



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

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September 4, 2018

Dear Chair Evans and Members of the Board,

It is my pleasure to present you with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) report for the months of July and August 2018. The primary issues we reviewed were: 1) 8000-Series Railcar Design, 2) MetroAccess Van – Seat Adjustment, 3) 7000-Series Inter-Car Barriers, 4) Safety, and Procurement of Vans, Buses, and Railcars. 5) Cashless Express Bus Experiment.

Issues of the Month

8000-Series Railcar Design

The AAC received an update on the 8000-series railcar design. The AAC is interested in having accessibility and safety further enhanced on the railcars of the future. Specific items of importance to the AAC include (a) better slip resistant floors, (b) placement of the priority seating next to the emergency door exit, (c) arm rests on the first row of seats, and (d) the AAC also highly recommends that Metro consider using gangway railcars for the 8000-series, or at least procuring several such railway cars for a pilot project as the New York MTA is doing. (Kawasaki is producing the MTA's newest trains to be delivered in 2020.)

The AAC would also like to request the opportunity to observe an entire 8000-series train, not just a mock-up of one car, before the trains go into full production.

MetroAccess Van – Seat Adjustment

The AAC received an update on the modifications being made to a portion of the MetroAccess fleet of Ford Transit vehicles. MetroAccess has received complaints about the height of the long seat on the Ford Transit vehicles. For people with short legs sitting in this particular seat often results in the customers' legs not touching the floor of the vehicle. This situation has resulted in complaints about very painful and uncomfortable rides. For some customers, a long trip in which their legs are never touching the floor could not only cause pain, but could contribute to poor blood circulation and the hazard of thrombus formation.

Metro attempted to address this issue by having a foot stool available for use of feet placement by customers upon request. Safety concerns about the use and the storing of the stools required an alternate approach. Metro instead will be able to adjust the seat on the Ford Transit vehicles yet to be delivered. That means 317 Ford Transits will continue to have the existing long seat, while 366 MetroAccess Ford Transit vehicles will eventually have single seats that are 17 inches high instead of the long seat. At the moment, there is no estimated time to completion of the delivery and introduction into service of the 366 vehicles. For customers who raise concerns about being transported in the existing long seat, they will be accommodated by being placed in other seats on the vehicle, whenever possible.

7000-Series Inter-car Barriers

There was a May 25th incident in which a blind customer fell off of the platform at the Van Ness station after mistaking the space between the rubber between-car-barriers (BCB) for a door opening. This is now the third incident of a person falling off of a station platform while trying to board a 7000-series train. The AAC has continued to express concerns about the rubber BCBs found on the 7000-series railcars, and would like Metro to consider alternative BCBs, namely accordion-style, found in other transit systems.

The AAC also received an updated on the status of the 7000-series BCB retrofit project. The existing rubber BCBs are scheduled to be replaced with the chain-styled BCB that is attached to every other railcar on 7000-series trains. In September 2016 Metro announced that, based on customer feedback, all 7000-series trains would be retrofitted to have chain barriers between all cars on the trains. Per Metro's announced timeline, the retrofitting was scheduled to be completed by April 2018. To date, not only is the project not complete, but it does not appear to have started.

The AAC was informed that the vehicle manufacturer was notified about the decision to retrofit the BCBs in late 2016, and in April 2017 Metro conducted the first testing of the new retrofit design. The testing resulted in the need to make some design adjustments, which included making the design practical for connecting the barriers while in the rail yard. In October 2017 Metro received the mockup designs from the manufacturer and then requested a commercial proposal for the change to the railcars. In January 2018 manufacturer submitted their proposal, and Metro is expecting materials to be delivered by August 2018. Metro is expected to receive 50 cars per month of materials, and the entire retrofit is expected to be completed by November 2019.

Procurement of vans, buses and rail cars

News reports and actual experiences of AAC members has brought into question the procurement procedures for vans, buses, and railcars. This includes protocols meant to protect proprietary information from public release during the bidding process, which prevent even the AAC, WMATA's only disability advisory body from providing information and technical assistance on issues that relate to accessible design and program access issues under the ADA or usability of a product, service, or program that WMATA is about to purchase from prospective vendors.

A case in point is the current issue with the newest MetroAccess vans. In addition, the lack of verbiage in the procurement documents shielding WMATA from absorbing the cost of repairing manufacturing defects and early obsolescence. The inadequate design of the newest MetroAccess Ford vans, the wiring defects and reduced slippage coefficient in floors of the 7000 series railcars, and the brake issues on the newest buses are examples that have recently been brought to our attention. We urge a review of the current procurement procedures that have resulted in both safety and financial issues for WMATA and its customers.

Cashless Bus Experiment

We are interested in the data from the “cashless bus” experiment and the plan for a follow up Title 6 analysis as well as a follow up: “no smart card loading test with cash fares permitted”. The title 6 study and the comparison of loading and no cash will be critical for a final decision on implementation and its effect on the senior/disability and challenged socio-economic communities.

In order to end on a high note, we would like to commend WMATA for enhancing the use of 8 car trains during the recent periods of reduced service and system maintenance.

Sincerely,

Philip Posner
Chair