



## **Westport Transit District Directors' Meeting Minutes**

**September 28, 2017 at 7:30 PM – Westport Town Hall, Room 201**

### **Attending**

Westport Transit District (WTD) Directors:

Patsy Cimarosa  
Martin Fox

Norwalk Transit District (NTD) Staff:

Kimberlee Morton, CEO  
Britt T. Liotta, COO  
Grace Zweig, CFAO

Public:

No representation

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 PM by Martin Fox.

### **Public Comment**

Members of the public who wished to address the Directors were asked to do so. There was no public representation present.

### **Approval of Minutes of May 31, 2017 meeting**

The minutes of the May 31, 2017 meeting of the Directors were approved as presented – motion made by Ms. Cimarosa, seconded by Mr. Fox.

## **FY17 and FY18 YTD Ridership**

Mr. Liotta reviewed the monthly ridership report for August 2017 and the fiscal TYD. As part of his review, Mr. Liotta noted that the year-to-year comparisons for the commuter shuttles for July and August were somewhat impacted by the fact that the shuttles (particularly the Imperial shuttle) got a boost in ridership in July – September 2016 due to the reconstruction of Saugatuck Railroad Station Lot #1.

Mr. Fox noted that shuttle ridership in the second half of the fiscal year ended June 30, 2017 was down about 23%, and that the year-over-year trend was similar in the August YTD period. He then commented that the principal cause of the lower shuttle ridership in the past year is the addition of a significant number of new parking spaces at the two Westport railroad stations and the associated increase in parking permits issued to commuters. This has resulted in a 45% decrease in the number of commuters on the Railroad permit waiting list between June 2016 and June 2017.

Mr. Fox stated that S4 ridership has been the most affected on a percentage basis, which he believes is mostly because of the length of the ride for many passengers. He then commented that the G1 and G2 continue to have very low ridership, although ridership on both routes is up somewhat over the prior year.

Mr. Fox then said that he and Ms. Cimarosa are hopeful that the new marketing program (see “Marketing” below) will have a positive impact on ridership – although he cautioned that most of the results of awareness and image building programs are not typically seen immediately, but are experienced over time.

Ms. Morton commented that the Connecticut Transportation Department has been reviewing the Westport shuttles, and that the declining ridership could cause a decrease in State funding. Mr. Fox indicated that he understands the concern and commented that the WTD will take into account the results of the first few months of the new marketing program and then formulate a plan to address the less productive components of the shuttles.

Ms. Cimarosa then provided an update about a meeting that she and Mr. Fox had with Westport’s Human Services Department and a few other interested parties earlier in September. As part of the meeting, the attendees had a brainstorming session about a possible mid-day shuttle service to go from certain housing areas to certain key destinations in Westport such as shopping areas on the Post Road and the Westport Senior Center and library. Ms. Cimarosa commented that many years ago a similar service was offered in Westport on a 3 day / week schedule during the mid-day hours. Ms. Morton stated that this service would need to be a fixed route open door revolving service with a schedule. Mr. Fox added that he and Ms. Cimarosa think that such a service has the potential of being valuable to the community, and he and Ms. Cimarosa

are meeting again with Human Services Department personnel and others in October to continue the discussion.

Finally, it was noted that Door-to-Door ridership, particularly Town-to-Town, continues to be less than expected. Mr. Fox noted again that Door-to-Door ridership varies significantly over time because the majority of trips are taken by a small number of riders. Mr. Liotta added that the ridership schedules doesn't include the complete picture for Door-to-Door trips for Westport residents as they don't include trips taken by Westport residents where the origin and destination are both within the ADA corridor (as WTD is not involved in the funding for these trips)

### **FY18 Budget Update**

Ms. Zweig presented the YTD financial report for the Westport Transit District, which shows a surplus of \$10,584 when actual results are compared to a pro rata monthly allocation of the NTD budget for Westport (which differs from the WTD budget, as described in the financial report). Mr. Fox noted that the principal reason for the surplus was the recent low Door-to-Door ridership compared to the assumptions utilized in budget and the Door-to-Door ridership trends about a year ago. Mr. Fox then said that these trends could change at any time.

Ms. Morton then commented that it would be a more efficient process for the NTD to invoice the WTD after each month based on the amount actually owed, compared to the current process where WTD reimburses NTD based on a fixed estimates and subsequent adjustments. It was agreed to start this process going forward.

Ms. Morton commented that the expenses for the Town to Town services are being under allocated to Westport. This is due to (a) the fact that the average length of WTD Town-to-Town trips exceeds the length of the other trips in the pool being allocated and (b) NTD's current methodology allocates costs to WTD based on the number of trips. Ms. Morton noted that in other situations when a trip crosses a municipal border, such trips are counted as two trips. She added that since the Westport Town to Town trips are allocated revenue reimbursement of two trips, it would be consistent to allocate the expenses as two trips. Mr. Fox commented that it may make more sense to utilize an average length of the Westport trips, because the cost to WTD of the Town-to-Town trips is not anywhere near the cost of two other trips, as reflected in NTD data and a sample of Door-to-Door trips dispatched in a particular week in September 2016.

Ms. Morton then stated that for administrative efficiency reasons, it would be difficult for the NTD to not apply the methodology of counting Town to Town trips as two trips for all NTD-serviced programs (vs. the previously contemplated new allocation methodology based on time and distance information coming out of the newly implemented software).

Mr. Liotta and Ms. Morton assured the WTD Directors that the accounting change would not have a significant impact on WTD's financials. Mr. Fox said that the WTD is in favor of whatever methodology would be fair to both parties and he indicated that he looks forward to reviewing the specific changes proposed.

Mr. Fox then indicated that he met with the Westport Board of Finance on September 13<sup>th</sup> as part of their regularly scheduled meeting to discuss carrying over the unused balance of about \$14,000 of the prior fiscal year's marketing budget, as well as the \$85,000 unused balance from the \$87,500 Supplemental Appropriation the Town approved in the prior fiscal year. The Board of Finance agreed to carry over the \$14,000 for marketing into the current fiscal year, and also agreed to carry forward the \$85,000 unused Supplemental Appropriation until December 31<sup>st</sup>, pending understanding whether there would be any adverse impact on WTD's budget of (a) any possible reductions in State financial support or (b) a significant increase on Door-to-Door ridership as a result of ITN ceasing operations.

### **Connecticut Funding Update**

Ms Morton and Mr Fox stated there is no further or definitive information about the State's financial support for the current fiscal year, and the subject will be carried forward onto the next meeting agenda.

### **Potential Fare Increases**

Mr. Fox commented that he received all of the materials from the Norwalk Transit District's latest public hearings in which there will be a discussion of whether there will be new fare increases. Ms. Morton stated that this is being done in advance of the release of the CT budget as a precautionary measure in case the State does cut funding, but she does not anticipate any fare increases this year. Mr. Fox commented that the WTD will wait for Norwalk Transit direction of fare increases, and that the WTD would follow NTD's lead on fare changes.

### **Marketing**

Mr. Fox gave an update on the progress in developing a new marketing plan to improve shuttle ridership, which has four parts:

- Signage at the train stations, consisting of:
  - 3 new billboards at the Saugatuck train station and one new billboard in Greens Farms with the WTD'S new messaging, which replace existing billboards

- 8 posters in one of the tunnels connecting the west-bound and east-bound sides of the Saugatuck station, which many riders walk through
- A new poster in the Saugatuck station house.
- Printed cards that include a marketing message, the shuttle routes and links to the WTD website for schedules and My Stop instructions
- A series of emails messages to approximately 10,000 email addresses, including to:
  - Railroad parking permit holders and people on the permit waiting list
  - People currently registered at Westport Parks and Recreation Department
- New route identifiers at the Saugatuck station with the map of the Saugatuck routes and instructions on downloading My Stop and links to the schedules

Mr. Fox indicated that he expected that the new marketing campaign will commence in October, and that the WTD will publicize the launch. He said that he and Ms. Cimarosa are excited about the new marketing campaign. They believe that it will increase awareness and the image of the WTD shuttles, ultimately leading to an increase in ridership from what it otherwise would have been.

### **Door to Door operations update**

Ms. Cimarosa provided an update on a meeting that she and Mr. Fox had with members of the Westport Human Services Department earlier in September. She reported that several clients that had issues in the May – July period with ride timeliness, but there had been no further issues of note. Mr. Liotta stated that during that time, Norwalk was implementing a new computer system and consolidating vendors which led to some operating deficiencies. Mr. Fox asked that going forward he and Ms. Cimarosa be notified in advance of the changes so they can do an outreach, which Mr. Liotta indicated would be done.

### **Other Business**

Ms. Morton commented that in Norwalk, the Norwalk Transit District is working with housing developers to refine commuter shuttle services. She stated they are considering utilizing shuttles that do not appear like traditional buses, and mentioned that the shuttles may have the look and feel of a “café on wheels.” She said that the residents of certain new apartment buildings are looking for something new and fresh, and do not want to ride in a traditional public bus. Ms. Morton mentioned that this consideration could be relevant to Westport in the future as well.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 9:03 PM. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 29th at 10:00am at Westport Town Hall in room 201.

Respectfully submitted,

Britt T. Liotta  
Chief Operations Officer  
Norwalk Transit District