

TPAG Meeting Minutes  
September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Attendees: Mark Binnall; Connie Mellis (CMRPC); Mike Kennedy; Sharon Strzalkowski; Mary Haroyan; Joe Bellil; Nancy Garr-Colzie; Manny Guerra; Kathy Kulesza; Carolyn Foley (PBSTM); Sujatha Krishnan (CMRPC); Nona Haroyan

**Discussion/Approval of July Minutes**

Mr. Binnall moved to approve the July meeting minutes, this was seconded by Ms. Strzalkowski. All attendees voted in favor.

**Paratransit Report**

Ms Foley, director of PBSTM, shared the statistics and figures from August 2025:

- Total application trips requested: 20
- Total trips requested: 14,377
- Capacity denials: 0
- Total trips scheduled: 14,377
- Cancellations: 2,799 (19.1% of scheduled trips)
- No Shows: 304 (2.1% of scheduled trips)
- Missed Trips: 3
- Trips completed: 11,274
- Companions: 468
- PCAs: 1,127
- Total trips completed including companions and PCA's: 12,869
- Elder Shopper: 163

Mr. Binnall asked the director about how many no-shows a rider can have before it results in a suspension. She responded that it depends on how many rides one schedules per month. A rider's first no-show trip is met with a written warning only.

One member was pleased to see that the completion rate of paratransit eligibility applications seemed to be higher in this report. Ms Mellis (CMRPC) noted that this could be due to the new online application process. Completed applications can be submitted however the applicant prefers. Carolyn Foley also added that many applicants are using the online form now.

Ms Kulesza asked Ms Foley (PBSTM) if there are people who use the paratransit service who can still drive. Ms. Foley responded that the paratransit service is for individuals who cannot use the fixed route service for some or all of their fixed route bus trips and isn't related to driving ability.

### **New WRTA vans - White Vans Discussion**

Ms. Kulesza brought up a potential issue with the new paratransit vans which are painted white. She suggested that it could be helpful to notify paratransit riders that the van coming to pick them up could potentially be white rather than the blue vans that riders are used to. This is to avoid a situation in which the rider misses their bus and could be classified as a 'no-show'. Ms Haroyan agreed and added that a rider who has low vision may rely on identifying the vans by color rather than the agency's lettering. Some attendees suggested to Director Foley that a reminder be added to the automatic message system to tell people that some of the vans are currently white. She explained that modifying the automatic message would take some time and difficulty, while the white vans are a temporary situation and will be updated once the WRTA finalizes its rebranding decisions.

### **Yellow Cab Discussion**

Ms. Nona Haroyan directed a question towards Carolyn Foley of PBSTM regarding what she observed to be a new policy with the Yellow Cab service. Ms. Haroyan explained that when she has a scheduled round trip with Yellow Cab and she ends up finishing sooner than she thought, she typically calls the Yellow Cab dispatch to see if she can get a ride back sooner than scheduled. At times they can, and they send a car, other times they are not, and she waits for her scheduled pick up. Recently, she said,

the dispatch has told her that they are unable to send a car to pick her up early and that she must call the WRTA. She wondered how long this policy has been in place and why. Ms. Foley of PBSTM responded, saying that the policy has always been in place and that the calls need to be through PBSTM because Yellow Cab may not have the first ride or know where the passenger is. She said that during PBSTM's business hours riders should call them directly. Ms. Foley stated that she was previously unaware of the fact that riders were calling Yellow Cab directly during PBSTM's business hours for early pick-ups and when she was made aware of it, she notified Yellow Cab to direct riders back to PBSTM. This is because PBSTM/WRTA pays extra for each time Yellow Cab is used for paratransit rides. It is much better for WRTA to send a van if one is available but if a rider calls Yellow Cab directly, there is no chance for a van to be sent.

### **Nominations and Elections**

Connie Mellis (CMRPC) opened the floor to discuss nominations and the upcoming election for the group. A few attendees raised the question of whether it was worth conducting elections if the future of TPAG was uncertain. She responded by saying CMRPC would position TPAG to continue if the members wished it to. Ms. Kulesza asked who decides if TPAG gets to continue. Ms. Mellis (CMRPC) explained that CMRPC is under contract with the WRTA to staff the meetings/group, however that will not continue to be the case. The future of TPAG will be up to its members. Mr. Bellil expressed concern about the dissolution of the group as he sees that it is an important voice in terms of advocating on behalf of paratransit users to the WRTA and that though it is a small group, he has seen other small groups still have an impact. He sees the value of having an organized group that meets consistently to discuss issues that affect WRTA paratransit riders. Ms. Mary Haroyan mentioned that there is a lot of overlap between TPAG and the Transportation Advocacy Coalition (TAC).

Sujatha Krishnan, Director of Transportation at CMRPC, explained the situation from CMRPC's point of view. TPAG has existed for a long time and has dwindled in membership and activity. Leadership at the WRTA is

looking for more and new avenues to get feedback and outreach from riders, especially paratransit riders. CMRPC's relationship with the WRTA now is more based on data collection and reporting. As users of the service, it may be better for TPAGs members to interact with the WRTA directly, rather than through CMRPC. She also explained that members who are interested in continuing to talk and learn about transit issues will be invited to join a new group that would discuss how to make the regional transit system better for all users and incorporate public health connections.

Ms. Garr-Colzie asked if the applicants that are denied for their ADA paratransit applications will still be able to appeal. Connie Mellis (CMRPC) answered that the applicants will still be able to appeal regardless of TPAG status and that CMRPC could form a committee for such activities. An appeals board is completely separate from TPAG.

One member discussed potentially using the TPAG mailing list to recruit people to join the other advocacy groups.

Sujatha Krishnan (CMRPC) mentioned that TPAG could have the organizers of these advocacy groups as guests on a future meeting, or they could be discussed as an item on the agenda which would effectively notify everyone on the mailing list for TPAG.

Mr. Binall suggested that the elections be put on hold due to the uncertainty of TPAGs future, many other members echoed this sentiment. TPAG nominations were not held and election is cancelled for Oct.

### **Customer Service Report**

Mr Binnall asked Ms. Foley about the Customer Service report.

Ms. Foley (PBSTM) read the statistics for August 2025 to the group:

- 128 complaints

- 105 related to fixed route (82%)

- 19 related to paratransit (15%)
- 4 referenced driver behavior
- 1 referenced the ride being early/late
- 2 referenced safety

Ms Strzalkowski gave a note of appreciation to Ms. Carolyn Foley (PBSTM) for explaining and guiding her through a complaint about a scheduling issue. She appreciated Ms. Foley's timeliness and thoroughness.

### **The Future of TPAG**

Ms. Mary Haroyan asked if the paratransit and customer service statistics would be made available to another transportation advocacy group if TPAG dissolves. Ms. Carolyn Foley (PBSTM) answered that decision would be under the purview of the WRTA, and she could not answer definitively. Connie Mellis (CMRPC) asked the members if they had another group in mind who could be given this information. Multiple attendees stated that Mr. Bellil's group the Transportation Advocacy Coalition might be best suited to receive the statistics and information. Mr. Bellil expressed concern that the other groups that exist, including his own, are private advocacy groups which don't necessarily have direct lines of communication with the WRTA and are not public facing. He sees TPAG as a group that handled complaints and had a direct line to the WRTA, and he expressed concern about how a private organization would be able to carry these responsibilities, and what that would look like. Sujatha Krishnan (CMRPC) explained that CMRPC would also need to get permission from the WRTA to share any data. She explained that in the coming months the responsibilities and functions of a future group could be discussed and ironed out. Ms. Strzalkowski made the point that all the administrative functions that Ms. Mellis (CMRPC) currently carries out, including managing the information, guests, and agenda, would fall on the members. She wondered how a future group, without CMRPC's assistance, would get guests to attend meetings to explain policies and legislation.

One rider posited that the disability rider representative could be the person who receives the paratransit reports and brings people from the transit authority to explain policies and hear people's concerns. Ms. Kulesza pointed out that the disability rider representative doesn't necessarily need to be someone with a disability, it could be someone who works with people with disabilities or a family member of someone with a disability. She explained that such individuals would not necessarily have a lived experience with paratransit. She emphasized the importance of the representative understanding how the service works.

Ms. Nona Haroyan asked Mr. Binnall if the WRTA was required to have a paratransit advisory group. She felt that it was on the WRTA to run and staff an advisory group where paratransit users can voice their concerns and have a line of communication with the RTA. Other members echoed this sentiment and were curious to see what other transit agencies do to hear the concerns of paratransit riders. If they directly ran advisory/advocacy groups or if they had a third party run them.

Mr. Binnall asked Mr. Bellil about the Transportation Advocacy Coalition (TAC), Mr. Bellil talked about a few of the TAC's agenda items and how their next meeting will be in November. Mr. Bellil also brought up the rider's group in Boston and how their approach is more structured, like TPAG. He emphasized the need for a formal, public group that can handle accommodation as well as making sure the relationship between the agency and the riders runs smoothly and that the rider's concerns are considered. One member questioned if it was the right decision to dissolve TPAG. Other members agreed and said they will need time to think about future arrangements of the group.

Sujatha Krishnan (CMRPC) suggested that the group make a formal memo to send to the WRTA that details what the group would need on a regular basis from the WRTA (e.g. statistics, staff.) She advised them to make a list of goals and structure the kind of relationship the group would have with the WRTA.

## **WRTA Advisory Board**

Ms. Mellis (CMRPC) reminded the group that the term for the disability and rider rep positions on the WRTA Advisory Board is expiring soon. She also noted that at their last meeting the WRTA Advisory Board discussed allowing the current reps to stay in their positions until new reps were appointed. Mr. Kennedy echoed this, as he is the current disability representative on the advisory board. He also expressed the importance of having more riders on the advisory board in general.

The meeting was adjourned after 1 hour and 22 minutes

The next and FINAL meeting will be on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025.