

A meeting of the Board of Directors of the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority (“Authority”) was held at the Authority’s offices in Jamestown on March 15, 2023.

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 A.M. by Chair, James K. Salome.

Members Present

James K. Salome, Chair
Darrell Waldron, Vice Chair
Peter M. Janaros, P.E.
Karen D. Pinch

Members Absent:

Peter Alvit, Jr., P.E., Ex Officio

Invited Guests:

Lori Caron Silveira, Executive Director
Eric Seabury, Director of Engineering
Kathryn Coleman, Director of Tolling Operations
Jamie Swanberg, Manager of Tolling Operations
Jeffrey Goulart, Chief Financial Officer
Stephen Cahill, Manager of Safety and Security
Jeffrey Wiggin, Assistant Project Manager
Frank Flowers, Maintenance Manager
Remmy Villacis, Network Technician
William O’Gara, Pannone Lopes Devereaux & O’Gara, Legal Counsel
Marianne Durgin, Executive Assistant to the Director

Item No. 2

Public Comment – There were no public comments.

Item No. 3

A motion made by Karen D. Pinch, seconded by Peter M. Janaros, passed unanimously to approve the minutes of the February 15, 2023 Board meeting.

Item No. 4

Motion by Darrell Waldron, seconded by Karen D. Pinch, passed unanimously to approve charging an hourly rate at RITBA’s charging station located at One Old Ferry Road, Bristol, RI of \$2 per hour, with a cap of four hours’ use. After four hours, an idling fee of \$4 per hour will be charged, to encourage motorists to limit their use so others can have access to the charging station. Chair Salome asked how this will be monitored. Mr. Goulart indicated there is an app that will capture the data on who is using it, along with the revenue information, and it will be enforced through the app. The charging access is turned off at four hours and the app will then continue to charge an idling fee. Director Caron Silveira indicated RITBA may be one of the first in the quasi-public sector to begin charging fees. RITBA has consulted with bond counsel, and since the Authority is purchasing electricity, it has an obligation to charge users a fee to cover the cost of the electricity that supplies the charger. Director Caron Silveira has also consulted with the Office of Energy Resources on this matter. Next year they will be introducing a legislative package addressing the matter. The Director has also consulted with the City of Newport. The city has begun charging fees at the Gateway Center. The Director noted that Representative McGaw (Little Compton, Portsmouth, Tiverton) has a bill pending in the House addressing electric vehicles and charging fees.

General Counsel has discussed it with Director Caron Silveira and is comfortable with the Board approving it. The Authority will have the ability to come back to the Board to seek either a reduction or increase in charging rates in the future.

Item No. 5

Motion by Peter M. Janaros, seconded by Karen D. Pinch, passed unanimously to approve a task order for ATANE to perform the routine inspection of the Jamestown-Verrazzano Bridge in the amount not to exceed \$628,241.00. Cost proposals were solicited from four of RITBA's prequalified On-Call Infrastructure Professional Services consultants. Three responded with pricing ranging from \$628,241.00 to \$1,034,097.00. \$650,000 was budgeted for the inspection based on previous costs and the savings to budget will be approximately \$22,000.00. The competitive price proposal process yielded this savings.

Item No. 6

Motion by Darrell Waldron, seconded by Karen D. Pinch, passed unanimously to approve a Second Amendment to the original RI DMV MOU of 2018 allowing up to nine RITBA employees to have access to the RIMS system and the ability to print vehicle registrations/cancellation forms and handle all in-state violation inquiries and toll disputes that may arise due to plate typing errors at all tolling agencies, incorrect registered owner information, and violations received in error. The nine RITBA employees will have access to RIMS software to place DMV blocks/holds/non-renewal of licenses and registrations of motorists who have outstanding tolls, fees/fines owed to RITBA.

Director of Engineering Eric Seabury - Capital Projects Status Report:

- Newport Pell Bridge Pier 5W Girder Temporary Shoring and Bearing Removal and Replacement: Ongoing meetings are taking place with Cardi to prepare for the replacement of the bearings in May.
- Phase II – AET Final Design- Newport Pell Bridge: Regular meetings are taking place with RITBA staff and Emovis to discuss the new highway realignment and gantry.
- Mt. Hope Bridge Suspension Cables & Anchorages Investigation and Dehumidification: The project commenced in February.
- ATMS Bridge Safety & Video Analytics – Pell & Mt. Hope: Meetings are taking place with the consultant, Parsons, to discuss system testing results. Stopped vehicles and incidents of pedestrians on the Pell Bridge are being detected by the system. Ongoing testing of performance metrics continues.
- Safety Barrier Feasibility Study: Notice to proceed was issued in January. The consultant, Atkins, has engaged its subconsultant to begin gathering data.
- Load Ratings & Inspections: The load rating and routine inspection for the Mt. Hope Bridge and the load rating for the Sakonnet River Bridge will be completed soon. The inspection report for the Newport Pell Bridge Main Span Routine Inspection has just been received.

CFO Jeff Goulart – Financial Summary Report: January year to date results continue to be strong. Overall revenue was higher than budget by \$5.1M, or 22%. Toll revenue was higher by \$5.9M, but gas tax proceeds were lower by \$0.7M, or 5%. Year to date operating expenses were lower than budget by \$0.6M. Overall operating profit exceeded budget by \$5.7M. The operating expenses that were over budget, including telephone, DMV look-up fees, postage, envelopes, paper, and credit card fees, are primarily related to the increase in revenue from bill-by-mail transactions. The Authority's top line growth is good, and RITBA continues to focus on controlling expenditures. Mr. Goulart expects February to come in comparable to January and be another strong month.

Kathryn Coleman reported on the traffic numbers for March 11th, the day of the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Newport. In past years, when the weather was good, it would be upwards of 40,000 crossings. This year it was a rainy day, and the traffic count was just over 31,000 on Friday, the day before the parade. This was the highest traffic day since December 15, 2022.

Director Janaros commented that he appreciates the narrative format Mr. Goulart uses to prepare the monthly financial reporting.

Executive Director's Report:

- **Tolling Operations - Pilot Program – Evening Hours** – The Authority has been listening to its customers, motorists, and host community elected officials who have asked for additional customer friendly hours in the E-ZPass walk-in center. RITBA will open the E-ZPass walk-in for the hours of 4 pm to 7 pm on two Thursday evenings this month. Director Caron Silveira will be speaking on WADK, the local Newport radio station to discuss this with Bruce Newbury. Staff have been cooperative in filling the hours. Chair Salome asked if there are other outlets being utilized to get the word out. An email blast to RITBA's customer base will go out and it will be communicated through social media. RITBA will track what kinds of transactions customers are coming in for and this should prove informative of customer needs so staff can better serve RITBA's customer base.
- **State of the State's Bridges – Legislators** – The legislators from RITBA's host communities have been invited to RITBA on March 21st from 11 am to 12:30 pm to hear about current capital improvement projects for the bridges and other Authority activities. RITBA hosted a similar event last year. Feedback from that event included a request for additional E-ZPass customer service hours. RITBA staff will be pleased to report about the upcoming pilot program providing additional walk-in service hours.
- **Federal Funding** – RITBA should be hearing about the outcome of the Bridge Investment Program this week. The Authority has submitted for the Mt. Hope Bridge dehumidification project and the rehabilitation of the decking on the Mt. Hope Bridge as a bundled project. A new RAISE Grant submission has also been submitted for the same project scope. Director Janaros asked about additional funding for the safety barrier study. Senator DiPalma is seeking additional funding for RITBA, as are other members of the General Assembly. Discussions with leadership, some of the stakeholders, and several senators and representatives have taken place. RITBA will need an additional \$750K for a safety barrier study for the Newport Pell Bridge. In the meantime, RITBA is proceeding with its consultant, Atkins, to perform the safety barrier study on the Mt. Hope and the Jamestown-Verrazzano Bridges.
- **General Assembly – 2023 Session** - On Friday, March 17th, there will be a hearing on a bill RITBA submitted to the General Assembly. The bill is seeking to change legislation to allow motorists 30 days to pay a toll invoice instead of 14. With delays in mail deliveries, customers being away on vacation, and it being standard industry practice to give 30 days to pay an invoice, the Authority is hoping to extend the payment time from 14 to 30 days. The new representative in Jamestown, Representative Finkelman, is the lead sponsor of the bill, and the Aquidneck Island contingent has offered their support. There will be a Senate version of the bill, as well. This will also allow RITBA's customer service representatives to focus on the more difficult tolling issues. Kathryn Coleman found that 40% of the adjustments made in tolling transactions are related to postmark issues, payments being received, and second notices crossing in the mail with payments. The legislative bill will also help to reduce paper and mailing costs.

Chair Salome asked if there were any questions for Director Caron Silveira. Director Janaros asked the Director to speak about the recent briefing provided by the RIDOT project manager to stakeholders regarding the status of the ramp project. (The briefing at the CCRI campus was attended by Director Caron Silveira, Mr. Seabury, Project Manager Jeff Wiggin, and Director Janaros.) Director Caron Silveira noted this is a RIDOT project and the Authority stays in regular contact with RIDOT to keep informed about its progress. Some stakeholders have voiced concern about the confusion motorists are experiencing with the new traffic patterns. On occasion, motorists are mistakenly finding themselves getting on the Newport Pell Bridge and then having to turn around and cross again. RITBA has adopted a policy, coining it the “5-minute rule,” whereby RITBA will credit motorists the toll fare(s) incurred with proper verification of the unintended crossings. Director Janaros stated that the biggest upcoming change proposed for the interim is that there be a direct connection between JT Connell Highway from the rotary to Farewell Street. Mr. Seabury indicated the new crossover will include two left turns into Newport and this should be completed by Memorial Day. This change should reduce the confusion that motorists are currently experiencing. Chair Salome noted there will be significant traffic coming into Newport for The Ocean Race 2022-2023 which stops in Newport from May 13 – 21. Chair Salome inquired about the completion date for the ramp project. Eric Seabury indicated the project should be complete by fall of 2024.

At 8:57 a.m. there was a motion by Darrell Waldron, seconded by Peter M. Janaros, and passed unanimously to convene into executive session, pursuant to RI General Laws § 42-46-5 (a) (3), Matters of Security to discuss cybersecurity initiatives and pursuant to RI General Laws 42-46-5 (a) (1), Personnel Matter to discuss job performance – Executive Director. Executive Director Caron Silveira was provided prior written notice that her job performance would be discussed and that she could require that discussion be held during the open session.

At 9:19 a.m. there was a motion by Darrell Waldron, seconded by Peter M. Janaros, and passed unanimously to reconvene into open session. It was reported in open session that there was a motion by Darrell Waldron, seconded by Peter M. Janaros, and passed unanimously in executive session to extend the Executive Director’s contract for two years beyond the current expiration date with the same terms and conditions. A motion to seal the minutes of the executive session was made by Karen D. Pinch, seconded by Darrell Waldron, and passed unanimously.

Item No. 7

Motion by Darrell Waldron, seconded by Peter M. Janaros, passed unanimously to extend the Executive Director’s contract for two years beyond the current expiration date with the same terms and conditions. The Board members congratulated Director Caron Silveira and thanked her for a job well done.

A motion by Darrell Waldron, seconded by Peter M. Janaros, passed unanimously to adjourn the public meeting at 9:21 a.m.

Lori Caron Silveira
Secretary