NIAGARA FRONTIER TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

Committee Meeting

June 24, 2021

Transcript of Video Recording of Proceedings held at NIAGARA FRONTIER TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY, 181 Ellicott Street, Buffalo, New York, stenographically transcribed by VALERIE A. ROSATI, Notary Public.

MEMBERS IN THE BOARDROOM:

Sister Denise Roche (Chair)
Commissioner Adam Perry
Commissioner Anthony Baynes
Kimberley Minkel (Executive Director)
David State (General Counsel)
John Cox (Chief Financial Officer)
William Vanecek (Director, Aviation)
Tom George (Director, Public Transit)
Helen Tederous (Director, Public Affairs)
Dejuan Hardy (Manager, EEO/Diversity)
Susan Ohol (Admin. Assistant to Director of Public Transit)
Robert Jones (Manager, Service Planning)
James Morrell (Deputy Director, Public Transit)
Sara Dayton (Lumsden McCormick)
Seth Hennard (Lumsden McCormick)

MEMBERS ON THE PHONE:

Commissioner Joan Aul
Commissioner Rev. Mark Blue
Commissioner Margo Downey
Commissioner Stephen Tucker
Steven Duquette (Chief Information Officer)
John Schaefer (Director, Engineering)
Mark Pereira (Procurement Manager)
Rick Hanulewicz (Facilities and Property Manager)
Christine D'Aloise (Director, Risk Management and Special Projects)

MS. MINKEL: Sister, I think we're ready. Do you want Dave to call the roll first?

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Yes. Welcome to this meeting of June 24th, 2021 for our joint committee meetings. And, David, would you please call the roll?

MR. STATE: Thank you, Sister.

Good morning, commissioners. This is a roll call to see who we have.

Commissioner Ansari?

Commissioner Aul?

COMMISSIONER AUL: I'm here, David.

MR. STATE: Thank you. Commissioner Baynes?

Commissioner Blue?

Commissioner Downey?

COMMISSIONER DOWNEY: Yes.

MR. STATE: Commissioner Hicks?

Commissioner Hughes?

Commissioner Perry?

Commissioner Persico?

Commissioner Tucker?

COMMISSIONER TUCKER: Here.

MR. STATE: Thank you. Sister Denise?

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Here.

MR. STATE: And Commissioner Wilcox?

So we're short our quorum, but we can begin the meeting. We won't be taking any action obviously. We will not be going into executive session. But the meeting can start and then

commissioners will begin to come --

MS. MINKEL: And Commissioner Perry is here.

MR. STATE: Yes, I will note Commissioner Perry as being present. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER PERRY: Does that mean I'm here or does that mean I'm like a gift?

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Both.

Well, this morning we're going to begin with our annual audit report. And I am thrilled to bring back and introduce for some of you who have not met them, Sara and Seth from Lumsden McCormick. Welcome.

SARA DAYTON: Thank you.

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: And please tell us about the audit results.

SETH HENNARD: Thank you. So let's jump right into it. It will probably just take five or ten minutes or so. And if you don't have a paper copy of the presentation, we have extras if anybody needs them. We can pass those out if anybody needs copies of those.

But as we said, the main purpose of the presentation here is a review of the 2021

financial statements. And so on page one of the slides, that's a list of all the different reports that are in the package there. If you're on the phone, the presentation in the binder is on the first, the first section there.

So on slide one is the reports. Management does prepare the financial statements and the related footnotes and we review and audit those work papers. The three things that are in the management reports is management's certification of the financial statements. That's management saying the statements are accurate. Management's report on internal controls is basically just management taking responsibility for the financial internal controls of the organization. And management's discussion and analysis is also prepared by management, and that's an analysis of the major transactions and fluctuations during the year.

Everything else on the bottom of page one is all the different auditors' reports. So each bullet point is basically a separate report or separate thing we have to do. So just kind of

quickly going through them. The main thing we do is a report, an opinion on your financial statements as to whether or not that's a fairly accurate representation of your finances. So it's an unmodified clean opinion. It means we had no issues and it's a fairly presented report. That is the best quality assurance you're looking for.

The federal single audit is the audit of the federal grants and the related data collection forms and online submissions. So we had no findings with your federal single audit report, so there's no findings with the federal grants.

The New York State single audit is required by the New York State Department of Transportation to audit certain grants received from them. Again, no findings with that report.

The compliance with investment guidelines of public authorities is required by a pre Triple A that we look at your investment portfolio and your policies and procedures, and there's no findings with that report.

The national transit database is done in

October when that report becomes available. We also do agreed upon procedures of your passenger facility program at the airport. And these other reports you have that we'll go through in a second.

Slide number two is just the audit plan. This is kind of a very brief reminder that it's a risk based audit. So we have communication with management throughout the year. We discuss the more risky transactions. We talk about the pension, the OPEB items. Those are huge liabilities and significant estimates. We determine your procedures and the updates, determine the risky areas, audit those areas. We also coordinate with the internal audit department, making sure that we are in agreement with what they are finding, review their reports and we rely on those as appropriate.

This is a reminder. The financial audit does not -- is not designed to detect fraud so it's not really the purpose of the audit, but if we were to find it, we would report it to you and let you know if we found anything, which we did

not.

Page three. The required communications. That's a three-page letter that's in your package there, but the summary of it is on slide three. Basically, there was no disagreements with management. There was no substantial issues to report. The audit went very smoothly. We had no concerns. It went very well actually.

The middle part of that is the accounting estimates. That's a reminder that the financial statements do contain a lot of estimates that we have to rely on management's assertions and actuary assumptions. The bullet points listed there are some of the more significant ones, the bottom two especially. The pension liabilities is a very substantial number that is really through New York State. You have no real control over that number. Then, finally, the other post employment benefits is really a half a billion dollar liability that you guys really have actuarial assumptions over that. And Sara will go through the numbers and explain a little bit further, but those are very substantial amounts.

They're just more estimate based.

The bottom of page three is the additional disclosures of COVID-19. So those notes are still there from last year. Note number two discloses all the different federal grants received from FAA and FTA, the CARES Act, the CARES Act Part 2, American Rescue Plan. Those are basically the grant awards you received and you're spending out this year, last year and into the future.

Note number thirteen is risks and uncertainties. That basically talks about just that we're not sure what's going to happen with COVID. Even though it's mostly hopefully getting over, the whole point is when are you going to get back to normal, when are your fares coming back, when are your enplanements coming back. So that uncertainty, that's disclosed in the footnotes.

Page number four is recommendations. So the recommendations. We have no material weaknesses. We do discuss minor efficiency items and such with management, just doing a review of those

items. And then new pronouncements. We talked about this for the last few years. GASB 87 with the leases is still coming out. That got postponed due to COVID, so you have 2023 still, so that's still a couple years out. And GASB 96 is the subscription based IT. Basically think of that as leases for software for multiple-year contracts. So it's kind of the same thing, just whether it's a physical asset or really a software asset.

SARA DAYTON: I'm going to go through the numbers pretty broadly. I think probably more so than most years you've really been focused on the numbers and what's happening. So I'm going to start with the income statement. As you can see on the operating revenues, fares are down, significant increases in ridership. As you recall, from April to June of 2020, which was part of this fiscal year, your fares were suspended, Buffalo Public Schools was remote most of the year, so significant declines in ridership that, you know, are not expected to come back to their pre-COVID levels quickly.

Concessions, commissions and rentals also down significantly as a result of the decline in enplanements as well. So your total operating revenues are down about forty-four percent from the prior fiscal year. Keeping in mind in the prior fiscal year you had the start of COVID. You had about a month and a half of activity in a COVID world.

On the operating expense side, your salaries, payroll taxes and benefits are down really as a result of a reduction in hours in overtime. Depreciation, however, remains consistent, meaning you're kind of replacing your assets as they're deteriorating and keeping that going. Other operating expenses, also all of those declines are really COVID related. Decreases in fuel costs because of fuel purchases that you had to make. Decreases in insurance. That's really due to a decrease in claims costs and improvements in safety really. So at the end of the day, your operating loss was about two hundred and -- just below two hundred and seven million as opposed to a hundred and seventy-eight

million in the prior year.

The way you were able to continue operating was really through these federal grant programs. So as you know, the CARES Act was the first of those. In total you received just under eighty-five million dollars in CARES Act funding, between the Federal Transit Administration and the FAA. Some of that was recognized in 2020. A majority of that was recognized in 2021.

In December of 2020, they passed -- I'm going to call it CRRSA for purposes of time. That was the next funding. And that was about forty-three million dollars, and really all of that is recognized as revenue and a receivable in 2021. And then more recently is the American Rescue Plan Act or ARPA, which was from March of this past year, and that funding is going to be combined between the FAA and FTA, expected to be just under a hundred and two million dollars. So you can expect to see that revenue in fiscal 2022 and beyond.

You can see the decrease continuing in non-operating revenue in your passenger facility

charges, or PFCs, as a result of the decline in enplanements. Your capital contributions are up. There's some CARES funding in there as well. So that your actual change in net position is an increase of about forty-five million dollars from year to year. Again, thanks to really that funding.

Page six is the balance sheet, so this at a point in time. So this is March 31st, 2021 compared to March 31st, 2020. You can see your cash and investments are up, again because of that funding. The receivables are up because of the CRRSA funding which hadn't been received as of year-end. No significant changes in capital assets. You did have about fifty-nine million dollars worth of capital additions during the year, offset fifty-one million worth of current year depreciations.

That deferred outflows of resources line goes with the net pension liabilities, the total OPEB liabilities and the deferred inflows of resources lines. Those are all a result of actuarial calculations. As Seth mentioned on the

pensions, so that is your participation in the New York State Employees Retirement System and Police and Fire Retirement System. You can see that the liability there went up relatively significantly from twenty-seven million to almost fifty-three million at 3/31/21. That's really a function of when the investments in those plans are measured. The measurement date is March 31st, 2020 for that plan. So if you recall, on March 31st of last year, the markets were not doing well at all. This was right at the beginning of COVID. So as a result, the funding of those plans looks very low because it has to be measured on that date. So that has since recovered, so you can expect that liability to go back down when you report it for your 3/31/22 year end which will be measured as of 3/31/21.

On the OPEB liability -- so this is your own liability as opposed to one with the state. OPEB is your other post employment benefits. And this is really the promise to pay health insurance to any employee who retires with ten or more years of service. Again, an actuarial calculation.

The actuary calculates those amounts each year. It is also based on a measurement date a year prior. And really the decrease in this liability is a result of the difference between expected versus actual results. And it's really a function of your good claims experience. So your safety rating has been going up, your claims are going down, so it's really reduced that liability because their expectation was that your claims would be much higher.

My understanding too is the claims were even more positive -- or, went down even more during this current year, so when that's measured again for your 3/31/22 statements, I would anticipate that liability going down even more. Obviously, though, it is a very large liability and has a big impact when you look at the organization as a whole on your -- when you look at liabilities, it's more than half of your total liabilities, so any changes in those estimates will continue to have a significant impact or your financial statements.

I think those are all the big pieces I

wanted to go through, trying to keep it relatively quick for you. Are there any questions that you have on the numbers or on anything that Seth went through?

COMMISSIONER AUL: Hi. It's Joan Aul. Hi, Sara and Seth. Just a quick question. So on page four on the, on the other comments, I know it's not a significant deficiency, but can you expand a little bit where it says continue to review the GBNRTC and NITTEC relationships and allocations? Can you just expand on what the intent is there?

SETH HENNARD: Yeah. So those are really different organizations that it's not really clear at the state level how they wanted those to be reported. We've seen different transit authorities report them differently. Some report them as part of their statements, some report them as a separate entity, separate audits. So we just wanted to make sure everybody is aware that neither one of these entities are audited. NFTA does process the transactions. And the tricky part with these is they also receive federal funds. So our approach to this has been to make sure it's in

your single audit so it is audited so the federal government has some assurance that someone is looking at these funds, but they are not reported in your financial statements. So just to keep aware of how that relationship works and the need to evaluate it, and if we had any guidance from New York State on how they would like that to be done, that would be helpful. But there's different agencies -- everybody reports it differently, so we just want to make sure that it's audited in a way that it's at least covering the federal funds. That's how we've been doing that.

SARA DAYTON: And we've disclosed that in the notes, the statements as well, Joan.

COMMISSIONER AUL: Okay. Thank you.

MS. MINKEL: Are there any other questions?

Well, thank you.

SARA DAYTON: Thank you.

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Great job. Great summary.

MS. MINKEL: So up next, Sister, is Tom George to provide an update on surface transportation.

Tom?

MR. GEORGE: Good morning. First, before I get into the discussion items, I'll just briefly go over our performance for the month of May, 2021. We had a very favorable month. Our operating revenues were essentially on budget. We had very favorable operating assistance, both Erie County sales tax and mortgage tax combined were nearly twenty percent favorable for the month. Our state operating assistance was seven percent favorable for the month. And, overall, total operating assistance was nine hundred thousand or eight percent favorable for the month. That was coupled with our operating expenses being favorable as well. Personnel, service and maintenance, and repairs, transit fuel power, amongst others, were favorable for the month. Overall we ended up the month of May at a position on the operating side two point four four six million favorable. That combined with April year to date, we were four point five two million favorable for the year to date on the financials.

On the Metro initiative status report, I'm

going to skip over that today because the two primary items of discussion on that are also our discussion items. I'm also going to skip over the performance in the book. I will note that, however, our ridership, our on-time performance and our miles between service interruptions are all starting to show some rebound from the positions that we've been in previously on those items.

Skipping over to my committee reports, if I could. The citizens advisory committee was held on May 27th. The minutes are included in your book. We did discuss the Erie Canal Harbor Station redesign and had a number of comments about accommodations that should be included in that design. We talked with the committee about both our onboard survey and our customer satisfaction survey. We went through with them the transit service improvements and some of the initiatives that were ongoing right now. Talked a little bit about that. We had some comments relative to -- about branding the initiative so that people can get excited about it, and also

making sure that organizations with people directly affected by the proposed changes are engaged.

We talked again about bus stop balancing and we talked a little bit about the proposed signage. There was comments included on that. We also provided an update on the MetGo system. We did have some general comments from the committee. We talked about again rebranding -- or, branding the service improvements to make it exciting. We talked about how we're going to be enforcing fare gates when they go into place in the system. We also talked about mask protocols still being included and the requirement to maintain masks in the system, and we also talked a little bit about driver training in relation to customer service. Our next citizens advisory committee is scheduled for June 22nd, so next month.

And then we also had an accessibility advisory committee meeting on May 27th. We indicated that we were seeking individuals to do audits on behalf of the ADA, and we were asking

those folks who were interested to apply. We talked about the new fare capping system and the new system again, went through the details of that. And we also indicated that we are now participating for the first time in the ABBG or American Bus Benchmarking Group. It has always done customer satisfaction surveys as long as we've been a part of them. This year we are introducing a customer satisfaction survey for the paratransit community, which is new for the group and we are one of the agencies that are participating in that. So that was ongoing and we wanted to give them a heads-up on that. And last, but not least, we also indicated that the seating capacity on the PAL vehicles is going to be increased to half the vehicle's capacity at that point in time due to some demands.

Since that point, as an aside, on June 21st, this previous Monday, we have relaxed the capacity limits on our system system-wide. So we are no longer employing capacity restrictions on the system. It really isn't an issue. We don't really have capacity problems, we haven't had

pass-ups, but we now have formally relaxed that requirement in the system.

That was all I had on my report. If there's any questions.

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Any questions of Tom?

Everything is perfect.

MR. GEORGE: Hearing none, I did want to indicate that, again, it's time for our Metro annual performance report. A very different and challenging year as you may imagine. The metrics really -- you know, we really look at them heavily on an annual basis to see how we're trending, and the trends have been blown up, as you may imagine. Across the board they've been totally, totally blown up, so -- but we did put the report together. It kind of gives you an indication of where we are system-wide and what we've been doing and kind of gives us a new benchmark to move forward from. This will be released on our website effective today, and it will be sent out to our electeds and stakeholders as per our normal practice.

So that was what I wanted to cover in my

report. The next thing is our discussion items. We're going to tag team this a little bit today. As a standing, standing invitee, Rob Jones, our manager of planning, is going to start us out and talk about the service improvements and the program we have there, and then we're going to transition to James Morrell who is going to talk about the fare structure and then I'll wrap it back up. So with that, I'll introduce Rob and get you started with that.

MR. JONES: Yes. Thank you, Tom.

Good segue from the annual performance report into this presentation, mentioning that a lot of the metrics and trends are kind of blown up. So we'll kind of start there and say, you know, where were we when step back before COVID versus where are we right now. So, honestly, our ridership on the bus, just looking at bus only pre-COVID, was around sixty-six thousand, sixty-seven thousand per day and now we're down to really around thirty-two thousand, so about fifty percent of our ridership that we were about two years ago so -- or, eighteen months ago.

It's a really dramatic shift. And you can see in the top chart that some of that is school related, but a lot of it is general public related as well. Our peakiness in our system is pretty much gone. There's no more really pronounced morning and afternoon peaks. It's a different type of travel out there. It's really important for us to understand where our riders need to travel. So that's changed a lot as well. I already mentioned Buffalo Schools were online. I think the auditors mentioned it as well. That changed a lot for us. That's a whole segment of ridership that was gone. A lot of colleges adding a lot of remote classes really changed where we were at that point.

So why do we need to change service? Why should we look at changing service? Well, we just noted that the ridership patterns are different. A lot of work and education from home has happened in the last eighteen months and a lot of it is expected to continue, maybe more so on the work side than the education side. People are online shopping more. We saw it during the

pandemic; grocery delivery, Amazon. Those are the areas that were growing. So people are taking less trips for retail now than they were before. And, additionally, telehealth medical appointments. You know, less in face with the doctor. I've done basically all three of these things during the pandemic at some point and I know a lot of other people have as well. And also responding to our funding and staffing challenges moving forward.

So really critical to us, our understanding from the public what their needs are in terms of our system. So about a year ago, June, 2020, we were right in the middle of the pandemic, at the beginning. We were really confused as to what was going on and what our riders were doing. And we put out a survey to our public and asked them a lot of different questions. Are you riding, are you not riding? If you are riding, why are you riding? So half our respondents at that point identified as essential workers. They were riding because they had to get to their jobs and transit was the way to do that.

Most recently they're going to work and they're going to the grocery store, things that we all have to do and people still have to continue to do. But really interestingly, the most frequent reason for people not riding was because they were working from home, which leads to why we saw some of that lower demand for the peaks and why our rail service was down slightly more than the bus service overall during the pandemic.

Another point to note there is that about forty-three percent of respondents said they plan on riding transit less frequently moving forward. Obviously this is self-reported. We were at the beginning of the pandemic. Things have changed now. But it's important for us to know that not all our ridership is coming back very quickly, so we need to respond to that as well.

So additional public outreach efforts last month and this month to do really extensive public outreach. We got five hundred and seventy-two respondents to our survey. And I want to thank the commissioners and our other

partner organizations for helping us spread that word. We have really great partnerships with the City of Buffalo, Town of Amherst, and a lot of our community partners, religious organizations, nonprofits. We got a lot of widespread coverage of that. United Way sent it out, as an example, in their e-mail blast that they usually get thousands and thousands of people there. So we really tried to cast a wide net.

Additionally, we went out and talked to people in the system. So here you're going to see some of my staff and some of (inaudible) from service planning's staff out talking to our customers. It's been almost sixteen, seventeen months before we were actually talking to our customers because of the pandemic. They were really glad that we were out there. We were at University Station, out in front of our building at MTC, out at Portage Road in Niagara Falls, just interacting with people. And not everyone filled out a survey, but we talked to a lot of other people who shared their concerns with us and we took notes on that as well. So some of

the most common requests were suburban access, not only for jobs but also for retail. Some recreational destinations were a little bit surprising to us. We don't usually hear that comment. And then all-day and weekend service to areas that we only service with express networks right now.

Really interesting also is we asked our respondents to say, well, what's the most important factors of service to you? And the three highest by far are shorten wait times, realtime information and bus shelters and benches (inaudible) followed really closely by travel time. And that's really consistent with -- Tom mentioned the ABBG survey. We asked a similar question on that survey over the last seven, eight years and those are usually kind of the top, top things. We wanted to reaffirm that with our community.

So moving forward with planning service during COVID and coming out of COVID is really difficult because it's a lot of change to our system, a lot of change for our ridership. So we

need to come in with some assumptions. I already mentioned the peaks. If you look at the bottom chart there, the orange is what the system used to look like in terms of temporal ridership. You see really pronounced peaks during the a.m. and p.m. commute, including when school kids got out, kind of around the three o'clock time frame. The blue line is what we're seeing now. It's pretty much -- pretty flat. You see a little bit more ridership in the p.m., but it really kind of builds up in the p.m. and then kind of tapers off.

So we look at that and say, well, how do we respond to that? Maybe we need less peak service and we should spread our resources out throughout the day and throughout the community because people's travel needs are changing. We think we need more reliable express services on routes where we have sustainable demand. A lot of those routes right now may have one trip in, one trip out; two trips in, two trips out. We know that people's schedules need to be more flexible than that. If you don't work within that shift time,

it doesn't really work for your schedule, you're not going to take it as an option.

And, lastly, pulse system may be useful on parts of the network. To put that simpler, it's really kind of a time transfer system. So think about being at a location and having all of the routes come in, and instead of a bus leaving or you miss that timing, they'll wait for a set time. So like ten o'clock all of the buses are going to go back out and then at ten-thirty the same thing will happen. So you're really reducing that wait time for individuals, so you're making that transfer between routes really easy and simple for people to do.

So this is a really quick rundown of some of the draft service improvements. And I say draft service improvements because this is really the first bite at the apple for the public. We're putting out a lot of options to people, including our stakeholders and the public, that we're going to get comments and refine as we move forward. So some routes may have only one or two options; some may have four or five. Really we're at that

kind of throw spaghetti on the wall and see what sticks type of phase. (Inaudible) comments on the whole system, different concepts and really get a sense of what people value.

So we kind of broke it down into the three categories that we discussed before. The first is our express network. We want to have more permanency on the routes that are working and have kind of more options for people who work different shifts to match their demands. And we may eliminate routes that have some very low ridership where we don't think we're ever going to be able to capture some of that demand. Create faster service between Buffalo and Niagara Falls, add some limited-stop services as well.

Finally, Niagara Falls. We haven't tackled Niagara Falls network in a couple of decades. We've been working really closely with the Niagara Falls mayor and some partners there from the CAC and trying to really simplify the service up there in terms of legibility, ease of use, making it easier to understand for people to have that easier transfer at our two transit centers

since we have those resources up there in that community. And providing new routes that serve the airport, Vantage International Pointe Industrial Park, N Triple C and BOCES. Those all kind of came up out of that. And providing that 77 faster travel between -- on both communities will enhance not only the ridership for our regular customers, but also for tourism as well.

And then in terms of the Erie County network, we've heard a lot of people refer to new access to job areas. Adjusting frequencies in certain areas to meet that new demand. Streamlining some of the routing, especially through downtown where it can be very confusing where we have kind of routes on every street, people are not always sure where to go. And potentially creating some access to more recreational areas.

So I could walk through every single route and all of the options and we'd be here all day, so we're not going to do that. Instead, what we're going to talk about is our approaches to how we're creating the service. So some

examples, essentially, of how we're creating service through this plan.

The first one I just talked about. So we looked at some areas and said, well, we may need some new routes in the system to meet some of that demand. The gray underlined area is the area we would no longer serve on Niagara Falls Boulevard and Ward Road. But, really importantly, the new Route 58 creates better service to Niagara Falls International Airport. It provides service to Vantage International Pointe which is an industrial park where the Niagara County IDA is. It has over a thousand jobs at that location that's not currently being served importantly. And it provides better service to N Triple C and BOCES to match what their schedules are and their demand.

The next approach is limited stop service. So I was here in January or February talking about the Bailey Ave. plan. This is just kind of another look at it. It's not the only example, but this is a way to not only shorten the wait, but to respond to a community request for faster

and frequent service on major corridors for the ridership (inaudible).

Another one is truncation. So there's lots of areas in our system where maybe we were going extra distance that we no longer go. This is an example of 69. The gray dashed line, which is almost as long as the line that currently leads to Lancaster, was a service that we had to Alden. We plan on not going to Alden and ending in Lancaster. And what that does for us, though, is allows us to take those resources and better match it to the service that is existing, add another trip, another round trip for those commuters which represent about ninety percent of the riders on that route anyhow. So it's really about looking at the overall service and we're tweaking efficiencies to better serve the riders we already have.

Consolidation. This is an example of the 70 East Aurora route. Right now we have one trip in on one variant in the morning and one trip on another variant that goes a different route. The same thing in the afternoon. So really unless

you work the exact schedule that fits those needs, you can't really use the service. Instead, what we're going to do is provide all of the trips on the same route and add a little bit of service there so we have three trips in, three trips out, to add that flexibility for people. So regardless if you're working five -- or, eight to four-thirty or nine to five, you'll have a trip that serves you as opposed to trying to fit a square peg in a round hole for only one kind of shift time.

Extension. So we heard a lot from our communities there were areas we weren't going or weren't serving that we should serve now. So this is an example of one of the options on the 47 (inaudible) Road where we modified the route now to instead of ending at the airport which was a convenient end location (inaudible) lot of ridership on that route at the airport, going out on Transit Road where we don't currently have service in this location along Transit Road, to serve those areas over there near Northtown Plaza, to provide some job access and ending at a

common time and point at Eastern Hills Mall where people are also trying to get to. So it's really a smaller change, but we're extending it up Transit Road where we know that there's some demand, but it's very dispersed demand in terms of the density.

So I talked a little bit about downtown. So just this map is a little bit confusing for people to look at, and that's only five routes, and we have forty routes that come downtown. So this is just one example of how it can be confusing as a passenger to kind of go out there and say, okay, well, I'm going to the north or northwest. Where do I go? If I'm on this street, I can get the 11; if I'm on this street, I can get the 20. What we're going to do is change that so that all of the approaches for routes coming through from certain directions into downtown will have the same common routing. So as an example, all of these routes, so Niagara, Grant Street, Delaware, they're all going north and northwest out of downtown, will all have the same bus stop, will all travel on

the same corridors and be really easy and legible for people to understand.

So right now in our system we have some areas where you may be standing at a stop and see a bus go by, but that bus doesn't actually stop there because of a turning issue or a parking lane. So we want to really simplify that routing in through downtown. And we actually have eight of these maps that kind of show the downtown routing being simplified for all of the routes coming in having commonality. The other thing that helps us do is limit the number of stops, make them more legible and allows us to focus our resources in terms of shelters (inaudible) the bench program into those stops to enhance those stops as well.

Faster service. I mentioned the new service between downtown Buffalo and Niagara Falls. Right now if you want to get between downtown Buffalo and Niagara Falls through most of the day, you get on the 40, which is really kind of a local service that travels along Niagara Street, River Road, it drives down Grand Island Boulevard

on Grand Island and it goes into downtown Niagara Falls. It takes about fifty-five minutes to do so it's not very quick. What we're looking at doing is saying, okay, well, the 40 right now runs every half hour. Let's make it run every hour, but in those other half hours, put the 77 there so you get between downtown and downtown in thirty-eight minutes, forty minutes. Really streamline that level of advancement there for those riders, because we know there's a big need for not only individuals in our community who work between those locations, but also for tourists. If you're kind of looking to get between those communities because you're here on a trip and you have to sit on a local service that takes almost an hour to do, that's less beneficial than saying, hey, if you get on right here, you can be up in Niagara Falls in thirty-five minutes. It makes it much more competitive for everyone involved. We think that will be a very popular option for individuals who are making those trips daily.

And lastly is eliminations. There were a

couple routes, most of these were routes that were suspended during the pandemic that we think will allow us to eliminate moving forward, like the 29 that will allow for investment in other routes.

So what are our next steps? So you saw a lot of community and stakeholder feedback on our initial kind of outreach efforts, but we really want to get you back on the concepts. For a lot of people, it's hard for them to have discussions in terms of what their needs are until they can see it and really have something tangible in front of them to talk about. We have a really interesting new tool called Remix that we're using on our transit planning side, but the public will also be able to use to comment on routes and look at routes and comment all the way down to the granularity of bus stops. So we're going to show a video on the next slide that gives kind of an overview of how the staff has been using Remix, but also how the public will be able to use Remix to provide more comments and feedback to us.

So we're going to do a lot of partner outreach, we're doing in-person outreach. We're doing in-reach as well with our operators and our supervisors. That's planned for next -- two weeks from now. We're working with our internal stakeholders on that because their feedback is just as important as well. They're the individuals on the frontline who are out there driving these routes every day. They often have great ideas. Same can be said with supervisors as well. And we're going to update those concepts based on what we hear from the public.

If we put something out there and the public says, this doesn't work for me, you're missing something, what about going to this location, Remix allows us to be able to publish that almost immediately. I can go back to my desk after this meeting and change a route and be able to publish that instantly. So gone are the days where you have to go through GIS, create a PDF, print it, go do it that way. It really creates a lot better flow of communication that way.

So next month we're going to come back to

the board, commissioners who are here, with more of a proposal. So instead of saying, hey, we have five alternatives for you to review, we'll say, this is the alternative we like and we'd like to advance forward. So that's kind of where we see that going in terms of the overall efforts here. So it's a quick timeline. We've been on a quick timeline and we've been meeting that timeline. The staff has been putting in a lot of work and appreciate all of the efforts from other departments as well, but we think it's doable and we think we need to do it and the time is right with where we are with COVID as well.

So now real quickly we'll show a little bit of a video that Helen is getting ready here relating to Remix. So if you bear with us here, it's just two and a half minutes really quickly.

Station engineer and planner Remix. Through the demo of how to use Remix to envision, plan and evaluate your fixed route transit network. It works in any city. Today let's take a trip to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and explore future service connecting Jackson Park to downtown. I'll start

by sketching out my first idea for the proposed new service.

As I draw, bus stops are automatically identified based on my existing network. On the left, I can see frequencies, costs and demographics. They populate instantly. For example, if I change the frequency of service, say to come every ten minutes in the morning, I can see the cost go up and that I may need an extra bus. If I extend the line to downtown, I can see the cost and vehicle requirements grow again.

To understand more about how my proposed service will impact the community, I can quickly overlay demographic data, including poverty and minority information. Checking the interactive origin designation layer helps me fine-tune the proposed alignment or brainstorm other scenarios. I can add layers from any custom data I have such as ridership, future land use or pedestrian and bicycle networks.

I now want to view the network more holistically, so I'll bring in all existing

lines. This is where Jane comes in. Jane is Remix's isochrone feature. By placing Jane onto the map, I can see how far a rider can go and how many jobs they can reach in fifteen, thirty, forty-five and sixty minutes. I can visualize the impact with and without my proposed project. From the park area, Jane can reach about fifty thousand more jobs within an hour with my new line.

Once I'm done with my map, it's easy to share, export and collaborate with colleagues, elected officials and the community through the Web-based platform. Once everyone is happy with my proposal, it's time to plan my service down to the minute. In the timetable, I can customize time points, segment level speeds or trips. Seeing these impacts is powerful because it lets me center conversation around the trade-offs inherent to designing quality transit service. This is just a quick tour of Remix. To learn more about planning transit in Remix, get in touch at Remix dot com.

So the video really focuses kind of on

the -- why it's beneficial for me and my department. It's also very beneficial from the public side. So when we publish the map, which we're planning on doing tomorrow. We have a dedicated website for this project that Helen's team is working on. Individuals will be able to click on it, leave comments, we get those comments immediately. The comments will be aligned directly to specific routes (inaudible) bus stops. Really a great level of granularity for us.

So I'll stop there and take any questions that anyone might have.

COMMISSIONER BAYNES: One question. On your page four, forty-three percent of the respondents said they plan on riding transit less frequently. That was in June of 2020?

MR. JONES: Correct.

COMMISSIONER BAYNES: Was it just because of COVID or do they totally plan on --

MR. JONES: Yeah. I think most of it was -- I don't know exactly how we framed the question, what time frame was there, but we weren't thinking

permanently. It was right now are you going to ride the same in the future, the near future, are you going to ride less? And twenty-nine percent did say they were going to ride the exact same. Some people said they were going to ride more. But a lot of people said they were going to ride less. So I think it's more of a perception issue. And we always struggle with that perception issue even during the pandemic. A recent study did come out and say the air on a bus recirculates more often than the air essentially in this building or really anywhere because you're opening the door all the time so you get more of that air circulation. It's really communicating that to the public and getting them comfortable again with transit I think is a lot of it.

COMMISSIONER BAYNES: Thank you.

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Any other questions?

COMMISSIONER BLUE: Reverend Blue. Hello everyone.

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Hello, Reverend Blue.

COMMISSIONER BLUE: My question, when it comes down to the ridership, is that all of those statements

were back in June. With the new opening now and a lot of the restrictions being eased, I think ridership may increase. And I know you made the knowledge of the telemedicine and things of that nature, but a lot of people are still wanting to go I know wanting to go and see their doctors. And, also, although shopping online has increased, it's only increased because of the pandemic. And you would still have those riders who will do a lot more in-person shopping as well. Because even with on-line shopping, it's -- the extent and the satisfaction of people are just online shopping because of the pandemic has been high, but there's still a lot of people who are unsatisfied with online shopping because of returns and things of that nature. People are starting to get out and to socialize.

So I'm glad we have this apparatus, this app that we can use to insert changes, but we need to look at that as well. People want to come out because they're social beings. So although some will say during the time of the survey that they wanted to rely on the telemedicine and the online

shopping, I think you're still going to see a segment of the population getting back out for socialization. So I just wanted to put that bug and idea as we go forward and make sure that we don't make too many changes too soon for that segment of people that will feel slighted if they don't have that opportunity.

MR. JONES: Yes. Thank you. Very well noted. Appreciate it.

MS. MINKEL: Yes. Thank you. And I think it's an important point that you're making, Reverend Blue. I think I should highlight that we are looking at pre-pandemic travel patterns as well, assuming and making certain that as we make our assumptions that we have excess capacity on anything that we're proposing so we don't isolate those individuals when they come back.

MR. GEORGE: So just one comment on that. We've been tracking a lot of -- whether it's through the transportation research board or a lot of research that's going on as well as this forecasting that we're seeing in the industry. And on the low end, you're seeing forecasts being

in the range of a seventy-five percent of pre-pandemic numbers. On the high end, you're seeing closer to a ninety percent recovery to pre-pandemic numbers. And the timing of that is also a question as well.

So we're looking at September as a target date for us because we feel we're already gaining some normalcy now. When schools go back, you'll see quite a bit more. And then we'll see through 2021 and into 2022 you'll start to see more people normalizing. So those are the numbers we're kind of forecasting right now, seventy-five to ninety percent. So even though there is some changes here, we still have an incredible amount of capacity in our system that will not be going away. You know, our ridership is at -- probably in the range of twenty to thirty percent of our capacity on our vehicles at this point in time. So the comment is great. We're tracking it across not only our system and our community, but across the country and the world to see how people are responding.

One last interesting comment I'll just make

is that in Europe it's responding very quickly. In Australia it's responding more quickly. The United States is one of the place where it's responding the slowest. A lot of it has to do with, you know, faith in transit, the whole, the whole concept of transit, how it's used in communities, the urbanization. So in the U.S. we believe, and based on international studies, will be responding more slowly than most of the rest of the world unfortunately for us. So just a little snapshot and just some additional information.

Mr. Morrell?

MR. MORRELL: Good morning, commissioners. So I don't have a video, but I have something as equally exciting, our fare collection system and the upgrade and update of that product. So we are changing out our entire fare collection system. We're changing the fare boxes, our ticket vending machines. We're introducing fare gates. We're also introducing something that our passengers are not looking at right now when they access the system, and that's access control.

We're putting up fare gates and fences in the underground stations.

When I talk about smart cards, when we introduce an account based system, what we're looking at is a system that's very similar to what you see on a thruway, the card that's in your car. This is a card that we'll be using. You tap the system and you'll be able to go through fare gates as well as the fare boxes on the buses. What's interesting is the value is not on the card. The value is within an account based system. So if you lose your card, you just register with the system and you will be able to get a new card and you don't lose the value that's inherent in the system.

We're also looking to provide easy access for our fare products. Once you get your fare card -- and we'll talk about how we're going to distribute that a little bit later. Once you get that card, what's going to happen is those individuals won't have to get a card ever again, at least for another five to seven years. What's going to happen is they'll use a portal on the

Web, through their phone or through a computer. So each month right now we distribute thousands of passes that we print here in-house and then we distribute them. That's going to go away. Individuals will just keep their card and they will just put value onto their card every month. We're trying to streamline that process for our individuals that we deal with, all our partners, the Board of Ed, our employers, that they wouldn't have to get cards every month, that those cards would be distributed to their clients each month and then they would go on the portal to put value on those cards. It's going to make the system a lot easier. And what's going to happen is once an individual touches the system through the card, it would get their origin and destination data. That will provide information to service planning that would allow us to track individuals, where they're going. Not individuals, but their, their journey.

So where are we right now? We're in final system development and testing. We're looking at the back end, seeing how this system actually

works. Constantly reviewing what the vendor is providing. But what's more important is what we're providing is PCI compliance. That's our payment card industry standard. And what that does is it's making sure that everyone that uses a credit card, that it's safe. We're making sure that the merchant services management, you swipe your card, that all that data is safe within the system. And how are we doing that? One of the main things is through our cellular network. That's being developed by our vendor on our system -- I mean, the data will not be going through our system.

Talking about hardware installation. So we're changing out about three hundred fare boxes within the system. We're about two hundred and seventy-five in right now, and we have over two hundred thousand instances currently where a transaction has gone through the new fare boxes. All new TVMs in our stations are complete. We have new fare gates that's going in that's the fencing around them so individuals won't be able to get through the system. And our

administrative point of sale which is within our customer service area is being developed right now.

We're also looking at our third-party integration. We're looking at working directly with our universities, colleges, the Board of Ed, Social Service Department and our employers to make sure that they can get onto our portal easily and work through the system where it's efficient for them to get all their passes and making sure that the system works properly.

So right now we have a retail network that's about fifty locations where individuals can buy their passes. We're working with this company called InComm where we're going to have over two hundred and seventy locations where individuals can go in and upgrade their value on their cards. And that is a process that -- you know, it's taking some time to get these establishments, but going from fifty locations to over two hundred and seventy is going to make our passengers a little easier to get value onto their card.

Now, we have to finalize our fare policy.

We were here back in 2015 to look at the fare policy. And what is the fare policy? Our fare policy is basically guidelines to establish the restructuring and fares within the system. The board is required to adopt the fare policy. That was the one that was adopted in 2016. And what does that guide? That guides fare payment, fare structure, as well as fare equity. We have to make sure that what -- the product that we're putting out is fair across the board.

So in 2015 we advanced a fare policy to our vendor Scheidt and Bachmann to begin development of the system. In 2016 we came to the board and what they did was approve that fare policy that included a number of items that I'm going to go through a little bit later. But, what we found over the past three or four years in the development of the system is there were areas that we did not include in that structure. That included fare capping at all levels, how are we going to distribute the cards as well as how individuals at the youth level access the system.

Now, our previous fare policy that was

adopted in 2016 included all these different elements. Day cap. When I talk about day capping, that means that an individual would not pay more than five dollars per day. The card, that individual will get on the bus, they would tap, two dollars on their first tap. The next bus, two dollars will come off their, off their account. The next tap would be one dollar. So the individual would not pay more than five dollars in a day.

The rest of these items that the board approved are already set within our fare policy. Weekly pass, enhanced thirty-one day, seven-day pass, monthly pass as well as our thirty-one-day pass. We have also passes for individuals that are in our PAL system as well as our youth for the Summer Go pass, individuals that's receiving a reduced fare as well as our youth half fares for individuals that are ten and under will now have to pay full fare. I mean, ten and under would now pay full fare. Okay? So what that means is this. Individuals currently that are nine and under -- ten and under now pay half

fare. Individuals that are nine and under now, under the new system, will be free with a fare paying adult. The problem that we're having is that individuals within this category that are nine and under, if they do not have a fare paying adult with them would now be required to pay a full fare. So that's some of the discussion that we would like to have today regarding this specific area.

So we go back to those areas that we did not include in our previous adopted fare policy. Fare capping at multiple levels. We're looking to do day capping, possibly week capping, but also monthly capping. Right now our monthly cash fare is seventy-five dollars per month. Under our proposal, we're looking to do it at the monthly level with an individual not paying more than seventy-five dollars in a given month. They pay five dollars in a day. They continue to pay that. Once they reach seventy-five dollars, they stop paying for the month. That element within the fare policy is something that we would like to do moving forward.

Youth access concerns. I'm talking about those individual that are double digits in age. Ten and up now pay full fare. Individuals that are nine and under pay no fare if they're with a parent or a full fare paying adult; but if they're by themselves, they pay full fare. That is a concern of ours. Tom is going to get into that a little bit later as to how we bring that together.

The other issue that we would like to have a discussion on is our new smart card distribution. How are we going to distribute these cards to all the individuals that's currently using our system. We originally thought about charging everyone two dollars per card. So if you get a new card, it's going to cost you two dollars. What we began to think about is, from an equity standpoint, is that fair? For those individuals that currently get a card for free when they pay their five dollars or when their buy their monthly pass. What we're looking to do, our recommendation moving forward, is to have a mass distribution, but what we don't want to do is

flood the system to where individuals will be getting these cards and throwing them away because they're not really of value to them at this point. So what we want to do is develop a system to where we can distribute these cards to where individuals will hold on to them and keep them for the future as we implement the system.

So at this point, I want to turn it over to Tom -- no. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Yeah. Turn it over to Tom so that he can bring it all together. And if there's any questions, I'll entertain questions.

COMMISSIONER BAYNES: I have a question. How do you ensure that the community that doesn't have cell phones or computers or credit cards have access to -- is it the third-party --

MR. MORRELL: Yes. Yes. So the third-party -- we have a retail network of about two hundred and seventy locations. We're going through an exercise right now where we're looking at these deserts, those places where those retail networks are not in those areas as well as where there's a digital divide; and if they match, we know that

we have to either provide a location for those individuals within those communities to go and upload value onto their card. What we found back in '15 was that we thought that there was going to be a very big increase in the number of individuals that don't have smartphones. That has pretty much gone away. Most everyone has a smartphone. What we're looking at also is those individuals that are unbanked. So those individuals that don't have access to a regular institution, M and T, KeyBank and stuff like that. But, most individuals do use their phones to get to digital retailing. They also use what's called Green Dot cards and cards that are used on -- that you can load that's not part of institutions like M and T and KeyBank. So we are --

COMMISSIONER BAYNES: So if they came in with cash, would you -- how would they pay for their card?

MR. MORRELL: Okay. So an individual at the -- through a TVM, the APOS that's downstairs, to a retail establishment, they would come in, purchase the card. Now they have the card.

COMMISSIONER BAYNES: With cash.
MR. MORRELL: With cash.
COMMISSIONER BAYNES: Okay.
MR. MORRELL: Now they have the card. Then they go to that same establishment or other locations that we provide, downstairs, ticket vending machines, and they put value on their card. But in addition to that, they can do it mobily on the phone or on the Web.
COMMISSIONER BAYNES: Okay. Thank you.
MR. GEORGE: So we're going back to the public here, public for input this month, in June. In July we're going to be coming back to the board with a firm proposal on service. So all of the input that Rob's group gets, based on everything that's on the Remix and the outreach will be summarized. Then we'll present our report to you in July as to what we're recommending.

We're also going to be asking for feedback on the fare. So we are recommending today that we go with full monthly capping. Previously we did not have that. So now anybody in our community who accesses the MetGo system -- and I

want to make a point. James talked a lot about the card, but the card really is only necessary if you don't want to use your smartphone. Because it's -- there's a full app on MetGo that allows you to do everything that you can do with a card, including use your phone to swipe your way into the rail, use your -- or, use your phone to swipe your way into the rail, use your phone on the fare box on the bus. So there's a whole part of our community that doesn't want to have another card in their pocket then they won't need the card. But, those who do, we would like to distribute those free of charge initially, so we'd like to develop a program where we have free distribution of cards for those individuals who want to have a card.

The goal here is to promote the use of the system as much as possible. Okay? It provides better value to our customers, it provides a more equitable distribution of service to the community who needs that and also reduces cash in our system so we don't have to count cash. Most of you have never had the pleasure to go to our

cash counting center. But, it's not the optimal 21st Century system that we're operating, so we want to get into more automated and reduce that cash as much as possible. So we believe that the monthly fare capping is the more equitable solution that will encourage more people to move out of the cash and into the system and is better for our community as a whole.

And the other part that we just want the board to recognize and to be aware of is I believe right now that if you are below -- is it eight years old?

MR. MORRELL: Nine.

MR. GEORGE: Nine now -- or nine and up you pay half fare. We're moving that to ten and saying you're going to be free from ten under if you have an adult with you. So children under the age of ten who are in the system without an adult will be required to pay a fare. The only fare that will be available to them will be a full fare. That's a change. All right? So we want the board to be aware that that's the change.

What we're going to do in July as well is

bring this in a formalized manner to you with the service changes and a Title Six equity analysis and we're going to say to the board, here's what we want to go to the public with, this is our final recommendation, please authorize us to go to public hearing in August. We'll also -- then we'll introduce a whole public feedback process and we'll be asking the board to approve that. Once we go to that public hearing -- we get that approval, in August we hold those public hearings, in September we come back to you and we say, this is what we told you we wanted to do in July, this is what the public said, we have now revised that or we haven't revised that or what we've done, so we'll give you all the summary of the public feedback we get through that process, any changes we make, and we'll be bringing to you something we're asking you at that point to adopt. It will be a new service plan and new fare structure -- or, in this case additions to the fare structure. Primary focus is on that monthly capping piece.

So if that does occur and the board likes

what they see and it wants to agree with what we're doing or asks us to consider other things or pushes back and decides we want to do some of it or others, that's a discussion we have in September. If the board adopts that in September then we roll through in October through December and implement the changes and implement what we do with the fare policy in the -- as the system rolls out.

So that's kind of a summary of where we are today and where we, where we plan on going and we're really looking again for as robust public input as possible on this process.

MS. MINKEL: Tom, do you want to mention how this reduces dwell time? As we talk about bus stop balancing, as we talk about changing the service network, one of the advantages is that it also reduces dwell time. So with the old system, more people using cash, it takes longer for people to board and it's less efficient.

MR. GEORGE: Yeah. It really does improve efficiency on the system. And it does a lot of things for our operators as well. It's really a nicer

system for our employees to implement, and we're hearing a lot of really positive feedback from them. But, Kim is right. If some of our bus stops are really heavy, and the work Rob is looking to do downtown Buffalo where we're really consolidating some of those stops and making them better amenities, you get a whole group that gets on with their smart cards, they tap, tap, tap, tap and off we go. So it's really -- it's a modernization. It's a modernization of the service. It's a modernization of the system.

COMMISSIONER BAYNES: One question. So children that are ten an under, if they're with an adult, they ride for free.

MR. GEORGE: Correct.

COMMISSIONER BAYNES: So why would you change them if they're not with an adult?

MR. GEORGE: They need a methodology to get into the system. So a child shows up at a fare gate by themselves, they can't open the gate. They need to have some way to open a gate. They need to have some way to get onto a bus.

MR. MORRELL: So, currently, you can go to a TVM

machine and purchase a half fare card. Under the new system, we are issuing half fare cards as well as PAL cards for those individuals that take our PAL service. So we issue the card. We know that you're a PAL customer. We know that you're a reduced fare customer. Currently, right now if a person buys a TVM -- out of the TVM a half fare card, they then have to show some other form of method to the operator and the ticket inspector. Moving forward, because there's gates, there's no way that an individual that's checking the tickets will know that that is a person that should be getting a half fare. Currently, you have to show two forms. All right? So we don't have a method for an individual to purchase a half fare card currently -- I mean, in the future.

MR. GEORGE: And these half fare cards all have a photo ID on them as well.

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Anybody, then, who pays full fare, say being twelve or thirteen or something, covers for the one under ten?

MR. MORRELL: Theoretically, yes.

MR. GEORGE: Yes.
CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Okay. So there just has to be another rider --
MR. MORRELL: A full fare paying person, yes.
CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Okay.
MR. GEORGE: And, you know, we don't promote a lot of younger kids riding the system by themselves, just as a sidebar. That's not something that -- I mean, it happens, we're cognizant of that, but we try to provide a safe and as clean of a system as possible, but it's not an environment that we control. Thank you.
CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Any other questions?
COMMISSIONER BLUE: This is Reverend Blue. I have a question. Now, if the full-fare rider has three children under nine, all of those children ride for free?
MR. GEORGE: That's correct.
COMMISSIONER BLUE: Okay. And I just want to say I commend you on what you guys are doing. If you have someone who is, who is having problems with their phone, per se -- because some companies aren't offering the smartphone. They are still

offering the flip phone. We need to be aware of that too. AARP, they're not -- some of their phones are just flip phones and some of the other companies that offer phones to senior citizens and to other agencies, they're only offering the flip phone, so it doesn't have the LED screens and things of that nature. Have you considered an alternative to that, just if they don't have the card or a smartphone?

MR. GEORGE: We've not been able to recognize any alternatives other than the smart card, and certainly that's why we're focusing on advancing a free distribution -- a free, broad distribution of smart cards in the community, because -- specifically for that, folks who are uncomfortable with a digital environment, folks who don't have access to smartphones, folks who just have limited service and are concerned about having service in areas. We want to make sure that there's a viable option. And, again, that's really why we wanted to promote that free distribution of those so we could get as broad as possible.

COMMISSIONER BLUE: Thank you. I would -- at the risk of losing my neck, I'm going to say this. When you have those public meetings, if I am available, I would like to -- let me know if I'm overstepping or if I'm doing something that's not -- well, let me know what I can do to assist if you have any of those public meetings and you would like a board member there. Because sometimes -- and I do believe it will be better to have someone there on the board and not just, not just you guys there by yourselves, that can -- so they can have a comfortability that they're not only being heard, but they have somebody who can help make a decision on the proposal. I think this would be good for both -- for you when you make your -- or whoever makes the presentation and for the audience as well. You know, I'm not afraid of getting -- of having eggs thrown at me. I make pretty good omelettes.

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: That's very kind of you, Reverend Blue.

MS. MINKEL: Well, thank you, Reverend Blue. We appreciate that. I will send out the schedule to

all board members, so anyone who has interest in being at the events can be there so that way you can share the eggs.

MR. GEORGE: And you can't see me in person, but I have a big smile on my face with that comment.

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Commissioner Perry?

COMMISSIONER PERRY: So I was just -- so I'm hoping that this time that we'll also invite or have the meeting open to members of the Erie County Legislature. Because I understand from a letter that they wrote that they were intentionally excluded, we told them they couldn't come to any of these other past public meetings. Is that right?

MS. MINKEL: No one's ever been excluded.

MR. GEORGE: No.

COMMISSIONER PERRY: Okay. Well, that's what they said in the letter, so I thought they -- that's what it seemed like the letter said. So they -- it's always been open to them, they're invited, they know -- it's a public notice, they have full notice and the same thing will happen like it's always happened next time.

MS. MINKEL: Absolutely.
COMMISSIONER PERRY: Great. Maybe we won't get another letter like that.
MS. MINKEL: Thank you, Tom.
CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: That's a good discussion. And congratulations to all of you who have been working on this for such a long time.

And, Commissioner Perry, I'm going to call on you again to give the aviation report.
COMMISSIONER PERRY: Thank you, Sister. And I'm going to ask Bill Vanecek to start us off with the airport improvement project details.
MR. VANECEK: Okay. Well, there's really not too much to report on there. Of course the big one is the fact that we opened up a significant portion of the terminal enhancement project on the 18th. And it is just getting rave reviews by everybody that sees it and uses it. It really has changed the dynamics of how people are traversing through the airport and getting out quicker and getting to enjoy Western New York on a much quicker access.

So we still have some time to go on that.

It won't be entirely completed until -- we'll say December 31st, but we're hoping it will be approximately a month earlier than that. That's when the last two baggage carousels will be put into service, and at that point we can say we've done it, we've got it all done and off you go. So we're very, very excited about that.

And, you know, the other ones that are out there, the big one is the engineered wetlands which is ongoing. There's really not a lot to talk about there. So I'll try to move through this quickly because I think we're running a little bit behind on time here.

So just a couple of quick notes. Our enplanement numbers for May came in at almost a hundred and twenty thousand for this year, and that compares to seventy-five thousand last year. So we're seeing a big jump now as we're going forward. For the first two months we're up two hundred and sixteen thousand versus a hundred and forty-one last year.

A couple of items. Our bottom line, our net surplus was three hundred and four thousand for

May, 2021. That was really attributable to a couple of things. The concession revenues are really starting to climb now, and most notably parking. And there's a note a little bit further down that talks about parking changes. If you recall, we opened up the lots back to full fares in the beginning of April and now we're really seeing the bearing of fruit of that. So people are using our parking lots and we're seeing a big jump in the parking revenues. Talks about the CARES expense operating assistance was a million -- little over a million dollars of that. Definitely helped our bottom line here as well. So on a year-to-date basis, we are currently at a surplus of eight hundred and seventy thousand dollars so far in the month -- in our 2021 year, I guess -- 2022 year I guess it is.

A couple of other items I wanted to point out. So we're seeing it in -- it will look odd in your book, but when you're on page -- I don't know what number it is here. Anyway, it's on the concession revenue (inaudible) and enplanement and deplanement number. You'll see some

staggering numbers on the left-hand side that we're getting twenty-four dollars per enplanement. Well, it's a little bit misleading because back in the days when we were having -- dark days in April, et cetera, our concessionaires were still paying their minimum annual guarantees, so those numbers are wrapped up in here so the number is much higher. We're getting to see a little more normalization now on the right-hand side, but they're still very healthy, particularly in the parking operations. People are really coming back to our lots which is great.

If you look down on the next page, again, you can see how much -- how dramatic it is with respect to parking revenues, both in the daily lot and in the long-term lot. It's just a huge jump. If you compare the number of cars that were parked in the long-term lot in May was a little over thirteen thousand versus thirteen hundred the year before. So it's starting to rebound nicely.

I wanted to talk just a little bit about

some of the airline market shares and what they're doing at this point. So when you look at the BNIA, again, we talked about where we're at from a -- you know, nineteen -- a hundred and nineteen thousand 2021 enplanements for May. And that's a pretty healthy load factor. If you do the math on this, the load factor is a calculation of how many seats do you have on a plane and how many people are filling them. Well, in the month of May, they were filling eighty-three percent of the seats. And if you look back on last year, it was twenty-two percent of the seats. So we're really seeing a nice rebound at this point. The airlines -- and that's also apart from the airlines have now started adding some more flights. I went through a lot of those last meeting, so I don't think we need to go through them again. But, I can tell you, overall, all of the airlines are upping their number of flights that are going out of the airports so that's great news for Western New York.

Niagara Falls. Of course we're still

hurting from the Spirit impact. They're not back yet. They haven't told us they're not coming back, but right now I would be -- I wouldn't see it until maybe kind of the fall time frame there's usually a little bump and then getting -- ramping up to speed next year.

What else did I have in here? So, I did want to point out, again, you can see all the (inaudible) in here, but, again, all the airlines are doing really, really well. But I wanted to point out that our twelve-month period ending February, '21 versus the same period last year, we actually had -- we had a decrease of sixty-nine percent, relatively speaking, of similar sized airports from where we were positioned. It's one hundred percent attributable to the border closing. Absolutely, one hundred percent. Because we're still not seeing that happening. Again, I've said it before, twenty-five to thirty percent of those people are going to be down here. And given the fact that they've come out now and said they're not going to open up the border until they have

seventy-five percent fully vaccination of people, I don't see this happening until the fall unless something dramatic changes.

Niagara Falls we've already talked about. I did want to mention one thing. There was an issue that we were able to sidetrack, if you will. The Town of Niagara has the landfill and they have -- you know, they were going to build buildings up in areas that could impact flight operations which would really jeopardize the ability of the military to operate the planes into that airport that they need to fly. So what they did is they put together something which is called an airport protection plan that will limit heights, so we're now completely filled around the airport of all the communities that joined -- that have stepped up and done this, and Niagara was the last one to do it, so now we will be able to continue to accommodate the military aircraft which is critical to obviously -- obviously to Niagara County in particular.

MS. MINKEL: And for future missions, too, Bill.

MR. VANECEK: What's that?

MS. MINKEL: And for future missions.

MR. VANECEK: And for future missions as well.

I really don't have too much. I guess a couple of quick things on -- this would be just the performance ones. We do have some openings. The Anchor Bar is back. And that's a recent picture. Okay? This isn't from previous years. They're flocking back to it. We also have our play gates are all open again as well. And so these adorable children here are actually the granddaughters of (inaudible)who works at the airport, so we (inaudible). And then, lastly, the lounge is open again. We have been getting so many requests on this. And so I stopped in today, and they are up and running and they're getting good visitation to their gate and so we're very happy that at least we're starting to see some of that back to normalcy if you will.

So that's really all I have. And I have no board actions for the board when we get into there, so it will be a quick meeting when we get into that portion of that. But, any questions or anything I can answer.

I do want to mention one more thing, though. And, Reverend Blue, you're on the line. So I want to just let people know that we are looking at putting in some sort of a -- for lack of a better term, a reflection room that will allow people to have a quiet space before they fly out. There's a lot of travelers that get a lot of anxiety before they board a plane, so we reached out to Reverend Blue to come out and we've identified a space. Now we're starting to look at how we want to build that space out to create a really warm, welcoming and peaceful place to have a little bit of time before you board the plane, so we'll keep you up to date as that project progresses.

And if there are any other questions, I'd be more than happy to answer them.

COMMISSIONER PERRY: And seeing none, hearing none, that concludes the aviation committee report.

CHAIR SISTER ROCHE: Thank you very much. And that concludes the meeting of the committees.

* * * * *

STATE OF NEW YORK)

SS:

COUNTY OF NIAGARA)

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