

## STA BOARD MEETING

Approved Minutes of March 19, 2026, Meeting

*STA Boardroom with Virtual Joining Option*

### MEMBERS PRESENT

Lance Speirs, Small Cities Medical Lake, *Chair*  
Pam Haley, City of Spokane Valley  
Josh Kerns, Spokane County  
Kitty Klitzke, City of Spokane  
Sarah Dixit, City of Spokane  
Tim Hattenburg, City of Spokane Valley  
Zack Zappone, City of Spokane  
Michael Cathcart, City of Spokane  
Dan Dunne, Small Cities Liberty Lake ex-officio  
Dan Sander, Small Cities Millwood-ex-officio  
Elsa Martin, Small Cities Cheney-ex-officio  
Bill Campbell, Small Cities Airway Heights-ex-officio  
Rhonda Bowers, Labor Representative, *Non-Voting*

### MEMBERS ABSENT

Al French, Spokane County

### STAFF PRESENT

Karl Otterstrom, Chief Executive Officer  
Brandon Ropez-Betty, Chief Operations Officer  
Carly Cortright, Chief Communications & Customer Service Officer  
Emily Poole, Chief Planning & Development Officer  
Kade Peterson, Chief Information Officer  
Nancy Williams, Chief Human Resources Officer  
Robert Hamud, Chief Financial Officer  
Dana Infalt, Clerk of the Authority

### PROVIDING LEGAL COUNSEL

Megan Clark, Etter, McMahon, Lamberson, VanWert and Oreskovich, P.C.

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1. Call to Order and Roll Call - Chair Speirs call the meeting to order at 1:31 and the Clerk conducted roll call.
  2. Pledge of Allegiance – Board members, staff, and guests stood for the pledge of allegiance.
  3. Excused Absences – none requested
  4. Approve Updated Board Agenda – Chair Speirs noted the Updated Agenda included an addition to the Executive Session. **Mr. Hattenburg moved to approve the agenda as updated. Ms. Haley seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**
  5. Public Expressions – In addition to the 80+ written expressions received via email in advance of the meeting, public expressions were received from 16 individuals in person at the meeting. The individuals who wrote in or attended the meeting to provide public comment all spoke in favor of sales tax renewal to maintain and enhance public transportation services.

6. Public Hearing:

- A. Connect 2035 Strategic Plan: Draft Amendment – Chair Speirs opened the Public Hearing at 2:07 pm and asked Ms. Poole to present.

Ms. Poole provided background on Connect 2035. Ms. Poole emphasized that Connect 2035 aligns with STA’s funding strategy and updated agency goals and currently includes 39 initiatives intended to guide transit advancement over the next decade. She noted proposed amendments to adjust timelines and initiative descriptions to reflect updates made to *Connect Spokane* and reflect discussions with the Board and community.

Ms. Poole reviewed each proposed amendment. The first related to the Mobility on Demand (MOD) pilots in Latah Valley and North Spokane Valley. The plan currently schedules these pilots for 2027–2029, but staff propose moving implementation forward to 2026–2028 to reflect commitments in the 2026 Budget & Action Plan. Ms. Poole next addressed revisions to the High-Performance Transit (HPT) Planning and Design initiative. The existing plan references HPT planning for the former Route 90 extension to Appleway Park & Ride; however, staff propose updating the language to reflect current HPT concepts identified in *Connect Spokane*, specifically a future HPT corridor in Spokane Valley and Liberty Lake serving Sprague, Appleway, and additional activity centers and destinations. Ms. Poole explained this change aligns the strategic plan with the updated HPT network map, which envisions a rapid transit corridor distinct from Route 9.

Ms. Poole discussed revisions to the Zero-Emission Transition Plan. She noted current language assumes resumption of fixed-route battery-electric bus purchases, but the proposed revision would clarify that these purchases would focus on Division BRT vehicles and other fixed-route needs only if the agency secures required grant funding and in-route charging infrastructure. This clarification communicates that continued expansion of the zero-emission fleet is dependent on external funding sources.

It was noted the existing Facilities Master Plan language in Connect 2035 centers primarily on the clean-energy base, Plaza public space, and a new training facility. The proposed revisions would reorganize these under a new umbrella titled “Essential Support Facilities” and clearly identify five projects: renovating the Plaza for administrative and public meeting space, constructing a near-term operator training course in lieu of a full training facility, building a new Fixed-Route Operations center, constructing a new Paratransit and Rideshare Operations base, and acquiring property for a future clean-energy base. She explained these changes reflect the emerging strategy from Phase II of the Facilities Master Plan and clarify that the full clean-energy campus is not yet fully funded.

A Board member asked about property acquisition being included if the project is not anticipated for several years, and how that relates to any forthcoming ballot measure. Mr. Otterstrom responded that acquiring suitable property when opportunities arise is strategically important and the acquisition remains part of the Connect 2035 capital program regardless of ballot timing.

Ms. Poole then introduced the final proposed change to add a new Community Van Program under Goal Two. This program would make STA-owned vans available to partner organizations to support mobility needs for specific populations served through those organizations. A Board member asked how eligible partner organizations would be determined. Ms. Poole explained that program guidelines are still in development but are expected to follow the

structure of the Community Access Program (CAP), focusing on nonprofits serving target populations. Staff emphasized that the van program would not provide permanent operating capacity for organizations but would function as a periodic-use partnership.

Ms. Poole concluded by outlining the timeline for the amendment process and anticipated Board action at the April meeting.

Following the presentation, board members raised questions related to potential future service extensions. Ms. Dixit asked whether the Dogtown/Beacon Hill area in District 1 was considered during discussions about future expansion under Connect 2035. Staff explained that Route 36 is scheduled for an extension along Freya in September and that the upcoming MOD pilot includes the northeast zone in its service area. Fixed-route service is not currently planned for the area, but staff noted that MOD ridership data—specifically origin/destination patterns—will inform future decisions.

Staff referenced commitments in the 2026 Service Revisions Final Report, which include further evaluation of Wellesley Avenue with a Board member commenting on anticipated development in the northeast. Staff reiterated that Connect 2035 includes a Fixed Route Network Optimization initiative designed to reinvest operational efficiencies into underserved areas over time. They also explained that, under the existing 0.2% sales tax, STA is operating near its maximum fixed-route service capacity, making optimization a continuous rather than one-time effort.

A final question from a board member asked whether increased revenue or recurring surpluses could allow for service expansion beyond what Connect 2035 currently outlines. Staff responded that certain expansions—such as later evening service—could occur without requiring additional buses and would therefore be more easily implemented if funding becomes available. Staff also noted that, over the past decade, STA expanded service by 36% even though the plan initially called for 25%, due partly to receipt of state transit support grants and stronger-than-expected financial performance. Staff emphasized that the annual Transit Development Plan (TDP) serves as a rolling three-year roadmap and includes ongoing community input, allowing STA to integrate new service opportunities when financially feasible.

With no additional questions from the Board, Chair Speirs opened the public hearing for testimony from the public.

Mr. Ben Small was in person at the meeting and spoke in favor of the Community Van Program.

Chair Speirs called three times for comments from attendees in person or online. With no additional comments, Chair Speirs closed the Public Hearing at 2:28 PM

#### 7. Board Action - Consent Agenda

Ms. Bowers requested Consent Agenda Item 7H be discussed separately.

The Chair indicated he was open to a motion to approve the balance of the Consent Agenda items 7A through 7G.

**Ms. Haley moved to approve the Board consent agenda items 7A-7G. Mr. Hattenburg seconded and the motioned passed unanimously.**

- A. Minutes of February 19, 2026, STA Board Meeting– Corrections/Approval
- B. Minutes of February 19, 2026, Special STA Board Workshop – Corrections/Approval
- C. Approval of February 2026 Vouchers – Approve claims as listed:

DESCRIPTION	VOUCHER/ACH NUMBERS	AMOUNT
Accounts Payable Vouchers (February)	Nos. 636485 – 636889	\$ 5,293,396.63
Worker’s Comp Vouchers (February)	ACH – 2286	\$ 133,399.57
Payroll 02/06/2026	ACH – 02/06/2026	\$ 3,020,657.45
Payroll 02/20/2026	ACH – 02/20/2026	\$ 2,326,267.08
WA State – DOR (Excise Tax)	ACH – 1767	\$ 6,742.99
<b>FEBRUARY TOTAL</b>		<b>\$ 10,780,463.72</b>

- D. Public Works Contracts under \$35,000: Final Acceptance - Approved, by motion, acceptance of the contracts below as complete and authorize release of retainage security subject to receipt of Department of Labor & Industries approved prevailing wage affidavits.

Purchase Order/ Contract Number	Project Description	Contractor	Purchase Order/ Contract Value	Substantial Completion Date of the Work
20260556	Division BRT Office – Network Wiring	Arctic Lighting & Electric, LLC	\$878.26	2/28/2026

- E. Mirabeau Transit Center: Final Acceptance - Approved, by motion, to accept the contract with Cameron-Reilly, LLC for the Mirabeau Transit Center contract as complete and authorize release of retainage security subject to the receipt of such certificates and releases as are required by law.
- F. Route 25 Downtown Layover: Final Acceptance - Approved, by motion, to accept the contract with Cameron-Reilly LLC for the Route 25 Downtown Layover contract as complete and authorize release of retainage security subject to the receipt of such certificates and releases as are required by law.
- G. Connect Spokane Minor Update: Final Draft Recommendation: Resolution 852-26 - Approved, by Resolution 852-26, the minor updates to the Connect Spokane Comprehensive Plan as presented.

- H. Public Records Index Undue Burden Determination: Resolution 853-26 – Chair Speirs recognized Ms. Bowers to speak to her question on this item. Ms. Bowers asked what a Record Index was and whether it refers to all records, if it is organized by department or type of information, and if items like customer complaints would be included.

Ms. Clark explained that state law requires public agencies to maintain an index describing the types or categories of records they hold. She clarified that this index is not a list of individual documents, but rather groupings of records maintained by the agency. She noted the law allows an agency to adopt a resolution declaring that keeping such an index would be unduly burdensome. Ms. Clark emphasized that this requirement pertains only to maintaining the index itself - it does not affect the agency’s responsibility to keep records, maintain them appropriately, or provide them in response to public records requests. She added that STA currently has one public records officer, whose primary responsibility is fulfilling requests, and that routinely creating and updating a detailed index would be a significant administrative burden. She stated the Index has nothing to do with responding to a public records request.

Discussion ensued regarding the RCW requirement, what constitutes an index, clarification of the type of information being indexed, what constitutes an undue burden, and why it was too burdensome for staff to maintain an index.

Ms. Clark and Mr. Otterstrom clarified that the legally required public records index is not a simple list of broad categories, but a detailed, department-by-department inventory of all types of records an agency maintains. Maintaining such an index is a significant, ongoing administrative burden, especially with only one public records officer, because it must be frequently updated and can itself become the target of public records requests and, if outdated, can pose a risk for the agency. The requirement stems from an older statute based on a time when agencies kept physical books of documents, and the law has not evolved alongside modern electronic records systems. Agencies, including STA, are therefore allowed to adopt a resolution stating that maintaining this detailed index would be unduly burdensome.

Ms. Bowers expressed concern that adopting a resolution declaring the records index an undue burden could give the appearance of reduced transparency. She noted that agencies have the ability to charge requesters for large or complex public records requests and questioned why that would not be preferable to eliminating the index requirement. She stated that, given recent public scrutiny of STA and the agency's upcoming request for public funding, the language and timing of the proposal appeared problematic to her.

Mr. Otterstrom noted that the statute requiring a records index dates back to the 1970s and confirmed there is no evidence STA has maintained such an index in recent decades. He explained that modern electronic systems already allow staff to search and locate records efficiently, making the traditional index envisioned by the statute outdated. He emphasized that the proposed resolution would not change STA's current public-records practices but would simply align board policy with how records are already managed. He stated that most jurisdictions have adopted similar resolutions. Ms. Klitzke agreed that, in her experience, it was much more comprehensive to use technology to capture records than a physical search. Mr. Cathcart said understanding what it is helps eliminate the concern and he asked if there was an urgency to pass this month or if it could be deferred to receive additional briefing to understand what other jurisdictions have in place. He said he'd like to understand the cost to implement, too.

Ms. Clark added and reiterated that STA already stores all records digitally and that creating and constantly updating a separate physical index of every record would duplicate effort. In addition, if a public records request came in between now and when the Resolution was approved requesting the index, STA would be unable to provide it.

Mr. Cathcart proposed adding a short-term expiration date to the resolution to allow the Board to gather additional information before making the index exemption permanent.

**Mr. Cathcart moved to amend the Resolution by adding an expiration date of June 19, 2026. Ms. Klitzke seconded. Mr. Zappone, Ms. Dixit, Mr. Cathcart, Mr. Hattenburg, Mr. Speirs, Mr. Kerns, Ms. Klitzke voted yes. Ms. Haley voted no. The motion passed with a vote of 7-1.**

**Ms. Klitzke moved to approve Public Records Index Undue Burden Determination: Resolution 853-26 as amended. Mr. Zappone seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

## 8. Board Action/Discussion - Other

- A. Paratransit Operating Strategy - Mr. Rapez-Betty presented an overview of STA's Paratransit Operating Strategy and noted staff is recommending transitioning from the current hybrid model (partly contracted, partly directly operated) to a fully STA-operated service. He reviewed the history of STA's paratransit operations, challenges experienced under the hybrid model, and trends in contractor performance and cost escalation. He compared the components of contractor costs versus STA's internal costs and outlined the assumptions used in the financial projections. He then summarized projected operating and capital savings associated with bringing the service fully in-house, along with anticipated benefits to service quality and customer experience.

Mr. Rapez-Betty described operational considerations for the transition, including staffing, training, facility and fleet readiness, and the plan to work collaboratively with the contractor during the wind-down period. The presentation concluded with an overview of the performance metrics STA will monitor to evaluate the success of the transition over time.

Mr. Rapez-Betty outlined how STA will manage workforce stability during the transition, including onboarding new employees together, ensuring consistent training, and coordinating with the union on bargaining topics. He described facility and fleet readiness. He reviewed the success metrics that STA will monitor. Mr. Rapez-Betty concluded his presentation by reiterating the recommendation that the Board approve the proposed paratransit operating strategy prior to discussion.

Board members and staff engaged in a detailed discussion following the presentation, focusing first on the cost calculations and whether rising contractor rates were related to STA shifting service levels. Staff clarified that increases reflected contractor cost escalation, not changes in service volume, and that STA already maximizes the work the contractor can reliably perform. Additional discussion ensued about whether STA should issue an RFP before making a long-term decision; some members felt competitive bidding might reduce costs, while staff explained that contracting trends suggest similar or higher pricing and that the timeline before the contract expires leaves little room for an RFP and transition.

Several questions centered on impacts on contractor employees, including whether their jobs would be absorbed, how seniority would be handled, and how shifts—particularly nights and weekends—would be assigned. Staff described the preliminary transition plan. Board members also asked about reliability issues, contractor turnover, and whether fluctuations in ridership would pose challenges. Staff explained ridership is steady and variability stems from contractor staffing shortages, which STA can better manage in-house.

Further questions addressed the contractor's presence in the region, the feasibility of returning to contracted service in the future, and the historical reasons STA outsourced Paratransit service. Staff noted that outsourcing originally offered cost advantages that no longer exist. As discussion continued, some members voiced readiness to move forward, citing service quality and cost savings, while others expressed interest in additional time or an RFP.

**Mr. Hattenburg moved to approve the Paratransit Operating Strategy as presented. Mr. Speirs seconded.** Discussion ensued.

**Ms. Haley called for the question. Chair Speirs called for a vote to approve the motion of calling the question. The motion passed 6-2.**

**Chair Speirs called for a vote on the motion to approve the Paratransit Operating Strategy as presented.**

**Mr. Hattenburg, Mr. Kerns, Ms. Dixit, Ms. Haley, and Mr. Speirs voted yes. Mr. Zappone, Mr. Cathcart, and Ms. Klitzke voted no. The motion passed 5-3.**

9. Board Operations Committee

- A. Chair Report – Chair Speirs noted the Board Operations discussed the policy review cycle and policies and the Public Records Index item presented today.

10. Planning & Development Committee

- A. Chair Report – Ms. Klitzke reviewed the items presented at the Planning & Development Committee meeting of March 4.

11. Performance Monitoring & External Relations Committee

- A. Chair Report – Mr. Hattenburg gave a brief review of the agenda items presented at the Performance Monitoring & External Relations Committee meeting of March 4.
  - i) 2025 Preliminary Year-End Financial Report – *Due to time constraints, this item was not presented. The Clerk will forward a copy of the presentation to Board Members for their review. Any questions should be directed to Mr. Hamud.*

- 12. CEO Report - Mr. Otterstrom reminded Board members of the invitation to attend the annual STA Safety Awards Banquet at Northern Quest and noted it as a valuable opportunity to connect with employees.

13. Board Information – *no action or discussion*

- A. Committee Minutes
- B. February 2026 Sales Tax Revenue
- C. January 2026 Financial Results Summary
- D. January 2026 Operating Indicators
- E. 2027-2032 Transit Development Plan: Tactical Framework and Stakeholder Outreach
- F. Five Mile Mobility Hub Update
- G. Meadowglen Layover Project Order Update
- H. Opportunity Fare Program Update
- I. Legislative Update
- J. 2026 Service Revision Final Report Review
- K. 2025 Year-End Performance Measures
- L. Connect 2035 Funding Requirements Public Outreach Plan Update

- 14. Executive Session - Ms. Clark advised the Board would adjourn to Executive Session for the following purposes:

- 1) *Pursuant to RCW 42.30.110(1)(b) to consider the selection of a site or the acquisition of real estate by lease or purchase when public knowledge regarding such consideration would cause a likelihood of increased price, and*
- 2) *For the purpose of discussing, planning, or adopting the strategy or position to be taken during the course of ongoing collective bargaining.*

- 3) *Pursuant to RCW 42.30.110(1)(i) To discuss with legal counsel representing the agency matters relating to agency enforcement actions, or to discuss with legal counsel representing the agency litigation or potential litigation to which the agency, the governing body, or a member acting in an official capacity is, or is likely to become, a party, when public knowledge regarding the discussion is likely to result in an adverse legal or financial consequence to the agency.*

The Chair advised the Board would meet in Executive session for 30 minutes and would reconvene in open session at 4:15 pm. Should additional time be needed, the clerk would advise members of the public.

- At 4:15 pm, the clerk advised the board requested an additional 15 minutes and would return at 4:30.
- At 4:30 pm, the clerk advised the board requested an additional 30 minutes and would return at 5:00.
- At 5:00 pm, the board returned to open session.

15. New Business - *none*

16. Board Member Expressions - *none*

17. Adjourn – With there being no further business to come before the Board, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 5:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Dana Infalt  
Clerk of the Authority