



# Town of Sudbury

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<https://sudbury.ma.us/transportation/>

## Sudbury Transportation Committee

### Minutes

Friday, MARCH 7, 2025

10:30 AM

Via Town Zoom Conference Call

Core Members Present: Daniel Carty, Alice Sapienza, Bob Lieberman, Adam Burney, and Cheryl Wallace

Core Members Absent:

Advisory Group Present:

Advisory Group Absent: Martha Welsh, Chief Scott Nix, Carmine Gentile, Maura Carty

Guests: Kay Bell, Mitch Cohen, Jill Dube, Linda Faust

**Confirmation of Quorum:** The statutory requirements as to notice having been met, Dan Carty as chair convened the meeting at 10:30 AM. Dan made an announcement that this was a public meeting, and the meeting was being broadcast live via zoom and recorded by Sudbury TV. Roll call was taken, a quorum was present. Dan assigned Adam Burney as co-host.

**Selection of Clerk:** Alice Sapienza was assigned the duties of Clerk for the meeting.

**Guest From Northborough:** Dan began the meeting by introducing Mitch Cohen, member of the Select Board in Northborough, and having committee members introduce themselves to Mitch. Mitch was invited by a friend, Cheryl Wallace, to talk to the committee about transportation in that town.

Mitch reviewed what is available (Senior Center vans, which are shared with another town) and stated that the town has reached out to the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) about expanding their services to include Northborough. He noted that there is interest in providing transportation to the Westborough commuter rail and paying for that service via Northborough's MBTA assessment. Currently, the WRTA has an agreement with Via, in which rides cost \$2 each, and service is offered from 7 AM to 7 PM, Monday through Friday. Northborough's interest is in expanding both the service area and the hours/days. The town contracted with Nelson-Nygaard (which had consulted to Sudbury as part of a Community Compact Cabinet grant) to conduct a needs assessment. One of the outcomes was a recommendation to reconfigure the WRTA/Via system in a way that would provide services to between 50%-60% of Northborough residents. Included in the new system would be transportation to the commuter rail and to Solomon Pond mall. From the latter, riders

could also meet MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) services to communities beyond the WRTA service area.

Based on the Nelson-Nygaard recommendation, the WRTA is sending a proposal out to bid (including to Via). There will be no additional cost to Northborough for the new services; the MBTA assessment should cover the costs. *See the Appendix for a summary of the current WRTA/Via program.*

Dan said that Sudbury also paid an MBTA assessment, but that it was used to support the Council on Aging van service (drivers, vehicles, fuel, etc.) and there was little remaining. He stated that subsidized transportation to date was primarily grant funded, as well as with “free cash” from the town.

Cheryl commented that the planned hours of Via service were broader than the current times of Sudbury’s Catch Connect.

Dan thanked Mitch for coming, and all agreed it was a very interesting discussion.

**Agenda topics:** Dan next recommended the committee discuss the following topics (not necessarily in that order):

- Finances (a quick review of the material sent recently)
- FlashVote results
- Uber meeting to discuss vouchers.

He also announced that, as of now, continued remote meeting would not be possible after the end of March. We would meet again via Zoom in two weeks, but beyond that it was not clear if remote participation would be allowed for public meetings.

**Uber vouchers:** Debra Galloway, Jill Dube, and Alice Sapienza met on February 25<sup>th</sup> with Andy Willard and Eric Cartrite of Uber, to discuss vouchers. As noted for some time, the company is moving from the system that Sudbury has been using to vouchers and will provide support going forward only for that system. Earlier concerns about the change were allayed; for example, Sudbury will be able to retrieve data that have been used in successful grant applications; Senior Center staff will not have to spend as much time overseeing Uber use of qualified riders; and users will have an easier way to use and track their subsidized transportation.

In the Uber website, the following information to riders explains the proposed system:

“When you receive an Uber voucher from an eligible transit agency program, it’s added to your Uber account. You can then use the voucher to pay for eligible services. Typically, the voucher will cover the cost of your trip up to a certain amount. If the cost exceeds the voucher’s value, the difference is charged to your default payment method on the Uber app.”

On 7 March, Andy Willard sent a Vouchers Guide—Admin Resource to Sudbury, and that was in turn disseminated to committee members. The committee agreed to discuss actual implementation processes for the new system at length at the next meeting on 21 March (in addition to discussing the need for continued dispatch services for taxis).

**Finances:** After sharing his screen with the most recent spreadsheet of funds and rides to date, Dan pointed out that a handful of new riders had been added to both GoSudbury Uber and GoSudbury Taxi programs. And, if activity were stable, the town would run out of GoSudbury funds at the end of June 2026 (i.e., about 17 more months of subsidy). Also of note is that the grant funds for CatchConnect service and the hospital shuttle will end in June and July 2025, respectively, and Jim Nee stated that the next round of possible grant funding would not be for several months. Dan suggested that we look into the MBTA assessment and find out if, as Mitch described for Northborough, some of that money could be used by the MWRTA to continue and even extend the latter programs.

**FlashVote Results:** Dan reviewed the initiative, stating that a five-question FlashVote survey was sent to residents on 2/24 and closed on 2/26. The number responding was 761 people out of 1,583 who were invited. Respondents received the graphic results of the survey, and Alice then summarized the assessment based on verbatim comments.

She explained that FlashVote surveys provide a way for municipal officials to “take the pulse” of residents on issues of interest and are not meant to provide robust statistical evidence for a decision. For example, of the approximately 13,000 Sudbury residents 18 years of age and over who could respond to a FlashVote survey, only about 10% actually agreed to respond and, thus, receive the invitation. Of those, a little more than half answered the survey questions.

Even though these results are not meant to be representative of the town, Alice said, they do illustrate a range of important issues and challenges that affect residents and their overall mobility. The three most mentioned were (1) the need for more and broader communication about transportation; (2) the desirability for many of additional transportation options, including for school-age riders; and (3) ongoing concerns about walking/biking/driving safety for all residents.

Although there were strongly worded negative responses, they were vastly outnumbered by positive and constructive responses. For example, out of 87 responses to the question of why public transportation was not used, only one answer was negative (public transportation was inconvenient). And, out of more than 180 responses to the final question (“any other comments...?”), only three were negative.

**Discussion:** Bob asked how many residents usually attended the Town Meeting, and Adam responded about 200 people. Yet, Bob noted, more than 700 people answered the survey on transportation, and so many of the verbatim comments were positive. He asked: why is continuing to support transportation such an uphill battle for funding? Adam suggested that the amount of money to be spent by the town on transportation was always in the mix of monies requested for cost increases affecting families such as school salaries. There are competing priorities for funding.

In response, Bob said that the town budget was populated with the fixed costs, predominantly, of the schools. Thus, there was never enough to add funds even for vital programs like transportation. In fact, Adam stated, there is talk about the situation in FY27-28 and the possibility that the town might be facing over-rides. If that happens, transportation could be part of an over-ride, because it would be a small percentage of the total requested. Dan asked Adam about the request for the remaining earmarked funds, and Adam answered that he made the request about 3 months earlier and would now reach out to Rep. Gentile.

Cheryl said people who seem the most negative about transportation in Sudbury often are those who do not need it. Yet, the same people do complain about the car traffic.

Dan was interested in the recurring challenge of communication reflected in the survey responses. Although print was used in flyers, for example, we may need to consider how to reach people who need to hear about transportation.

Members stated that we also need strong advocacy for these programs. Kay Bell (guest) talked about making the case for transportation to the general population. Those who drive also benefit from taxes that support our roads, so the benefit to needy residents for transportation (from tax revenues) should be part of the “case for transportation.”

**Minutes:** Dan suggested that we postpone review of minutes because of time.

**Next Meeting:** Given people’s schedule issues, the group agreed that the next Zoom meeting would be 21 March at 9 AM. For that meeting, Dan listed the following subjects for there wdiscussion:

- Uber vouchers (how implement)
- Mitch and the Northborough example of using MBTA assessment (perhaps invite Jim Nee/MWRTA for this topic)
- Adam and the possible hiring of transportation staff
- Dan and talks with the town manager about grant writing staff.

**Adjournment:** Dan asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:45 AM. It was moved by Alice, there was no requested discussion, seconded by Adam, and voted unanimously.

## **APPENDIX WRTA and Via**

<https://therta.com/9611-2/>

...The Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) celebrates tremendous ridership growth on the heels of its two year anniversary with global transportation technology company, Via. Initially funded through the MassDOT Discretionary Grant Program for RTAs , Via-WRTA launched in Westborough in September 2020, and expanded to Shrewsbury in April 2021.

This project was the first Public-Private Transit Partnership in the Central Massachusetts region that introduces on-demand micro-transit. Since launching in September 2020, Via-WRTA has provided over 33,000 low-cost rides to the Westborough and Shrewsbury communities, and has seen an increase in service of over 10% over the last several months.

Via-WRTA service is provided from 7am – 7pm, Monday through Friday and functions much like a shuttle that comes when you want, where you want. With its powerful technology and use of advanced algorithms, passengers are directed to a nearby virtual bus stop within a short walking distance for pick up and drop off. Multiple riders are able to seamlessly share a vehicle through the unique technology that match passengers headed in the same direction into a single vehicle for quick and efficient shared trips. Rides are just \$2 dollars per trip!

Benefits passengers can expect to receive include:

- On-demand service that allows for an easy switch from their personal vehicle to our vehicles;
- Reduction in overall daily cost for commuters who are currently using the MBTA parking lots;
- Easier to pay fare using the Via-WRTA mobile app, available in both the App Store and Google Play.

Worcester Regional Transit Authority is excited for the continued partnership with Via to provide commuters and riders access to on-demand transit service and ensure that there are affordable and convenient transportation options available...