

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT ESTUARY TRANSIT DISTRICT MEETING
ESTUARY TRANSIT DISTRICT
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, April 29, 2025 @ 9:00 a.m.
Chester Meeting House, 4 Liberty Street, Chester, CT

Pre-ceding the Retreat a continental breakfast was served starting at 9:00 a.m.

In attendance: Leslie Strauss, David Cox, DG Fitton, Joan Gay, Timothy Griswold, John Hall, Beverly Lawrence, Christine Marques, Charles Norz, Michael Pelton, and Kathryn Russell

Staff: Joe Comerford, Christina Denison, Halyna Famiglietti, Brendan Geraghty, Nick Kulakowski, and Jared Whitcomb

Guests: David Lee

Absent: Michelle Benivegna, Jim Irish, David Lahm and Brendan Rae

Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Strauss opened the Retreat at 10:03 a.m. by welcoming everyone to the Chester Meeting House and giving a brief history of the venue. She introduced David Lee, Facilitator.

MISSION STATEMENT DEVELOPMENT

Participants discussed the district's mission and values, developing a list of points to be included:

- Access – RVT provides economical, affordable mobility to essential services
- Safe and reliable
- Empowering people
- Seamless, multimodal connections
- Historical role (maybe introductory point?)
- Delete sustainability and energy conservation?

STAKEHOLDERS and CHANGING CONDITIONS

The impact of future economic and societal conditions on transportation was discussed, including:

- Economics – towns losing transit-dependent population
- Lack of attractive housing options for young families
- Modest growth at best
- Getting to work, and for transit-dependents, getting everywhere else
- Small employers
- "People can't afford to live where they work."
- Potential for microtransit
- What are the economic drivers in the region?

- Hospitals
- Logistics
- Local government
- Small manufacturers
- A few larger manufacturers
- Service workers
- Hospitality
- Potential AI applications for multi-modal trip planning, paratransit scheduling, etc.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Participants discussed opportunities to expand into other towns and developed a list of facility issues considered to be strengths and weaknesses and threats:

- EXTERNAL GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES
 - Connectivity with other bus and rail services
 - Improving customer experience
 - Statewide unified fare structure and fare media (a long-time “holy grail”)
 - Schedule coordination with other bus and rail operators
 - Completing implementation of the bus study for RVT
 - Potential for express-type service to New Haven, airports (potential to link more directly with the Hartford Line as feeder to BDL, once CTDOT arranges for traveler-friendly shuttle between Windsor Locks station and BDL)
 - Creative solutions to terminal limitations in downtown Middletown
 - Planning for new shoreline facility
 - Possible expansion to other non-member towns
 - Could CTDOT see RVT as a more efficient operator of the Meriden division?
- STRENGTHS
 - Senior staff – knowledgeable, leadership, a great team
 - Employee morale; courteous to the public
 - Board members – effectively work together, engaged, connected (with local elected officials, state legislators, local employers)
 - Good services
 - Strong financial position; effective financial management
 - Excellent working relationship with CTDOT; confidence of CTDOT in RVT to “get things done that other CT operators and DOT staff cannot”
 - Modern (website, cutting-edge fare collection, microtransit)
 - Relationship with Wesleyan University; microtransit
 - RVT attorney is a great resource
- WEAKNESSES (Opportunities for Improvement)
 - Facilities
 - Maintenance capacity of Middletown garage
 - Condition and capacity at the downtown terminal
 - Need for a shoreline facility
 - Maintenance facilities and equipment needed to service the RVT fleet more effectively than relying on outside providers

- Union vs. Non-union workforce creates administration challenges
- Challenge to attract and retain good employees, especially skilled technicians
- Frequency and span of service
- EXTERNAL THREATS
 - Uncertainty about financing for transit at both the state and federal levels; chaos regarding federal requirements
 - Possible changes at CTDOT that could undermine currently excellent working relationships
 - Unrealistic demands by CTDOT, legislature (e.g., electric bus mandate)
 - Unfunded mandates (e.g., fares)
 - Competition in the labor market for skilled employees
 - Public perceptions – “People don’t want to pay for services.”
 - Transit budget must compete with other State-funded services
 - Shift in work trips

LUNCH

STRATEGIES and ACTION PLANS

Future goals and action plans were discussed:

- STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT 3-5 YEARS
 - Services
 - Connections with other bus and rail providers; coordinating schedules
 - New microtransit initiatives
 - Explore potential for express services to New Haven and airports
 - Work with CTDOT to implement a unified fare structure for all transit
 - Facilities
 - New shoreline facility
 - Middletown maintenance facility
 - Middletown terminal
 - Dues formula for members (both current and new)
 - Communications strategy; public relations

CLOSING REMARKS

David Lee thanked everyone for their participation and contributions and summarized key action items and the next steps. Strauss thanked Lee for facilitating the event. Strauss will draft a Mission Statement for review at the next regular Board meeting on Friday, June 13 at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christina Denison, Clerk