said that SEPTA could maximize the effectiveness of the current Operating Budget, and ensure that transit becomes a feasible option for more Philadelphians.

Mr. Adamez said the redesign must make buses more reliable, reducing delays and increasing timeliness. He then spoke about the average speed of buses in Philadelphia in comparison to peer agencies in other large cities. He mentioned that according to the annual Customer Satisfaction Survey, riders stated that service, reliability and frequency were among the greatest barriers to SEPTA’s convenience. Using data to guide decisions, Mr. Adamez said there was potential to modify routes to increase their average speed and improve on-time performance. He said that as a grocery store manager, he has witnessed first-hand the important of a bus network that connects people to opportunities and that timely and reliable transit was critical to ensure that workers arrive on time and that without transit, communities were not nourished during the pandemic.

In closing, Mr. Adamez thanked the Board for their time and consideration, adding that 5th Square and TFP look forward to working with everyone in achieving a network that supports opportunity and reliability.

Danielle Bossert

Ms. Bossert said she represents Nationality Service Center (NSC) and is a coalition member of Transit Forward Philadelphia. She explained that
NSC serves immigrants and refugees who make up nearly 15 percent of Philadelphia’s population. She said they come to Philadelphia fleeing persecution for a better life. She said they help grow our economy, and contribute to our diverse cultural fabric and that most of these immigrants rely on public transportation for their first two to three years of residency. She added that they often work as essential workers on the frontline of service, hospitality and transportation. Ms. Bossert said that nearly 67 percent of NSC’s current clients were employed in essential positions, utilizing SEPTA every day.

Ms. Bossert said she was present at the meeting to speak about the final goal of Transit Forward Philly for the bus redesign to support a Greater Philadelphia. She said that they hope that the redesign would be completed in a timely manner. She commented that our communities could not wait while the bus network loses rides. Ms. Bossert said that the Board’s decision today was to approve Nelson/Nygaard as the consultant was an important first step to commence the program. She said the hiring process had taken nine months and that it was a full thirty months since Jarrett Walker & Associates had released its initial analysis of the bus network. She reported that before Covid, SEPTA’s ridership had hit its lowest number in over 20 years and that the CBNR was critical for SEPTA’s financial and mission recovery. Ms. Bossert said that over the next few months, they hope to be working with the consultant quickly and thoroughly to onboard and commence their three-year timeline as quickly as possible.

She closed by stating that they look forward to working with the Board and staff in the future.

Emma Horst-Martz

Ms. Horst-Martz introduced herself as an advocate with the Pennsylvania Public Interest Research Group, which was a coalition member of Transit Forward Philadelphia. She explained that they were also a statewide nonprofit advocacy organization working on behalf of the public interest. She said they have a long history of working to expand public transportation options for Pennsylvanians, and they was why they were standing with coalition members, Transit Forward Philly, to call upon SEPTA to modernize its bus network through the redesign process.

Ms. Horst-Martz said they believe that the redesign should be proven research, and must be publicly engaged. She mentioned that cities like Boston, Houston, Baltimore, and New York have completed and were in the process of a successful bus network redesign. She added that these cities used proven research and up-to-date passenger data to design the bus network around quick connections, rather than lengthy one-seat rides. Ms. Horst-Martz explained that this would allow riders, businesses and communities to best benefit from a well-connected network, as well as help SEPTA regain bus ridership and the trust of passengers. She said the redesign must also engage the public and involve riders regularly throughout the entire planning process of the redesign since transit would only serve everyone if it was created by everyone. The public outreach process should be used to inform the public about pre-determined changes and the redesign team must ask for public input before approaching rides.
with a new proposed plan.

Ms. Horst-Martz concluded by stating that Transit Forward Philadelphia coalition encourages SEPTA’s leadership to use the redesign process to transform how staff conducts public outreach, and they hope that SEPTA would learn from the experiences of riders and community organizations, like the two dozen groups represented by TFP coalition.

Will Herzog

Will Herzog introduced himself as the Chair of the SEPTA Youth Advisory Council, and congratulated the Chairman, the General Manager’s Team and each of the frontline workers for their courageous efforts since early March. He spoke about leadership and sacrifice and noted the voluntary pay cut. He said that despite the ongoing fiscal challenges, we suspended any fare increases and unlocked additional benefits at a time when the riders were among those who were hardest hit by the pandemic. Mr. Herzog said that through the toughest moments, SEPTA operators and the team never stopped ensuring that the essential functions of our region continued forward. He mentioned how operators had experienced illness, and several had passed away.

Mr. Herzog closed by stating that the sacrifices and leadership across the Board were not unnoticed, and he wanted to make sure that the Board knew that the Youth Advisory Council appreciates each of you and their actions.

Yasha Zarinkelk

Mr. Zarinkelk introduced himself as the coalition organizer of Transit Forward Philadelphia. He stated that as the Board has already heard from a few of TFP’s two-dozen coalition members, they want to celebrate the Board’s decision to approve the consultant for the Comprehensive Bus Network Redesign project. He said they were pleased to announce a few goals for our Better Access Better Service, Better Bus campaign, which ask SEPTA to transform their current bus service to be faster, more frequent, and more reliable through the redesign.

Mr. Zarinkelk said that upon the redesign’s launch, TFP would be organizing to ensure that the redesign supports Philadelphia and SEPTA’s recovery provides access to opportunities for all riders, and transforms the bus network into one of the preferred modes of transportation in the Greater Philadelphia region. He said TFP’s members of their coalition have shared with the Board today what each letter in support stands for, and he wanted to reiterate to the group that SEPTA needs to start over and redesign a bus network for today’s needs. Bus routes needs to be easy to understand and better connected to SEPTA’s trolleys, trains and subways. He said the redesign must use proven research to design the bus network around quick connections, rather than lengthy, one-seat rides. Mr. Zarinkelk said that most importantly, the redesign needs to engage the public and involve riders and residents regularly during the entire planning process of the redesign, asking for public input before approaching riders and residents with a proposed plan. He said it needs to
increase the number of opportunities and the number of Philadelphians to have access to frequent, reliable bus service by prioritizing the redesign around low-income and Philadelphians of color, as well as the elderly, and persons with disabilities. He said that it needs to improve service with reliable buses that show up more often and on time and to implement and complete the redesign in a timely manner.

Mr. Zarinkelk closed by stating that they look forward to working with operations and long-range planning teams and the Board with this project and they also appreciate the hiring of the consultant.

Chairman Deon thanked Mr. Zarinkelk and told him that the Board has a parallel interest with them. He then requested that Mr. Sauer respond to the speakers who had service questions. (Noted in the transcript was a call received from SEPTA pensioner, Louis Testa.)

In closing, Chairman Deon wished everyone a happy and healthy holiday.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Board at this Regular Meeting, Chairman Deon then entertained a Motion that the meeting be adjourned. Mr. Babcock moved, seconded by Mr. Johnson and unanimously adopted that the meeting be adjourned at 3:39 PM.

A transcript of this meeting was made by an official court reporter and is made a part of the original minutes.

Carol R. Looby
Secretary