

**Ozark Regional Transit Authority  
April 24, 2025, Board of Directors Meeting Minutes  
10:00 am at Ozark Regional Transit and VIA Teams**

In Attendance:

Board Members

Zachery Birdsong  
Dane Eifling  
Kent Laughlin  
Jesse Hull  
Ryan Carr  
Tristan Hill  
Dan Weese  
John McCurdy  
Peter Nierengarten  
Yolanda Fields  
Juliet Richey  
Tim Stachowiak (for part of the meeting)

ORT

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

Legal

Tom Kieklak

Other

Sarah Moore

Dan was announced as the proxy for Tim Stachowiak.

The agenda was accepted as adopted.

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

**February 2025 Board Meeting Minutes** were approved for adoption.

**March 2025 Executive Committee Board Meeting Minutes** – Ryan gave a brief summary of the meeting and Joel’s Executive Director Performance Evaluation. The minutes were approved for adoption. Peter made the first motion to adopt, Dane made the second motion. All in favor.

**NWARPC Update** – NWARPC contacted Joel prior to the meeting stating that they do not have any updates to present to the board at this time.

Mindy presented the **Financial Report** for March 2025. Revenue had a favorable balance of \$17 K as compared to the budget. Fare Box Revenue had a favorable balance of \$1 K and Contract Revenue had a favorable balance of \$16 K due to outside work performed during the month. Expenditures had a positive variance of \$45 K. This was largely due to timing and will adjust throughout the year. Benefits are the largest positive variance of \$33 K because of the delay of APERS starting, which should start in August. Parts and Fuel were also running below budget. Overall, there is a positive balance of \$62 K for March, but since this is largely due to timing, it is expected to adjust during the year.

Kendall presented **Ridership Statistics** for March 2025. Some key points from his presentation:

- So far this year, ORT has had 96,442 passengers; up 12.7% from this time last year.
- February saw a slight drop in ridership due to the winter storms during which ORT was closed.
- Ridership is trending up in all of the cities
- Dane brought up the possibility of charging a flat rate of \$1.25 for On Demand rides instead of charging per person. Joel will do further research and speak to Via to find out if that would be an option for ORT.

The **Safety Report** was prepared by Franco Tompeterini, ORT’s Safety Coordinator. Joel presented the report in his absence. Franco has been tracking eleven different statistics, including accidents by route, time of day, and who caused the accident. There is also an Employee Safety Score that is tracked by a program called Motive that monitors each of the drivers. The majority of employees fall in the ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ category.

There was more discussion going back to Dane’s question about implementing a flat rate for On Demand rides and whether that would be feasible or not. Joel explained that his idea is to use the data collected from the ODT rides so they can establish where a fixed route is needed within the area. While ODT is convenient and grew in popularity during COVID, he sees it as a temporary service to eventually lead to more fixed routes. Joel also explained to the board that if we wanted to increase our fares to more than \$1.25, it would require months of public input to get approval from the FTA.

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

Erika presented her Marketing and Social Media report. The marketing team is focusing on promoting each city individually. Their goal for the end of second quarter is to create a landing page for each city. They are also focusing on a bus stop awareness campaign. The marketing team has also created a Train the Trainer AmBUSSador program to help people learn how to educate the public on using transit. UAMS is partnering with us to purchase and distribute 300+ bus passes. Marketing also developed door hanger campaigns to raise awareness and educate that public on transit in Rogers. John McCurdy suggested that we start a campaign to promote Rogers and Bentonville together as Benton County routes instead of promoting the cities individually. There are new communications directors in Rogers and Fayetteville that will work with ORT’s communications department.

Jeff presented his report on community engagement. So far this year Jeff has done 130 hours of outreach at networking events and booth fairs. He has been using Now Hiring handouts with a QR code

to the ORT website to hopefully help fill the job openings in drivers and mechanics. Jeff is also working on developing a game to go along with the Blind Spot Awareness Events.

Lakisha then presented an update on arts, culture and wellness. The team is partnering with local artists to transform bus shelters into pieces of art to engage the community and promote public transit. The Mobile art Gallery will be features at the Arkansas Transit conference in Fort Smith. The Employee Wellness Program has had 21 participants in total with 9 graduates of the program. Lakisha and Gail DeLancey were invited to the New Mexico Transit Association to present two workshops on wellness in transit.

**Adoption of the community Engagement Sub-Committee minutes** – Zachery gave a brief summary. One of the things discussed was the impact that road work can have on routes and how ORT can ensure that they are notifying the public when there is a route delay or change. They also talked about board members participating in the AmBUSsador program. Having gone through the program himself, he encouraged other board members to attend as well. Peter made the first move to adopt the meeting minutes, John made the second. All in favor.

**Open Discussion on Transit Successes/Opportunities** – Peter discussed how Razorback Transit is in the early stages of doing a transit study for their system. He hopes that Ozark Regional Transit will be a part of that conversation, as well as Fayetteville Public Schools.

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

APERS Update – HB 1268 was filed on January 27<sup>th</sup>. It was signed into law on April 3<sup>rd</sup> as Act 450. Joel is looking for the Board to assemble around July 16<sup>th</sup> to approve APERS.

CFI Grant – The FHWA paperwork has been completed and submitted. The next step is to have it entered into the STIP. Due to having to wait on the federal government to release funds, the project is delayed by about one year.

ORT Shelter Purchase – With the Boards permission, ORT is ready to submit the paperwork to the FTA to utilize the 5339 grants from 2023 and 2024 to purchase 20 bus shelters through Brasco. The total will be \$180,000 and the shelters will be installed on a first come first served basis. The Board gives Joel their approval.

National Transit Database – ORT staff is in the process of providing financial, ridership, mileage, and facilities condition for the annual NTD reporting.

**ORT Upcoming Meeting Schedule:**

May 22, 2025 – Executive Committee Meeting

June 26, 2025 – Regular Board Meeting

Ryan adjourned the meeting. The next Board Meeting will be June 26, 2025.

AN AUDIO/VIDEO OF THIS MEETING IS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST