

WRTA Service Redesign Recommendations to Concentrate on Core Service

WORCESTER, MA. Thursday, February 3, 2005 —For the first time in its history, the Worcester Regional Transit Authority took a comprehensive look at its service to evaluate the needs of current and future riders.

In 2003, the WRTA Advisory Board recommended the study and a federal grant of \$80,000 was used to fund the project. Three companies responded, and while each were more than competent, the WRTA found that Urbitran, an engineering and planning consultancy based out of New Haven, Conn., provided the best value of the three companies. They were awarded the project to evaluate the WRTA's service area and future system needs. Urbitran is currently completing a study to determine basic service levels for RTA communities state-wide.

In early 2004, nearly one dozen 'drop-in' surveys at various times and locations in and around the city were held to provide passengers the opportunity to give feedback to the survey takers. From this point, Urbitran took the survey information, along with comprehensive research and passenger counts to develop a five year plan of recommendations. Urbitran was directed to work within the WRTA's fiscal constraints for the first year. During the latter years, they were allowed to be more expansive in the recommendations with the hope that the state may provide additional funding to the WRTA for new service.

"Urbitran made 150 recommendations over five years to initially build up the core service, and in the years to come, recommends expanding service to the outer areas," stated Mary MacInnes, administrator of the WRTA. "In the current fiscal situation, the only way to build up the core service is to re-allocate resources. When State government can allocate funding for new service, the WRTA will be in a position to identify how to effectively allocate those resources," acknowledged Ms. MacInnes.

While the first year of the report does recommend the elimination of under-utilized fixed-route service for Clinton and the Brookfields, the WRTA wants to work with the communities to develop possible alternatives to service these areas. One of the possibilities is a dial-a-ride service. "Transit agencies across the country offer other types of service such as dial-a-ride for smaller communities; satisfying all trip purposes, including work trips," added Ms. MacInnes. "A rider can make one call to have a 'standing trip' for certain days of the week, and also call in for trips out of their pre-scheduled routine," MacInnes closed.

Highlights of Five Year Recommendations:

- Year One:** Enhancing frequency to Worcester's Belmont St area to create 15 minute peak service, more direct trips to UMass Hospital/Medical School, extend terminus of Route 4 to Mass Pike Exit 10A Park n Ride. It also includes more service to Union Station and the Worcester Senior Center and create 90 minute service to Spencer. Shuttle service to the Shoppes at Blackstone Valley and Dial-a-ride service to feed existing routes, if funding is available.
- Year Two:** Year Two of the recommendations calls for 10pm service for eight of our current routes and to examine the needs for the city of Marlborough.
- Year Three:** Year Three recommends adding 10:00 p.m. service to more than a dozen additional routes, recommends service until 1:00 a.m. to eight routes, as well as demand response zones for the four quadrants of the city from 10p.m. to 1a.m. to transfer them downtown to either a later operating route, or another zone service. This would provide the city of Worcester with service after midnight.

Year Four: Year Four is dedicated to the concentrated approach of targeting peak service to specific routes to improve service levels.

Year Five: Year Five concentrates on weekend service and community service with goals of providing more service hours to weekend routes. It also asks to look at the productivity of the demand response service that was implemented in communities to see if adjacent communities warrant service.

These recommendations focus on improving the core service for the WRTA, providing more service to the inter-modal transportation center (Union Station) and to have that location serve as an alternative transfer station for the WRTA in the coming years by utilizing the future City Hall/Downtown improvements.

Urbitran based its recommendations on public input, and the WRTA will continue the process with public hearings. The five scheduled public hearings include the following affected communities:

Brookfield February 10th, 7pm, Brookfield Town Hall, Banquet Room, 6 Central Street.

Clinton February 7th, 6pm, Clinton Town Hall, Chamber Room, 242 Church Street.

Leicester February 16th, 6pm, Leicester Senior Housing Complex, The Meeting Room, 1075 Main St.

Millbury February 15th, 7pm, Millbury Senior Center, 1 River St.

Worcester February 9th, 2 p.m. & 6 p.m., Worcester Public Library, Saxe Room, 3 Salem Sq.

All changes are subject to approval by the WRTA Advisory Board, and the earliest implementation would be phased in beginning August 2005.