



Meeting Summary

External Stakeholder Meeting 2

August 22, 2023, 1–2:30 PM

Welcome & Introductions

Samuel Gallivan, Project Manager for NFTA, welcomed participants and thanked them for attending. Megan Morsch, Public Engagement Lead for Highland Planning, led the introductions for everyone on the call, which included NFTA staff, the consultant team, and steering committee members. A list of meeting participants is included in Appendix A.

Project Overview

Emily Oaksford, Deputy Project Manager for Nelson/Nygaard, and Megan Morsch led a PowerPoint presentation, which is included as Appendix B. The presentation included a progress update on the study schedule, research and analysis progress, pre-engagement results and engagement plan overview, and an overview of the project website. The design process is in the early stages. By late 2024, NFTA will complete a comprehensive study of PAL service to identify opportunities to improve quality, increase efficiency, and enhance the customer experience.

NFTA and the Nelson/Nygaard consultant team are committed to engaging with stakeholders and the community to ensure a collaborative and thoughtful approach to the design and implementation of the project.

Paratransit Expansion Study Objectives

The goals of the study are to ensure that NFTA's complementary paratransit service (PAL) meets the DOT ADA requirements, is efficient and equitable, makes the best use of public funds, can meet customer needs today and in the future, can offer innovative services, and delivers excellent customer service.

Project Schedule

The study has three phases:

- Phase 1- Evaluation, research, and engagement to recommend improvements. We are currently in this phase.

- Phase 2- Estimating future demand, costs, and options for delivering paratransit, including expanded service area
- Phase 3- Implementation plan design

Public Engagement

Megan Morsch (Highland Planning) provided an overview of the public engagement and communication process. The public engagement and communications plan was shared with the steering committee for review on August 18, 2023. NFTA and Nelson Nygaard committed to engaging with stakeholders and the community throughout the project's planning and design phases. Three public information meetings will be scheduled in the late winter and early spring of 2024 to solicit input from stakeholders, riders, and potential riders on paratransit expansion needs and opportunities. The project team will use public notices, direct mailings, and collaboration with NFTA for promotional materials to notify the public of opportunities to provide input. Stakeholders expressed an interest in being part of the communication process, suggesting direct email and a link to the study's website.

Discussion

Stakeholders expressed interest in the project and asked questions about the study's overview and progress. The following are the main topics of discussion.

- Study Timeline. Stakeholders were interested in the timeline for the study and wanted more specific details about each of the three phases. They were also concerned about the May 2024 deadline for providing cost estimates, as they felt that Phase 2 of the study should be moving forward concurrently with Phase 1.
 - The consultant acknowledged the community's interest in this study and will work with NFTA to address schedule concerns.
- Study Promotion: Stakeholders expressed concern that the study was not being promoted enough and suggested that NFTA use social media and hold a press conference to raise awareness.
 - The consultant team will work with NFTA to coordinate outreach.
- Service Expansion. One stakeholder was interested in the cost of expanding the paratransit service area and wanted to know how NFTA was planning to estimate these costs.
 - The consultant noted that expansion costs are part of Phase 2.
- Other: One stakeholder expressed the desire for the NFTA paratransit system to be the "Super Bowl" of paratransit systems in the country. They felt that this was a great opportunity to take a fresh look at the paratransit services provided and make them the best they can be.

Overall, stakeholders were positive about the study and expressed support for the project. They were eager to learn more about the timeline, promotion, and expansion costs, and they also expressed the desire for NFTA to make the paratransit system the best it can be.

Appendix A: Meeting Attendees

Steering Committee Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Organization/ Title
Jordan	Bellassai	Program Officer Health Foundation of Central/Western NY
Mike	Billoni	Stephanie Speaker's Advocate and Communications Person
Frank	Cammarata	Executive Director for Erie County Office for People with Disabilities
Tabitha	Fisher	Director of Program Services for Hearts and Hands
Jeanette	Grimaldi	Advocate for Deaf Access Services
Nick	Hester	Niagara County Department of Mental Health
Michael (Mickey)	Kearns	Erie County Clerk
Kevin	Peterson	Mayor of the Village of Depew
Stephanie	Speaker	PAL Rider and Advocate
Todd	Vaarwerk	WNY Independent Living

Project Team

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Role
Megan	Morsch	Highland Planning	Public Engagement Consultant
Emily	Oaksford	Nelson/Nygaard	Consultant Deputy Project Manager
Bill	Schwartz	Nelson/Nygaard	Consultant Project Manager
Nadine	Chalmers	NFTA	Manager, Service Planning
Samuel	Gallivan	NFTA	PAL Study Project Manager
Rachel	Maloney	NFTA	Manager, Bus & Special Service Operations Service Planning
Patricia	Wiseman	NFTA	Paratransit Customer Service