

**City of Worcester Accessibility Advisory Commission**  
**Tuesday, February 16, 2021, 4:30 PM Minutes**  
**Virtual meeting with WebEx platform**  
**Live streaming on City's website:**  
<http://www.worcesterma.gov/video-on-demand>  
**Call-in conference line and ASL interpreters provided**

**Attendance:**

**Members Present:** Robert Bureau, James Delage, Philip Economou, John Finn, Jr., Nancy Garr-Colzie, Dee Karuna, Linda Larrivee, Elizabeth Myska, Joseph Prochilo

**Members Absent:** Fitzroy Hall, Stephen Stolberg

**Staff:** Jayna Turcek, Miriam Nyante, Dawn E. Clark

**Guests:** Jennifer Henning (MA DOT) and Connie Mellis (Central Ma Regional Planning Commission)

**Call to order, instructions for virtual meeting, introductions**

Chairperson Bureau called the meeting to order and requested Director Turcek to provide the technology instructions for access to the meeting. Commissioners then introduced themselves.

**Approval of January 19, 2021 minutes**

Commissioner Linda Larrivee moved to approve the January 19, 2021 minutes as written. Commissioner Nancy Garr-Colzie seconded the motion. All approved.

**Discussion on potential planning grant opportunity for on demand wheelchair accessible vehicles/ service**

There were a number of people/representatives on the WebEx meeting for this conversation including but not limited to City Councilor Gary Rosen, Meg Coffin from Center for Living & Working, Inc. a Tower Hill representative, Joseph Bellil and Robert Bilotta from Easter Seals.

Jennifer Henning from Mass. DOT and Connie Mellis from Central Mass. Regional Planning Commission were the guests for this item. Associate Commissioner James Delage and Commissioner Elizabeth Myska led the conversation.

Mr. Delage framed the conversation as an opportunity to learn more regarding available funding to replace the accessible taxi cab(s). He also hoped for a community planning process to provide for a permanent solution to the gaps in accessible on demand transportation. He introduced Ms. Henning from Mass. DOT to speak about the available grants through her office.

Commissioner Myska shared background regarding the cessation of the operation of two accessible taxi vans. Red Cab had been operating the two wheelchair accessible cabs (otherwise known as WAV) in Worcester for 20 or more years. Occasionally one or both cabs have been off the road for a month or more at a time. Last year Red Cab relinquished one of the medallions to the City after attempts to repair/replace the damaged vehicle were unsuccessful. This Fall Red Cab relinquished the second medallion for the same reasons. As a result the city no longer has a wheelchair accessible on demand option for transportation for persons with disabilities.

Commissioner Myska continued by asking the Commission to consider the need for accessible vehicles for all people with disabilities. She recently participated in a webinar where Ms. Henning presented not only the grants available but who received them and how they were being used. She is delighted that both guests were present to provide information to the Commission. She is grateful that Councilor Rosen is present and for his work to address this need at the City Council.

Ms. Henning, Manager of Grant Programs from Mass. DOT shared the following funding is provided through this office:

FTA Section 5310: Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities grant program. This program helps fund mobility management activities, operational costs, and the purchase of capital equipment to meet the mobility needs of seniors and people with disabilities. This grant is annual and will next open up in May 2021. FY 2022 fund will be used for those receiving grants as a result of application approval beginning in January. Eligible activities include purchase of a new fully accessible vehicle or expansion of existing projects, operating expenses and mobility management activities which would include planning, research, or anything that might not fit in the vehicle or operating category.

There are many examples of communities that have received these funds. A Transit Authority is not eligible to receive these funds so places like Montachusett Area Regional Transit in Fitchburg established the Montachusett Enterprise Council, which is a nonprofit, in order to be eligible. This Council submitted two applications for these funds:

1. A feasibility study to think about a volunteer driver program.
2. A separate idea that was submitted was to establish a steering committee to explore the connector programs in the state to see what would work best in the Gardner area with to goal of creating a pilot program.

Another model of interest is the Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA) Program. They offer subsidized Uber services beyond the time and area of normal operation. A group of human service providers in that area recognized that many of their clients were not able to access needed rides so this group formed the Consortium of Community Access and Rides and applied for funds. Ms. Henning suggested talking with this group.

It will be important for Worcester to work with the many transportation resources in Worcester to determine the best way to move forward when thinking about an application to the Community Grant Program.

Other Communities like Williamstown in the Berkshires has a volunteer driver program that serves everyone in the community where there is no regional transit

authority might help learn about WAV options. This program is subsidized by Uber and Lyft as well.

WAV are not widely available in many communities, the Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission does have grant money for CoVID relief. A second round may be available soon. Communities are partnering with local taxi and livery companies. An example of partnership with taxi companies during CoVID were rides to medical services and food deliveries were made in one western town.

Commissioner Prochilo clarified for the audience Worcester does not have access to the Ride and does not have the robust system that communities closer to Boston enjoy. WRTA works on a fixed routes system with limited service on the weekends and none after 9 PM. Worcester currently has no WAV taxi service outside of chair cars one would hire for approximately \$125 per hour plus mileage.

Connie Mellis shared about the para transit schedule which is based on eligibility. This service covers the entire city of Worcester for about 16 hours a week days and Saturday and about 10 hours on Sunday.

Commissioner Prochilo went on to say if one does not qualify for paratransit then a person has to negotiate sidewalk hazards including snow not shoveled and ice in the winter depending on where one lives.

Ms. Henning suggested applying for a research grant through DOT to figure out what system would work best for the Worcester community. Operational funds are available to taxi cabs for taxi cabs. The focus should be on regionalization.

Ms. Mellis indicated the result of an application for a WAV submitted by WRTA has not been announced.

Public comments:

- Clearing snow and fire hydrants need to be address.
- Seniors could use a better transportation system.

Ms. Mellis is willing to assist with writing a planning grant. She mentioned that there are other grants available to address the infrastructure such as signs, snow removal issues, etc. The Health Foundation may be a place to submit an application.

The Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities grant program training sessions are being prepared now and should be available in April with application available in May and June and submissions due at the end of June. Applications are similar from year to year.

Easter Seals of Massachusetts received a planning grant from Community Living in 2017 on behalf of the disabled community in Worcester.

Connecting this work with Complete Street funding should also be reviewed/discussed.

Lastly, the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Funds could be something to review.

For more information about the above grants and others please check out the MassMobility website and sign up for their newsletter.

Next Steps:

Councilor Rosen is willing to work at establishing a new Task Force to include all interested in transportation. He will also check in with the Red Cab owner about the two cabs they had to see if there is any way they can be useable. 1

Joe Bellil expressed need for a clear understanding on transportation needs. He also raised concern that maintenance of vehicles has to be built into funding.

Ms. Henning is willing to connect Worcester to other communities doing the work.

Commissioner Myska requested Connie Mellis provide a primer of local transportation infrastructure, who provides what services to what populations etc.

**Review of AAB notices and applications: No City properties**

No action taken.

**Black History Month observance**

February 2, 2021 memo to City Council was shared.

**Suggestions for upcoming agenda items**

None identified at this meeting.

**Announcements:**

- **Mayor's Mental Health Taskforce Working Group, February 17, 2021, 10am-11am. Contact:** Kelsey Hopkins [hopkinsk@worcesterma.gov](mailto:hopkinsk@worcesterma.gov)
- **Transportation Advocacy Coalition, February 17, 2021, Contact: WRTA Advisory Board Meeting, February 18, 2021, 8:30am, Contact:** [tsebastian@therta.com](mailto:tsebastian@therta.com)
- **WRTA Transportation Planning Advisory Meeting, February 18, 2021, 1-2:30pm, Contact:** [CMellis@cmrpc.org](mailto:CMellis@cmrpc.org)
- **Next Accessibility Advisory Commission virtual meeting: March 16, 2021, 4:30pm**

**Adjournment:**

Commissioner Garr- Colzie moved to adjourn and Commissioner Prochilo seconded. All approved at 6:55pm

\*Material can be viewed at the Human Rights and Accessibility Office during normal business hours.