



## Paratransit Rider's Forum Meeting Summary: Thursday, February 26, 2026, 1:00-2:30 PM

The Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) is committed to providing exceptional transportation services that meet or exceed the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. The WRTA provides accessible fixed route bus service. WRTA also provides ADA paratransit service to people with disabilities as required and non-ADA paratransit service to both seniors and people with disabilities in the 37 communities that comprise the WRTA's service area.

This forum was held in a virtual format via Zoom and from 1:00 to 2:30 PM. It was the inaugural quarterly Paratransit Rider's Forum and was attended by 45 riders and/or members of the public. The following WRTA staff were in attendance:

- Nick Burnham, Director of Transit Operations and Planning
- Josh Rickman, Public Transit Administrator
- Jamie Winters, Director of Marketing & Communications

In addition to WRTA, several staff from Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates were present to assist with facilitating the meeting. Interpreters were also present to offer Spanish and ASL interpretation services.

The February 26 forum recording is available at this link for those who were unable to attend. Presentation materials from the meeting are posted on the forum webpage: <https://therta.com/qprf/>. Please email [comments@therta.com](mailto:comments@therta.com) or use the [WRTA Customer Service Feedback form](#) with any additional questions, comments, or concerns regarding paratransit service.

The next forum will be held virtually on **Thursday, May 21, 2026, from 1:00 to 2:30 PM**. More information will be posted on the forum webpage and sent out to the mailing list closer to the next forum date.

### Agenda

This forum covered the following topics:

- Introduction to the Paratransit Rider Forum and overview of WRTA paratransit services
- Updates on ongoing work and service improvements provided by WRTA staff
- Public participation session regarding paratransit service



## Introduction and Overview of Services

WRTA staff gave a brief introduction to the Paratransit Rider's Forum and its purpose. The Forum provides an opportunity for riders and members of the community to learn about ongoing service improvements and to ask questions and provide feedback.

Staff also gave an overview of WRTA service providers across fixed-route, demand response, and on-demand transit services, as well as a detailed breakdown of demand response options for ADA paratransit and non-ADA paratransit and WRTA's Mobility Management Model used to provide the service. Ridership trends were shared showing that usage of paratransit services has grown steadily between Fiscal Year 2023 and 2025, with the Yellow Cab service seeing the highest utilization.

## Ongoing Work Staff Updates

WRTA staff continued the meeting by providing updates on ongoing work and service improvements expected in 2026.

WRTA will be procuring new demand response software in the spring and will aim to implement it before the end of the year. Staff noted some key features that riders have expressed interest in – including booking/cancelling a ride, imminent arrival notifications, ride tracking, trip planning features, and identification of which vehicle is performing the trip. Riders were invited to reach out to WRTA with any other features they would be interested in.

The construction of the Hub Lobby began in January and is expected to be completed by the end of June. Additional information is available on the WRTA website: <https://therta.com/lobbyreno/>.

WRTA staff closed out updates by sharing findings from the Demand Response Customer Survey, which collected 538 responses throughout summer 2025. Survey results are available on the WRTA website: <https://therta.com/2025-demand-response-survey-report/>.

## Public Participation Session

Discussion from the public participation session is summarized below. Full discussion can be found in the recording.

### Hannah Confer

- **Comment:** Hannah asked if drivers are supposed to notify riders if they are scheduled to pick up other riders on a trip.
- **Staff Response:** Staff responded that demand response is a shared ride service, so the assumption is that there may be multiple riders being picked up and dropped off. Drivers are not required to notify riders of additional trips.

### Sharon Strzalkowski



- **Comment:** Sharon asked for details regarding the demand response software procurement process and selection, including feedback/reviews from other paratransit providers and what parameters and “must-haves” WRTA is looking at for decision-making.
- **Staff Response:** Staff responded that, in addition to maintaining all the functionality the software has today, the “must-haves” include improved real-time tracking capabilities and customer-facing interface, such as timely arrival notifications. Carol Schweiger from Schweiger Consulting is assisting WRTA with the procurement process as a consultant on demand response software. The process will also include an assessment of the existing software and what is needed from the new software to better meet rider needs. WRTA has also been in conversations with peer agencies who have some of the newer programs, and staff has built a good understanding of who the main players are and what they have to offer. Many of the programs have similar capabilities, but technical compatibility may be an issue and will be evaluated as part of the procurement process.

Winifred Octave (comment only)

- **Comment:** Winifred noted that she has had issues with routing efficiency and pick-up/drop-off, which has made her late for appointments.

Kate McGrath

- **Comment:** Kate asked if the new software would map out paratransit rides better and include real-time ride tracking mechanisms like fixed-route buses.
- **Staff Response:** Staff responded that the efficiency of paratransit routing is an issue they hear about consistently from paratransit contractors and vendors. As WRTA operates in 37 cities and towns, efficient routing is extremely important, and improving routing efficiency will be looked at as part of the procurement process. In terms of ride tracking mechanisms, new software should also provide riders with a day-of arrival notification in addition to the existing night-before notification.

Harry Duchesne (comment only)

- **Comment:** Harry emphasized the importance of real-time tracking mechanisms to enhance riders’ personal schedules and autonomy.

Mary Haroyan

- **Comment:** Mary reiterated the importance of software that will allow for scheduling paratransit trips and real-time ride tracking so that riders can plan around an accurate pick-up ETA. She asked what the follow-up would be with the new software if a rider’s trip is very late – can it be rescheduled on another vehicle, or does the rider have to call the dispatcher? The new software should have a mechanism for riders to reschedule very late trips. She also noted that it would be useful to have an expected drop-off ETA once riders are on the vehicle.



- **Staff Response:** Staff thanked Mary for her comments and responded that better real-time tracking and more accurate ETAs are a priority for the new software procurement.

Zoe Hill (comment only)

- **Comment:** Zoe noted that she likes the arrival calls from Yellow Cab, and it would be helpful if the same happened with the vans.

Susan Crossley

- **Comment:** Susan asked if there is a standard regarding how long it is acceptable for riders to be on the van. She noted that sometimes she is on the van for over an hour as other riders are getting picked up and dropped off and was wondering if there is any time limit set on the routing/scheduling end.
- **Staff Response:** Staff responded that the ADA law is no more than what it would take to complete the same trip using fixed-route service. Therefore, the length of time that is acceptable for riders to be on paratransit would vary based on the comparable fixed-route service.

Nona Haroyan

- **Comment:** Nona asked if there will be a selection committee during the demand response procurement process. If so, she asked if members of the disability community can be represented and if software accessibility for people with disabilities can be considered.
- **Staff Response:** Staff responded that the RFP has not been completely drafted yet and will be finalized based on best practice review and an internal needs assessment. WRTA has been in conversations with their consultant, Carol Schweiger, to make sure that they are meeting ADA compliance standards and finding opportunities to engage individuals with various disabilities, such as through software testing. Details of a selection committee have not been discussed yet, but staff acknowledge the importance of representation on the committee and will discuss internal participation from members of the disability community.

Nina S.

- **Comment:** Nina commented that most of her recent scheduled rides have arrived past the 20-minute window. She has been turned away from a couple of appointments at UMass because her trips have run late. Nina noted that she is blind, which makes delays harder to deal with and would like to see improvement happen on timeliness of trips. She understands that other riders need to be picked up as well, but some Yellow Cab drivers have noted that the lateness is not really in their control and is more a function of the software (ex. her trip got added last-minute from across town). Is there a way to prioritize trips that are medical appointments where timeliness is important?
- **Staff Response:** Staff apologized for the inconvenience and asked for clarification on whether this has happened more recently (post-snowstorm) or has been more of a regular



occurrence. Nina responded that it has been more of an issue with recent appointments. The issue may have also been due to trips being flexed over to Yellow Cab based on van capacity throughout the day. Staff responded that they could investigate some of Nina's recent trips to see what was happening and also could investigate options to improve timing thresholds for Yellow Cab.

#### Kate McGrath

- **Comment:** Kate commented that she is very grateful for paratransit and uses it a minimum of two times a week. She noted that she has a very different experience with Yellow Cab compared to the vans in terms of how she is treated and assisted by drivers with her mobility devices. She asked whether Yellow Cab drivers receive the same training as WRTA drivers.
- **Staff Response:** Staff responded that the training may not be identical, but Yellow Cab does have training for their drivers.

#### Kate McGrath

- **Comment:** Kate commented that there is no earlier-than option for online booking and that the online system is very outdated and difficult to use. She hopes the new system will be better for online booking.
- **Staff Response:** Staff clarified that they have not been promoting the online reservation system because it was set up around 2019 in coordination with the automated fare collection system, but it has not been updated since WRTA went fare-free in 2020. The online reservation system will all be replaced with the upcoming procurement.

#### Jennifer

- **Comment:** Jennifer shared a recent experience she had on a Yellow Cab trip. The driver took her to the wrong destination very far from her intended destination (the same store in a different town). Jennifer is deaf and was unable to communicate with the driver – she tried to communicate with the driver by typing on her phone, but it was difficult to redirect while the driver was driving. She asked what she should do if this happens in the future, as well as how she should communicate with the driver (ex. if she needs to use the bathroom).
- **Staff Response:** Staff apologized for her recent experience and responded that Jennifer should contact the customer service department in the future. WRTA will do a full investigation into this issue if it isn't already in progress and discuss internally regarding how to better address this issue moving forward, potentially with the new system capabilities. Staff responded that typing on her phone is probably the best way to communicate as of now but will internally connect to better solutions.

#### Sue Brown

- **Comment:** Sue asked about how she would go about getting from the Center of Living & Working where she works to New Start – while she drives, sometimes it is hard to (especially



with the winter weather) due to her fall risk. There is also no good place to park at New Start due to the snow, so taking a bus or paratransit from CLW could help her reach her appointments.

- **Staff Response:** Staff responded that Sue could get in touch with WRTA's customer service staff to get registered for paratransit rides. She could also take Route 3 if she is able to take fixed-route service.

#### Mary Haroyan

- **Comment:** Mary asked if WRTA has plans to eventually expand ADA paratransit service connectivity across all 37 communities within the WRTA region, ex. if a rider in Worcester could reach any of the 37 other cities and towns via paratransit.
- **Staff Response:** Staff responded that ADA paratransit service is offered in areas within a three-quarter-mile radius of the fixed-route system. The fixed-route system is designed based on transit propensity, which measures how many riders are going to and from a specific geography and are in need of transit service. There are more outlying and rural communities within the WRTA region that do not have the residential and employment density to support fixed-route service. Given that the ADA paratransit system is based on the fixed-route system, it is unlikely that ADA paratransit service will be able to connect across all 37 communities. However, staff will keep regional connectivity in mind as they make future service decisions.

#### Anonymous (comment only)

- **Comment:** This rider provided an anecdote regarding poor routing efficiency. They had been on a Yellow Cab to an appointment 10 minutes away, and the driver had to go across town to pick someone else up before dropping them off at their destination. This made them late to their appointment, and the driver was not aware that the rider had a time-sensitive appointment within close distance. They requested that this be improved with the new procurement.

#### Kevine

- **Comment:** Kevine echoed requests for real-time tracking mechanisms with the new software, as well as app scheduling abilities with AI assistant rather than exclusively through the web. He also noted that, while the white vans are nice, they have been difficult to visually locate in the winter with all the snow compared to the blue vans. The blue vans are more unique and easier to identify from a distance.
- **Staff Response:** Staff thanked Kevine for the helpful comment and clarified that the new vans delivered this past year were white because WRTA was still actively making decisions regarding the rebranding. Staff also noted that the white vs. blue has its pros and cons, as a blue van may be harder to differentiate from other van services in the area. There will be significantly more brand identification and color contrast on the new white vans, which will



make them easier to identify in the field. Once finalized, staff will share the new design with riders at a future forum meeting.

#### Cynthia Willis

- **Comment:** Cynthia asked if the COAs in the MMM could have access to “view only” in the new software to be able to assist residents with their many questions as they come up, especially when they can’t get through to PBSTM.
- **Staff Response:** Staff responded that they will be talking with all the COAs and providers about what access they will have inside the new system.

#### Hannah Confer

- **Comment:** Hannah commented that she has missed the original arrival phone call on several occasions and has tried to call them back several times but will not get a response. Drivers have gotten angry at her before for not knowing the appointment time.
- **Staff Response:** Staff responded that they would check with contractors on this issue.

#### Nancy Garr-Colzie

- **Comment:** Nancy asked if there are any plans to get larger white vans. The white vans that came last summer are much smaller with a double seat only on one side, and she must do a 17-point turn to get off the van.
- **Staff Response:** Staff responded that the Type E, or single axle, vans are a bit smaller than previous vans. WRTA applies for all their vans through the statewide MassDOT Community Transit Grant Program, and staff noted that they could take a look at what vehicles they applied for and were offered through the state's competitive program for the upcoming year.

## Wrap-Up and Next Meeting Date

WRTA staff concluded the meeting by thanking everyone for their time and announcing future meeting dates. The next forum will be held virtually on **Thursday, May 21, 2026**, from **1:00 to 2:30 PM**. The September and December forums will be held in a hybrid format following Hub construction completion.