



Worcester Regional Transit Authority

60 Foster Street
Worcester, MA 01608

TO: WRTA Advisory Board
FROM: Nick Burnham, Director of Transit Operations and Planning
DATE: February 12, 2025
SUBJECT: Summary of Public Outreach Efforts – Proposed Spring 2025 Schedule Changes

BACKGROUND:

At the November 21, 2024 WRTA Advisory Board meeting, Administration requested to release a series of schedule changes aimed to recalibrate existing fixed-route schedules to improve on-time performance and increase overall operational efficiencies. The WRTA Advisory Board voted to approve and release the proposed schedule changes for public review and comment, and for Administration to present its findings at the January 2025 Board meeting, which was further extended to the February Board meeting.


PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS:


Administration created a new, independent webpage for the proposed schedule changes that launched in mid-December 2024; <https://therta.com/routes-schedules/schedule-changes/>. The website detailed the reasons why the WRTA were proposing schedule alterations, individual links to each route schedule proposal, public meeting and tabling event schedule, and methods for how riders could provide feedback and ask questions of the WRTA.

A new, independent email address was created (comments@therta.com) for direct communication with Administration regarding the proposed schedule changes. This new email address will be used for future public engagement and outreach efforts. A detailed Public Meeting Notice was made available in all WRTA buses, and WRTA-owned shelters in order to promote the meeting schedule. The Public Meeting Notice was translated into nine languages (based on the WRTA Title VI Program); Albanian, Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Haitian Creole, Polish, Portuguese (Brazilian), Spanish, Swahili, and Vietnamese.

Five public meetings were held; four in-person at locations throughout the City of Worcester, and one virtual meeting using Zoom. Spanish and ASL interpreters were available for the Worcester Senior Center, Worcester Public Library, and virtual public meetings. A brief summary of each public meeting is included below;

1. Worcester Senior Center – 1/7/2025 at 2:00 PM
 - a. Attended by four members of the public, and one WRTA Advisory Board member.
2. Boys and Girls Club of Worcester – 1/9/2025 at 12:00 PM
 - a. Attended by no members of the public, and the WRTA Advisory Board Chair.
3. Worcester Public Library – 1/16/2025 at 2:00 PM
 - a. Attended by 13 members of the public.

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4. Worcester Housing Authority – 1/22/2025 at 3:00 PM
 - a. Attended by one member of the public.
5. Virtual Public Meeting (Zoom) – 1/27/2025 at 5:00 PM
 - a. Attended by seven members of the public.

The presentation used for all public meetings was made available on the WRTA website for the project, and played on-loop throughout the month of January on two monitor screens in the Hub Lobby. This effort was to ensure that all passengers who may not have been able to attend any of the public meetings was able to view the presentation at their leisure.

Four tabling events were conducted at the WRTA Hub. The tabling events allowed for passengers to speak directly with WRTA, CMTM, PBSTM, and CMRPC staff, or ask questions regarding the proposed schedule changes. Staff were available at an information table within the Hub Lobby in teams of two, and rotated staff every two hours. Printed copies of all route schedule proposals were available, and given to passengers who inquired. Passengers were able to provide both verbal comments to staff, and written comments on a feedback card that logged the comment. A brief summary of each tabling event is included below;

1. Table Event #1 – 1/14/2025 from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM
2. Table Event #2 – 1/15/2025 from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM
3. Table Event #3 – 1/21/2025 from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM
4. Table Event #4 – 1/23/2025 from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM

PUBLIC COMMENT RECEIVED;

Overall, the comments and feedback received regarding the proposed schedule changes were positive. Many passengers were appreciative that the WRTA is taking steps in order to improve reliability of the service and felt their voices were being heard based on prior complaints to Customer Service, Customer Satisfaction Survey efforts, and general frustration.

From the five public meetings, nearly 40 comments were submitted by those who attended. From the four tabling events, 72 comments were written and submitted by passengers. The 'Comments' email address received 10 comments regarding the proposed changes. While the majority of comments received were germane to the proposed schedule changes, other comments were received regarding other WRTA endeavors such as future WRTA fare policy, rebranding efforts, bus stop signage, vehicle technology improvements, etc.

Below is a summary of the feedback received that has been condensed, and revised for clarity.

Route 1

- Please continue to keep Routes 1 and 3 interlined; as a senior who uses Route 3 from Highland Street, the proposed schedule for Route 1 does not depart the Hub to allow for a good connection to the Worcester Senior Center.
- Request to leave current Routes 1 and 3 interlined, the proposed schedule changes are noted as being implemented too fast.
- Positive comment regarding proposed interline of Routes 1 and 16.
- **Action: Reviewing the proposed Route 1 and Route 3 departure and arrival times to allow those arriving at the Hub from Route 3 inbound have the proper amount of time to transfer to the Route 1 to go to the Worcester Senior Center.**

Route 2

- Service request to have all Route 2 trips end at Worcester Airport; takes extra time to walk from Sunny Hill Drive.
- Request to extend Saturday hours of service.

Routes 2/3

- Request to create consistency between Routes 2 and 3 for Newton Square timepoint; the proposed schedules have the buses departing from Newton Square sometimes a minute, or 15 minutes, or 45 minutes apart.
 - *Administration Comments – Recognizing the comment, in reviewing the attached timepoints, the departure times for Routes 2 & 3 both outbound and inbound from Newton Square average to be approximately every 30 minutes. There are instances where there is an overlap of a couple of trips by 1 or 2 minutes, but they are independent routes that happen to meet at the same point.*

Route 3

- Request to leave current schedule as is.
- Request to add Sunday service between 11:00 AM and 6:00 PM.
- Request to consider reviewing route schedule with class schedules at Worcester State University so that the bus matches the end of classes, and arrives 30 minutes before classes start.
 - *Administration Comments – A preliminary review of WSU course offerings, there are approximately 100+ courses on Weekdays between 8:00 AM and 6:00 PM. Courses appear to have all sorts of different start and end times without consistency. Recognizing the comment, there are only five instances where Routes 3 & 6 depart inbound within a couple minutes of each other (7:14, 10:14, 13:14, 16:14, 19:14), but the remainder of trips are scattered throughout the service day.*
- Request to extend Saturday hours of service.

Route 4

- Request for later PM service, past 9:00 PM – some Walmart employees have to make changes to work schedules and may lose hours to get home after a shift.
- Request to early AM service, 6:30 AM or earlier in order to connect to Routes 23 or 26 in enough time at the Hub.
- Request to add second bus to route to have service more than every 75 minutes.
- Schedule is confusing as to where the last stop on the route is; is it Millbury Center, or Shoppes at Blackstone Valley?

Route 5

- Request to add trips on Saturdays.
 - *Administration Comments – Recognizing the comment, there are eight round trips added to this route in the proposed schedule that should satisfy the comment.*

Route 6

- Request to consider reviewing route schedule with class schedules at Worcester State University so that the bus matches the end of classes, and arrives 30 minutes before classes start.
 - *Administration Comments – See comment under Route 3 regarding WSU course offerings.*

Route 7

- Service request to extend route the entirety of Mill Street.

Route 825

- In favor of reinstating Friday service.
 - Received comment twice.

Route 11

- Comment to not reduce any trips on the route at all; needs to have service later at night.

Route 12

- Request to add earlier trips to North High School from teacher who uses service.
- Request to add Saturday and Sunday service in order to go to Market Basket in Shrewsbury.
 - Received comment thrice.

Route 15

- Current passenger uses the 4:50 PM bus from the Hub, but the proposed times will shift to 4:35 or 5:50 PM that will make trip planning difficult from to/from Shrewsbury.
 - *Administration Comments – Recognizing the comment, the proposed layover time does not appear to provide enough ‘wiggle room’ in order to shift the 4:35 PM trip as close to the currently scheduled 4:50 PM departure time.*

Route 19

- In favor of reinstating full Friday service; current limitations on Friday affect employee schedules to Goddard Memorial Drive/TJX.
- Service request: consider starting bus earlier on Weekday AM for employers along Goddard Memorial Drive. Some employers start shifts prior to 6:00 AM, and both Route 19 buses are proposed to begin their day on the Inbound.
- Service request to start Route 19 inbound at 5:00 AM to have an outbound trip to Goddard Memorial at 5:30 AM on weekdays.
- Proposed schedule changes still have bus bunching issues – Route 27 inbound departs Webster Square Plaza at 6:00 AM, while Route 19 inbound departs at 6:02 AM.
- **Action: Reviewing the proposed Route 19 schedule to modify the 5:30 AM trip from the WRTA Hub to end at Goddard Memorial Drive/Coppage Drive to provide earlier AM service to the number of employers in the area.**

Routes 23/26

- On Sundays, should start at 9:00 AM and since both routes operate on Lincoln St. – stagger the bus departure times so that there is one bus at least every 30 minutes.
 - *Administration Comments – Recognizing the comment, without disrupting the proposed Route 26, potential to hold for a future schedule change to propose Sunday trips on the hour vs. the :45 in order to have precise 30 minute service on Lincoln St.*

Route 24

- Request for later PM service, proposed schedule ends too early. (ex. 10:00 PM).

Route 26

- Request for earlier weekday bus, prior to 5:45 AM.
- Service request to re-introduce service beyond Great Brook Valley Pool along Clark Street to Century Drive.
- **Action: Reviewing the proposed Route 26 schedule to determine possibility of utilizing extra layover time to save current 5:20 AM, or 5:30 AM trip.**

Route 27

- Request to re-introduce former interline between Routes 27 and 26.

Route 29

- Service request to Amazon in Charlton.
- Request to add Sunday service.
- Request to re-consider Weekday schedule; last outbound bus is scheduled for 5:35 PM – should be 6:00 PM to accommodate people getting out of work in Worcester.
 - *Administration Comments – Recognizing the comment, the proposed schedule is only shifting trips by 10 minutes. By extending out the current schedule, some passengers will have to wait 25 minutes more if their work schedule roughly matches the route schedule (from Worcester).*

Route 30

- In favor of the proposed route schedule.
- Request to ensure route arrival time of 6:45 AM to West Boylston Walmart, and increased frequency in the afternoon.
 - *Administration Comments – Proposed route schedule has the bus arriving at the West Boylston Walmart at 6:47 AM. Proposed frequency in the afternoon is adequate with service roughly every 20 minutes.*

Route 31

- Request to add Sunday service between 11:00 AM and 6:00 PM.
- Question regarding if bus stop in front of Stop & Shop would remain active, since the store has closed.
 - *Administration Comments – Confirmed at public meeting that the stop would remain active, as there are other retailers/employers within Lincoln Plaza, and the likelihood that former Stop & Shop will be re-utilized sometime soon.*

Route 33

- Positive comment with newly-implemented seven day a week service.

Route 42

- Service request to YMCA beyond North Main Street, then loop over the bridge past Golden Heights.
 - *Administration Comments – there is no YMCA in Webster, but a Boys & Girls Club in Dudley.*
- In favor of the proposed route schedule; states the times are easier to read.
- Request to add Sunday service.

- Negative comments regarding proposed schedule changes will make it difficult to get from Oxford Center on Weekday mornings to job in Worcester. Passenger works traditional 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM in Worcester, but proposed Route 42 schedule will make it difficult to match times.
 - Proposed changes would make it difficult for others who may work traditional hours of 7:00 AM to 3:30 PM, or even 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM because of the infrequency of the route.
 - Additional comment received that another passenger has used Route 42 to commute to Worcester since 2017 and proposed times will not allow for employees, or those with medical appointments to make timely transfers at the WRTA Hub.
 - Request to add service on this route; buses are only available every two hours.
 - **Action: Reviewing the proposed Route 42 schedule to minimize the impact to this route. Recognizing that there is a limited number of trips each day, there is a need to retain certain AM trips from the existing Route 42 schedule for employees to come into Worcester from Oxford/Webster for peak AM/PM commute times.**
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General Comments Regarding Proposals

- Disagrees with all proposed schedule changes.
 - Received comment twice.
- Positive comment for all proposed schedule changes.
 - Received comment thrice.
- Comment regarding current 61% on-time performance; passenger suggest reinstating fares to have 100% accuracy on bus times.
- Comment that some buses are too ahead of schedule; 5 to 10 minutes ahead of time vs. what is published on the schedule.
- Request to provide more notice before proposed schedules are to take effect.
- Schedule proposals need to take into account MBTA schedules, night events at Polar Park, etc.

Onboard the Bus

- Buses can become noisy with riders on FaceTime, or speaking on their cell phones.
- Passengers need cleaner buses, and more transparency on WRTA safety policies for riders and bus drivers.
- Comment that buses are clean and in good shape.
- WRTA drivers are kind and generous.

WRTA Hub

- When buses depart or arrive at the Hub, buses should have to wait at least three to five minutes.
- Visually-impaired passenger; unorganized platform at the Hub. It is difficult to know which bus routes are at the Hub. Announcements are not working on the platform; no ADA announcements are made at the Hub.

Route & Service Expansions

- Request to have all routes operate seven days a week.
- Request to add Saturday service; specifically, to Routes 11, 19, 24, 26, 27, 30, and 31.
- Request to have all routes operate earlier and later on all service days (no specifics given).
- Request to provide service to the Worcester EcoTarium.
- Request to provide service to the nursing home on School St. in Northbridge on Route A.

Route Specific

- Routes 4, and 31 run very well.
- Route 19 buses do not come on time to Goddard Memorial/TJX facility.
- Positive comment regarding multiple WRTA routes and providing service to and from work on Weekdays.
- Positive comment for proposed schedules on Routes 15, 24, 26, and 27.

Comment Potpourri

- There is no on-demand paratransit.
- Public meeting times do not accommodate people working during the typical workday, need to schedule evening and weekend meetings.