

MINUTES

Public Meeting on Status Report for Deviation Services by Clinton County Public Transit (CCPT) after three months of operation

Meeting Date: September 18, 2018 at 2:00pm

- 13 individuals in attendance (including presenters) as indicated on attached sign-in sheet.

- James Bosley, Planning Technician with the Clinton County Planning Department, explained that there are documents on the table near the door for attendees, and a sign-in sheet, and he encouraged everyone to sign in.

- Mr. Bosley stated that the purpose of the meeting is to provide information to the public regarding the first three months of CCPT Deviation Service, and to gather feedback from the public about the service. He also indicated that any individual may also provide written comments to the Planning Department, and any comments received by Tuesday, October 2, 2018 will be included in the minutes for the meeting.

- Mr. Bosley delivered a presentation of information regarding the performance of Deviation Service which was implemented starting on May 1, 2018 as replacement for Paratransit, which was previously provided. Mr. Bosley's presentation included the following information:
 - Two concerns led to the decision by the Clinton County Legislature to replace paratransit service with deviation service: 1) continued increases in the cost of providing transit services; and 2) regulatory compliance concerns.

 - Compared the statistics of the first three months of deviation service to the same three month period of paratransit service from the previous

year (May through July). Mr. Bosley stated that a sheet is provided on the table for audience members with the results of the comparison (the document is also attached to these minutes). As described by Mr. Bosley, the information demonstrates the following items:

- There were 851 deviations from May – July 2018 compared to 2,876 paratransit trips from May – July 2017.
- Total ridership for the period of May – July 2018 declined by 7,327 or 27% from the same period the previous year (26,821 to 19,494). Mr. Bosley remarked that this drop in ridership likely results from a number of factors, including most prominently a significant change in the system and a significant decline in the transport of Clinton Community College students, which is in the process of closing its dormitories.
- The drop in ridership had negative impact on the revenues of the system during the first three months of implementation of deviation service, with revenue declining \$29,814.35 or 22% from the same three month period in 2017.
- The analysis also revealed that the total miles travelled during the first three months of deviation service declined 30,586 or 22% from the same period in 2018.
- The total driver hours also dropped during the comparison periods by 1,652 hours or 21%, though driver overtime actually increased slightly, by 42.67 hours or 8%. While the reduction in total driver hours was expected, the increase in overtime was surprising, but likely explained by the difficulty in retaining drivers in this period of low unemployment.
- Although the total miles travelled by transit buses declined by 22%, the cost for fuel actually increased slightly during the comparison periods, by \$1,652.06 or 7%. Mr. Bosley indicating that the increase is likely due largely to the increase in fuel prices, but to a lesser degree due to the larger proportion of gasoline buses in the fleet, which are less fuel efficient than the diesel buses, and longer period of time where the buses are idling as necessitated by the time periods built into the schedule for deviation service.
- Overall, a comparison of the three month period from May – July of 2018 for which Deviation Service was implemented to the same three month period in 2017 for which paratransit service was

provided shows an increase in net costs by \$14,866.61 or 44%. Mr. Bosley stated that it cannot necessarily be presumed that the implementation of deviation service resulted in the cost increases as other factors were involved, and a longer period of time is needed to determine the full results of the change as it is not uncommon for ridership to decline when any significant change in the scheduled is implemented. Mr. Bosley said that it is also not clear whether a more significant cost increase may have resulted if the change from paratransit service to deviation service was not accomplished given the increase in fuel costs and difficulty in retaining drivers.

- Mr. Bosley then opened the meeting up to questions or comments from the audience.

The following are the verbatim questions and comments. No additional questions or comments were received by the Planning Department by the October 2nd deadline to be included in this list. The meeting was concluded at 4:15 pm.

1. Debra Buell

Well just to start with. One group of stakeholders that was left out that I have not mentioned in my emails in the last couple of days was drivers. But I think the drivers have discussed with the Planning Department that if First Transit became the operator that many of them had planned to quit. And that is what we saw was an exodus of drivers who did not want to work with First Transit again because of the issues that they had had previously. So one of the things I think the County needs to take into consideration besides trying to invite a driver representative to things like this, is that when you get input about a lot of drivers, you know four or five drivers is a significant amount of the workforce, wanting to leave because of the choice of the new operator which was an old operator that we had a lot of bad experiences with not just the drivers, it seems like that input ought to be weighted very carefully in the decisions that legislators make. And I think that is a critical important reality that keeps getting missed here. Drivers come to me frequently and have for years. I do email correspondence with them. I report problems, both to the legislature and to New York State Department of Transportation. But I would rather feel that they felt safe coming to the legislators. And I would rather feel that when they came to the Planning Department that the Planning Department would report drivers' concerns to legislators. Because then you're getting it from a source other than me. And I think it should be something you would invite and seek out and hopefully value as a critical part of your decision making.

Staff Response:

Rodney Brown

I can say we obviously do value the drivers. We wouldn't have a system if it wasn't for the drivers. And I can certainly say in the time that I've been with the County, you might even say that the heart and soul of this system often times is the drivers because they're the interface between the County and the people who are actually getting rides. We have had a number of drivers that have come into the Planning Office and have communicated with us. Some may not feel comfortable in doing that. And I also know the Legislature has a policy at every one of their meetings, I'm not going to advertise that they welcome phone calls, but people are allotted time I think Debra as you know to come to the meetings and speak on any topic that they wish. I understand that there are a lot of people who are not comfortable in that environment and providing that feedback. But I can certainly say that whenever a driver has come to me we certainly have taken their input and we've made changes in the system based on input of the drivers. Could we reach out to the drivers more? Probably. That's probably something that we could do. I do know that when we anticipate changes in our system we often go to the drivers and say what is your experience been? Because they're the ones that when we make changes are going to have to implement those changes more often than not. But that point is well received.

Even though she didn't want to speak today, this is Teri Blake, my name is Rodney Brown I'm the director of the Planning Office, this is Teri Blake. Teri is the manager for First Transit here locally in Plattsburgh that operates our system. We have a contract with First Transit to operate Clinton County Public Transit. And you were saying about a driver?

Teri Blake:

There was only one driver on the roster that left. And she left to go into trucking with her husband. The roster that I received from McDonald Transit. In fact one driver came back. So I don't know who these four or five drivers are that you're speaking of, but everybody on the roster came over and there was that one lady that left and she left to go into the trucking industry with her husband.

James Bosley:

There are one or two that left later, but it wasn't leading up to the company switch, it was rather recent.

Teri Blake:

Yeah, so I don't what happened in the six that I was gone but I always thought I was always good with the drivers before. I have an open door policy and I think that the Planning Office does as well as the Legislators. And I think my drivers have always come and talked to the Planning Office and the legislative body.

James Bosley:

Yeah the posting about this meeting was posted on all the buses so I have to think the drivers must have seen it. I think they were the ones that posted it in their buses. So I think they knew about the meeting.

Rodney Brown:

Well drivers would have a tough time coming to this meeting because of the time that we're having the meeting because their out driving the buses, most of them.

James Bosley:

Some of them are, yes.

2. Judith Judge

That was my question. Where was this posted? But I haven't been on the bus in a week. So shouldn't it have been posted somewhere else, like in the Press Republican?

Staff Response:

Rodney Brown:

Can we have your name for the record?

Judith Judge:

Judith Judge

James Bosley:

So we did a legal ad in the paper, I realize people don't usually look at those, but we did official notice in the paper that was published August 27th. And then shortly after that, I don't know the exact timing, but we put it up on the CCPT website and Facebook. I posted it in the bus shelters out here and it was posted on all the buses. I'm pretty sure it was a full two weeks before the meeting that we had everything up. So we did put out notice.

Judith Judge:

I was on the bus a week ago and I did not see a notice.

Teri Blake:

They were just put on last week.

James Bosley:

Oh, okay.

Judith Judge

I have another question. Does anyone here actually ride the bus?

Rodney Brown:

It looks like three people. As you know, not everyone is comfortable in a forum like this. We don't assume because nobody else is here that they don't have concerns. Likewise we don't assume there's a huge number of concerns. We don't know. There is an opportunity for people to provide, if they're not comfortable with this, to provide written comments. And if they provide a comment we will publish that as part of these proceedings. We will also answer any questions. So if they send a question in we'll be happy to answer any questions that people might have.

3. Robert Poulin

So I have a couple questions and comments. First of all, is there a plan to do a second meeting with advance notice that everybody gets? Because we didn't get a notice at NCCI until last week and I had requested there be at least a month notice because people have their schedules set for at least a week maybe two weeks in advance. The notice in this case was ridiculous. Legal notices, no one in the disabled community reads legal notices, most of us can't even read that print. A lot of people don't have computers. So we need more notice to identify people who would want to attend and to be able to let them know that this kind of a meeting is going on. I understand fully that getting meetings together, you can put out a notice a month in advance and still have a pretty poor showing. Which leads to my second comment here, I believe from what you've read off in the statistics and from what I have talked to with bus drivers is that the most impacted people by this switch are people with disabilities. They are not using the system. They are choosing to stay home and stay isolated. What I would like to see is a survey sent out to all paratransit riders asking them basic questions such as "Are you using the deviation system?" "Do you understand how it works?" All those type of questions and leave a place for them to provide comments as well. Because as you say, people are not necessarily comfortable to come to a meeting like this. For a lot of people with disabilities, it is a serious challenge to do just regular everyday stuff let alone trying to navigate a bus system that is going to take them well over an hour to get here if they live on the edges of the system. I think it is a real problem that only three bus riders are actually in this meeting.

Staff Response:

Rodney Brown:

But we can't assume Robert that we only have three here because they didn't read the notice and they chose not to attend. Maybe the case, but we don't know that. It may be that, what we do know that the trend has been over time less people come to public meetings. And it may be a reflection of that trend. We don't know that. It could be. I take your point. We could have provided more notice. I think you can make the argument too that if we provided two months' notice, some people forget about it by the time the two months come around so you know there's a happy medium. Where that is, I'm not quite sure. In answer to your initial question, will there be another meeting? We have not made a decision on that. We could easily do that and provide more notice to that meeting. It has been suggested that we contact agencies more directly and invite them so that they're well aware of it without having to read it through the normal notice procedures. That could be done too.

I would say if we're going to do it, what I'd rather is let's collect a little bit more information. A few more months of information so we have a little bit more to present rather than present the same information that we just did for this meeting.

4. Debra Buell

So from this moment forward instead of people stating opinions about trends, I would like proof of those trends. Because the trend that has been referred to once historically about for example ridership going down if the bus fares were raised. The only time in history, this was from last year, the only time in history that the bus fares were raised was in the 1990s which I proved through research sent to the legislators and the trend apparently in the 1990s did show there was some drop in ridership. But there has been no test of that ever since. So to call a one-time thing a trend does not make you a scientist or a researcher that can back up your opinions. So according to trends as far as attendance at meetings goes, the behavior last year of many riders was to show up at meetings. There was good attendance at some of them, very good attendance. And then what happened? We saw media full of accusations blaming paratransit riders for the downfall and the killing of the whole system. This is not the kind of portrayal that makes people feel warm and fuzzy about coming to public meetings where they will be blamed if the bus system fails. No, in fact, it is far more likely that people hearing that and reading that and experiencing that when they do come to meetings, they are going to say to themselves "You know what, this is like City Hall. I Can't fight City Hall. I'm just going to stay home and forget about it." And I think that's what's happened with ridership, at least in part. Some people did participate in the training events and we thank you very much for having those, but it might be appropriate to have them again. And it might be appropriate to also reach out by media such as you stated you would in your deviation plan updated 9/2017 such as you state you will in your Title VI plan. So media, the way advertising works, you can ask any advertising executive, it's repetition. It's not a one-time legal ad. And there's lots of ways to do that. It could be free ways to do that. You can do a radio station public service announcement. You might even be able to interest the television station in doing a public service announcement. Getting on community calendars. Putting up posters in places people frequent like social services. Maybe the library. Maybe the libraries and social gathering places of students at colleges. On telephone poles, at the Koffee Kat. Think of places where bus riders might congregate and put up posters and put up really big print ones too. So that those of us who are severely visually impaired have a chance at reading them.

Staff Response:

James Bosley:

I did make the statement last year that paratransit is killing the CCPT system. I never said anything about paratransit riders. I always talked about paratransit as a service type and never did I blame any paratransit riders.

5. Debra Buell

I'm sorry James, but that was a discriminatory statement, that describes a service, that served you know, except when you felt like letting anybody else ride, it was supposed to essentially from the beginning be a paratransit service such as described in federal law which means there is an eligibility process. Now we didn't get that back here until last year in August, and guess what, a whole lot of less trip denials, a whole lot of less compliance issues. So at some point whatever point you know through history you know people started to just ride paratransit because it was cheaper than a taxi, and at whatever point all those people that had subscription ride service got to keep booking up the service so other folks couldn't get a ride and at whatever point somebody decided that you couldn't do paratransit the way you are doing deviation now which is just what Sam used to do when he was a driver, he was a great driver. He would look at his list for the day he would get as many people on the bus as he possible could and deliver them to their destinations. You have a two hour window. People across the nation do paratransit and in that two hour window some people might not, unless they think ahead, get to their destination on time unless they literally ask to leave two hours earlier. You have leeway to say, somebody says I want to get to CVPH by nine o'clock in the morning, you could say well we'll be picking you up at eleven if that was the way you could put more people on the bus. But nobody ever did that here.

Staff Response:

James Bosley:

It's a...

Rodney Brown:

I would suggest that you not respond to that.

James Bosley:

Alright.

6. Rachel Brown, Senior Citizens Council

I guess I just have a question. I refer a lot to the bus system.

James Bosley:

Is it okay if we get your name?

Rodney Brown:

And who you're with?

Rachel Brown:

Rachel Brown, Senior Citizens Council. I have a woman that she's disabled and rides in a wheelchair and has multiple aides and uses the transportation system. We had an unfortunate event last winter

and I would assume that sometimes the bus has to be late [unintelligible]. She needed assistance to use the rest room at which moment she had been waiting for the bus as long she could and it was quite cold.

Rodney Brown:

Rachel, was this a paratransit trip or was this on a regular route? Do you know?

The CV-Tec stop and it was my understanding through her care plan that she would call, I'm not sure which one, but she would call the transit and they would expect her. And she had went into the school to use the restroom and came out and at which point she had missed the bus. So my question is if you're expecting somebody that might be vulnerable or disabled how long would you wait for that individual if there might have been a late bus or something to that effect just out of curiosity.

Rodney Brown:

That's a tough one.

James Bosley:

Yeah, if it's on the regular route, let's say it's off the Military Turnpike near the Kinney's there, because there's a CVES location on the Oval, but you're talking about Military Turnpike?

Rachel Brown:

Yes.

James Bosley:

That would most likely have been, this was last winter?

Rachel Brown:

Yes.

James Bosley:

So this was before the service changes. So it would have been our West City bus route, or, I mean that's if they were going over to Kinney's to catch the bus. They were going to catch the bus right at CV-Tec?

Rachel Brown:

There was an arrangement yes, and she had went into the school.

James Bosley:

So it was probably a paratransit pick-up. So if the bus got there and the person wasn't there, typically the driver will radio dispatch and dispatch will try to call the person. But that's tricky because maybe the person doesn't have their phone with them or their batteries have died, or there's no service.

Rodney Brown:

Or they don't have a phone.

James Bosley:

Yeah, and if the weather was bad we might very well have been running late and the driver you know probably in error might have been more motivated to not wait very long because they were running behind. So it's hard to kind of go back and sort that out at this point. Right now we don't have the paratransit service. So what that person would do is they would get a deviation on what we call our West End bus route. And we would give them an estimated time of us getting there. And if we get there and we don't see them it would be a similar process. But if we aren't able to get ahold of the person then we're gonna roll on and continue our route. So what we'll do in this case is, you know the deviations are requested the day before or up to two weeks in advance. So if somebody calls us in the morning and says I'd like to get picked up with a deviation we say sorry we can't do that you've got to call the day before. Now if we've brought somebody out to a doctor's appointment or whatever and they've got a return trip scheduled and they miss it for reasons outside of their control like in that case when nature calls you go and what we would do is we would go back the following hour. You know, their deviation is supposed to be at the two o'clock run...

She was picked up the following hour, just with limited mobility she was quite cold. So I guess, what would be a good, when referring people to this, and that they are vulnerable or have special circumstances is there a key word or something I should be saying to them when they place that call or wait for that ride so is there a certain request that should be said so that when they are vulnerable that they communicate that with you. What would I?

Staff Response:

James Bosley:

The individual can share whatever information that they want. We're really not supposed to be talking about anybody's disability information. So even if like you call dispatch on behalf of that person and you tell the dispatcher, the dispatcher might be able to say to the driver you know just wait another minute or two but the driver's not necessarily going to know why. And we're only going to be able to wait so long too.

7. Debra Buell

So a number of elderly folks have called me and are talking in relationship very similar this woman's example. And it's something that was brought up I believe in the August meeting when you guys

were talking about building a heated shelter. So really part of the problem here is that we don't have places for people to sit and wait. That's been an ongoing problem for more years than I can count. I understand the County got ARRA grant funds to get bus stop signs and even some bus shelters. I don't know how many. I just don't recall but they have all that information stored. So one thing that would be helpful I think for people that are former paratransit riders is to have clear bus stop signs so folks do know where the bus is going to stop for them and wait. And you own them. So basically what you are gonna have to do I think is work with whatever business owners or the colleges the hospitals whatever and say to them "look we're bringing your shoppers your workers your patients up to visit your premises where you will be making money from their visits and we would like to number one put up a bus stop sign as soon as humanly possible and number two we would like to make sure that very near that bus stop sign at a minimum there is a bench for people with disabilities and the elderly to sit down on." Because at many of these locations there is no way you can look outdoors from inside and see the bus coming. And if you are a slow moving person you don't have enough room or time or space or maybe there is no automatic door and you just can't get out the door fast enough and then the bus doesn't realize that you're trying because how could they you're inside and off the bus goes and you have to wait another hour. And for a lot of the elderly folks what I'm hearing is that when they have to wait like yet another hour for the bus when they have already spent an hour fifteen an hour and twenty minutes getting to where they have to go they don't ever want to ride the bus again. I have heard less from people with disabilities but I hear the same thing. It affects me. My decision today was I don't want to spend an hour and fifteen minutes riding around in a circle to get down to the government center. So I'll drive my wheelchair down, I'll take the risk of the rain, and I'll bring my battery charger in case my charge drops and I'll sit at the government center or Koffee Kat for an hour to charge my chair. But that's me. I have that option. I'm pretty lucky. I have a power wheelchair. For somebody who is having ambulatory problems still walking whether has a cane, crutches, manual wheelchair, this is a very difficult issue. If you're trying to get in and out of a door a manual wheelchair is a whole different ball game than when I'm trying to get in and out of a door. At least I can have one arm free. And this is what I was talking about when I talked about having an equivalency plan. There is a law about this. I sent it to you guys earlier in the Spring. I can send it to you again. It's in the state plan for transportation it's also in the federal law. So how do you guarantee equivalency for senior citizens and people with disabilities if you are not attentive to these kinds of issues?

8. Robert Poulin

So I want to go back to this idea of the comment that you made about paratransit is destroying the system and that wasn't directed at people with disabilities. The implication is there and the problem here is that you listed as the second reason to change over to the system being that you were having trouble with compliance with the paratransit regulations and part of the reason for that is that we, the disability community, held your feet to the fire when there were trip denials. Trip denials have been occurring for probably a couple decades but were never counted. And we fought for years to insure that that would change and really pretty soon after that you guys came up with this deviation plan and it was a "screw you" to the disability community.

Rodney Brown:

Oh that's not why we did that Robert, with all due respect. Maybe that's your perception. That's not why we did that.

Robert Poulin:

That's the perception of people with disabilities. And you should take that seriously.

Rodney Brown:

I do take it seriously. How can I combat that? If it's not in fact the truth.

Robert Poulin:

We made suggestions about paratransit. We recommended that you run a tough paratransit system that would transport people who had mobility problems and could not navigate the sidewalks. You guys chose to...

Rodney Brown:

We can't limit it to people with mobility problems.

Robert Poulin:

No, you ran a paratransit system that allowed pretty much anybody.

Rodney Brown:

We disagree with that. That's your opinion. We disagree with that.

Robert Poulin:

That is a fact.

Rodney Brown:

That is not a fact.

That is a fact.

Rodney Brown:

Well, that's your perception, it is not a fact. That's your opinion, it is not a fact.

Robert Poulin:

We kept records on every single person that had to submit applications. We did allow people who claimed that they had a disability and were allowed to use the system a period of time to get their application into us while they were getting their applications done but they had to get their applications in, they had to be determined to be qualified to use the system and eligible and then

they continued to use it. If they were not able to provide us the applications they were not able to use the system.

James Bosley:

If there's one situation where a person wouldn't be able to use the fixed-route bus to complete their trip they should be approved eligible for paratransit per the FTA guidelines. So it is very easy to come up with one situation that would not work for an individual so it was very easy to get paratransit approved eligible. But we did it following the FTA guidelines.

9. Debra Buell

In last year's meetings, it's amazing how selective memory can be, that even in paperwork that you presented to the legislative transportation committee, you had certain people listed as "other" types of riders – I don't think that was the exact term, but it was something other than eligible riders- and they made up a significant percentage.

James Bosley:

"Other" is a trip purpose, so typically: work, there's six: work, education, medical, recreation, I don't know if it's social and other is basically if they didn't specify.

Debra Buell:

Well, just the point is here, that the FTA regs have been clear since way before 1990 and what has been happening is for example we used to put on our paratransit buses way back when I'll go way back to try to like skip your time James, we have the people on for renal and deny trips for everybody else because we'd be all booked up with renal. Everybody wants to think that I'm a horrible person because I talk about the renal problem. I'm not. I'm talking about the law and equivalent opportunities to ride for any purpose. That's what the law says. However, we gave preference to renal riders and there was even a newspaper article about that just a couple years ago when you changed over to the rural route system. So there's plenty of evidence out there for the Planning Department if you'd like I'd be happy to send it to you and you can review the kinds of things that you've said to the transportation committee, to the public, to the media, which supports and defends Robert's point here which is that we have not run ever a compliant paratransit system. We have had many ineligible riders, whether they were booked for CVPH renal or booked for MAS. And it was only long after the fact when we started getting mad and upset wanting everybody to have a chance that we started to think about ooh gee maybe we better see if all those MAS riders actually need a paratransit trip, meanwhile we'll just keep denying the eligible people that have to go to a doctor fill out an application etcetera etcetera. You can't escape all of the evidence.

James Bosley:

So I think one of the things that you're talking about is CCPT transporting people on paratransit who had not yet been approved eligible. There's an eligibility process described in the paratransit

regulations. The regulations also state that a transit entity can choose to provide transportation to persons other than those who have been approved eligible. So it's not non-compliant just on the basis that we provided transportation to people who were in the process of doing the application. So we did report on how many of the rides had been for persons who were on the approved eligible list and how many were not. And at that time our policy was that you didn't have to be approved eligible to get the ride and that's allowed under regulations. So we changed that policy because we were looking at the possibility of having trip denials generated by persons still in the application process basically preventing somebody who had been approved eligible from getting their ride and that is a compliance issue. So we saw the problem and we addressed it. But the fact that we provided trips to persons who had not been approved eligible, that by itself is not a non-compliance.

Debra Buell:

Well I would like to see the records because here's the thing: if you made sure, and you can prove it, that every MAS rider, every CVPH renal rider, every other rider that had a subscription ride, in the last we'll say five to six, seven years, actually filled out an application within a month of the time that they started riding paratransit then you got something.

Rodney Brown:

Well some of them never submitted an application and then we stopped giving them rides.

Debra Buell:

That is kind of my point.

Rodney Brown:

Well we can't force them to submit an application. Once they request one and start asking for rides, we can't force them to submit an application to us. All we can do is after a period of time is stop allowing them to get rides on paratransit.

Debra Buell:

Okay no argument there Rodney. My argument is, how did you police that? How did you know that they had been stopped getting rides.

Rodney Brown:

Well when a month expired or whatever the time period has expired we took their name off the list and so they couldn't request a ride through our operator any longer.

Debra Buell:

So if this went to court, you could produce a list?

Rodney Brown:

Oh for God sakes, I'm sure that we could dig up something Ms. Buell.

10. Robert Poulin

The last year you guys, like right before all the hearings last year, you had taken on the policy that anybody could ride paratransit.

James Bosley:

Right.

Robert Poulin:

Anybody was riding it.

James Bosley:

Right.

Robert Poulin:

And then all of a sudden you came out and told and said we can't afford paratransit anymore and after a number of hearings and complaints then you changed the policy.

James Bosley:

Actually that reminds me, I think the reason why we showed those figures of these are how many rides are for the approved eligible and these are the ones that are for the individuals who haven't completed or haven't been approved eligible, I think the whole purpose of doing that report was that was the issue at the time is we had all these paratransit rides that were proving burdensome for the system because of cost and concerns about trip denials and we wanted to show that even though we ended up going to a you have to be approved eligible policy eventually, the whole purpose of doing that analysis was to show that it wasn't going to have a big impact because so few of the trips were from the group that wasn't approved eligible yet. It wasn't gonna to save our paratransit program to make the change. We did make the change because it was the right thing to do finally in that context, but that was the whole point of looking at it.

Rodney Brown:

The reality was, when we looked over time, and it wasn't isolated periods of time that you were talking about, paratransit ridership just increased continually over a fairly long period of time and it got to the point where it was excessively expensive to provide that service. It's the same reason that paratransit service isn't provided by most of the other rural areas, rural systems, because they found it to be too expensive. We actually kept our service a lot longer than many of the other rural transportation services out there. And it was just becoming too costly. Now we just presented the numbers today. The numbers are not much better for deviation service. We'll see how that plays out over time. We're not sitting here saying that this is the ultimate answer. We don't know yet. I don't

think this has played out. We'll have to see how the numbers look the next time we sit down. I'm sure that the County Legislature is going to be demanding those numbers from us so that they can review and decide what direction they want to go in.

11. Debra Buell

Well speaking of numbers, there's rural routes that are actually, you did the figures for the legislators last year on that, more expensive per rider than paratransit was. But they didn't get discontinued. How do you explain that?

Rodney Brown:

I would explain that by virtue of the fact that the Legislature doesn't want to provide rides only to people in the City. They want to make sure that the system serves people in the rural communities too. We went to a system that still provided opportunities for people to gain rides on our system in the City as well as in the rural areas. I don't think that the Legislature had any appetite for eliminating all rural ridership.

Debra Buell:

No I didn't mean that at all. What I meant is if it's going to be a cost analysis and you're going to say that paratransit was a very expensive service then you need to also include for example, Lyon Mountain.

Rodney Brown:

We have over time, there are many rural areas that we no longer serve because the ridership was too low to justify sending a bus out to those locations.

James Bosley:

Lyon Mountain and Clayburg routes have been close in the last couple of analyses. And I think sometimes they've been in the red and sometimes they've been in the black, but it's been close. So I would have to go back and look and see how that came out per passenger. But it depends on how the subsidy comes in with the clean-up payment which unfortunately is not determined by the size of our system. The subsidy is primarily our miles and our passengers, but a large chunk of it comes in, about forty percent of the subsidy is actually determined more by what other systems in the state have done. If they have gotten bigger we'll get less, if they have gotten smaller we'll get more. And depending on how that clean-up payment comes in determines whether Lyon Mountain and Clayburg show as covering their own direct operating expenses or whether they show that they've been, they failed to cover their own operating expenses.

Rodney Brown:

For those people who may not be as familiar with the system, our major funding source for Clinton County Public Transit is State Transit Operating Assistance. It's money coming from the State. And

they have a formula where they provide us a certain amount of money per every mile that we travel and a certain amount of money for every passenger that we pick up. And they haven't changed that formula in, twenty years? So what they do is they do a clean-up payment at the end of every year to make up. And now that clean-up payment is what percentage approximately of the amount we get from STOA? It's a significant percentage.

James Bosley:

Oh yeah it's about forty percent of what we get for the subsidy, and that payment by itself is about 15% of what we get of our total revenues for the whole system, so it's, yeah.

Rodney Brown:

So it's significant. They first put that formula in place because they knew that these were rural systems and what they were encouraging all the rural systems to do is to go out into the far reaches of your County and pick up passengers. They incentivized us to do that by giving you more money per every mile that you travel. It's much more miles to get out to Lyon Mountain and Ellenburg and Rouses Point and so you'll get more money by sending the bus out to those locations because you get money per mile. You do a route here in the City and you don't get nearly as many miles as you do when you send a bus to Lyon Mountain, but they also give you money for every passenger you pick up. Clearly you pick up more passengers in the City than you do in the rural areas. So they're trying to encourage you to do both.

James Bosley:

There's a couple other considerations. It's more per mile than it is per passenger so you would think well then you know cover as many miles as you can and that used to be very much true. But what they give you per mile doesn't cover your wear and tear on the vehicle, your fuel, and your driver labor to travel that mile. So even though you get money per mile, every mile you travel you're essentially losing money. So the idea is to maximize how many passengers you get for the services that you do. But there's a conflicting goal. Because public transit is not a profit making venture. It's why you see it as a government program as opposed to a private profit making venture. So the goal isn't necessarily, obviously we don't want to become so expensive that we lose our system, but we're also trying to meet this goal of meeting critical transportation needs in our community. So sometimes we do services that maybe don't cover their full expenses but it's meeting an important need.

12. Robert Poulin

Can you talk about new buses? I've heard that some bus drivers want to drive the new buses because of the ramp. The kneeling ramp has kind of a steep angle and there is too much effort on the part of the driver to push people up.

James Bosley:

Yeah that's a really good question. So we have these new buses and as opposed to a wheelchair lift that folds out and comes down to the ground as well as a stairwell door, there's one entrance into the bus and it's a ramp that can fold out. It's possible for somebody to board without the ramp being deployed but as we've looked into this exact issue my belief is that it is almost always better to deploy for different reasons. But yeah we've definitely been looking at that question. And it sounds like the drivers have had some trouble pushing some wheelchairs up the ramp or keeping control of the wheelchair as they go down the ramp. And we're still sorting through this basically. We did get information from the company that shows that the vehicle itself complies with ADA regulations and all applicable regulations.

Rodney Brown:

In terms of the angle of the ramp.

James Bosley:

And there is information on the FTA website that does say that the drivers are to assist the passenger with the ramp basically. So the driver is required to push the wheelchair up or down.

Rodney Brown:

If they're not able to do it themselves, it is required for the driver to provide assistance.

James Bosley:

Right. So I've heard also like you said Robert that a couple passengers have had trouble, a couple drivers have had trouble. So it is something that we're looking into and paying attention to.

Rodney Brown:

I don't know if you have anything to add to that Teri? You don't have to.

Teri Blake:

We are having issues, yeah.

Rob Timmons:

Is it greater than one percent slope? Isn't that the ADA standards, one percent?

Debra Buell:

It's twelve to one.

James Bosley:

Oh I don't remember. Well, it's apparently different for this ramp for the vehicles as opposed to a sidewalk. So it's normally the twelve to one, but it wasn't in this case. The standard was something else. I don't have it with me. I can bring it to, I can do an email.

Rob Timmons:

So bus ramps have a different standard than normal?

Rodney Brown:

Yes.

James Bosley:

Yes.

Rodney Brown:

But as Robert what you are specifically referring to I think is some of the drivers have expressed concern that they're not strong enough to assist some of the wheelchair users with the ramp. Whereas, that's not an issue with the lift. The lift takes longer. The reasons that they produce these buses is that is presumably to reduce the amount of time it takes to pick up passengers because it takes far less time to deploy the ramp than it does the lift. But you know you do have some of these issues that we did not face when we had just the lift buses.

James Bosley:

Yeah.

13. Debra Buell

In New York City when you get on a kneeling bus there are geographic areas where it is not a problem at all and then there's geographic areas where there is either an angle where the ramp is being deployed which makes the slope across the issue making it harder for a wheelchair user even with a power chair to safely get down the ramp. And then there's areas where you just got too much of a height differential so no matter how much the driver tries to lower the kneeling bus to the lowest possible level there's still too much of a slope for it to be a safe entrance or exit it doesn't even approach what a power wheelchair user company would say "oh yeah that's okay that's safe you can get easily down that slope" no they'd say "don't you dare". So what MTA has learned to do in New York City is in those geographic areas where that is a continuous problem they make arrangements for people flag down buses where the slope might not be as bad or it might not be as much of an angle or it might not be as much of a height differential. So drivers do have to look out for boarding passengers in special areas where that's the case. So it might be worth taking a look at these areas wherever the problems have been recorded trying to look at is there a big height differential between the curb height and the bus at its lowest kneeling point. Is there any angle? How much of an angle is there?

Rodney Brown:

I think Debra, I think it's actually better when we have a curb, so the ramp can go down to a curb. The angle is far less.

Debra Buell:

That's Right.

Rodney Brown:

If we have to go down to bare pavement it's obviously going to be more. I think what Debra suggested is there may be locations where the pavement actually falls away from the road and it's even worse. The angle may not even be compliant the Americans with Disabilities Act depending on the geographic area that you're deploying it.

Debra Buell:

So I'm just basically saying maybe when drivers report problems you could try to find out specifically where they occurred and take a look at the location maybe with a driver and with a slope ratio calculation, see what the slope is. See if there's a cross slope. John Farley at NCCI I think has slope instruments that can help you. I do too. Or you could purchase your own. Another idea would be to try to educate any passenger that has experienced that difficulty to see if there is a spot that they know of that may be a little bit flatter or have more terrain to choose from. Like if they're up at Family Dollar that slope coming off of that Family Dollar main curb cut is extremely steep. I always back down it if I go down it at all. I prefer to go down to the curb ramp that's by that physical fitness place, I think the name is called Curves, and it's a wide ramp it has a much longer more compliant slope ratio and it is far safer for somebody to get off and on which means it would probably be far safer to load or unload somebody there than at the slope at the Family Dollar store. So these kinds of things might be able to be problem solved with some of that. Other things I would at least consider as a possibility is when I've encountered new drivers in the MTA system in New York City they often think they have the bus down as far as it will go, but the driver who's training them will tell them no you've got to do this this and this. So there is a possibility that maybe the drivers think they have it down but they don't quite have it down as far as it will go. So maybe there is a manufacturer trainer that can come and at least take a look at that since the buses are new.

Staff Response:

James Bosley:

Yeah I spoke with the vendor and he provided me with detailed instructions on the kneeling and I shared that with our operator so we have the full information for that. And I don't know if the timing of it, maybe the first week we were using these buses is when we had the most problems and I'm not sure, maybe we're continuing to have issues, I don't know.

Teri Blake:

I think the issue, more issues are in the rural areas where there are no curb cuts. And I mean we did it right in our parking lot and the ramp, first of all it's built and it curves when you go in then it curves. So somebody in a power chair with their legs out is going to have a difficult time even

maneuvering that. And then when they leave the ramp, the ramp does slope a little bit and if you're, I escorted a lady down and I was running behind her. And it's not an ideal situation in the rural areas when you don't have a curb cut to look forward to, or a curb I mean. It is better if you have a curb to put the ramp on because then it levels out.

James Bosley:

So Teri is deploying those ramp equipped vehicles where they're working the best. It's not like we can trade them in for lift equipped vehicles. But since we've been having issues with these new buses with the ramps, we probably won't purchase more buses like that. We'll probably get ones that have the lift.

Rodney Brown:

Which is unfortunate. We hoped that this would assist in speeding up the process of as opposed to deploying the lift, but we'll evaluate it and if we just can't make it work we'll have to go back to fully just lift buses instead.

14. Debra Buell

So I'd like to go back to a point Robert brought up and then maybe I'll let him expand on it. Historically it hasn't been the province of the county to spend a lot of time listening to partners. So if you consider agencies in your coordinated transit group your partners as well as NCCI which is also in the coordinated transit group, it's interesting that when a coordinated transit partner makes it clear to you that there is a problem with something that rarely is it considered valuable enough to be attended to. So I can see that you're trying really hard today and I appreciate that. I thank you for the large print agendas and for the recording, but certainly NCCI did make it very clear last year and NCCI working with me in years previous made it very clear all the problems with the system in terms of equal access, in terms of efficiency of operations, in terms of trip denials. More often than not, we were called into question as if we were not telling the truth. That's not the way you treat a partner. So I'm going to let Robert pick it up from there.

15. Robert Poulin

One thing I'd really like to see right now is for better communication to the public about meetings. And that includes the transportation committee meetings. Today I can tell you last year at the various public meetings we had the North Country Association for the Visually Impaired many of their team members came to these meetings. They had an event this afternoon. So there is no one I think here from that group of visually impaired blind people because they didn't have any notice of this and they had an event already planned. Next week's transportation committee meeting we got notice on Wednesday and I'm already planned to be in Albany next Tuesday. I'll try to find somebody to cover me, but especially for agencies we need some notice. A week and a half two weeks is not enough to get to meetings. It's just not.

Staff Response:

Rodney Brown:

Every Legislative meeting and every Legislative sub-committee meeting including the transportation committee, which is one of ten legislative sub-committees, if anyone who wants regular notice of those meetings, all they need to do if they have an email address is to provide an email address to the Legislative Office and they will be sent emails on every single notice, every week, on when those meetings occur. So it's easy enough to add anyone to the group if they have a computer and an email address.

16. Debra Buell

I'm on that group and I'd like to address that. So when you're talking about agency heads like Robert and perhaps other agency heads that may have a disability or maybe they're a one car family or maybe their car broke down and they need to ride the bus to come to any public meeting whether it's a transportation committee meeting, a public safety committee meeting, or the legislative sessions, the current practice of the legislature is to make people attending committee meetings wait until the end of the committee meeting to speak. We have a problem with that because when your meetings start at 5:15 if I come the last bus I could take home on a super rainy or snowy day would be 5:53. Your meeting might be winding down enough by then that I'd be allowed to speak if I didn't interrupt like I did in August, but it might not be. And for somebody who is not as outspoken as me they're going to be sitting there waiting their turn and not getting any because the current policy from speaking at the beginning and still being able to get home. This has aggravated me for all time because it's been used against us. So when you said in the last transportation committee meeting that when I told you things that had been talked about to NCCI by the people that made claims, the same claim was made by you Rodney that people all they gotta do is come to these meetings and we publish them on the web and okay we'll go back to the fact that not everybody has a computer, not everybody knows how to read a computer, 13% illiteracy rate in the County and even if they know how to use a computer they may not be able to own one. Your bus riders, whether they're agency heads or two income one car families are on the edge of poverty an awful lot of the time. So to expect that they're going to be able to come up with say \$100 to get WeCare Transport or Adirondack Assist to give them a ride home on a terrible night, because that's pretty much the going fare, that's ridiculous. So what are they going to do? They're gonna, if they're not like me, I interrupt, they're gonna sit there, they're going to go home, they're going to feel like their voice isn't heard, their voice will not be counted. It is not easy, it is not easy at all. When they call the Planning Department typically historically comments pre and during James' time in the Planning Department are filtered, altered, and you know made to fit whatever the Planning Department agenda is. So in other words, not the exact words of the person maybe close sometimes maybe not so close other times. So if you wanna say it's easy for us, the first thing the Legislature could do is allow people to make comments at the beginning of your committee meetings because right now that's the only thing they could possibly go to and still get a ride home. The second thing you could do is change the legislative sessions, it's only two times a month, you could either change them and have them earlier if you didn't want to run the buses later, that would solve your problem of not having to pay the drivers extra. So you could have your legislative sessions earlier it's only two times

a month. Or if you wanna have the legislative sessions stay the way they are then you pay to have extra drivers only two times a month. That's inviting people in. That's community partnership. That is valuing the entire workforce. So for all of us folks that we want to entertain as tourists or have fly on our airport, you know what, they need workforce to serve them and a lot of those workforce are low income folks riding on the bus. Now if they can't get to their jobs and they can't get to the Legislature who's gonna be the supporting workforce for all the lovely tourists we're trying to attract? So you've done everything you possible could to make it impossibly difficult to completely impossible for people to attend meetings and have their voice be heard. And when they did speak up last year what did they hear? They heard that the system we rode was killing the entire system. So partnerships with the community if you wanna have cooperative partnerships, I feel I had a very cooperative with Chris Kreig at the airport. He was open, inviting, interested. Mr. Conroy was there the day I met with Chris and Mr. Conroy. I felt respected. I do not feel respected by the Planning Department and that's been a long history. So and I'm the person who typically is brave enough to speak up no matter what, so what happens if you're not as brave. I think you guys really need to look at that.

Rodney Brown:

Any other comments, questions for us? We've got a little bit off topic, but if you have anything we'd appreciate it.

17. Debra Buell

Have you decided that you want to run the program two or three more months before you have another meeting?

Rodney Brown:

Well that's not our decision that's the Legislature's decision. I'm not sure that they've made that. That will be a topic at our next Legislative meeting our next transportation meeting.

Rob Timmons:

One question I had Rodney is how long typically when you've made changes and there's always a drop of ridership, does it take to get back up to where you were at? Is it months, is it a year?

Rodney Brown:

Well the one incident Ms. Buell talked about before where we implemented a fare change, it took two to three years for the numbers to come back up. Now that was a pretty radical change.

Rob Timmons:

What was the increase if I can ask?

James Bosley:

I think it was fifty percent.

Rodney Brown:

It was doubling.

Rob Timmons:

A doubling?

Rodney Brown:

Yeah. It was, the Legislature held out for a long time in increasing the fares and when they did they increased them quite a bit. And there was a fairly significant drop off for a long period of time.

James Bosley:

So it was fifty cents to a dollar. So it wasn't fifty percent it was fifty cents. And it would have been, yeah, that.

Rodney Brown:

I would say it generally takes several months to a year for the numbers to rebound. Now what we're talking about here is I'm not sure that we'll achieve those numbers in that timeframe because another thing I think is, as you're well aware of that has occurred is that the, a number of our riders over the last few years have been students who lived in the dorms for Clinton Community College. We were providing I would say probably the major transportation service between those dorms and the college. Their last semester of providing any people in the dorms is this semester and I think there's only sixteen people. So that really has dropped off fairly significantly in the last few months.

James Bosley:

And our Medicaid ridership has become almost non-existent whereas back before the big changes in late 2013 we were doing hundreds of Medicaid rides a month and now it's, they did buy some more tokens from us recently but, you know we're getting less than fifty Medicaid rides a month.

Debra Buell:

James, did you ever enroll in the managed long-term care programs.

James Bosley:

You're talking about VNA and Fidelis?

Debra Buell:

VNA and Fidelis.

James Bosley:

I reached out to them and for some reason they didn't want to use us. And I can't remember exactly what it was. But basically how we operate as public transit didn't work with how they want to do things maybe because we weren't tracking individual information and they needed that. It was something along those lines.

Rob Timmons:

Is there a chance that we'll get some of the MAS back after seeing what happened with the taxi service. It sounded like they know now that there's issues with the whole service.

James Bosley:

Well I reached out to MAS to tell them that the new structure should be easier for them to use because we've got coverage, I mean we have County-wide coverage between the different service types, but we've got coverage in all of Plattsburgh because the buses will go off their route, it's no longer an issue of you know I'm one block away from the route so and I can't get to the route and so the route can't take care of my trip. Well no we can, we can deviate one block away, usually a block is less than three quarters of a mile. So I sent a very clear email that went to Russ Maxwell the President of MAS by way of our Field Liaison from MAS to let them know hey we should be easier for you guys to use than ever. And so the Field Liaison sent it onto Russ saying he'd get back to me because obviously they'd be interested in the opportunity. We're gonna be the least expensive option in almost all cases. But they never got back to me.

Rodney Brown:

We haven't found them to be terribly responsive.

Debra Buell:

Have you guys approached New York State Department of Transportation to see if they would assist you in coordinating with Department of Health, to force that issue?

Rodney Brown:

Oh yes. We haven't had much of a response on that one either, after several calls.

Debra Buell:

Well I believe that because they've been feuding with DOH for a number of years, but it's something that maybe is worth continually trying like, you know the drop of water on the rock that eventually wears a hole in the rock.

Rodney Brown:

Point taken. Anything else? Thank you, we'll meet with our Legislative committee and decide on whether we're going to hold another meeting and if so what time duration that will be. And we will certainly take Mr. Poulin's comments into account in the notice period provided for that meeting, as well as method of providing that notice.

James Bosley:

Yes.

18. Debra Buell

I hope you'll also at least consider trying to get public service announcements on radio stations for the folks who are either illiterate or have trouble reading or don't have a computer. You know the trouble reading wouldn't necessarily be illiteracy; it could just be vision issues. So if you reached out to radio stations now you could have a production made up for you or you could have James or somebody else read it. It just says "We're going to have a meeting" and then you could even leave that part blank, right? And then the DJ in production can go in and say on November 12th and then at 7pm or at 4pm or whatever. There's ways to do this in advance so that it could be just a little insertion by the DJ produces a public service announcement. They're required to do that by federal law. It doesn't cost you guys any money. And it's going to reach audiences you can't reach any other way.

Rodney Brown:

Thank you.