

Coventry Board of Education
Coventry, Connecticut

Transportation Committee Meeting
Approved Minutes of July 12, 2023
Administration Building Conference Room

Committee Members Present:

Eugene Marchand, Committee Chair
Peter DePaola
Emma Eaton

Also present: Jennifer Beausoleil, Board Chair and Ex-Officio

Administrators Present:

Robert Carroll, Director of Finance and Operations
Christian Marcinczyk, District Transportation Liaison

Audience: Jon Hipsher, Chief Operating Officer of M&J Bus Inc; Nicole Irvine, M&J Coventry Dispatcher

I. Call to Order

E. Marchand called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m.

II. Audience of Citizens

There were none.

III. VOTE: Approve minutes of March 9, 2023

MOTION: To approve the minutes of March 9, 2023

By: P. DePaola

Seconded: E. Eaton

Result: Motion passes unanimously

IV. Information: Update on Status of Public School Transportation in CT

E. Marchand reviewed various items related to transportation that he would like to discuss, including bus ridership, the length of bus routes, and the preliminary routes for 23-24.

Mr. Hipsher was present to share information regarding the status of public school transportation in Coventry and Connecticut in general. He said currently, Coventry is down one driver. He said that they will continue to use the long-term sub used last year. He reviewed the continuing challenges with obtaining and retaining drivers and the actions M&J is taking to meet the challenge. He added that a driver would be pulled from another location, if necessary.

Mr. Carroll asked if there was any improvement from moving along the licensing at the state level. Mr. Hipsher said, not anything that is consistent. The Committee discussed the challenges associated with the driver shortage.

The Committee discussed public information related to union bargaining discussions that are taking place with M&J and if it would affect Coventry's transportation.

V. Discussion: Preliminary Review of 2023-24 Bus Routes

E. Eaton said that the Committee and the Board requested that M&J be asked to look at the routes with fresh eyes and redraw the routes from scratch.

J. Beausoleil agreed with E. Eaton and said with the preliminary routes she counted many buses where the route is over an hour. Ms. Irvine said the route time noted at the top of the route includes the bus travel time from the last drop off until the bus returns to the lot. J. Beausoleil asked that passenger time be noted so there is no confusion.

Ms. Irvine explained that these routes are preliminary and she knows work still needs to be done.

E. Eaton returned to the subject of looking at the routes from scratch. The Committee discussed the different variables.

E. Marchand asked, for the August 2 meeting, if a narrative could be added to the bus routes that would help Committee members understand any special situations. He also asked that a map of each route be provided with the routes.

J. Beausoleil talked about the new first graders being at group stops this year and kindergartners having their own stop. Ms. Irvine agreed.

Ms. Irvine said that last year, the longest afternoon route ran 50 minutes at the most. She said she is working on keeping the bus routes under an hour for this year.

J. Beausoleil made it clear that the Board's expectations are that none of the routes should be over an hour.

P. DePaola talked about parent partnerships and the time of each stop. He said there needs to be parent responsibility related to putting students on the bus in a timely manner. The Committee discussed putting out a parent communication that covers various "start of school" items related to transportation.

The Committee discussed general procedures and practices related to transportation.

E. Eaton asked if M&J was asked to re-write the routes from scratch. Mr. Carroll said no, that was not his understanding. E. Marchand and P. DePaola said they did not recall that directive.

E. Marchand asked if there would be a benefit to doing this at this time. Mr. Hipsher talked about that process and how they could provide a large-scale map with the current routes indicated in different colors. He said this would enable the Committee to see the big picture. Ms. Irvine said a complete overhaul would take months.

The Committee discussed how to move forward. J. Beausoleil and E. Eaton both agreed a complete re-do is what they would like to see. E. Marchand said a meeting could be set in

late fall, once the year is underway, to review where we are. Mr. Hipsher said that would give them time to provide a status of the routes and include the large-scale map.

E. Marchand asked that any areas of concern (buses with high ridership, etc.) be highlighted during the overview in the fall.

E. Marchand touched on transportation solutions for athletics. Ms. Irvine said the process worked well last year; the Athletic Director has been great to coordinate with, which is very important.

VI. Adjournment

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 3:41 p.m.

By: P. DePaola

Seconded: E. Eaton

Result: Motion passes unanimously

Respectfully submitted:

Kimberlee Arey Delorme
Board Clerk

Approved: August 2, 2023