



*The COMET COVID – 19 Ad-Hoc Subcommittee Meeting minutes are prepared and presented in summary form. Audio recordings of the meetings are on file at The COMET and are part of the approved minutes. If you would like to hear the recording from the meeting, please contact Paige Jernigan at [pjernigan@thecometsc.org](mailto:pjernigan@thecometsc.org).*

*Per SC Code of Laws, Title 30, Chapter 4, Section 30-4-80 - All public bodies shall notify persons or organizations, local news media, or such other news media as may request notification of the times, dates, places, and agenda of all public meetings, whether scheduled, rescheduled, or called, and the efforts made to comply with this requirement must be noted in the minutes of the meetings. **The COMET complied with the notification of this meeting on Wednesday, January 20, 2021 at 3:15 P.M.***

**Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority  
COVID-19 AD-HOC SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING  
Friday, F, 2021-10:00 A.M.  
3613 Lucius Road, Columbia, SC 29201 – Teleconference**

**Members Present:**

Derrick Huggins\*  
Lill Mood\*

**Guests Present:**

Maurice Bell\*, RATP Dev  
John Furgess\*, Guest, Board Member  
Joe Sanchez\*, Asst. General Mgr./Operations Mgr.,  
RATP Dev  
Ronnie Sweeny\*, Maintenance Manager, RATP  
Dev

*\*Indicates participation by phone.*

**Absent:**

None

**The COMET Staff Present**

John Andoh, Executive Director/CEO  
LeRoy DesChamps\*, Director of Administration & Operations/COO  
Eric Harris, Planning & Development Specialist

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Huggins called the meeting to order at **10:00** A.M.  
A quorum was present at the opening of the meeting.

**2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

**Motion:**

A motion was made by Ms. Mood and seconded by Mr. Huggins to adopt the agenda.

**Approved:** Mood, Huggins

**Absent:** None



**Motion passed.**

Mr. Andoh said we made the suggested amendment that Ms. Mood asked for, which was sent out 25 minutes prior, highlighted in yellow.

Ms. Mood said it is important the amendments be included because she wanted to portray the content of what she was saying about how we might work on the initiatives to reach people with the vaccine information. She said this was the point of her talking about her role, to look at what we might apply, and what we are proposing to do.

Ms. Mood clarified that when she said mask brackets made wearing masks easier for her, it was not a directive or strong recommendation to the staff to buy those mask brackets. She said she was just offering her experience of what works for her, and that it is up to the staff to evaluate and decide what to do.

**3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES FROM JANUARY 8, 2021**

**Motion:**

A motion was made by Ms. Mood and seconded by Mr. Huggins to adopt the minutes with

the changes and substitutions just discussed.

**Approved:** Mood, Huggins

**Absent:** None

**Motion passed.**

**4. DISCUSSION & ACTION ITEMS**

A. Update Executive Order

Mr. DesChamps stated that the government extended the executive order on January 7 for another 15 days, and he said he will provide updates if it is extended after these 15 days.

Ms. Mood asked whether the new executive orders from the President apply to anyone receiving federal funds.

Mr. DesChamps said the President's executive order requires masks for federal buildings, locations, or anytime you are dealing with federal employees.

Mr. Andoh said his impression is that the Presidential order applies to those who enter federal properties such as the Post Office or VA Hospital, anything that is controlled by the federal government, or if you interact with a federal employee or an onsite federal contractor, such as Fort Jackson, or interacting with FTA or FHWA representatives. He clarified for Ms. Mood that it does not apply to all recipients of federal funds.



Ms. Mood said this affirms what we have taken as our policy, so it would not be a new requirement for us anyway. Mr. Andoh concurred.

B. Update of The COMET Operations – including Food Delivery, Vehicle Cleaning & COVID-19 Policy

Mr. Sanchez stated that we had a couple personnel who tested positive for the COVID strain, and so the building was cleaned and fogged, as well as the buses operated by those who were infected. He said one person has returned since testing negative for the virus, and the other is still self-isolating and waiting to be tested.

Mr. Sanchez said there was a precautionary scare with a maintenance technician who was not feeling well. He scanned his temperature at the thermal scanner in Maintenance, and his temperature was about 98.8. But after sending him home and asking him to get tested to make sure it was not COVID, the building was deep cleaned and fogged as a precautionary measure. Said personnel member subsequently tested negative for COVID.

Mr. Sanchez said that from January 1 to January 21, there have been thirty-one (31) food service deliveries, and that number is slowly creeping up and there have been two hundred and forty-six (246) details on the vehicles, two hundred and twenty-eight (228) foggings, and six hundred and ninety-eight (698) interior and exterior cleanings on the fleet. He said these are all preliminary numbers, and that once everything is finalized and entered in the Solutions for Transit Program, it can be a more finalized number he could present at the next meeting.

C. Update of Testing

Mr. DesChamps added that the next testing for staff at the Administrative Building will be:

Tuesday, Feb 2 from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Wednesday, Feb 3 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

He said The COMET continued to do COVID testing in coordination with DHEC at Comet Central with a secured kiosk, and that is still continuing:

Wednesday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. to noon and 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m

Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

He said that the packet shows some of the results from these particular days over the past week or so. He said we have one other testing here at the building with Lovelace in March, and then we will evaluate scheduling farther out for any COVID testing.

D. Update of Driver Barriers and FAR-UV Technology

Mr. Sweeny reported that we are currently having two driver barriers installed into



two small vans, 15301 and 15302. With those being completed, as well as the five (5) NABI's being completed last week, the only thing remaining is the 31 New Flyers. He said the New Flyer Corporation is manufacturing the driver barriers which are expected to ship to us by mid-February. There will be an installation team to come and install them soon after delivery. He said New Flyer engineering staff are looking at how to design the two trolleys, and he sent them an e-mail today and asked for an update. He anticipates this should be completed mid- to late February, and that will complete the project.

Mr. Sweeny said the FAR-UV technology will be installed on Bus 801 tomorrow at 11:00 a.m. Mr. Andoh asked whether the installation will include training on how to use the system and suggested Mr. Sweeny could report back at the next meeting about how it's working out. Ronnie said there is nothing in the email about training, but he is sure training will be included, since that is usually how it works, when they install it.

#### E. Update on DART Office Space

Ms. Gibbons said they are still social distancing inside the DART Office, and they do appreciate the recommendation of the face mask brackets. She said they were evaluated and are being used and are working out well in regards to comfort and being able to talk on the phone.

#### F. Update on Vaccination and Impacts to Public Transit

Mr. Andoh said Phase 1B appears to have been pushed back to early spring 2021 versus late winter 2021, so it is anticipated that transit workers will probably be vaccinated in March or April. He said a letter has been drafted from himself as well as the interim general manager of RATP-Dev and is being reviewed once finalized, it will be sent out to all employees of The COMET and RATP Dev, advising them about the vaccines. He said that once Phase 1B happens, additional instructions will be given on how they can get vaccinated if they wish. He said that while vaccination is not a requirement, the letter states that it is strongly recommended and encouraged.

Mr. Andoh explained that we are working with DHEC to set up a registration table at COMET Central to allow seniors to register for the vaccine if they are unable to register online. He said it appears that we now have the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccines here in South Carolina, and the pharmacies are now starting to get involved with the vaccination process for the Phase 1A participants. He said that on January 15, Phase 1A was expanded to include seniors aged 70 and up, and that in order to get the vaccine, one must register online at a special website.

Mr. Andoh said staff is working on the implementation of Take The COMET to Vaccination, a program that will have four components. The first component is, we are going to promote The COMET's fixed-route system, as it stands, and



there will be a brochure that lists all the CVS, Walgreens, hospitals, and urgent care facilities where vaccines are distributed. It will also show which bus routes go by which of those locations. It will be distributed on the buses and online to encourage people to use The COMET system, as it stands.

Mr. Andoh said that for Page 15, we used GIS to plot all The COMET routes in operation today, as well as the DART service area, and all the pharmacies, drugstores, hospitals, and urgent care facilities in our service area. There are many of these locations along the existing routes, so the promotion of our fixed-route service will help make it easy to access vaccination sites.

Mr. Andoh said we are also going to implement DART same-day service for seniors 70 and up and for eligible DART riders. Same-day service will be available, as long as the person has made a reservation to receive the vaccination. He said reservations can be made up to seven days in advance. He said we are currently awaiting additional guidance from RATP Dev to make sure that we have available vehicles to perform this service, because we anticipate that by adding this demographic group to the DART service, it could potentially create capacity constraints, which we are not allowed to have for the ADA community, so we need to make sure we have ample vehicles.

Mr. Andoh said he estimates, based on people that are utilizing demand-response service in other areas, that we may need at least two additional vehicles added to the DART program on weekdays.

Mr. Andoh said we are promoting the Pickup Program for seniors and persons with disabilities. The program started on January 19, where we provided \$50 cards for seniors and persons with disabilities to utilize on TAXI, Lyft, or Uber, and this is a program that could be used for reaching vaccination appointments for people who do not want to use DART or the regular COMET system.

Mr. Andoh said the last program is the Volunteer Transportation Program (V-Trip), where seniors and persons with disabilities, if they find a friend to give them a ride to a vaccination facility, will be reimbursed at 56 cents per mile, which is the new IRS rate as of January 1, 2021, up to 100 miles per month.

Mr. Andoh said our marketing team is currently putting together the marketing plan. He said that within the next week or so, marketing materials and social media posts will appear. He said we will start engaging with various churches, social service agencies, and community groups. He added that we are also getting assistance from prominent African American leaders to ensure that the message is getting out about the importance of vaccination and utilizing The COMET to assist with that.





Mr. Andoh said we are also communicating with DHEC on how they can help push our message to those in Richland and Lexington County. He said we are also continuing to engage with Uber and Lyft, as it relates to partnering with their vaccine access campaign program which will also provide another measure for the general population to get access to vaccines.

Mr. Andoh said FTA recently issued guidance that the use of FTA funds is allowable for transporting passengers to vaccination sites via the 5311 Program in our rural areas, such as the lower Richland area and Batesburg Leesville, or in our urban area via our 5307 program or via the 5310 program which pays for V-Trip and the Pickup Program which comes through the Council of Governments.

Mr. Andoh said the Columbia Organized Area did not get the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriation Act funding that was recently passed by Congress, because based on the way the formula was derived, we did not qualify, which was the case for other urbanized areas in South Carolina. He said the Columbia Organized Area did receive \$84,000 of the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act funding, and we are in discussions with the Council of Governments on how we can access that funding to help supplement this Vaccination Transportation Program we are doing.

Mr. Andoh said we will utilize 5307, 5311, and our Cares Act funding to cover the costs of the enhanced transportation service that DART would be providing at 100% federal share, based on a rate of \$44.63 per revenue vehicle service hour. He said that at the present time, there is no need to add buses to The COMET's system. He added that if that need arises after our marketing efforts are promoted, and we see an increase in ridership that can create capacity on The COMET's regular, fixed-route service, then he will keep this committee apprised and seek direction on adding buses.

Ms. Mood asked whether we will be purchasing new buses if we need more vehicles in the future. Mr. Andoh clarified that we have enough DART vehicles, and it would be a matter of merely adding more drivers, so that we do not conflict with ADA.

Mr. Bell said we are in the process of working with our subcontractor, TCS, and we also have training classes currently going on, in order to be able to provide the additional staff, if necessary.

Ms. Mood commended the service we are offering and the marketing plan as a great response to what we were requesting. She asked if there is a way to obtain a capsule description for public consumption, so that she can distribute it to various community groups she is associated with. Mr. Andoh said that should be possible, starting next week.



Ms. Mood expressed support for in-person circulation of materials among informal networks, as it was so successful in increasing demand for vaccine doses, when Phase 1A was expanded to include seniors aged 70 and up. Mr. Andoh concurred and said it is already in the plan, to go through prominent local leaders to help us in spreading the word, because while traditional marketing will help, we are not sure that it will be 100%, so we'll have to rely on word of mouth. He said we will have presentations with the various neighborhood associations in Richland County and City of Columbia, for instance, as well as churches, etc.

Ms. Mood emphasized that learning information from a friend or familiar face is usually more effective than hearing it from an official source. Mr. Huggins concurred.

Mr. Huggins asked for further input from the Committee. Hearing none, he commended Mr. Andoh, Mr. Bell, and their respective teams for all the hard work and time they have put into this for the benefit of the community. He then asked for a motion to adjourn.

**5. ADJOURN**

**Motion:**

A motion was made by Ms. Mood and seconded by Mr. Huggins to adjourn.

**Approved:** Mood\*, Huggins\*

**Absent:** None

**Motion passed.**

*The meeting adjourned at 10: 27 A.M.*

CENTRAL MIDLANDS REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Adopted this \_\_\_\_\_ 2021

Prepared by:

**Frances**

**Von**

**Korff**

Reviewed by:

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Paige Jernigan, Administrative & Customer Service Specialist

Approved by:



*Christopher Lawson*

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Christopher Lawson, Secretary