

**PIERCE TRANSIT
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
RETREAT MEETING MINUTES**

March 18, 2021

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Woodards called the Board retreat meeting to order at 1:06 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners present:

Marty Campbell, Vice Chair of the Board, Pierce County Councilmember
Kent Keel, City of University Councilmember (*representing University Place and Fircrest*)
Ryan Mello, Pierce County Councilmember
John Palmer, Deputy Mayor for City of Puyallup (*representing Puyallup and Edgewood*)
Kim Roscoe, Mayor of Fife (*representing Fife/Milton/ Pacific/Auburn/Gig Harbor/
Ruston/Steilacoom*)
Kristina Walker, City of Tacoma Councilmember
Jason Whalen, Deputy Mayor of Lakewood
Victoria Woodards, Chair of the Board, Mayor of the City of Tacoma

Commissioners excused:

Chris Beale, City of Tacoma Councilmember

Staff present:

Sue Dreier, Chief Executive Officer
Brittany Carbullido, Assistant to the CEO/Deputy Clerk of the Board
Ryan Wheaton, Executive Director of Planning and Community Development
Tina Lee, Planning Manager
Aaron Millstein, General Counsel from K&L Gates

OPENING REMARKS

Chair Woodards welcomed Board Members, staff, and citizens to the virtual meeting.

CEO Sue Dreier provided the following opening remarks:

- She noted that it was Transit Driver Appreciated Day and offered her thanks to Pierce Transit Operators for their outstanding service the past year.
- She informed commissioners that Pierce Transit will be holding a vaccination event for front line employees on base Sunday, March 21.
- She provided an overview of the agency's funding as context for the meeting's discussions and asked commissioners to envision how the agency could achieve a system that provided greater service to the community.
- CEO Dreier gave a brief history of funding related discussions that have happened in the past, including a community preference survey that was conducted in 2019 regarding feelings towards transit expansion.

Commissioners briefly discussed the potential for another survey and the limitations of current funding mechanisms, including sales tax. The discussion also touched on the desire of certain areas within Pierce County to rejoin the public transportation benefit area (PTBA);

Review and Discussion about Future Service Needs and Consideration to Proceed with a Ballot Measure to Collect Additional Sales Tax for Additional Services

Executive Director of Planning and Community Development Ryan Wheaton gave a presentation that focused on several areas, including projections for increased population and congestion in the Puget Sound Area; current funding levels and the decrease in transit service since 2009; the benefits of increased transit service to the community such as increasing equity and minimizing congestion; community input on the agency's long range plan; how a sales tax increase would equate to more service and new transit programs in areas of the PTBA; and a comparison of Pierce County sales tax levels to higher taxes in other public transportation benefit areas in Washington State.

During the equity and potential service expansion portions of the presentation, commissioners were shown a map of potential new routes. These were proposed based on several factors, including projected ridership, an equity rank, cost, and whether it filled a gap in service. Commissioners voiced a desire for additional data on how the agency was determining low income or minority areas, as well as the definition used for equity. Executive Director Wheaton noted that staff would provide additional data at future board meetings and would continue to flesh out the equity definition for further discussion.

When showed maps of potential expanded service areas within the PTBA, a discussion took place on how the agency could use similar maps to display service possibilities to areas who may be wanting to re-join or join the PTBA. It was asked whether it would be best to try to pass a sales tax increase before focusing on those areas who may want to join. It was noted by Executive Director Wheaton that it would likely be wisest to pursue a sales tax increase before looking into expanding the PTBA.

Executive Director Wheaton reviewed a phased approach for incrementally increasing the sales tax collection rate. He noted that any ballot measure would be phrased in such a way that it would allow for a .1% tax increase each year over the course of three years. This would give Pierce Transit time to hire additional staff and order buses as the sales tax increases to .9%.

After the presentation, commissioners expressed concern about the climate towards additional taxes and called for a targeted strategy towards areas of the PTBA that may be less inclined to vote for a sales tax increase. For example, Commissioner Palmer suggested that providing a connection between existing service lines and the new light rail system in Federal Way may be appealing to voters in Puyallup.

There was general consensus that the agency should begin the process of surveying the public and gauging their preference on service. It was also suggested that Pierce Transit aim to get a measure on the primary ballot this summer. Commissioner Campbell noted that the public is very aware of the important role transit has played during the COVID crisis. He explained that even if the percentage of community members who approve of increased service has slightly decreased since 2019, the agency would still be in good shape based on previous survey results.

Chair Woodards recessed the meeting for a 10-minute break at 3:15 p.m. The meeting was called back into session at 3:28 p.m.

CEO Dreier provided a recap of the presentation and noted that staff has set a meeting with the company who handled the 2019 community preference survey for Monday, March 22.

Due to time concerns, CEO Dreier noted that we would need to skip over the board exercise that was on today's agenda.

Prior to proceeding to the BRT/Stream update, commissioners reiterated the need to strategize further about a ballot measure proposal and a plan was proposed to provide the survey results to the commissioners by May 1 so a vote could be held at the May board meeting. It was also suggested that the April board meeting be used as a strategy session. Commissioner Keel indicated his support for exploring a sales tax increase but urged the board not to rush.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Update – Stream

CEO Dreier provided introductory remarks regarding the BRT update. She presented the new Stream logo and noted that Pierce Transit is in the process of drafting a sponsorship agreement with a company in Pierce County that will bring in \$10 million over a 20 year contract period. She noted that staff is also looking into sponsorships for stations.

Tina Lee, Planning Manager, presented additional updates, including an overview of the benefits of BRT such as frequent service and larger buses for greater accessibility; a route overview with planned stations and different lane types that will be used; funding sources; and a project timeline.

Commissioners expressed some concern regarding the different lane types that were proposed along the route and the possibility for drivers to be confused by the variability. Planning Manager Lee indicated that commissioners would receive some additional information as the agency proceeds that will make the different lanes easier to understand. She noted that the stations would be in the middle of Pacific Avenue, which would mean that buses would not be crossing from left to right in order to pick up passengers and would not negatively affect other drivers.

Concerns were also raised about whether the stations were spaced appropriately, with several commissioners commenting that they appeared to be too close together. Planning Manager Lee noted that the current spacing is half a mile apart, which is standard on BRT routes. The current spacing also allows stations to line up with other routes and makes it easier for customers to transfer onto a different bus.

It was noted that the planned BRT route will greatly assist in providing transportation to the downtown area. A discussion took place on how the agency can leverage that benefit to gain greater support and funding. Commissioner Mello also pointed out that the City of Tacoma and county have additional work to do to ensure the stations are accessible to customers along the route.

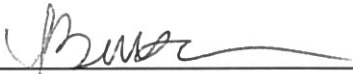
Recap of Meeting and Outcomes

CEO Dreier and Chair Woodards thanked the commissioners for their time and staff for their well-prepared presentations. CEO Dreier noted that the funding question will need to be solved, but that the future of Pierce Transit looks bright.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioners Campbell and Keel **moved** and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 4:22 p.m.

Motion **carried**, 8-0.



Brittany Carbullido
Assistant to the CEO/Deputy Clerk of the Board



Victoria Woodards, Chair
Board of Commissioners