



**Sunset Empire Transportation District
Board of Commissioners
August 26, 2021
Zoom Approved Board Meeting Minutes**

1. CALL TO ORDER - Chair Debbie Boothe-Schmidt called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.
2. OATH OF OFFICE- Guillermo Romero took the Oath of Office for Board Commissioner Position #6 which he was appointed to at the July Board Meeting.
3. ROLL CALL:
Present: Chair Debbie Boothe-Schmidt, Vice Chair Tracy MacDonald, Secretary/Treasurer Diana Nino, Commissioner Pamela Alegria, Commissioner Charles Withers, Commissioner Rebecca Read and Commissioner Guillermo Romero.

Staff: Executive Director Jeff Hazen, Chief Operating Officer Paul Lewicki, Deputy Operations Officer Jennifer Geisler, Financial Officer Kelly Smith, Executive Assistant Mary Parker, Transportation Options Specialist Kathy Kleczek, Human Resources Manager Sue Farmer, Mobility Manager Jason Jones

Executive Director Hazen informed the Board that driver Jeff Curry had passed away unexpectedly and asked for a moment of silence in his honor.
4. CHANGES TO AGENDA- Executive Director Hazen requested the addition of a discussion on mandatory Covid vaccinations be added under New Business 10.b.
Commissioner MacDonald moved to approve the agenda as amended
Commissioner Read seconded the motion
5. PUBLIC COMMENT (3 minutes)- Aaron Puchalski commented that he knows quite a few people that ride the Route #15 bus. In the proposed schedule that he had looked at on the website when the route won't be running, the missing times, are when his friends go to work. He also knows people who use the bus for shopping and going to doctor appointments and said his concern is that it would make it more difficult for them. Aaron said he recognizes SETD is down several drivers which makes it difficult on your side but said his concern is how could we work around this and make it a little easier on those riders.
6. APPROVAL OF THE JUNE AND JULY 2021 BOARD MEETING MINUTES-
June 2021 Meeting Minutes
Commissioner Withers moved to approve the June 2021 Minutes
Commissioner MacDonald seconded the motion
Discussion- None
Roll Call Vote:

Name	Boothe-Schmidt	MacDonald	Nino	Alegria	Withers	Read	Romero	
Aye	x	x	x	x	x	x	abstained	6
Nay								0

6-Aye
0-Nay
1-Abstained
Motion passed.

July 2021 Meeting Minutes-

Executive Director Hazen reported a correction on the votes taken on 10. a. It should say 6 Ayes and 1 Abstention.

Commissioner Withers moved to approve the July 2021 Minutes as corrected

Commissioner Alegria seconded the motion

Discussion- None

Roll Call Vote:

Name	Boothe-Schmidt	MacDonald	Nino	Alegria	Withers	Read	Romero	
Aye	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	7
Nay								0

7-Aye

0-Nay

Motion passed.

7. FINANCIAL REPORTS- July 2021 Financial Report- Financial Officer Kelly Smith asked if there were any questions. Commissioner Alegria asked why there were two separate line items, 420 and 422, for Paratransit fares on page 18. Financial Officer Smith said these should be one entry and would combine them. No other changes were made to the Financial Report.

Commissioner MacDonald moved to accept the July 2021 financial reports.

Commissioner Nino seconded the motion.

Discussion- None

Roll Call Vote:

Name	Boothe-Schmidt	MacDonald	Nino	Alegria	Withers	Read	Romero	
Aye	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	7
Nay								0

7-Aye

0-Nay

Motion passed.

8. REPORTS FROM CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

- a. Chair Boothe-Schmidt- Reported that she did 3 shifts at Sunset Lake to train riders on Token Transit. There were not many riders from 1 to 3 pm so she tried 9 am and most of those riders were using a pass or knew about Token Transit. She also reported that she is still doing volunteer work at the Covid call center where they are receiving more calls for testing than for vaccinations.
- b. Commissioner MacDonald- Reported that his training sessions were cut short because of a problem with his foot but had an opportunity to speak with a rider near the doctor's office about Token Transit. The rider was very appreciative of the route schedules. He also rode the Columbia Connector last week and said that all except one of the riders that got on in Portland were coming to Astoria. He encouraged all the board members to take a ride on the Connector.
- c. Commissioner Alegria-Reported that she had worked with Stephanie at the front desk and learned about what she does, and she does a fantastic job. She signed up one person with Token Transit, but most knew about it before they came to the Transit Center. Commissioner Alegria also took the Columbia Connector to Astoria and said the bus driver was polite and offered water to the riders. She agreed with Commissioner MacDonald about encouraging the board to ride the Connector.
- d. Commissioner Read- Reported that she is continuing to work with the Clatsop County Court pre-trial program with defendants having issues with getting to their appearances, although at this time the appearances are remote, so it is not as critical, but it is an issue for those that do not have their own transportation and do not live on the bus route and are obligated to appear in Clatsop County. She has been working with public defender Kurt Wintermute and Melissa Davis from the court program. She also said she had talked with Kathy Kleczek with Transportation Options, about people coming together and sharing rides. Commissioner Read also reported that she had spent some time at the McDonalds stop in

Seaside and it was interesting to see the rider usage in that area, but not many riders were interested in Token Transit.

- e. Commissioner Withers- Reported that he had worked 2 days in Cannon Beach at the Tolovana and Midtown stops for a couple of hours. Like all new things people are leery. He said people will be more interested in time. Commissioner Withers said he wanted to compliment Eric in Seaside for doing a great job and expressed condolences to Mary Parker for her loss.
- f. Commissioner Nino- Welcomed Commissioner Romero to the board. Expressed her condolences to Mary Parker and her family and Jeff Curry and his family. She also asked the process for becoming a signer on the bank accounts as soon as possible. Commissioner Nino reported that she had been out discussing Token Transit and was talking with a family with children about the Transit App (Where's My Bus) that gives real time bus locations and had a hard time finding it on our web or any place else and asked if finding it could be made easier.
- g. Commissioner Romero- Thanked the board for his being appointed and said he is looking forward to working on the board and thanked everyone for their kindness.

9. CONTINUED BUSINESS

- a. IN-PERSON BOARD MEETINGS RESUMPTION- Executive Director Hazen explained that this is a continuation of the discussion that was held at the July Board meeting however since then the situation with the variant has increased and the TSA announced that the mask requirement has been extended to January 18th. Hazen said he recommends that we continue with the Zoom meetings. Chair Boothe-Schmidt said she agreed, and we could look at the situation and discuss next month and there does not need to be a motion made for this.

10. NEW BUSINESS

- a. DRIVER SHORTAGE-SERVICE ADJUSTMENTS- Executive Director Hazen said that he never thought he would be having to deal with this and have to recommend that we would have to cut service. It has gone beyond critical with the number of drivers we have employed and the lack of applicants. This situation is not unique to us. This is happening to other businesses in the county and other transit services throughout the country. It has gotten to the point where our drivers are working 6-7 days and they are burning out, it is affecting their health and so we are having a lot of sick calls which makes matters worse. What we are doing now is not sustainable. Hazen said we have cut back already by cancelling Route 17 and the Cannon Beach Shuttle. Route 101 has also been cut back drastically with only one bus running. Hazen said that were concerns about the Route 16 being cut which he had mistakenly stated in the Press Release that went out. Hazen said the Route 16 is not going to be cut but it will be a split shift running in the morning going back to the yard and then going out again in the evening. The correct Route 16 schedule is in your Board Pack. Hazen said if we continue to have driver's call in sick, we will still be challenged to provide the service. Commissioner Withers asked if Cannon Beach was paying extra for the shuttle. Hazen said they were, but we cannot make that a consideration. Everything we do has to be done with an equity lens in place. Since we already have service in Cannon Beach it would not be fair to other areas to run two simultaneous routes in Cannon Beach at time when other low-income areas need service. Commissioner Withers said he understood but wondered if we owed Cannon Beach anything. Hazen said no, we have informed them of the lack of drivers, and they understand. Commissioner Read said we have talked about this before, about the salary rate for bus drivers. Do we need to provide more incentive for people to consider being a bus driver by way of increasing the beginning salary and pay? Executive Director Hazen said we have a very competitive wage, but the pool of people out there is very small. There are agencies who are offering sign on bonuses, but still, no one is applying. Hazen said we will be going through negotiations on wages with the driver's union this year and I have thoughts on that. Commissioner Romero said the question he had was about incentives and work scale and if the union is considering hazard pay. Hazen said because of funding we received; we were paying a \$3 hourly hazard pay to the hourly employees last year. Hazen said what is being proposed is suspending Astoria Route 13, Cannon Beach Route 17, Cannon Beach Route 21, Astoria-Seaside Route 101 runs C and D and the Seaside Streetcar.

Service Reductions will be made to the Warrenton Route 15, Warrenton Route 16, and Astoria/Seaside Route 101. In addition, each remaining route will be shut down for one hour during each shift for the driver’s lunch break. There will still be overtime and we are hopeful supervisors will not have to drive. The total service hours are being reduced from 622 to 454 which is a 27% cut in service. Hazen said this has been very difficult.

Chief Operations Officer Paul Lewicki reviewed the changes that were made to Route 15, Route 16, and Route 101. Commissioner Nino said since there were many comments on Facebook from those who were relying on our services to get to work, could we make an easily understandable message to let employers and others know that if they need help, they can contact Kathy Kleczek with Transportation Options for help. Commissioner Nino also said maybe post this on Facebook a couple times a week. Executive Director Hazen said that the press release that went out prior to the schedule changes encouraged employers to contact Kathy Kleczek. Kathy said she has not been just waiting for employers but has already been attending community meetings and informing them about the route changes. Chair Boothe-Schmidt said she read all the Facebook comments and feels bad for those having a rough time, but we are still making most of the routes and maybe employees can talk with their employers or maybe leave a little earlier for work or adjust their schedules. We sure hope this is temporary and not long term. Executive Director Hazen said that we will not turn our routes back on until we are confident that the drivers we have hired are going to stick with us. Commissioner Alegria asked how people working at Fred Meyer or Walmart on the weekend that get off after 5:35 pm will return home? Executive Director Hazen said they will have to make other arrangements because we will not be able to operate Route 16 any later.

Commissioner Read said she was sure this is being done, but she thinks it is critical that we find out what the issues are that the bus drivers are having when they come online as employees and then drop off again. What are the issues and challenges that people are having and what can we do about that? Hazen said we do exit interviews with all employees. As an example, we had a person come on board that left 3 days later who had applied only to fulfill a requirement to maintain unemployment. Commissioner Read said she appreciated the anecdotal story but would imagine there are more issues involved with employee satisfaction. Executive Director Hazen said he would be addressing that a little later and reading a resignation letter from an employee along these lines however, Sue Farmer, Human Resources Manager does an exit interview with all employees. Commissioner Read said it would be a good idea to know about that as a continual effort to find out about employee satisfaction and what the issues are that arise during a person’s tenure. Hazen said staff is recommending that the Board make a motion to approve this recommendation of the reduction in route service as presented.

Commissioner MacDonald moved to accept the new Bus Routes as presented today

Commissioner Romero seconded the motion

Discussion- Commissioner Withers asked at what point or level will routes be started again. Executive Director Hazen said it will be done piece by piece as we can when we have the drivers to cover the routes.

Name	Boothe-Schmidt	MacDonald	Nino	Alegria	Withers	Read	Romero	
Aye	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	7
Nay								0

7-Aye

0-Nay

Motion passed

- b. MANDATORY COVID VACCINATION-Executive Director Hazen said there has been a lot of discussion about this throughout the country, state, and local area about mandatory vaccinations by employers. Locally, the City of Astoria is requiring their employees to be vaccinated, except for the police department. Sunset Empire Parks and Recreation is also requiring all employees to be vaccinated. Hazen said he has checked with other transit agencies across the state and there is only one so far in Harney County which are mandatory. Hazen said he would like the Board to discuss this today but there does not need to be a decision made at this time. Commissioner Read said she knows it is a challenging decision for organizations to make but appreciates it when organizations step up and require it. What is

the blowback from proposing to do that? Hazen said we have a pretty good vaccination rate which is at about 80%. The problem is the other 20% possibly leaving if required to be vaccinated. Hazen said before the Delta Variant was being talked about, he was not going to force mandatory vaccinations unless required by the FTA and follow their requirements. Now that we have cut service and lost drivers, we would have to revisit our service again if we went to mandatory vaccinations. Commissioner Read asked if he has talked with those employees that have not been vaccinated and asked them what their concerns are. Hazen said he has sends out information to employees about the vaccine but has not met with them one on one because of concerns that they would leave. I do not want them to feel like we are forcing them to do that. Chair Boothe-Schmidt said she agreed with Hazen because if we lose more drivers, we will lose more service. Hazen said some employers are requiring unvaccinated employees to pay a higher medical premium. Hazen said he would be in support of that. Commissioner Alegria said that as a public entity part of our mission should be public safety and we should be 100% vaccinated. It is possible we could lose drivers but on the other hand we have the possibility of people contracting the virus because people are not vaccinated. We owe the public bus routes and to keep them healthy. Commissioner Withers said he agreed we cannot lose more drivers but need some sort of protocol for testing because the last thing we want is an outbreak that is traced back to our bus or to one of our employees. We need a procedure in place for stepped up testing for those who are dealing with the public and do not want to be vaccinated. Executive Hazen said that there is a large shortage of testing kits as this time. Hazen said we do have a plan in place if there is an outbreak or pandemic and we use some of it now. Hazen said we are notified if we have an exposure. Commissioner Nino asked if we have anything in place like taking temperatures before they start their shift and providing PPE's like N95 masks to make it a little safer. Hazen said we do use the CDC approved masks but do not do temperature checks. COO Paul Lewicki said that we purchased thermometers however it was at a time when it was uncertain employers could require that, so we were equipped but it was never settled if we had that latitude. Commissioner Nino asked if we are still at 3 feet between passengers. Hazen said no we are at 100% capacity on buses. Commissioner Nino said even though we have reduced our routes our drivers are protected with 6 feet distance from the riders, but then not the riders? Hazen said we have been following the Governor's and the Oregon Health Authority's rules. The problem is if we go to 3 feet and another system does not require it, it becomes a patchwork which is not appreciated by our riders. Commissioner Nino said it would be best if spacing is a state mandate, so it is the same. Hazen said yes or federal mandate. Commissioner Read said that in listening to our discussion the reason we have the problem that we have is because of unvaccinated people. We would be in better shape in our community if more people were vaccinated and this variant was not sweeping through our country. So, I am the person that is going to say that we need to do a better job of it. There are things we can do. We are in a tough situation, but I think we need to let employees know they have a responsibility too. She said that is where she is headed and asking that this organization does everything it can to get people vaccinated who are employees. Chair Boothe-Schmidt we could put out more literature, but it is tough, because if we lose any more drivers, we lose more routes. We should probably stay where we are for now and look at this next month. Executive Director Hazen said he will discuss this and the importance of getting the vaccine with employees at the Driver's meeting tomorrow.

Arla Miller, Regional Transit Coordinator Region 2 reported that we have had at least one transit agency with a couple of outbreaks, and they had to drop their service by 50%. In southern Oregon there was a driver that had died but she did not know if he was vaccinated or not, however vaccinated people are also dying. Hazen said that vaccinated people are not getting as sick but the unvaccinated are dying.

11. CORRESPONDENCE- Executive Director Hazen read a driver resignation letter to the Board.

- a. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT- Executive Director Hazen reviewed his reports included in the Board Pack asking for any questions. He reported that the Lower Columbia Connector had record ridership of 788 riders in July. Hazen said he wanted to talk with the Board about an idea. He reported that early last week he read a paper from a colleague in Iowa about developing bus driver training as a prison re-entry program. The nation has a driver shortage and needs a pool of people to pull from or train. Hazen said this got him thinking about doing something like that in the prisons in the state of Oregon. He reached out to the head of Public Transportation to see if she had contacts at the Department of

Corrections. She did not but found that the Assistant Director did have contacts and thought it was a good idea. So, we got in touch with the right people, and I have put a team together and we will be meeting in early October. DMV has also asked to be a part of this. Hazen said he is hoping to get funding to set aside to stand up this program We want to train within the prison so that when they get out, they will have a job and a place to live. I will be looking at driving simulators to place in the prisons for training. We will also be meeting with local partners. This will be a great opportunity to people who are getting out of prison. Hazen said he will have an update at the next Board Meeting.

12. LEADERSHIP TEAM REPORTS- Review of Team monthly reports and open discussion with Board.

13. OTHER ITEMS- None

Meeting was adjourned 11:00 AM

Mary Parker, Recording Secretary

Secretary/Treasurer _____
Diana Nino

Date _____