

Shari Parker, Esquire
sparker@eckertseamans.com
(215) 851-8530

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

October 30, 2023

Mr. Pasquale T. Deon, Sr.
Board Chairman
Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority
1234 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107

**Re: Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority
Comprehensive Bus Network Redesign (“Bus Revolution”)
September 12, 2023 – September 28, 2023**

Dear Mr. Deon:

Pursuant to my appointment as Hearing Examiner in the above-referenced proceedings, I write to provide my Report and Recommendation (“Report”) on the Comprehensive Bus Network Redesign, known as “Bus Revolution.”

Between September 12, 2023 and September 28, 2023, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (“SEPTA”) conducted ten public hearings for the purpose of considering formal adoption of service changes recommended through Bus Revolution. These hearings were held in-person in Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Montgomery and Delaware counties, as well as virtually via WebEx.

The hearings proceeded with a safety briefing when appropriate, opening remarks from the Hearing Examiner, an Introduction from SEPTA General Manager and CEO, Leslie S. Richards, testimony from SEPTA representatives and, finally, comments from members of the public who pre-registered to speak.

The Bus Revolution proposal was made available to the public on September 1, 2023, with prior notice of the public hearings published through the following channels: SEPTA’s website, local newspapers, the Philadelphia Library for the Blind, the website of the Associated Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the National Federation of the Blind toll-free phone service. In addition to commenting at the hearings, SEPTA provided several additional methods through

which the public could submit comments: (1) by email; (2) by voice message; and (3) by U.S. mail. The public comment period remained open through September 29, 2023.

Enclosed with this Report are the following exhibits, which have been admitted into the record:

<i>Exhibit No. 1</i>	Hearing Examiner’s appointment
<i>Exhibit No. 2</i>	Proofs of publication of the Notice of the public hearings in local newspapers
<i>Exhibit No. 3</i>	Confirmation that the Notice of the hearings was posted at various SEPTA locations
<i>Exhibit No. 4</i>	A copy of SEPTA’s online posting of the hearing Notices
<i>Exhibit No. 5</i>	Confirmation that the Notice of the hearings was distributed to the Philadelphia Library for the Blind, www.asb.org, and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Newsline toll free phone service
<i>Exhibit No. 6</i>	SEPTA Tariff Sheets showing changes to Routes 1 through 50
<i>Exhibit No. 7</i>	SEPTA Tariff Sheets showing changes to Routes 51 through 100
<i>Exhibit No. 8</i>	SEPTA Tariff Sheets showing changes to Routes 100 and above
<i>Exhibit No. 9</i>	SEPTA Tariff Sheets showing new routes
<i>Exhibit No. 10</i>	SEPTA Tariff Sheets showing routes with no changes
<i>Exhibit No. 11</i>	SEPTA Tariff Sheets showing routes being discontinued or changing numbers
<i>Exhibit No. 12</i>	SEPTA Tariff Sheets showing On-Demand Zones
<i>Exhibit No. 13</i>	Engagement Summary
<i>Exhibit No. 14</i>	State of the Bus System
<i>Exhibit No. 15</i>	Market Analysis
<i>Exhibit No. 16</i>	Existing Bus Route Profiles
<i>Exhibit No. 17</i>	2023 Route Statistics
<i>Exhibit No. 18</i>	SEPTA’s written testimony and presentation regarding Bus Revolution

Below is a summary of the proposed service changes, the input of the public on the proposed changes, and the Hearing Examiner’s recommendation.

a. Summary of the Bus Revolution Proposal

The following SEPTA representatives testified at the public hearings on behalf of SEPTA:

- Daniel Nemiroff
- Ryan Judge
- Brandon Miller
- Harley Cooper
- Jody Holton
- Melissa Silverman

The SEPTA representatives' testimony and the summary of the proposed changes describe a multi-phase process pursuant to which SEPTA planned and evaluated the proposed changes through technical work and public outreach throughout Philadelphia and the surrounding Montgomery, Chester, Delaware, and Bucks counties.

As part of this public outreach, SEPTA conducted Transit Talks; Community Meetings; Virtual Community Conversations; small group meetings, presentations, and briefings; Pop Ups and Project Bus Events at bus stops, transit centers, and community events; and finally, numerous public hearings.

Phase 1 of the Bus Revolution was initiated in Fall of 2021 and comprised of four components:

- (1) Surveys through which SEPTA assessed Transit Trade-offs and Existing Conditions;
- (2) A market Analysis, through which SEPTA evaluated the regional bus service market and acquired information regarding demand, the manner in which transit served various areas, and service times;
- (3) A State of the System Report, which addressed the performance of the bus system, speed, reliability, and ridership; and
- (4) A detailed analysis of each bus route, which included review of ridership levels, timeliness of performance, and potential areas of improvement.

Phase 2 of Bus Revolution, which began in the Spring of 2022, entailed preparation and presentation of two potential bus networks with differing approaches to achieving improvements to the network. Option 1 prioritized frequency, whereas Option 2 was a hybrid approach implementing frequency and elements of the current bus network. In assessing the two draft networks, the public indicated through survey feedback a preference for the prioritized frequency of Option 1, and the lesser transfers and greater service coverage of

Option 2.

Phase 3 of Bus Revolution involved SEPTA’s application of the Phase 2 feedback to development of a Draft Network. The Draft Network was presented and revised in the Fall of 2022 and the Spring of 2023, after two rounds of public engagement campaigns. The Draft Network proposed an increase in the number of routes, reduction in the number of trips requiring a transfer, adjustment of Microtransit/On-Demand zones, and re-evaluation of all routes facing discontinuation.

The resulting Recommended Network comprising SEPTA’s Comprehensive Bus Network Redesign includes:

- Fewer routes;
- More frequent routes, with a 30% increase in the number of bus routes that will provide “frequent service”¹;
- Replacement of fixed route bus service with On-Demand or Microtransit service in certain areas; and
- An increase in the percentage of riders and jobs within a five-minute walk of a frequent bus route.

To aid in the implementation of the service changes proposed through the Recommended Network, SEPTA allotted approximately \$150 million to supporting projects geared toward improvement of infrastructure, including:

- Construction of a new Wissahickon Transportation Center to increase service frequency and improve ridership experience, and
- Red-painted bus lanes on Market Street in Philadelphia, aimed at improving trip times and service reliability.

b. Summary of Public Comments

In its final step of the public outreach process, SEPTA conducted ten public hearings, virtually and in-person. Over 100 members of the public attended the hearings, many of whom provided oral comments.

Speakers commended SEPTA for undertaking a comprehensive redesign of the current bus

¹ SEPTA defines “frequent service” as routes in which a bus is scheduled to arrive every fifteen minutes or fewer.

network, on efficiencies that exist in the current system and for the extensiveness of its community outreach. They advised of the ways in which the proposed changes would improve their commuting experience, such as providing more frequent weekday and weekend service, and route changes that maximize efficiency in their respective commutes. Speakers further applauded SEPTA for taking into account public feedback and implementing changes to the Recommended Network based on public input, as well as for increasing the frequency of service in areas serving essential services and destinations frequented by riders.

Speakers urged SEPTA to consider further increases to service frequency on certain routes and the effect of specific route changes on seniors, the disabled, college students and lower income riders. Speakers further urged SEPTA to consider the extent to which service changes may affect accessibility to specific destinations, including universities, shopping centers, and medical institutions. Route changes with a potential or perceived potential to experience redirections, reduced frequency, and traffic congestion as a result of the proposed changes likewise attracted public comment. Speakers additionally expressed concerns regarding services requiring an increased number of transfers. Members of the public posed questions related to the manner in which Microtransit and On-Demand Zones would operate and be accessible to riders. Speakers also proposed ideas on modifications to proposed service changes, such as redirection of buses away from traffic-dense streets, integration of bus and rail services, a protracted and gradual timeline for implementation of service changes, and allotment of funds to addressing safety concerns of the public and any staffing shortages.

The record remained open through September 29, 2023 for receipt of comments. Throughout the comment period, SEPTA received over 1500 comments in writing and via voice message. The comments were authored by members of the public, including members of advocacy groups such as the SEPTA Youth Advisory Council and the Philly Transit Riders Union. The comments applauded SEPTA for eliminating redundancies in the current system, retaining existing route numbers, and conducting public hearings to discuss the Recommended Network.

Commenters expressed concern on various matters related to route changes, such as elimination or redirection of specific routes such as Routes 32, 42, and 49. Commenters shared how they expected route changes to affect their respective commutes, expressing concerns regarding longer foot travel to access buses, availability of service to areas where riders work and frequent for shopping and other reasons, and accessibility of service to seniors and the disabled. Commenters provided feedback on SEPTA's process of implementing the proposed changes, suggesting that changes be more broadly advertised and incrementally applied, and offering ideas on how they thought routes could be more efficient or convenient. Some commenters posed questions regarding SEPTA's plans to increase current staffing levels to support the proposed changes and whether a mobile application will be available for estimating travel times

from specific points within each route. Comments further urged SEPTA to consider extending service hours on certain routes and to major events, such as sporting events, occurring in the area.

c. Hearing Examiner's Recommendation

Upon consideration of the Bus Revolution process and resultant Recommended Network, SEPTA's testimony and exhibits, and the input from the public, my recommendation is as follows: In the limited instances in which routes would be discontinued under the proposal without a corresponding alternative, I implore SEPTA to consider whether there are additional alternatives not yet considered. I otherwise recommend that the SEPTA Board adopt the proposed changes related to Bus Revolution, as the proposal is consistent with federal and state programming requirements, was developed with extensive community outreach and responsive modifications to the Recommended Network, and prioritizes the aspects of an effective network, such as frequency, reliability and efficiency, that are of paramount importance to SEPTA's ridership.

Respectfully submitted,



Shari Parker, Esquire
Hearing Examiner

cc: Daniel Nemiroff (*via email*)
Ryan Judge (*via email*)
Brandon Miller (*via email*)