



PINELLAS SUNCOAST TRANSIT AUTHORITY
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LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES – MAY 6, 2015

The Legislative Committee of the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) Board of Directors held a meeting in the Auditorium at PSTA Headquarters at 9:30 AM on this date. The purpose of the meeting was to approve the April 8, 2015 meeting minutes and receive an update from Gray Robinson. The following members were present:

Darden Rice, Committee Chairperson
Doug Bevis
Ben Diamond
Pat Gerard

Absent

Wengay Newton

Also Present:

Brad Miller, CEO
Robert Stuart, Gray Robinson (via conference call)
Fred Leonhardt, Gray Robinson (via conference call)
Bill Jonson, PSTA Board Member
PSTA Staff Members

CALL TO ORDER

Committee Chair Rice opened the meeting at 9:31 AM.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

ACTION ITEMS

April 8, 2015 Meeting Minutes – Mr. Bevis made a motion, seconded by Ms. Gerard to approve the minutes. There were no public comments. Motion passed unanimously.

INFORMATION ITEMS

PSTA Legislative Priorities – Gray Robinson – Mr. Leonhardt reported that he had a discussion with the Governor’s General Counsel, Tim Seria, who said they are encouraging the House Speaker and the Senate into agreeing on a game plan. Mr. Stuart added that the Senate has made an offer of a Special Session that would start on June 1st and last for no more than 20 days.

In response to Mr. Miller’s asking for suggestions on what PSTA can do on the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project, Mr. Stuart responded that it is important to reconnect with the delegation with an updated bulleted document as a reminder that the BRT project is in the Senate budget. He stated that Gray Robinson continues to communicate with Representative Ingram, Chair of the House Transportation & Economic Development Appropriations budget, and is continuing to encourage him to accept the Senate offer. Bob Lasher, External Affairs Officer, reported that the Lieutenant Governor seemed negative about the BRT and has concerns about funding the operations. Mr. Stuart commented that he could get in contact with the Lieutenant Governor so he has all the information and understands the BRT project. Mr. Miller stated that he will prepare the information sheet for the delegation and Gray Robinson’s use with the Governor’s Office. Committee Chair Rice asked if there are other people that PSTA should send a letter to and Mr. Stuart recommended Chair Ingram and the House Speaker.

Mr. Leonhardt reported that the next Legislative session will be January, February, and early March next year, so the Committees will be meeting much earlier in the fall this year. Mr. Miller suggested the Legislative Agenda development begin much earlier and try to meet with the Legislative delegation by the end of the summer.

Mr. Miller said that PSTA had received correspondence from the Commission for Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) stating that even though PSTA’s ridership had increased, which typically would generate more income for PSTA, the Commission said that all of the grants distributed to the counties are going to be flat compared to the current grant because of Medicaid funding. Mr. Stuart suggested he and Mr. Miller get together to discuss and report back to the Committee.

2016 Federal & State Legislative Planning/Performance Evaluation – Mr. Miller presented a draft of the annual performance evaluation requirements for the federal lobbyist with the following performance criteria: 1) annual submission of suggested legislative strategy, 2) monthly written reports, 3) minimum three monthly PSTA-related meetings, 3) minimum two annual in-person updates at PSTA in Pinellas County, 4) successful organization and 5) attendance of all PSTA-related meetings in Washington D.C. by individual or multiple PSTA Board members or staff.

Mr. Miller stated that when PSTA issues the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the state lobbyist later in the summer, similar criteria will be incorporated as well. The Committee discussed the document and Committee Chair Rice suggested adding to the written reports section that the firm will provide some helpful analysis and recommendation of strategies based on new information. She also suggested that the number of meetings should be five not three.

Mr. Miller reported that on April 30th, he went to Washington D.C. to meet with Congressman Jolly at the request of the head lobbyist for American Public Transportation Association (APTA). He explained that earlier, Congressman Jolly co-sponsored a bill to eliminate the mass transit account in the federal budget. Mr. Miller said that at the Pinellas County Legislative delegation meeting, Congressman Jolly explained that the reason he did that was to start a conversation that might lead to devolution; where the gas tax money would come back to the states, which Congressman Jolly believes would increase funding for all modes of transportation. Mr. Miller reported that he and APTA's head lobbyist had a very good meeting with Congressman Jolly and his Transportation Staffer and he acknowledged that this bill has no chance of passing, but he explained that he wanted to have a conversation about increasing transportation funding. Mr. Miller reported that Congressman Jolly expressed his strong support for mass transit and helping PSTA.

Also while in Washington D.C., Mr. Miller said he had a meeting with a representative from a lobbying firm in D.C. who told him that PSTA does not need a federal lobbyist unless the agency has specific legislative priorities and stated that without earmarks, there is nothing that Congressman Jolly can do directly unless PSTA has a specific project like the BRT project. Mr. Miller explained to the lobbyist that PSTA does have priorities: 1) BRT project, 2) to restore cut bus money within the transportation budget in the House and, 3) establish a better relationship with Congressman Jolly. This is why, Mr. Miller explained, that the RFP needs to be very specific and the Committee needs to have a very specific legislative agenda.

Mr. Diamond suggested adding a few words to the sentence, "The annual evaluation will be based on the firm's ability to meet the performance criteria listed below, and the firm's success in implementing PSTA's Legislative strategy." He believes the evaluation needs to be tied to outcomes. He also spoke about the three meeting requirement and suggested a clause be added stating that "The firm and the CEO determined that the meetings were not necessary." Committee Chair Rice suggested adding that there is an expectation that the firm coordinate with lobbyists for other advocacy agencies and also HART. Mr. Diamond suggested preparation of a one-page document to explain why PSTA needs to retain a federal lobbyist.

Mr. Miller reported that PSTA is working to put forth the RFP now with a goal to have a recommended firm for approval at the Board meeting in June. He stated that he will send the RFP to the Committee.

Mr. Miller said he believes there should be another Legislative Committee meeting before August 5th to start mapping out the 2016 State Legislative agenda. It was decided that the next Legislative Committee meeting will be held on July 13th at 9:30 AM.

FUTURE MEETING SUBJECTS

The committee was provided with a list of upcoming meeting subjects.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Diamond said he is concerned about the \$4 million difference between the House and Senate budgets and the possibility of some projects falling by the wayside. He believes it is important to communicate and reinforce PSTA's position with the delegates, the Chairman, and the House Speaker.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:18 AM. The next Legislative Committee meeting will be held on July 13th at 9:30 AM.