

RITS COORDINATION MEETING

6/15/22

Minutes

1) Call to Order 9:05AM

- a) Attendance: Stacie Nicholas (Geer), Ivana Powers (Geer), Rob Philips (NHCOG), Kathryn Faraci (NHCOG), Leonardo Ghio (NHCOG), Mike Criss (NWTD), Jessica Tanner (NWTD), Brain Kalosky (NWTD), Gertrude O'Sullivan (FCH), April Chaplin (Kennedy Center), Charlie Perrotti (North Canaan First Selectman), Joel Sekorski (Sullivan Senior Center), Denise Raap (NWTD), Melissa Woodward (Warren SS/SC)

2) RITS Program Operation Discussion-

a) GEER Comments/updates -

- i) Demand is high, increasing distances for trips for medical rides
- ii) 1 RITS vehicle - Dodge Minivan (sometimes use another vehicle to supplement to meet demand), 2 individuals/per vehicle/per day is at capacity
- iii) Many specialists not in the area - provides rides to Poughkeepsie, which is not included in RITS data because it is out of state -
- iv) Will be needing a replacement RITS vehicle within a year - 87K as of now, coming up on 5 years old
- v) Believes demand is up due to gas prices.
 - (1) Denise Raap asked - why wait to procure another vehicle?
 - (2) Stacie responded - had other 5310 grant priorities, did not want to take another provider's opportunity while their vehicle is still within DOT guidelines (i.e. mileage)

b) NWTD Comments/Updates - Mike Criss has been asked by board to oversee day to day operations NWTD for at least 1 year

- i) 1 RITS van, 2017, 53k on it - hoping to add at least 2 more RITS vans to build service capacity, acknowledging that the region is aging and will continue to rely on the service
- ii) Will be exploring funding options for NWTD and spreading awareness about their services - reorganizing/rebuilding NWTD to make it more accessible
- iii) Plans to meet with each town in the service area to rebuild relationships - hearing outcry from seniors and students for the need for more transportation

- iv) Brian Kalosky - noted an obvious of need for more RITS vehicles due to the length of trips and wide territory
- v) Computer software for ride scheduling has been rolled out
- vi) Denying rides - prepared to increase capacity and rebrand their service to provide better service to the community - Jessica echoed they are turning a lot of people away
 - (1) Denise asked - can we approach Hartford Healthcare to ask them to explore making specialists more accessible to the NWC?
 - (2) Mike feels that by adding more RITS vehicles and with the new scheduling software, they will be able to meet the increased demand, as well as identify gaps in the service areas
- vii) Will be moving into a new facility in Torrington - contract in place, waiting for close date once DOT is back in office - all vehicles will be garaged - will save about \$50,000/year in maintenance costs by keeping them inside
- viii) Dispatcher will begin keeping track of denied rides with rider info - by town
- ix) NWTB buys fuel through city of Torrington - but will be reviewing options for cost savings
- x) Working closely with DOT on expansion plans for NWTB as a whole
- xi) Looking to increase pay scale for drivers - competitive job market means driver positions are harder to fill

c) EdAdvance Comments - Not present

d) Sullivan Senior Center Comments - Demand is increasing, denying rides but will call the doctor's office to reschedule ride -

- i) Booked out over a month - at capacity - turning people away every day - but will reschedule appointments to accommodate
- ii) They operate by monthly budgeted hours so as not to exceed contract hours or run out of hours before the end of the contract period
- iii) Driver shortage- 3 vans sitting every day - none owned by COG/RITS - all Sullivan 5310 vehicles
 - (1) Dodge Caravan is at about 50k, 6 years old, mainly used for RITS due to good gas mileage
- iv) Pays drivers \$15/hour - looking to increase to \$18/hour

(1) Joel asked to stay in the know on what other providers are offering for hourly rates as they are essentially all in competition with each other looking for drivers

(a) Litchfield pays their bus driver \$17/hour

- v) Will begin tracking RITS denials - before rescheduling
- vi) Feels they could double their contract if funding were to be available and they were able to find drivers
- vii) Fuel through City of Torrington
- viii) Sullivan was scheduled to get a RITS van through COG previously w/Rick Lynn and prior to COVID - but if another provider is in immediate need, they can take priority
- ix) Offered to adjust hourly ride rate for economy scale to increase RITS rides if DOT is interested in offering increased funding
 - (1) Would require smart scheduling software to identify duplicate locations and to schedule same-location rides (i.e. 2 people go to UConn on same day)

e) Kennedy Center - April Chaplin, Mobility manager - ridership is up in Waterbury

- i) No complaints received for NWTB during transition
- ii) Have been receiving complaints about VEYO, so may add to increase on RITS providers
- iii) April recognizes that NWTB pay scale is lagging behind the rest of the state
- iv) She is happy to share job postings, but notes that the driver shortage is not specific to our area, however, a pay increase may help
 - (1) Leo suggested reaching out to local Lion's/Rotary clubs to try to recruit drivers
- v) Offered to assist Mike/NWTB with marketing/meeting with towns in service area
 - (1) Mike mentioned they would like to meet with April separately to further discuss

3) Discussion of potential future changes to RITS Program

- a) Provider's donations and changes to contracts - contract does not state donations need to be deducted from invoices, however financial reports from 2019 through 2021 show that donations were be deducted.

- i) **NWTD is the only provider who has been deducting donations from COG invoice**
- b) Provider's Service Areas- can some territories be "shared" -
 - i) areas are essentially shared internally among providers, but should consider making that more known to the towns served, in the event a client had a bad experience with one RITS provider and then no longer wish to use the program
- c) Creative ways to increase service capacity by greatest area of need:
 - i) Adding town vehicles to RITS program would require Towns to determine logistically if they can provide long-distance RITs rides
 - (1) Would also need to secure long-term funding through DOT
 - ii) Need to analyze ridership (over-served and underserved) by town to identify where we need to prioritize program changes to increase capacity
 - iii) Northwest Transit district is prepared to increase capacity to keep burden off of town vans to provide RITS rides.
- d) More hours are needed in order to meet the volume of need
 - i) All providers will begin keeping track of all denials (rescheduled or denied completely)
 - ii) We will collect this data to use moving forward as we seek more funding options to increase program capacity to meet the demand

4) Other Business:

-Denise asked: do individuals ever call the RITS provider first to find an available time, and then call the doc to make an appointment?

-Geer responded: that mostly depends on the location of the appointment - long distance

-North Canaan - excited to hear that NWTD will be expanding - mentioned that the Board of Finance likes to see how rides are being provided to their town residents

-Joel asked about DOT RITS funding from COG -

-providers have not been paid for as many as 8 months (Sullivan)

-He would also like to meet with his ride coordinator, Mike Criss, Brian and Jessica at NWTD to discuss collaboration, to avoid duplication of service, identify deficiencies/efficiencies, share ideas, etc.

-Mike mentioned that he would be happy to help coordinate a meeting with Rob and DOT to share concerns about the delayed billing cycles

-Quarterly meeting schedule - 2nd Wednesday in September, December, March and June, 9:00am to 10:30 - hybrid format

-Kasey Farraci - Suggested inviting someone from DOT to join our next meeting

5) Adjournment: 10:23AM

A recording of the meeting can be found here:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/vXXun-sLo0JCg1Sf9U8V4qrF2oO9ICPXeyH2sRlr4H7GGG3mmc27NpE-74oc749m.6hSH0-X4I4sKBqMz>

Passcode: AM2%#PS9

Follow-up Action Items:

All Providers- Begin tracking the town from which denied ride requests are originating from to identify where the gap in service is so that we can focus on expanding services in those areas.

Info to gather: Name of Town that the denied request is originating from & location of the appointment (providers already report # of denied and # of rescheduled rides)

Note 1 denial = 2 rides (one each way)**

NWTD - Coordinate with Rob and DOT to schedule a meeting to discuss concerns with billing cycle inefficiencies

Leo- To send out a calendar invite to reflect quarterly meetings

COG - Meet with EdAdvance to discuss status of current MOU