

TPAG Meeting Minutes
January 24, 2024

Attendees: Nona Haroyan; Sharon Strzalkowski; Mary Haroyan; Carolyn Foley, PBSTM; Nancy Garr-Colzie; Connie Mellis, CMRPC; Karen Santiago; Dave Trabucco, General Manager; Benji Kemper; CJ Posk; Mark Binnall; Heather-Lyn Haley; Josh Rickman, WRTA Administrator; Jamie Winters, WRTA; Nick Burnham, WRTA; Harry Duchense, Audio Journal; Bill Regeri; Brian's iPhone; Kathy Kulesza; Jim Murphy; Mike Kennedy; Doreen Goodrich, Sen Michael Moore's office; Rahila; Tyler Distefano, CMRPC; Nahrin Sangkagalo, CMRPC; Anna Kusterski, Worcester Public Schools (late attendee); Joe Bellil (late attendee)

Meeting minutes of Dec 27 were accepted as presented.

WRTA Administrator Josh Rickman is discussing his first few months with a discussion of the current status of service and taking questions from the group.

WRTA is working to improve reliability on both fixed route and paratransit services. The WRTA Advisory Board discussed restoration of fixed route Fri service. Fri service was reduced last year due to operator availability. Strategies have been discussed to increase the number of full time drivers (for both fixed route and paratransit) which will increase the number of operators overall and will allow WRTA to restore Fri service to its full levels. This was introduced to the Board at their Jan meeting and will be discussed again in Feb. Another item to highlight is the WRTA's Information Technology systems. Much of the technology used by WRTA today is in need of updating since much of it is about 10 years old. We are in the process of evaluating the entire IT system with the ultimate goal of improving the customer experience. We hope to have a new system by Summer 2025. An RFP has been issued for on-call planning services which may include bus stop inventory, analyze micro-transit and corridor studies. WRTA has adopted a Severe Weather plan to document the steps and contacts required to continue service. Riders have commented that the WRTA Hub platform is difficult to navigate and that restrooms are needed. WRTA has an architecture and engineering firm looking at the lobby in its entirety, including the restrooms. They will also look at the platform with regard to rider use.

Q: Can you share any ideas for a paratransit app that could help riders locate their van/taxi? I'm aware that WPI has developed free apps for several organizations. Yellow Cab currently has an app which has been very popular.

A: That will be part of the bigger IT discussion as we address all the technology upgrades.

Q: What is the status of hiring more paratransit van drivers?

A: Last week the WRTA Advisory Board heard my presentation about the transition concept. In Feb they will be asked to approve a revised FY24 budget for this and have a preview of the FY25 budget which will include this concept as well. CMTM states that they are working with multiple organizations to help with the hiring efforts. In addition, CMTM will be streamlining its divisions from four to two.

Q: My paratransit trip is sometimes much longer and more round-about than seems reasonable. Can you comment?

A: Since paratransit is a shared-ride service, there are a lot of variables that are considered when scheduling the van. When this becomes an issue, contact the paratransit office to discuss the issue further.

Q: Are you considering an on-demand transportation service that can be used within 10 minutes of the pickup?

A: At this time WRTA is not considering adding an on-demand transportation service and is focusing on improving its existing services.

Q: Its difficult to navigate through the announcements at the Hub since there are sometimes multiple announcements being made at once. Is WRTA addressing this?

A: We will be addressing this as part of the bigger IT discussion.

Q: Are drivers allowed to pickup or drop off riders across the street from their location?

A: Drivers should never ask a rider to cross a street to be picked up. That type of request should be reported immediately.

Q: Are there plans to place advertising on vans like the buses have?

A: The option for van advertising is available. There have been inquiries on advertising inside the van but no recent discussions about the exterior.

Q: As you proceed with your IT upgrades, it will be very important to involve the disability community in the development of the public facing tools.

A: WRTA also recognizes the importance of involving the disability community in this effort.

Thank you to Josh and his staff for speaking with TPAG.

Paratransit Report was presented.

A rider wanted clarification on the number of bags she was allowed to take on paratransit. PBSTM responded that there was no limit to the number of bags but they had to be in control of the rider and brought on board in one trip and could not take another seat.

Customer Service Report was presented. In Dec there were 136 complaints closed. Of the 136 complaints, 117 were for fixed route and 16 were for paratransit. Of the 16 paratransit complaints 8 was for driver behavior and 8 were classified as 'Other'.

The electronic feedback form goes to the Customer Service office. They are then distributed as needed to the appropriate department for follow up and response.

Transportation Advocacy Coalition shared that the WRTA Advisory Board has a new Disability Rep.

WRTA Advisory Board discussed the revised advertising policy.

Next meeting is Feb 28, 2024, 1:00-2:30pm. Meeting will be held virtually.