



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

**May 13, 2020 at 9:00 AM – Held electronically pursuant to Governor's Executive Order No. 7B.**

### **Attending**

#### **Westport Transit District (WTD or District) Directors:**

Martin Fox  
Patricia Cimarosa

#### **Norwalk Transit District (NTD) Staff:**

Kimberlee Morton, CEO  
Matthew Pentz, Chief Financial Officer  
Matthew Abbott, Transportation Planner  
Francis Murray, COO

The meeting was not called to order at 9:20 AM.

### **Public Comment**

RTM member Sal Liccione announced that Dick Lowenstein, a member of the RTM Transit Committee was recently appointed to Chair the Committee replacing Peter Gold. He then applauded the service of Directors Fox and Cimarosa and the NTD Team and said that he's hopeful that ridership will increase on buses and trains once the coronavirus is no longer a concern.

Mr. Fox then said that given Mr. Liccione's announcement he would make some other comments at this beginning of the meeting. Mr. Fox then recognized the exemplary service of Peter Gold, who recently decided to step down as Chair of the RTM Transit Committee after 6 years in that position. (The RTM Transit Committee oversees the Westport Transit District for the RTM.) Mr. Gold will remain a member of the RTM and the RTM Transit Committee. Mr. Fox then noted Mr. Gold's tireless support of public transit in Westport and his many contributions to the Town and the Westport Transit District. Mr. Fox then said that he and Ms Cimarosa believe that the choice of Dick Lowenstein to succeed Mr. Gold is an excellent one given Mr. Lowenstein's long service

to the Town of Westport including on the Westport RTM, his previous service as Chair of the RTM Transit Committee and his advocacy for public transportation.

Mr. Fox then noted that in April the Westport RTM had appointed him to another 4-year term as a Director of the Westport Transit District (ending April 30, 2024), but that his intention is to serve for a few more months to enable the community to get through the most challenging part of the COVID-19 crisis and to help implement Wheels2U microtransit in Westport.

### **Approval of Minutes of February 6<sup>th</sup> meeting**

Director Cimarosa made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 6th meeting. The motion was seconded by Director Fox and passed unanimously.

### **Norwalk Transit operations during the COVID-19 virus**

Ms. Morton provided the Directors with an update on Norwalk Transit's operations during the COVID-19 virus. As part of her update, Ms. Morton noted that they would be putting barriers on the buses to help better protect the drivers during this period. Ms. Morton added that she expects that maintaining social distancing while ridership ramps back up will be a challenge in Norwalk, but she doesn't anticipate that it will be an issue in Westport.

### **Update on On-demand Westport commuter shuttle service and Door-to-Door service during the COVID-19 virus and March / April ridership**

Ms. Morton indicated that the Westport commuter shuttles were converted to an on-demand service on March 30<sup>th</sup>, and that there had been significant outreach to the community to make commuters aware of the service. She then noted that there had been few riders for the on-demand service, consistent with very low commuting on Metro-North. She commented that Door-to-Door ridership is also down significantly due to the coronavirus. Ms. Morton also reported that Norwalk Transit ridership is down significantly during this period.

### **FY20 financial update through March 2020**

Mr. Pentz began his review of March YTD results by indicating that there wasn't much impact of the COVID-19 crisis during the March YTD period and that the results were consistent with his expectations. Mr. Fox then noted that trends in Westport's March YTD results appeared to be consistent with December YTD results. Mr. Pentz then noted that the NTD, on behalf of itself and agencies it serves, including the WTD, has been awarded \$4.3 million under the CARES Act to help offset increased costs resulting

from the virus and the loss of fares. He then said he is hoping that these funds will be sufficient to offset the increased costs and lost revenue through about September.

Ms. Morton then indicated that a decision needs to be made about how to allocate the costs of resources, including of full-time drivers, which are not being used during the COVID-19 period. Mr. Fox said that he and Ms. Cimarosa understand that the WTD will need to absorb its share of these fixed costs, and that they are confident that a fair way of doing that will be developed.

Mr. Fox then added that during the Westport budget process and prior to the coronavirus impacting the community, the WTD forecast that the assistance it would require from the Town of Westport in FY20 would be about \$35,000 below budget because the number of Door-to-Door trips had been lower than budget. While results for the last 3 months of the year are very uncertain, he indicated that the WTD still expects to be able to operate within its FY20 budget.

### **FY21 Budget**

Mr. Fox indicated that on May 4<sup>th</sup> the Town of Westport concluded its FY21 budget process and approved a \$320,400 budget for the Westport Transit District for the fiscal year starting July 1, 2020. He noted that in March the Town's Board of Finance cut \$39,600 from the WTD's original \$359,000 budget proposal, which had provided for inflationary cost increases and an increase in the funding for Door-to-Door trips from the unusually low level in FY20. In light of the evolving circumstances since that time and the uncertainty about the demand for WTD services in the coming months, Mr. Fox indicated that he believes that the \$320,400 budgeted Westport contribution to the WTD is reasonable.

### **Connecticut Funding Update, including State Matching Grant application for Door-to-Door service for seniors and residents with a disability**

Mr. Pentz indicated that he is preparing the budget due to the State by June 10<sup>th</sup> and that there is no information yet about funding for FY21. Ms. Morton, Mr. Pentz and Mr. Fox then discussed the process for completing the application for the State Matching Grant program that helps support Door-to-Door services within Westport for the elderly and people with a disability.

### **Preparation for microtransit test as replacement for commuter shuttle fixed routes**

Mr. Fox commented that he and Ms. Cimarosa believe that microtransit is likely a good fit for Westport. They believe it is particularly well suited to the current circumstances:

as commuting ramps up over time resources utilized can be matched to demand. Their vision is to implement the NTD's Wheels2U microtransit in Westport before people start commuting again in larger numbers (instead of re-implementing the fixed commuter shuttle routes) – with a target implementation date of the later part of the Summer. He noted that there are several preparatory activities that the NTD and WTD teams will continue to work on through the implementation date.

### **Other Business**

Ms. Morton updated the Directors on enhancements the NTD is planning for Door-to-Door services across its system. These include a new electronic payment system and a telephone call-back system to remind users of their upcoming rides.

### **Next Scheduled Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for September 15th at 9:00 AM in Westport Town Hall Room 201. Mr. Fox indicated that the meeting may need to be held electronically, which would be so noted in the notice should that be necessary.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 9:59 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Martin Fox  
Westport Transit District Director