

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

July 19, 2023, 9:00 a.m.

433 West Van Buren Street, Suite 450, Chicago, IL 60607

1.0 Welcome, call to order, roll call, approval of minutes

CMAP Executive Director Erin Aleman called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

(Members Carole Brown, Deborah Carroll, Dan Cronin, and Bob Reiter attended the meeting virtually)

Members Present: MarySue Barrett, Randy Blankenhorn, Carole Brown, Deborah Carroll, Kevin Considine, Dan Cronin, Derek Douglas, Jacky Grimshaw, Julie Hamos, Darlene Hightower, David Leopold, Juan Carlos Linares, Tom Livingston, Justin Marlowe, David Narefsky, Doug Pryor, Bob Reiter, Roberto Requejo, Amy Rynell, Stephen Schlickman, Karen Tamley, Jen Walling, Sarah Wetmore

Members Absent: Mark Denzler, Rob Karr, Jack Lavin

Attendees (in person/online): John Amdor, Steven Brown, Kevin Brubaker, Christopher Canning, M Castle, Lynnette Ciavarella, Jack Cruikshank, Karen Darch, State Representative Eva-Dina Delgado, John Donovan, Ashton Drake, Jesse Elam, Jackie Forbes, Mark Fowler, Brandon Geber, Sam Greene, Dimitre Guenov, Veton Hasku, Scott Hennings, Neil James, Kendra Johnson, Pam Jones, Peter Kerston, Tom Kotarac, David Kralik, Brian Larson, Jill Leary, Nika Lofton, John Loper, Jen McNeil Dhadwal, John Noak, Charlotte Obodzinski, Kevin O'Malley, Philip Plotch, Jada Porter, Rob Puentes, Leanne Redden, Dany Robles, Stephanie Sarabia, Jeff Schielke, Garrett Shrode, Christoher Snyder, Linda Soto, Doug Sullivan, David Tomzik, Brian Townsend, Michael Vanderhoof, State Senator Ram Villivalam, Audrey Wennink, Kyle Whitehead

Erin Aleman welcomed the committee members and conducted roll call. A motion to approve the minutes of the May 24, 2023 PART Steering Committee meeting was made with all members in favor.

Erin Aleman gave introductory remarks and briefed the committee on the PART report approval process, which requires a vote by the CMAP Board and MPO Policy Committee on October 11, 2023 to meet the Illinois General Assembly's (ILGA) deadline of January 1, 2024. Aleman highlighted the committee's dedication and vision to achieving a better, more resilient transit system that supports economic growth, addresses racial equity, and mitigates the effects of climate change.

Illinois State Senator Ram Villivalam, Chief Senate Sponsor of the PART enabling legislation ([Public Act 102-1028](#)), briefed the committee on legislative progress at the ILGA related to PART, particularly the transportation omnibus legislation, [HB1342](#), signed by Governor Pritzker on July 28, 2023. The legislation extends the farebox recovery ratio waiver, requires the service boards to report system performance metrics, directs the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) to study the feasibility of providing year-round free or reduced fares to different groups for a more equitable fare structure, and addresses other issues like public safety and employment for youth.

Sen. Villivalam highlighted that improving regional transit is a task that relies on everybody, including the PART Steering Committee, to think big and outside the box for solutions that will make the regional transit system stand out among its peers. Sen. Villivalam stated that the consensus of the ILGA is that

new revenues for transit must be accompanied by improvements in how we operate, fund, and govern the system. Acknowledging that going beyond the status quo often brings an extra set of challenges, Sen. Villivalam stated that reforms to funding and governance guide the ability to make the case to taxpayers that the transit system is improving and will be able to address challenges around equity, climate change, and economic growth.

Illinois House Representative Eva-Dina Delgado, Chief House Sponsor of the PART enabling legislation, seconded Sen. Villivalam's remarks and noted appreciation for the committee and CMAP for taking on this work. Rep. Delgado emphasized that the committee and CMAP are working to develop policy ideas that will be used to make the case in Springfield for improving regional transit and highlighted the value of good policy to guide decision-making for challenging issues around funding and governance.

Erin Aleman emphasized the wide array of stakeholders CMAP is engaging with in this process, with Jane Grover providing details of recent public engagement initiatives, including an update on regional stakeholder focus groups, engagement with Councils of Governments and Councils of Mayors, County officials and staff, and the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus. Grover also highlighted some of the key themes that are emerging from these discussions.

Aleman closed introductory remarks by noting that while there will be disagreement on various issues in the PART process, there is collective agreement that the fiscal crisis needs to be addressed and letting the regional transit system fail is not an option.

2.0 System We Want

Daniel Comeaux reviewed the seven main areas of system improvements that will be addressed by the report and provided an overview of how these improvements will scale with new funding for transit. Comeaux provided a high-level overview of the three packages of recommendations being considered based on the level of new resources proposed: *minimum viable*, *meaningful change*, and *transformational investment*.

Each package addresses the fiscal cliff, though only *meaningful change* and *transformational investment* will provide the resources necessary to ensure the long-term financial viability of a comprehensive and coordinated regional transit system, as the enabling legislation requires. Comeaux also highlighted the nexus between the system improvement recommendations and both funding (*How to Pay for It*) and governance (*How to Implement It*).

Committee members asked clarifying questions on the packages and noted the importance of providing a list of improvements that could be made based on each level of new public investment.

3.0 How to Pay for It

Elizabeth Scott provided an overview of the principles that guide the funding packages, highlighted paratransit cost growth. Scott reviewed state support of paratransit in peer regions and elsewhere in the state. Scott provided a conceptual framework for how various funding sources were allocated to each package, with an intermediate solution set (composed of baseline actions, durable funding sources, and stopgap/diminishing sources) and a long-term solution set (composed of baseline actions, durable sources, and long-term sources aimed at replacing stopgap/diminishing sources and reducing reliance on the RTA sales tax). This framework also includes cost savings that transit providers must pursue both by reducing future cost growth and raising fares.

Scott detailed each of the three funding packages, including the types of revenue sources under consideration, the amount each source could raise in 2026, and the types of improvements that the system could pursue with level of new resources.

Committee members discussed the capital investments needed within each funding package and provided messaging suggestions to better frame what the region gets out of each package. Members suggested an explicit link between funding transit improvements with other policy issues like healthcare and education to better frame these solutions to the public for buy-in. Members expressed skepticism of the political feasibility of expanding the sales tax base. However, the fiscal cliff represents a prime opportunity to push through good, but difficult, policy choices.

Members also asked clarifying questions around the exclusion of trucks in increasing existing tolls on the Tollway, expressed the need to understand the differential equity impacts each funding solution may have, discussed different policy choices that could be made around vehicle registration fees, and suggested that CMAP emphasize the role that some funding sources play in increasing transit ridership (e.g., congestion tolling, parking tax, etc.). Lastly, members suggested that the *minimum viable* package should not be proposed as a funding solution given its inability to address the concerns of the PART report.

Committee members participated in a polling activity to gauge the committee's collective thoughts on funding solutions. Members overwhelmingly agreed that any potential packages should include changes to the sales tax, with more agreement on expanding the sales tax base and less consensus on raising the rate. Members also demonstrated strong support to include a combination of road revenues in the funding packages, with the majority agreeing on including funds from tolling and road pricing as revenue solutions. When surveyed on the support for each package, the committee most supported the *meaningful change* package, with *transformational investment* second, and *minimum viable* last. Members were also provided an outlet to express any other questions they might still have.

4.0 How to Implement It

Aimee Lee provided a summary of the results of a governance survey that committee members participated in which attempted to gauge the level of consensus around centralization of different transit functions (e.g., fare policy, capital planning, service operations, etc.) Lee also reviewed the four major governance reforms under consideration in the PART report (e.g., "*Strengthening a regional entity and maintaining the service boards (Options 1 and 2)*" or "*Integrating service boards into one regional agency (Options 3 and 4)*") and presented several principles that any governance structure reform should seek to address.

Committee members remarked that existing governance structures do not advance a regionally focused system, rather they promote siloed decision-making. Members reflected on governance reforms that took place in 2008 as part of legislation that provided the system new revenues, and how the region can apply lessons learned from that legislation to advance the priorities and address the [problem statements](#) of the PART report.

Members also noted specific weaknesses of the existing governance structure, particularly around accountability and coordination, and remarked that the system is not designed to address today's challenges. Committee members highlighted the need to carefully consider governance proposals and their impacts on riders while balancing the need to improve integration, regional coordination, and accountability. Members noted potential cost savings of agency consolidation, provided suggestions on the framing of governance proposals, and noted the need to consider the system's workforce in these discussions.

Committee members participated in a second polling activity to gauge feedback on potential strengths and weaknesses of each governance approach under consideration. Members noted that the first approach, *“Strengthening a regional entity and maintaining the service boards (Option 1 and 2)”*, does not fully address concerns around coordination and inter-agency competition, maintains existing redundancies, remains confusing for riders which are primarily concerned about service and their destination, and doesn’t provide a regional entity the authority to enact priorities which advance regional goals. However, members also highlighted that this approach, with greater accountability, may promote innovation and competition, could still improve the rider experience and assuages concerns around decreased influence that different parts of the region may have in a singular regional entity.

Members noted that the second approach, *“Integrating service boards into one regional agency (Option 3 and 4)”*, has the potential to improve service and seamlessness for the rider, could lead to greater cost savings (e.g., consolidated procurement), and is more effective/efficient and provides greater opportunities for public engagement on service planning. Members also noted this approach provides the authority needed to implement a regional transit strategy on capital planning. However, members highlighted that this approach could impact labor negotiations and could create internal friction and mistrust of the allocation of funding to each service division. When surveyed on the preference rank of each governance option, the committee tied on both *“Option 3 – Integrated agency with committees”* and *“Option 4 – Unified new entity”* with *“Option 2 – Regional network manager”* third, and *“Option 1 – Stronger coordinating agency”* last.

5.0 Public comment

There was no public comment.

6.0 Adjournment

Daniel Comeaux provided next steps in the PART project. Erin Aleman gave closing statements. The next and final PART Steering Committee meeting takes place on September 6, 2023.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.