



Westport Transit District Directors' Meeting Minutes

September 12, 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:

Kimberlee Morton, CEO

Matthew Pentz, Director of Finance

Matthew Abbott, Transportation Planner

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 AM.

Public Comment

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

Approval of Minutes of May 16, 2019 meeting

Motion for approval of the minutes of the May 16, 2019 meeting was made by Patricia Cimarosa and seconded by Martin Fox. Motion approved.

FY20 Budget

Mr. Fox summarized the extensive budget process that the Westport Transit District and the Town of Westport follow annually. He noted that all meetings at which there is substantive discussion of the WTD Budget are publicly noticed in Westport. Mr. Fox commented further that before the WTD's FY20 budget was finalized there had been 7 public meetings in Westport in which the District's FY20 Budget was discussed and at which the public had an opportunity to comment. These included two Westport Transit District meetings, two Westport Board of Finance meetings, a RTM Transit Committee

meeting, a RTM Finance Committee meeting and the May RTM meeting at which the WTD's funding request was approved by the Town of Westport.

FY19 and FY20 YTD ridership

Ridership reports for the entire FY19 and the August FY20 YTD period were discussed. Mr. Fox noted that the year-over-year commuter shuttle ridership trends had been positive for the first 9 months of FY19, but since the April to June period showed a downward trend, the full FY19 commuter shuttle ridership ended slightly below FY18 (-0.4%). July and August commuter shuttle ridership was also less than the prior year.

Mr. Abbott commented that the public transit industry as a whole is experiencing a downward ridership trend and that, in particular, August ridership was soft at Norwalk Transit operations. There was then some discussion about whether the timing of the Labor Day holiday and vacations could have had an effect on August ridership. Mr. Fox then noted again that Westport commuter shuttle ridership correlates inversely with the quantity of railroad parking permits issued and that the Westport Police Department had recently issued a number of new permits as is typical after the June 30 permit renewal date. Mr. Pentz then presented his ridership tracker report which is helpful in classifying ridership by ticket types. The attendees are eager to see September and October results as these are typically bellwether months in predicting ridership trends for the year.

The attendees noted that ridership on the S4 was down significantly in July and August. Mr. Fox indicated that he thinks microtransit would likely to be a good option for commuters in the S4 area. Microtransit was discussed later in the agenda.

The number of door-to-door trips has trended down for the past two years, although Mr. Fox noted that the number of Town-to-Town trips had increased somewhat in recent months. The attendees then discussed the fact that since the majority of the Westport door-to-door trips are taken by a relatively small number of individuals there are frequent swings in ridership trends, which makes budgeting that service difficult.

FY19 and FY20 Financial / Budget Update

Mr. Pentz presented the expected year end FY19 financial results for Westport Transit. He indicated that a clean audit is anticipated for the NTD, with final results expected in October.

Mr. Pentz then presented the July FY20 financials. He commented that expenses for the commuter shuttles are 8% above the prior year, but he indicated that he expects these high year-over-year trends in July will not be representative of the entire FY20, as the NTD incurred some atypically high expenses in July. Mr. Pentz added that he is

pleased that revenue is up slightly over the prior year and he then stated he is watching revenue recorded for the WTD operations carefully with the ridership tracker report.

Mr. Pentz then updated the attendees on implementation of new software being used in FY20 to allocate costs in a more detailed manner to Door-to-Door trips, which he expects will result in a more accurate cost allocation system.

Connecticut Funding Update

Ms. Morton noted that the final budget was received from CT DOT and contained a 2.5% increase across the board.

Mr. Pentz noted that there has been no formal confirmation regarding the FY20 MGP however he was informally informed that it would be the same as FY19.

Marketing

Mr. Fox gave an update on marketing initiatives:

- In recent months, the WTD Directors worked with the marketing professional, Rob Feakins, to develop eye-catching emails to be sent to Westport employers to help promote the use of the S1 commuter shuttle by reverse commuters traveling into Westport. The WTD's plan is for these emails to be distributed by the Westport Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Merchants Association to its employer members, with a request that they share the information with their employees.
- The WTD Directors have also been working with Mr. Feakins to develop new emails for Westport outbound train commuters highlighting the benefits of riding the shuttles and some of the key mechanics of using them, such as how to pay fares and where riders can get on and off the shuttles. These emails follow the WTD's 2017 – 2019 marketing program (also developed with the assistance of Mr. Feakins) which significantly raised awareness of the shuttles among Westport commuters. The plan is to distribute these new emails to a list of over 10,000 residents – and subsequently to work with a volunteer to post selected emails on selected Westport social media sites.
- The WTD is also planning to update the posters in one of the tunnels between the east-bound and west-bound platforms of the Saugatuck Station with abridged versions of the new messaging produced as part of this marketing initiative.

Microtransit Update

Ms. Morton then reviewed certain aspects of microtransit software provided by NTD's new software vendor, Via. As part of this update, Ms. Morton informed the WTD Directors that configuration changes require the involvement of the Via organization and therefore take more time (up to 4 weeks) than with the prior software, where changes could be made by NTD staff. The attendees discussed the potential utilization of microtransit for all WTD evening shuttle services with the exception of the S1. The attendees agreed that they still think that it would be best to start with a test in the G1 and G2 areas. Ms. Morton indicated that she will set up an initial planning session with Via, which is expected to occur in late October due to other NTD priorities.

Norwalk Transit District Organizational Changes

Ms. Morton noted the departure of the COO, Mr. Liotta. She advised that a comprehensive reorganizational plan would be presented to the Norwalk Transit District Commissioners at their September 26th meeting, and that she would inform the WTD Directors once the plan had been approved.

Ms. Cimarosa and Mr. Fox then expressed their appreciation for Mr. Liotta's and the NTD team's excellent support of Westport Transit's operations.

Other Business

Ms. Morton advised the Directors that the NTD had an electronic sign earmarked for the Saugatuck Station. The Directors agreed that it was not necessary for the station due to the way the service is designed and would only create confusion for the consumer. NTD will look to relocate the sign elsewhere in its service area.

Ms. Morton highlighted the status of the following projects.

- Triennial Review
- Receipt of new 35 and 40-foot Gillig buses
- Facility Rehabilitation
- Electric Bus Project

Next Scheduled Meeting

The next scheduled meeting is Thursday, November 21st, 2019 at 10:00 AM. The meeting will be held at Westport Town Hall, Room 309.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:25 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Martin Fox
Westport Transit District Director