

**Ozark Regional Transit Authority  
February 27, 2025, Board of Directors Meeting Minutes  
10:00 am at Ozark Regional Transit and VIA Teams**

In Attendance:

Board Members

Ryan Carr  
Peter Nierengarten  
Dane Eifling  
Tristan Hill  
Juliet Richey  
Jesse Hull  
Yolanda Fields  
Dan Weese

ORT

Joel Gardner  
Mindy Campbell  
Kendall Luallen  
Tayler Clark  
Bobby Tomlin  
Franco Tompeterini  
Gail DeLancey  
Lakisha Bradley  
Bryan Martin  
Christian Batres  
Jeff Hatley  
Erika Finnestead

NWARPC

Tim Reavis

Press

Ron Wood

Legal

Tom Kieklak

Ryan was announced as the Proxy for the Rogers board members: John McCurdy, Zachery Birdsong, and Kent Laughlin.

The **agenda** was accepted as adopted.

**Public Comments** – There were no public comments made.

**December 2024 Board Meeting Minutes** were approved for adoption. Peter made the first motion to adopt, Tristan made the second. All in favor.

**January 2025 Executive Committee Board Meeting Minutes** were approved for adoption. Peter made the first motion to adopt, Tristan made the second motion. All in favor.

**NWARPC Update** – Tim Reavis presented the update from NWARPC. Several NWARPC employees went to the SWTA Annual Conference in Tucson. They met with the Tucson Regional Transportation Authority to learn about their 20-year plan that has helped fund transportation in the area. The members of NWARPC that attended the conference agree that there is a potential path for a steady funding stream for transit in Northwest Arkansas. They are continuing to work with WSP on the Transit Alternatives Study.

**New Board Member Assignments** - Dane Eifling and Yolanda Fields were announced as the new Board Members for Fayetteville.

**Approval of Resolution 25.2.27** – This resolution comes from the Federal Transit Administration to attest to the fact that Ozark Regional Transportation has a local match for federal funds received. Tristan made the first motion to approve, Peter made the second motion. All in favor.

Mindy presented the year-end **Financial Report** for 2024. At the end of December, Revenue had a favorable balance of \$145 K as compared to the budget. This was largely due to favorable balances in Charters and Miscellaneous Revenue. Expenditures had an unfavorable balance of (\$138 K). Salaries and Wages were over budget (\$108 K) due to unbudgeted Charters and additional services added throughout the year. Equipment Rental and Repairs were also over budget (\$174 K) due to rising costs of parts and supplies. Fuel came out under budget \$147 K which helped to negate those unfavorable balances. Overall, year to date there is a positive balance of \$7 K as compared to the budget.

Kendall presented **Ridership Statistics** for 2024. Some key points from his presentation:

- Overall service has seen a 2.3% increase in ridership compared to the same time last year.
- ODT has 866 unique passengers so far this year. There is a 65% rate for completed rides and a 24% rate for seat unavailable.
- Ridership continues to trend up.

The **Communication Updates** was presented by Lakisha and Jeff.

Erika presented her Marketing and Social Media report. Going forward, messaging on social media will begin tailored to the needs of the individual cities. Representatives of each city are being encouraged to participate in our AmBUSsador program to learn more about public transportation. The team is working on increasing brand awareness and recruitment efforts with new “Now Hiring” billboards in the area. Social media is also providing route updates for passengers to find information in real time. Some things coming soon include website updates, providing updates in Spanish, and the integration of the City Mapper app.

Jeff presented his report on community engagement. In the past year, ORT has done several Blind Spot Awareness Presentations at different events throughout the community. Jeff spoke about the possibility of partnering with some students at the Tyson Innovation School to create a game to make the presentation more interactive. He also participated in several projects around the holidays to help give back to the community on behalf of ORT. Going forward, he is looking for opportunities to attend more Bentonville networking events.

Lakisha then presented an update on arts, culture and wellness. The team is working with Crystal bridges to get their documentary into the Hot Springs Film Festival. They have also continued to showcase their Mobile Art Gallery and will present it at the Fort Smith Transit Conference later this year

to bring awareness to public transit. The Employee Wellness Program continues to see success with a total of twenty participants so far. In mid-March, Lakisha and Gail DeLancey will be traveling to New Mexico for the Southwest Transit Conference to present and share the program with others in the transit community.

**Adoption of the community Engagement Sub-Committee minutes** – Lakisha gave a brief summary of the meeting minutes. Overall, the topics of the meeting were covered in the Communication Department update. Peter made the first motion to adopt, Tristian made the second motion. All in favor.

**Open Discussion on Transit Successes/Opportunities** – Dan questioned how the new routes in Bentonville were doing and if the snowstorm had affected ridership. Kendall gave the board a more detailed look at the Bentonville fixed routes and showed that ridership is trending upwards.

**Executive Director's Report** was given by Joel.

APERS Update – HB 1268 was filed on January 27<sup>th</sup>. It was referred to the Joint Committee on Public Retirement & Social Security Programs.

CFI Grant – All documentation has been finalized and is being submitted to FHWA Washington DC. The next step is entering the project into the STIP. Joel's goal for completion is July 2027, but at this point it is dependent on the federal government.

CPF/CDS Grant Process – ORT was invited by Representative Womack office to apply for funding through the Community Funding Project. The request for Funding was sent and is a total of \$8,705,000. This will go towards bus shelters, large transit buses, and small transit buses. Joel plans to purchase the large transit buses from a company that rebuilds and refurbishes buses that have met their useful life. These are a fraction of the price of brand new buses.

Pay Scale Increases – Joel brought his concerns to the Board about ORT's wages not being competitive. Starting at the beginning of 2025, Razorback Transit increased their pay scale to non-CDL drivers starting at \$21/hour and CDL drivers starting at \$23/hour. ORT is currently paying \$15.50/hour and \$17.50/hour respectively. Joel is hoping to raise ORT's rate by \$3.50/hour. By taking the total working hours for employees in 2024 and multiplying that by the increase, it's estimated that ORT would need \$804,195.00 in additional funding. Then based on each city's service hours they would be asked to increase their funding. That increase ranges from \$182 K to \$225 K. These numbers were calculated as if they were starting on January 1, however, if this change was made midyear, then the numbers would be adjusted accordingly. Even if the funding can't be provided at this time, Joel is hoping to work with the Board to develop a plan for pay increases in the future that can be shared with employees.

**ORT Upcoming Meeting Schedule:**

March 20, 2025 – Executive Committee Meeting

April 24, 2025 – Regular Board Meeting

Ryan adjourned the meeting. The next Board Meeting will be February 27, 2025.

AN AUDIO/VIDEO OF THIS MEETING IS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST