

Minutes

RTA Committee of the Whole Meeting

10:29 a.m., Tuesday, October 6, 2020

Committee Members: Clough (Chair), Lucas (Vice-Chair), Bibb, Byrne, Joyce, McCall, Moss, Pellot, Serrano, Weiss

Not present: None

Also Present: Anderson, Benford, Birdsong, Bitto, Booker, Burney, Caver, Dangelo, Davidson, Fields, Garofoli, Gautam, Johnson, Kirkland, Orlando, Peganoff, Schipper, Sikich, Sudy, Sutula, Tarka

Mayor Clough called the meeting to order at 10:29 a.m. The secretary called the roll and reported that ten (10) committee members were present. This meeting was conducted by teleconference for members of the Board in accordance with House Bill 197 of the 133rd General Assembly, signed by the Governor of the State of Ohio on March 27, 2020, the March 9, 2020 order of the Governor of the State of Ohio declaring a public health emergency and the April 30, 2020 order of the Director of the Ohio Department of Public Health prohibiting any gathering of ten (10) or more people. The meeting was live-streamed on RTA's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/rideRTA) for staff and members of the public.

Code Book Update Project

Dawn Tarka, Associate Counsel II, made the presentation. This is an update on the travel policies and procedures and it complies with ethics laws. The Board received a redline of Chapter 656 of the Code and a draft administrative procedure (AP). The Travel Policy was last updated in 2004. At the direction of Internal Audit, a Task Force was established to review and update the Code because of the significant changes in the travel industry since 2004. The Task Force consisted of members of the Operations Division, Human Resources Division, Internal Audit, Accounting and Legal Departments. Ethics Commission guidance is included in the development of the policy.

This travel policy and the procedure applies to both Board and staff travel. As a matter of best practice in drafting policies and procedures, the broad overarching policy is contained in the Code itself and the details for implementing that policy are contained in an Administrative Procedure. In the redline, they have removed a lot of detail from the policy and moved it into the AP. This presentation will highlight the substantive changes in how the travel is implemented. The Ethics Commission guidance they received related to two areas. One is frequent flyer accounts. The other is the use of rewards credit cards. With respect to personal frequent flyer accounts, it has been in the policy since 1991, that miles that are accumulated on travel for RTA business cannot be used for personal travel. They adjusted the language in the policy to clarify and make it easier to account for those miles. If an individual uses their personal frequent flyer account for business travel, it is hard to discern which points are for business and personal. They changed the policy to provide that personal frequent flyer accounts cannot be used for RTA travel.

With respect to rewards credit cards, the Ethics Commission advised of a potential conflict of interest where Authority employees and Authority travelers, which includes Board and staff, if you use a rewards credit card that is issued by a vendor that does business with RTA, that is a potential conflict of interest. They provided that rewards credit cards cannot be used by Authority Board members and employees whose job duties require them to authorize or

negotiate contracts with financial service providers for RTA travel. For example, she has responsibilities for reviewing and signing off on financial services contracts with financial vendors. She may hypothetically have a Key Bank credit card. Key Bank has a banking relationship with RTA. Therefore, she cannot use her personal Key Bank card if it gives her rewards such as cash back, gift cards or frequent flyer points. She cannot use that card to book RTA travel.

That provision applies to a number of Authority travelers both members of the Board and staff. They are listed in the AP. They include members of the Board, General Manager, CEO, Deputy General Manager for Legal, attorneys in the legal department who negotiate or review financial services contracts, DGM for Finance and Administration, Cash Manager, Procurement Director and Contract Administrators who handle procurements for financial services. To address the fact that there may be an issue for these individuals to travel, the Authority has prepared a new type of purchasing card to be available for travel only. It's called a travel P-card. There will be a resolution this month to authorize the travel card.

Ms. Moss asked if every Board member will receive a card for potential travel or will it be issued prior to travel. She has a personal credit card with rewards and when she travels, she uses it to make purchases. Dawn said the travel P-card would be available to individuals whose personal rewards cards are issued by Authority vendors. For example, if she is about to travel, she can request the travel P-card for the trip. That card will be issued to her for that trip for travel expenses only and has to be returned to the Accounting department. Ms. Moss asked whom would Board members contact to ensure their card is not a rewards card that RTA does business with. Dawn said the cash manager does a report that is sent to the Board that identifies the entities that RTA has financial services arrangements. Ms. Birdsong said that Raj Gautam and Sheryl King Benford would be the appropriate contact.

Chief McCall said that normally the Board support (Theresa Burrage) would make travel arrangements, so would they work with them on this item. Ms. Birdsong said that process would continue and immediate questions can be routed to staff for answers. Rev. Lucas asked if he can use the card for his nurse' travel. Dawn suggest the nurse traveling is not an authority employee who authorizes or approves financial agreements. They should not need to be concerned about whether they are using a travel p-card or not. Ms. Birdsong said that process would remain the same. The nurse is not subject to the p-card.

With respect to meals and incidentals, they have followed the reimbursement rate of the federal governments' CONUS rate, plus 25% for full days of travel. They are clarifying the policy to provide that for the first and last day of travel. The amount that the travel has to work with is 75% of the total amount. It is consistent with the federal guidance from the General Services Administration (GSA). For the AP, some of the provisions being recommended are first that a traveler may request permission in advance for expenses that are not expressly authorized or exceeds applicable caps. Often times a traveler desires to travel to a seminar that is being held at a particular hotel, but the hotel cost is higher than the per diem that RTA authorizes. This provision of the procedure allows that traveler to request permission in advance and get approval for the excess charge if it is approved. If not approved, the traveler has to make the choice to stay at a different hotel or cover the cost themselves. This at least gives the traveler the opportunity to request that permission. It will not be approved after the fact.


The procedure also includes some expressed recommendations to conserve Authority resources. One is to be mindful of using travel services that charge full price upfront. If travel plans change, it might be difficult to get a refund. In addition, there is an expressed recommendation that government rates should be requested whenever possible. Prepaid expenses such as hotel and airfare must be identified on the travel reimbursement form.

Reimbursement must be requested within 30 days of travel. For meals and incidental expenses, another concern raised by the taskforce is that the cost of ground transportation makes the incidental expenses so high, that it exceeds the per diem. The recommendation is to move the cost of ground transportation to be tracked and reported as transportation rather than M&I, with a guideline that employees are to requests, be mindful of the cost, and use the least expensive vehicle possible. So if public transportation is available, that is expected. If not, then a cab or other transportation is acceptable. Travelers will be reimbursed for actual expenses supported by itemized receipts up to the amount of the per diem. Missing receipts must be provided within 30 days or the expenses for which those receipts are missing will be denied.


There is a provision within the procedure that for the first time a traveler neglects to provide receipts, they can submit an affidavit supporting the basis for the expenditures and be reimbursed. This is a one-time per traveler opportunity. Under the Transportation section of the AP, by recommendation of the taskforce, the language has been changed to allow travelers to select a rental car one size larger than economy, if approved in advance by their supervisor. Travelers should decline liability coverage because the Authority carries substantial coverage for accidents. The AP also includes a provision for expenses of personal care assistants (PCA) who travel with individuals with disabilities. The travel reimbursement form has been updated to correspond with the AP.

It was moved by Mr. Bibb, seconded by Rev. Lucas to move this to the full Board meeting for consideration. Rev. Lucas said he would have an update from the Paratransit committee on the Call Center.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:46 a.m.



Floun'say R. Caver, Ph.D.
Interim Secretary/Treasurer



Theresa A. Burrage
Executive Secretary