



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

**February 7, 2019 at 10:00 AM – Westport Town Hall, Room 201**

### **Attending**

Westport Transit District (WTD or District) Directors:

Patricia Cimarosa  
Martin Fox

Norwalk Transit District (NTD) Staff:

Britt Liotta, COO  
Kimberlee A. Morton, CEO  
Matthew Pentz, Director of Finance

The meeting was called to order at 10:06 AM.

### **Public Comment**

No members of public present

### **Approval of Minutes of November 28, 2018 meeting**

Motion for approval of the minutes of the November 28, 2018 meeting was made by Patricia Cimarosa, and seconded by Martin Fox. Motion approved.

### **FY18 YTD Ridership**

There was a discussion of the issues that had been identified over the last month regarding the under-recording of ridership in WTD ridership reports. This problem was caused by certain drivers sometimes not pressing the appropriate buttons on the fare boxes to record rides. It was noted that the issue dates back to January 2017 when a change in the fare cards offered by the NTD triggered a change in the buttons the drivers needed to press to record rides. Mr. Liotta noted that in May 2018 additional driver training had been done to address this issue and the number of unrecorded rides decreased after that. He added that on January 25<sup>th</sup>, the NTD implemented a plan to further address this issue by monitoring, on a daily basis, all NTD drivers' adherence to

the required procedures; he believes that there has been much improvement since then.

Mr. Fox thanked Mr. Liotta and Mr. Pentz for their efforts to identify and quantify the impact of this issue by analyzing the “dumps” during this period (miscellaneous revenue recorded in the fare boxes that are not associated with recorded rides).

The group then reviewed a ridership report for the December YTD period, which includes an estimate of the previously unrecorded rides in both the FY19 YTD and FY18 YTD periods. The report indicates that, in aggregate, commuter shuttle ridership decreased by 1% in the December YTD period from the comparable prior year period. When reviewing the ridership on individual commuter shuttle routes, Ms. Morton commented that the large increase in the G2 ridership suggests that there may be issues with the reporting of that run. Mr. Liotta stated he would pull the individual detail and analyze it to see if there are any anomalies. .

Mr. Fox noted that ridership for the Door to Door services is down for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row. He asked whether NTD is seeing this trend across the other Door-to-Door services that it operates. Mr. Liotta commented that the NTD has not seen such a decrease in other Door-to-Door services. He then highlighted that the Westport ridership is down primarily due to a decrease in the number of frequent or regular users of the service. Ms. Morton commented that Norwalk Transit is still working to finalize an hourly report which will more accurately allocate hours to the each Door-to-Door service, and that the implementation of this new report may cause an increase in expenses to the Westport Transit District.

### **FY19 Financial / Budget Update**

Mr. Pentz presented the FY19 financials for Westport Transit through December 2018. Of note:

- The required Westport Assistance for the commuter shuttles is \$110,300
- The required Westport Assistance for Elderly / Disabled services is \$8,800
- The required Westport Assistance for the Town-to-Town services is \$19,100

The total required Westport Assistance for the December YTD period is about \$138,000. Mr. Fox noted that the total required Westport Assistance is less than the WTD budgeted due to the lower than budget Door-to-Door ridership. He then added that the required Westport Assistance for the commuter shuttles is continuing to run higher than expected in FY19 due to (1) higher wage, benefits and supply expenses than expected, which Mr. Pentz has previously explained is primarily due to higher

overtime utilization resulting from an unusual level of workers compensation and FMLA claims and (2) lower than expected revenues.

Mr. Fox asked if Norwalk Transit can continue to try to determine why FY19 WTD commuter shuttle revenues are lower in FY19 versus the previous year. Both Uniticket and cash revenue in the FY19 YTD period are down significantly from the comparable prior year period, while ridership is only down 1%. Mr. Fox asked Mr. Pentz to check to see if the formula for Metro-North's reimbursement of Unticket sales has changed at all from previous years. Mr. Liotta said he will also have the drivers perform spot checks on all UniTicket riders to ensure no one is riding without purchasing one or paying with another fare medium.

### **2019 CT Funding Update**

Ms. Morton commented that while the State has not formally made any announcements about FY20 funding, at this time it appears that the funding will be approximately the same for the next fiscal year.

### **December 3, 2018 RTM Committee meeting**

Mr. Fox gave the group a brief synopsis of the December 3<sup>rd</sup> public meeting of 3 Westport RTM Committees to discuss the commuter shuttles, which included the following points:

- The meeting included the 3 most relevant RTM committees to discuss the commuter shuttles: Transit, Long-range planning and Finance. A total of 13 RTM Committee members attended. (There are 36 total members of the RTM, which includes all Committees.) Also in attendance were two members of the Westport Board of Finance, including the Chairman, the Town's First Selectman (Jim Marpe) and members of the public.
- Peter Gold, Chair of the RTM Transit Committee, gave an overview of the history of the Westport Transit District and noted that the purpose of the meeting was to provide the Westport Board of Finance with a sense of what the three most relevant RTM committees feel about the continuation of the WTD commuter shuttles.
- The WTD gave a presentation about commuter shuttle operations (which had previously been shared with the NTD).
- Julien Beresford of Beresford Research reviewed the results of the 2018 WTD Town-wide survey, which included responses from 1,700 Westport residents.

- There was a thorough discussion among the RTM members and Board of Finance members present, the First Selectman and others about the benefits, challenges and opportunities of the shuttles.
- At the end of the discussion, each RTM member was asked to give their opinion about the shuttles. While there were concerns expressed about the viability of the WTD shuttles, particularly given its reliance on uncertain funding from the State, the general consensus was one of strong support for the WTD's commuter shuttles.

### **FY20 Budgeting process**

Mr. Fox gave the group a brief summary of the Town of Westport's 2020 budgeting process, as follows:

- February 14<sup>th</sup> – Budget workshop of the Board of Finance. The WTD will make a presentation and describe its FY20 budget request.
- March 12<sup>th</sup> – The WTD will make its formal request to the Board of Finance for the Town's FY20 financial assistance to the WTD.
- April (date TBD) – The WTD will present its budget to the RTM Transit Committee, which will vote on whether to recommend that the full RTM approve the WTD's budget request at its annual Town budget meeting in May.
- Should the Board of Finance approve the WTD's budget, the Budget would be considered by the full RTM in May at its annual Town budget meeting.
- Should the Board of Finance not approve the WTD's requested funding on March 12th, the WTD would need to attend an appeal meeting of the Board of Finance on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. Then if the WTD's full budget request were not approved at that meeting, the WTD can request that the RTM restore any amount the Board of Finance removes from the WTD's budget at its May budget meeting.

### **Marketing**

Mr. Fox provide some updates on the Westport Transit District marketing programs. He noted:

- There are again 8 posters in the tunnel at the Saugatuck Train Station. The WTD restored those that had previously fallen down or been vandalized.
- The WTD has ordered a new poster for the Saugatuck station house.
- The District is working with a marketing professional, Rob Feakins, to develop clever emails that will be sent to Westport employers to help promote the use of the S1 commuter shuttle by reverse commuters traveling into Westport.

- In the next few months, the WTD plans to develop new emails to Westport train commuters highlighting some of the key mechanics of using the shuttles, such as how to pay fares and where riders can get on and off the shuttles.

### **Microtransit**

The group held a discussion about a possible test of a microtransit pilot to replace a shuttle route with low ridership during the evening schedule. Ms. Morton and Mr. Liotta addressed many of the preliminary questions that the WTD had raised about how such a test might work. Then there was a discussion of additional items that would need to be considered; a list of additional questions was compiled for research and further evaluation. It was agreed that there would be a working session at NTD on March 7<sup>th</sup> to further consider and define a microtransit test in Westport.

Mr. Fox said that Nassau Inter-county Express, a public bus entity on Long Island, is currently doing a test of the replacement of low ridership fixed routes with microtransit; it may be worthwhile for the WTD and NTD to visit them and benefit from their experiences.

### **Other Business**

Ms. Cimarosa and Mr. Fox commented that over the last few months they had some additional discussions with the Westport Human Services Department about a possible test of a shopping bus route developed by the WTD. Ms. Cimarosa indicated that while she and Mr. Fox would be very happy if such a service could be implemented in Westport to address certain residents' transportation needs, there continues to be questions about (a) whether there will be sufficient ridership to make such a service feasible and (b) if a test is done whether there are sufficient resources available to effectively promote the service to possible users. Ms. Cimarosa and Mr. Fox will provide any updates at future meetings.

### **Next Scheduled Meeting**

The next scheduled meeting is set for Thursday, March 28th, at 10:00 AM at Westport Town Hall, Room 201.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 11:35 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Martin Fox  
Westport Transit District Director