



Meeting Summary

External Stakeholder Meeting 6

December 18, 2024, 1:00–2:30 p.m.

Welcome and Introductions

Sam Gallivan (NFTA) initiated the meeting by welcoming attendees and introduced Bill Schwartz (Nelson\Nygaard), who is leading the consultant team. This was the final meeting of the committee.

Presentation

Agenda

The agenda topics in the presentation (slides attached) were:

- Study update
- Expansion analysis
- Implementation strategy
- Discussion

Study Update

Bill explained that the presentation covers the same information shared during the September 2024 public meetings with the following updates:

- Cost estimates are now available for the six-mile buffer
- A report summarizing the expansion analysis and related findings is to be published shortly

Expansion Analysis

The expansion analysis tables include new columns, one for the trips per revenue vehicle hour and one for the number of estimated additional PAL drivers required to deliver service under the two scenarios.

The cost for the 6-mile buffer (\$11,584,600) is summarized in a table. As with the 3-mile buffer estimate, this does not include the cost of expanding maintenance capacity.

As mentioned during previous meetings, to deliver additional PAL service with NFTA resources, NFTA would need to hire more drivers, acquire more vehicles, and increase maintenance capacity. In addition, NFTA cannot expand the PAL service area until it addresses ongoing challenges with service delivery (vehicles, drivers, efficiencies).

Implementation Strategy

Timeline

Bill explained the timeline and objectives for improving PAL service and the roadmap for service expansion as follows:

- Near-term (2024-2025)
 - Improve service delivery by the end of 2025
 - Hire additional drivers
 - Replace aging vehicles
- Medium-term (2026-2029)
 - Build capacity for service expansion
- Long-term (2030 and beyond)
 - Implement expanded paratransit service

Bill also noted that medium-and long-term improvements and capacity-building strategies require additional resources.

Recommendations

Bill presented four near- and medium-term recommendations the consultant team has made to NFTA to improve PAL service:

- Improve the use of technology, which may include updating or replacing paratransit software.
- Improve eligibility practices (including in-person interviews), to limit PAL eligibility to customers who need the service (per ADA).
- Negotiate trip requests within ADA parameters to offer realistic promise times and improve on-time performance.
- Implement operational efficiencies to better distribute demand and improve on-time performance.

Supplemental Service Alternative

Bill presented the option to contract with a non-dedicated service provider (NDSP) to provide supplemental service. He explained that additional effort and study is needed before pursuing this option and that NFTA would need to negotiate with the labor union to ensure current NFTA drivers and staff do not lose work opportunities. He also stated that NFTA would need to hire additional staff to oversee the vendor. The cost of these options ranges from approximately \$1.6 to \$1.8 million per year in the three-mile buffer and from approximately \$3 to \$3.4 million per year in the six-mile buffer, not accounting for annual inflation.

Questions and Answers/Discussion

Question: In-person interviews may be eliminated by state legislation, as these may be considered too burdensome to the PAL rider base. The study should consider that.

Answer: The study and recommendations are not intended to be “punitive” for existing PAL customers. The existing conditions report identified areas where the current PAL process is too narrow or the application process can be simplified, so there are ways that the study aims to expand access to PAL.

Comment: You could conduct virtual interviews. The study can help to open a dialogue on these issues. You can also work with care coordination organizations such as Person-Centered Services and Prime Care; DMV non-driver ID days; Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western NY. Also, for those who have a physical (or other disability) requiring paratransit use where the disability will never change, allow lifetime approval.

Response: The consultant team recommended that NFTA establish a continuous eligibility category with the only requirement that customers with this status update their contact information periodically.

Question in chat: How did you determine the number of additional trips? Was it based on rider report on locations they want to go, but can't now?

Answer: Although not addressed during the meeting, the service expansion analysis report explains the methods used to forecast demand.

Question: How was the study changed based on feedback from September public meetings?

Answer: Six-mile buffer was added, further investigations and clarifications were made regarding the maintenance capacity cost estimates, and potential alternate service delivery models were elaborated on with more detail.

Question: Why not implement before 2030?

Answer: 2030 is not necessarily the earliest rollout, particularly if working with a third-party transportation provider, but ramp-up time is still necessary to address ongoing issues, hire additional staff, acquire additional vehicles, and build up necessary capacity for service expansion.

Question: Garage that used to be on Broadway; what is the status of that? Is there a possibility of rehabbing this site for use as a PAL site?

Answer: NFTA does not own this property, which is occupied by a private business.

Question: What about pay differences between PAL and big-bus operators?

Answer: Pay rates are negotiated with the labor union.

Comment: NFTA has excess resources and should be able to implement expansion sooner.

Comment: This study is part of a policy analysis to change statewide policy to expand the minimum ADA-equivalent paratransit service area. Study does well in developing cost estimates and in highlighting ongoing issues with costs, maintenance constraints, and operator/vehicle issues. It provides a jumping-off point for recommendations for a pilot program. It is also the start of a continuous process with the state and the AAC.

The meeting concluded just after 2 p.m.

Meeting Attendees

Steering Committee

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Mike	Billoni	Stephanie Speaker's advocate
Frank	Cammarata	Executive Director for Erie County Office for People with Disabilities
Aaron	Carlson	Hearts and Hands
Mindy	Cervoni	Community Services for Every1
Jeanette	Grimaldi	Advocate for Deaf Access Services
Jordan	Bellassai	Health Foundation for Western & Central New York
Stephanie	Speaker	PAL Rider and Advocate
Todd	Vaarwerk	WNY Independent Living

Project Team

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Role
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Samuel	Gallivan	NFTA	PAL Study Project Manager
Nadine	Chalmers	NFTA	Manager of Service Planning
Robert	Jones	NFTA	Deputy Director, Transit
Patricia	Wiseman	NFTA	Specials Services and Systems Manager
Maggen	Blair	NFTA	Planner
Jeffery	Amplement	NFTA	Planner
Bill	Schwartz	Nelson/Nygaard	Consultant Project Manager

Others

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Michael	Kearns	Erie County