



## Meeting Summary

### External Stakeholder Meeting 1 (Kickoff)

**Monday May 22, 2023, 1–2:30 p.m.**

The first meeting of the External Stakeholder Committee for the NFTA-Metro Paratransit Study took place at Metro's 181 Ellicott Street facility.

After brief introductions and a general overview of the study, the Nelson\Nygaard consultant team provided a presentation and facilitated a discussion covering two key topics, 1) ideas for engagement, and 2) PAL service. A copy of the presentation, which was distributed to committee members prior to the meeting, is attached to this summary.

#### Engagement Discussion

**Question: What's the best way to engage people about issues and opportunities in the paratransit system?**

- Direct calls and texts
- Focus groups
- Survey, but provide an option to dictate answers by phone
- Consider both hybrid meetings/virtual meetings – Zoom/Microsoft Teams
- Include areas outside of PAL service area in the engagement process
- Contact community organizations: person-centered services and care managers
- Use existing rider contact information
- Consider using the 211 mailing list

- Ask to be placed on the agenda of upcoming meetings of other organizations
- Make sure to let people know how their feedback led to changes
- Provide reasonable accommodations for survey: online, phone walk through (blind association)

## **PAL Service Discussion**

### **What are Areas for Service Improvement?**

- Some must transfer from outside service area to PAL service
- Bus never shows up, or is too late
- Negotiating with Controllers can be difficult
- Controllers are unfriendly; use recordings as monitoring and teaching tools
- Dispatch system/technology needs to be improved
- Service reliability
- Late trips/late-night trips: People have been left stranded after no-shows
- The driver and rider cannot find each other sometimes
- Consider a partnership to expand curb to curb service with Helping Hands
- Pulling up into the driveway would be helpful
- Riders receive a text message when the driver is on the way, but many riders would like these alerts to provide more information
- There's a complaint line, but the availability needs to be improved

### **What is working well with today's NFTA paratransit service?**

- Online scheduling for frequent trips
- Listen well; Patricia is great at this!
- Monthly meetings (Accessibility Advisory Committee)

**What should the focus of this study be? / What would be the best possible outcome of this study in your opinion?**

- Ride along as a paratransit user
- Utilize data: with pickups, schedules, and arrival times
- Talk to NFTA operators and staff
- Ask what it is like to use PAL in the winter
- Use GIS mapping of origins and destinations
- Maps are important for people to react to
- Study travel patterns: Where do they go now? Where do they want to go?
- Use plain language and pictures
- Include blind/visually-impaired associations such as VIA
- Use input from ongoing survey of paratransit riders

## **Meeting Attendees**

Mindy Cervoni, Committee Member, Community Services for Every1

Jeannette Grimaldi, Committee Member, Deaf Access Services

Frank Cammarata, Committee Member, Erie County

Jordan Bellassai, Committee Member, Health Foundation of Central/Western NY

Aaron Carlson, Committee Member, Hearts and Hands

Nick Hester, Committee Member, Niagara County Department of Mental Health

Jill Turchiarelli, Committee Member, People, Inc.

Todd Vaarwerk ,Committee Member, WNY Independent Living

Stephanie Speaker, Committee Member, Advocate

Mike Billoni, Support for Stephanie Speaker

Vicki DeMarco, ASL interpreter

Megan Morsch, Consultant, Highland Planning

Nancy Raca, Consultant, Highland Planning

Bill Schwartz, Consultant, Nelson\Nygaard

Nadine Chalmers, NFTA

Samuel Gallivan, NFTA

Tom George, NFTA

Rob Jones, NFTA

Rachel Maloney, NFTA

James Morrell, NFTA

Patricia Wiseman, NFTA

May 22, 2023

Stakeholder Committee Kickoff Meeting

# NFTA-Metro Paratransit Study

Bill Schwartz, Nelson\Nygaard

Nancy Raca, Highland Planning



# Today's Presentation

- 1 Study overview
- 2 Engagement planning
- 3 Discussion





# Study Overview

# Study Goals

The NFTA-Metro Paratransit Study has the following goals:

- Improve efficiency and effectiveness
- Enhance the overall customer experience
- Identify new and improved service delivery opportunities
- Evaluate service area expansion
- Ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)





# ADA Requirements

- Complementary paratransit is:
  - A “safety net” service for those whose disability prevents them from riding fixed-route service or traveling to/from bus stops or train stations
  - Offered to eligible individuals for travel within 3/4 mile of non-commuter bus routes or rail stations during the same times that fixed-route service operates
  - Governed by U.S. Department of Transportation Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations

# Selected DOT ADA Regulatory Topics

- Trip reservations and telephone hold times
- Timeliness of pickups and drop-offs (for trips with appointments)
- Trip lengths (when compared with fixed route)
- Training of personnel
- Complaint process
- Rider policies (late cancellations, no-shows, and appeals)

# Study Objectives

- Ensure that NFTA's complementary paratransit service (PAL):
  - Meets the DOT ADA requirements
  - Is efficient, making the best use of public funds
  - Can meet customer needs today and in the future
  - Can offer innovative services
  - Is equitable
  - Delivers excellent customer service



# Consultant Team

- Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, Inc. (Boston, MA) – Project Lead
- Highland Planning (Rochester, NY) – Engagement
- Marine Tiger Technologies (Teaneck, NJ) – Technology
- Thatcher Consulting (Topsfield, MA) – ADA Paratransit
- Thomas Procopio (Reading, MA) – Scheduling Software
- Setroc Group (New Brunswick, NJ) – Website and Communications

# Study Phases

- Phase 1 – Evaluation, research, and engagement to recommend improvements
- Phase 2 – Estimation of future demand, costs, and options for delivering paratransit, including expanded service area
- Phase 3 – Implementation plan design
  
- **Engage with Stakeholder Committee and others throughout the study**

# Phase 1 Overview

- Conduct a PAL service evaluation (next slide)
- Conduct research into how other transit agencies deliver complementary paratransit and suggest ideas that NFTA can implement
- Identify and recommend opportunities for improvement
- Develop and implement a stakeholder engagement plan



# Phase 1 Service Evaluation

- Compile data, conduct interviews (riders, drivers, other staff), and directly observe PAL service
- Typical focus areas for improvements include:
  - Customer experience
  - Organization and administration
  - Policies, procedures, rider guides, etc.
  - Training, hiring, and retention of staff
  - Use of technology
  - Overall service delivery

# Phase 2 Overview

- Estimate future demand for current PAL service area
- Estimate demand for expanded service area
- Estimate future costs and suggest service delivery options



# Phase 3 Overview

- Design an implementation strategy for different timelines
  - Short-term strategies that can be implemented quickly
  - Medium-term feasible strategies that take more time
  - Longer-term strategies that require more study and potentially more funding



# Stakeholder Engagement

# Engagement Goals

- Learn from representative riders and others about PAL (applying for eligibility, requesting trips, riding, etc.)
- Seek input on ideas for improvement
- Seek input on potential service expansion
- Obtain feedback at key milestones

# Stakeholder Committee Role

- Advise on issues and opportunities
- Provide input and review key findings
- Help spread the word and encourage others to participate

# Engagement Planning Activities

- Pre-engagement interviews
  - 20-minute phone conversations to help with design
- Stakeholder Engagement Plan (in development)
  - Spells out goals, outreach strategies, activities, events, etc.
- Rider outreach
  - What is the best way to reach riders?
    - Virtual meetings?
    - Small groups?



# Discussion

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# Additional Discussion Questions

- What should the team focus on as it evaluates the PAL service?
- What does NFTA's PAL team do well?
- What would you like to see changed in the future?

# Thank you!



Bill Schwartz, AICP

[bschwartz@nelsonnygard.com](mailto:bschwartz@nelsonnygard.com)