



Westport Transit District Directors' Meeting Minutes

August 18, 2020 at 10:30 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

The meeting was not called to order at 10:32 AM.

Public Comment

Mr. Fox asked if there was any public comment; there was none.

Approval of Minutes of May 13, 2020 meeting

Director Cimarosa made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 13th meeting. The motion was seconded by Director Fox and passed unanimously.

Review of public comments from the July 21st Public Hearing about proposed service and fare changes for Westport commuter shuttles

Mr. Fox indicated that two emails with comments were received prior to the July 21st public hearing and two Westport residents offered their comments at the 7/21 Public Hearing (one of whom was one of the two residents who sent an email with comments prior to the meeting). He then summarized the comments and questions as follows:

- 1) A Norwalk resident who commutes from the Saugatuck station requested that the Service Area include his home in Norwalk.
- 2) A Westport resident who commutes from the Greens Farms suggested that instead of having the service as designed so that the commuter requests a pick-up at home when desired in the morning and would not know for sure whether he or she will make a specific train based on that request, Westport Transit alternatively implement the service so that the commuter would indicate which Metro-North train they want to make and then the app would tell the commuter what time they would be picked up. Ms. Morton and Mr. Fox explained that the Via software being licensed is not set up this way. They also described the practical challenges of having a system work that alternative way when rider trip requests change from time-to-time and day to day.
- 3) A Westport commuter who is visually impaired asked whether the Wheels2U App works for visually impaired commuters. Ms. Morton indicated that she would research that question with the NTD's consultant and software provider, Via, and we would provide the information to the resident making the inquiry. After the Hearing, information about how a visually impaired rider can use the Wheels2U App was emailed to the commuter.

The presentation used at the July 21st Westport Transit Public Hearing is attached to these minutes.

To take such action as the meeting may determine to replace Westport Transit's seven commuter shuttle routes with an on-demand group Door-to-station service operating between (a) Westport locations with the "Service Area" and (b) the Westport or Greens Farms stations

Mr. Fox made a motion to replace Westport Transit's seven commuter shuttle routes with an on-demand group Door-to-station service operating between (a) Westport locations within the proposed service area that was shown at the July 21st public hearing as such service area may be revised from time to time by the Westport Transit District and (b) the Westport or Greens Farms stations, and to take such actions necessary or advisable in support of that objective. The motion was seconded by Director Cimarosa and passed unanimously.

Commuter shuttle and Door-to-Door ridership update

Mr. Fox summarized how the Westport commuter shuttles were converted to an on-demand service on March 30th. He then noted that the number of rides for this on-demand service was averaging about 5 per day vs. the average of about 135 rides per

day in the pre-COVID-19 FY20 period. Mr. Abbott added that ridership has consistently been less than 10 rides per day.

Mr. Fox then noted that Metro-North ridership from Westport had recently been averaging about 5% of normal, so the Westport Transit on-demand service ridership is consistent with that. Mr. Abbott then provided a general update of Door-to-Door ridership trends in the Norwalk Transit system, noting that as expected ridership has been down significantly; he also noted that June ridership showed an increase from the very low levels in the preceding months. Mr. Abbott is researching some questions about the Westport Door-to-Door ridership in the May and June period, which will be discussed at the next meeting.

FY20 financial update

Mr. Fox said that since Mr. Pentz is in the process of finalizing year-end FY20 results, it would be best to discuss this subject at the next meeting. Mr. Fox then reported that based on some preliminary FY20 results that Mr. Pentz shared with him, which are subject to change, he believes that the WTD's required assistance from Westport and CTDOT will be less than budgeted. He indicated that this is due to the conversion of the commuter shuttles to the on-demand service for the last three months of the fiscal year and significantly reduced demand for Door-to-Door services since March – partially offset by the WTD sharing in the cost of drivers who couldn't be utilized during the COVID period, loss of fare revenue and an increase in costs from a change in the fixed cost allocation methodology.

Mr. Fox then noted that in its August meeting, the Board of Finance approved the carryover of about \$10,000 of unused funds in the WTD's Marketing budget. The WTD plans to utilize this carryover amount to fund a communication program to support the implementation of the new Wheels2U shuttle service.

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

Mr. Pentz reported that the NTD has not received information from the CTDOT about the customary Operating Agreement for State funding for FY21 or the State Matching Grant application for Door-to-Door services for seniors and residents with a disability. Ms. Morton and Mr. Pentz indicated that State funding may be impacted by the NTD's receipt of funding under the CARES Act. Ms. Morton and Mr. Pentz will provide updates about State funding at future meetings.

Preparation for Wheels2U microtransit implementation

Mr. Fox gave a summary of preparations for the Wheels2U launch. He said that the NTD and WTD teams have been working on the implementation with NTD's consultant, Via, for a number of months and the teams feel that good progress has been made. There was then a discussion of the targeted launch date among Ms. Morton, Ms. Cimarosa and Mr. Fox, which resulted in confirmation of the targeted launch date of September 23rd.

Mr. Fox expressed the WTD's appreciation for the NTD's flexibility in deferring the launch date until late September when greater Metro-North commuting is expected. Ms. Morton and Mr. Fox then confirmed that at the launch date a maximum of five vehicles will be utilized during the peak commuting hours, with a somewhat smaller number utilized during hours of lower demand based on a schedule the WTD and NTD developed. The maximum of 5 vehicles compare with a plan of 7 vehicles prior to the reduced commuting associated with the COVID outbreak. Ms. Morton indicated that once there is data on ridership trends, adjustments will be made to the number of vehicles utilized, as appropriate and practical.

Mr. Fox then reviewed the components of the communication program planned to support the Wheels2U service. He reported that the award-winning Westport advertising executive, Rob Feakins, has agreed to work with the WTD again to develop creative messaging to promote the Wheels2U service, including new emails, posters and 'Take One' cards. It is expected that he will be supported by an Art Director, Samantha Cotton, who worked with the WTD on its 2019 marketing program. The WTD and NTD will also utilize the services of the marketing consultant, Susan Rubinsky, who will develop a Wheels2UWestport website and other materials. Ms. Morton then noted that the Team still needs to decide the best way of identifying the NTD vehicles that will be used in the Wheels2U program and which are not already painted with the Wheels2U logo.

A member of the public, Kristina Borry, identified herself and said that she was attending the meeting to learn more about the Wheels2U service. Ms. Borry indicated that she lives in the Greens Farms area and that her son sometimes took the shuttle to get to and from the Greens Farms train station on his way to and from school in Fairfield. Mr. Fox suggested that the Wheels2U service could work well for her son given its expanded hours in the afternoon / evening.

Other Business

There was no other business.

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 will likely need to be held electronically, which would be so noted in the notice should that be necessary.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:03 AM

Respectfully submitted,

Martin Fox
Westport Transit District Director