

WESTPORT TRANSIT DISTRICT DIRECTORS' MEETING MINUTES
OCTOBER 24, 2023, AT 7:30 PM – WESTPORT TOWN HALL, ROOM 201

Attending

Westport Transit District (WTD) Directors:

Peter Gold
Karina Betfarhad

Norwalk Transit District (NTD) Staff:

Matt Pentz, CEO
Lori Hammill, Chief Compliance Officer

The meeting was called to order at 7:45 PM.

WTD Performance Update:

Ridership on Wheels2U is up; there were 18,000 rides in FY22, 27,850 rides in FY23, and 7,450 rides in so far for FY24. Current projections are for 30,000 rides for FY24. Awareness of Wheels2U is growing with new riders almost daily.

Update on potential merger with another transit district:

State legislation incentivizing the merger of local transit districts into regional districts having populations of at least 100,000 was discussed. The advantages and disadvantages of the WTD merging with either the NTD and Greater Bridgeport Transit (GBT) were discussed. It was pointed out that merging with NTD would likely be more cost effective as deadhead time from the terminal to Westport would be less than the deadhead time from GBT's terminal. Also, GBT currently has no experience with micro-transit operations such as Wheels2U. Other issues, including how many representatives each town in the merged district would have and how many votes would be allocated to each representative were also discussed. Connecticut statutes provide that the number of representatives for each member town and the votes of those representatives are based on each town's population. The WTD will explore merging with both NTD and GBT.

The merger procedures is as follows. WDT does its due diligence and makes a recommendation to the RTM Transit Committee. If the RTM Transit Committee approves the WTD's recommendation, the Town would then negotiate a memorandum of understanding with the recommended partner outlining the conditions—financial, services to be provided, etc.—with the recommended party. The recommended partner would then have to invite the WTD to

join it in a merged district and the RTM and the legislative bodies of all other towns in the merged district would have to approve the merger.

Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) Update:

Nelson Nygaard is performing a COA for NTD. The WTD is included. The COA will take approximately 14 months to complete. WTD Directors requested Nelson Nygaard have a public outreach meeting in Westport.

Marketing Update:

The WTD's initiatives to increase awareness of Wheels2U and increase ridership were discussed. These initiatives include Facebook and Instagram pages, and a free coffee for riders promotion. WTD has also asked the First selectwoman and Chief Koskinas to do a new video clip speaking in favor of transit to replace the one done by Chief Koskinas and Jim Marpe when Mr. Marpe was First Selectman.

Review of the Meet the Commuter Event:

The WTD Directors, along with members from NTD, met with commuters at the Saugatuck Train Station on October 3, 2023 to hear their concerns and to publicize Wheels2U. As part of this event, the WTD put out a survey to commuters and received 118 responses, mostly in favor of Wheels2U. The most frequent issues uncovered were problems with using the Wheels2U app, the timing of buses, and wait times. A need to better educate the public on how to use Wheels2U was also apparent. Feedback has been shared with NTD so they can address the issues with the service.

New Initiatives

Currently there is no coffee shop at the Greens Farms station. The Board of Education is planning to start one staffed by special needs people. The WTD is working with the to provide rides for the employees who will operate the coffee shop at the station.

WTD will be present at the 2nd Annual Staples High School EcoFest Fair on 11/11/2023, 11am-4pm.

WTD is working with Staples High School to get interns for two weeks in May 2024.

Adjournment:

No votes were taken at the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 9:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Gold

Westport Transit District Director