



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

MEETING MINUTES: JANUARY 7, 2019

Attendees

Present: Phil Posner (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Elvir Ariza-Silva, Tappan Banerjee, Darnise Bush, Tino Calabria, Erin Coneys, Charlie Crawford, Steve Kaffen, Mary Kay McMahon, Phillipa Mezile, Anthony Oberg, Paul Semelfort, and Patrick Sheehan,

Call to Order

Chair Posner called the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Approval of Agenda, Board Report, and Prior Meeting Minutes

Chair Posner welcomed everyone to 2019 and to the meeting, and then started introductions of the Committee members.

Modified meeting agenda was approved. As a result of travel plans, David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, will provide his report during today's AAC meeting instead of the standard of having his report issued to the Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS).

The prior meeting minutes were approved.

The Board Report was approved. Chair Posner offered to revise the Board Report as per today's meeting discussions.

Recent Wheelchair Incidents

George Nader, Deputy Chief, Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD), provided information about the two incidents that involved customers using motorized wheelchairs falling off of a station's platform and on to the track-bed.

The incident at the Foggy Bottom station happened on November 16th at about 8:00 pm. The female patron stated that her chair was turned up too high, which caused her to accidentally go off the platform on to the track-bed. She suffered non-life-threatening injuries during the incident. She was operating a Jazzy Select 6 wheelchair. Christiaan Blake, Acting Assistant General Manager, Access Services, confirmed that this incident was the one he had described during the last month's meeting, where the customer was perpendicular to the bumpy tiles. Deputy Chief Nader confirmed this is the same incident and it did not involve the train.

The incident at the Friendship Heights Metro station occurred on November 11th at about 11:50 am. This person intentionally put herself on the track-bed. She was operating a Travelers Plus 3 wheel-chair. As the train approached she drove the chair directly in front of the train. From the investigation it was found that the incident was intentional and

unfortunately, she did not survive. Chair Posner thanked Deputy Chief Nader for providing information about the two incidents.

Chair Posner asked about the new bicycle policy, particularly what happens when customers with bicycles ride on the escalators. Deputy Chief Nader stated at this time it is not a prohibited act. Metro Police advise and recommend customers with bicycles take the elevators. Chair Posner asked if the same applied for baby carriages. Deputy Chief Nader confirmed yes.

Mr. Calabria stated Japan has a high number of suicides in the Tokyo subway system. There is an article about lights, stating that they have an effect of reducing the suicide rates, and that has been somewhat successful in the Tokyo subway system.

Dr. Banerjee stated as a motorized wheelchair user himself, he can tell there are no brakes in powered wheelchairs. A user can slow down the speed to stop. If a user is going with higher speed and stops abruptly, the person may be thrown off the chair. Dr. Banerjee stated training is very important for people with powered wheelchairs. Mr. Sheehan appreciated the information about powered wheelchairs not having brakes. Mr. Ariza-Silva stated some powered wheelchairs do have brakes, depending upon how they are used. However, he did agree that if stopped suddenly, the person may fall off the mobility device.

Mr. Calabria raised a concern about whether bumpy tiles contributed to either of the incidents. Mr. Sheehan stated bumpy tiles are very helpful, especially to customers with visual disabilities. Ms. Bush stated bumpy tiles help determine distance to the train, and that there is no training provided for users on how to use a powered wheelchair. Deputy Chief Nader stated MTPD had no evidence that the bumpy tiles played any role or contributed in either incident. Mr. Ariza-Silva stated there should be warnings to inform people that nobody should walk on the bumpy tiles. Mr. Sheehan recommended an announcement, *please show courtesy to persons in wheelchairs*. Chair Posner referred this topic to the BRS and stated there is a comment in the Board letter for WMATA to develop visual and verbal information about courtesy on the platform that could go along with bicycle and stroller policies.

Ombudsman Report:

Mr. Shaffer provided an update on the lighting within Metrorail station. Thus far, lighting has been completed at the following stations: Farragut West, Federal Triangle, Bethesda, U Street, Columbia Heights, Archives, Water Front, Union Station, Metro Center (lower platform), L'Enfant (upper platform), and Gallery Place (lower platform). Next weekend, lighting will be updated at the following three stations: Pentagon, Pentagon City, and Crystal City. Lighting work is performed at the time of track work. Completion is expected by the end of the year.

Mr. Shaffer also provided information about the Metro website. A new round of testing for accessibility has begun. A vendor has been hired to do the testing. Mr. Shaffer will work with the web-team for remediation and prioritization. A lot of website accessibility

work is being done as per the Section 508. Section 508 guidelines are adhered to first, followed by what is most important to riders.

Mr. Sheehan inquired how would the improvements be rolled out. Mr. Shaffer informed they are going on a development site; accumulate for approximately one week; then a roll out of the enhancements when finished. Mr. Sheehan inquired whether it would be helpful for the committee to provide feedback first. Mr. Shaffer welcomed the idea.

Chair Posner provided feedback on the ability to listen into the meetings, expressing concern that the meetings can only be heard through the Internet Explorer browser. He stated that it would be good to have other options, such as Firefox, Google Chrome, and Safari. For persons with hearing disabilities, it would be good to have text of the meetings. Mr. Shaffer stated that the automatic speech to text software could be added.

Mr. Sheehan asked is WMATA held to the Section 508A or AA. Mr. Shaffer stated WMATA is heading for AA.

Mr. Calabria shared feedback that he received from John Federico that the quality of transcripts has been very clear for the past few months. Chair Posner stated quality is impacted based on how well the microphones are used by the members. Mr. Shaffer agreed and stated that external noises do impact the quality, and that he will look into the speech to text feature.

Train Announcements

Chair Posner asked for a motion, requesting to invite the person in-charge of WMATA announcements to an AAC or the BRS meeting. The motion was approved.

Mr. Oberg commented about the document that was shared by Chair Posner prior to the meeting and stated the AAC could comment on three places where ridership is decreasing: people, service-reliability, and fares. There is no mention of disability in that document. There are five sub-categories. People with disabilities are part of ridership and should be taken in to consideration.

Chair Posner recommended the following to be addressed with the Rail Operations representative: difference in dwell-time and speed, time for announcements, utilization of five seconds of dead-time, and faster trains could provide more time for announcements.

Mr. Kaffen stated there were several things discussed at previous meetings including two sets of announcements: peak and non-peak. He has also noticed the train operators want to move trains faster during non-peak hours. As a result, announcements get cut off, however, not consistently. A person who is looking for a piece of information may not reliably get that information. During the five seconds of dead-time, announcements *please mind the gap* (for 7000-series-trains) and *doors opening* should be played. Currently, announcement of *doors opening* comes on when doors are opening. Chair Posner shared his observation that on Blue/Orange/Silver lines announcements are truncated between the L'Enfant Plaza and Foggy Bottom stations. These are core

stations. Announcements are impacted not only during rush hours or non-rush hours, but station location also makes a difference.

Mr. Calabria commented on his previously shared information about the New York subway system, where the new General Manager is reviewing dwell time and the speed of trains. Mr. Calabria stated if trains could speed up in-between stations, dwell time could be increased at the platforms, resulting in additional few seconds for announcements. If that happens, problems about announcements may get resolved.

Mr. Sheehan asked about the status of trains going in automatic mode. Chair Posner stated the Red Line pilot will start this year.

Dr. Banerjee stated that the automatic visual signs on 7000-series trains are helpful for riders. Chair Posner stated it is WMATA's plan to get all new trains in the next 2 years. He asked if anyone had noticed an animation about a rider going up on the down escalator, stepping in front of a bus, and being run over. Chair Posner stated it should be easy to do an animation for bumpy tiles.

Mr. Oberg stated to make announcements more useful and effective, as a group, the AAC needs to be cognizant that the more we add to messaging, the more we contribute to bogging it down. Chair Posner added that if too much information is in an announcement, people tune it out. Mr. Ariza-Silva recommended to have an announcement for the announcements, so that riders can be educated and know where to find information.

Bicycles on Trains During Rush-Hour

Chair Posner stated bicycles are a potential disaster. As per the new policy, riders with bicycles can use escalators and all the train cars. Mr. Oberg recommended to have explicit written guidelines as done for the stroller policy. The AAC needs to offer specific advice as to what may be the best place for bicycles to be parked in the trains. Mr. Kaffen concurred and stated the policy needs to have priorities. This policy seems to be placed to generate revenue, however, analysis for cost versus inconvenience is needed.

Ms. Bush stated there are several recommendations for riders with bicycles, however, no policies are in effect, thus, cannot be enforced. She does not foresee this policy working very well. Ms. McMahan stated the draft policy by WMATA about bicycles and stroller policies carry no cost and it encourages families to ride. The trade-off will be more difficult for persons with disabilities, and there is no mention of that.

Mr. Sheehan stated if there is no policy, no one is in violation. For the stroller policy, it was recommended to make buses family friendly. How can bicycles enhance convenience for families? There may be no restriction on scooters and/or Segways. Dr. Banerjee agreed that bicycles are not essential and should be allowed during non-rush-hours, or on designated cars only. Chair Posner stated on buses, bicycles go on bike racks. Mr. Ariza-Silva recommended to have half of a car designated for bicycles with fewer seats. Mr. Calabria recommended to have the policy as a pilot. After the pilot duration, experience and data will be available for evaluation. WMATA is not coming out

with this policy without a base. There have been other transit agencies that have allowed bicycles in their system with some stipulations, as mentioned in the article that he had shared previously.

Mr. Oberg stated that to be effective, the AAC needs to frame their concern they are being impacted by this policy. Mr. Crawford stated that is an idea from beyond our shores, there are cities around the world where bikers and riders get along or not. There should be some arrangement so that everyone can benefit from it.

Riders Advisory Committee Update, Budget Public Hearings

Mr. Sheehan provided a review of WMATA's Budget as discussed at the Riders Advisory Council (RAC) meeting. The RAC's work plan included the AAC's discussions. The RAC will be interested in getting the AAC's feedback on the 8000-series railcars and lighting, among other topics. There will be three public hearings regarding WMATA's budget, one each to be held in Arlington County, Prince George's County, and at Metro Headquarters.

Chair Posner stated the hearings will begin with an hour of information followed by a presentation on the docket (items that can be discussed). For example: fares, ridership, and announcements. The AAC will get the docket. After receiving it, he will circulate the docket, and develop talking points. Chair Posner encouraged everyone to attend the hearings, held in the evenings around 6:00 pm. Staff and one or two Board Members may be present at the public hearings.

Abilities-Ride Solicitation Update

Mr. Blake stated the solicitation is public now. Interested parties are now able to review the solicitation, and if interested begin preparing their proposals. January 17th is the pre-proposal conference date. The conference will start at 4:00pm. The AAC will have an opportunity to comment, share views on the existing program in a public forum. This will allow current and potential vendors to hear what customers want from them to use their service. The AAC cannot directly address any particular prospective vendor(s). The AAC can provide their questions to Mr. Blake in the form of statements. The Request for Proposal (RFP) is available online, and proposals are due on February 13th. There will be an expedited review process to have a running process by April. The goal is to find many companies that commit to meet WMATA's standards, and hope they are spread out in the region to serve the MetroAccess customer base.

Other Items:

Ms. Rush offered to assist with rides for people who may be interested in attending the public hearings. Chair Posner complimented MetroAccess for staying open until 2:00 am on New Year's Eve.

Public Comment:

A customer brought up an issue of losing a trip credit for trip he says he did not take. He has asked MetroAccess staff to prove that he took the trip by showing where he signed for the trip. MetroAccess acknowledges that the MetroAccess driver did not get the customer's Signature, but they have other evidence that the customer took the trip. Mr.

Blake informed the customer that there are other ways to confirm a customer's trip and added that staff will work with him on this issue and find a resolution. Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated other ways are available, so we do not totally depend on customer's signatures. There are other records that demonstrate that a customer did take a ride. Trip credit will be followed up as appropriate.

Ms. Rush shared her experience when a MetroAccess driver refused to write her initials and said it is forgery. She has asked drivers to write her initials for MetroAccess rides for years. Robbie Werth, Diamond Transportation, clarified that drivers can either have the customer sign the paper for their ride, or they can write "customer" unable to sign". Ms. Bush stated that she has asked drivers to initial for her many times. Mr. Blake stated this matter will be reviewed further to ensure all the drivers follow protocol. An update will be provided at the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting.

Rico Dancy, President, National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) Organization, stated that on October 19th, at about 2:00 pm, he was held by a MTPD Officer for 2 hours for no reason at the Union Station (Massachusetts Avenue side). He asked for an interpreter but was refused and was not provided with a tablet either. He was called deaf and dumb, and the officer laughed in his face. Mr. Dancy was angry and does not appreciate that kind of behavior. Mr. Dancy said his point of coming to the AAC meeting is to train the police department. Officers need to know how to communicate with people with disabilities. He comes from a family of hearing impairment, and it is rude to say something similar even as a joke.

Chair Posner offered an apology and stated that Mr. Shaffer will contact the MTPD and find out what kind of training do they provide to officers.

Mr. Dancy also stated that in Cleveland, there is a monthly pass for persons with disabilities. Why is a similar product not offered by Metro? Chair Posner clarified that Metro does offer monthly pass(es). The passes are going to be reorganized in the new budget. The AAC is recommending a monthly pass for MetroAccess customers as well.

Mr. Calabria introduced a motion regarding the death of former President George H. W. Bush: "whereas George H. W. Bush advocated for the American with Disability Act even prior to becoming President; and Whereas he duly signed passage of the ADA in 1990, the Accessibility Advisory Committee hereby pays grateful homage to President George H. W. Bush on his death in November 2018." The motion was approved unanimously.

Bus/Rail Subcommittee Report

Mr. Calabria stated there was no quorum for the BRS meeting. Mr. Oberg stated the announcements were discussed. Chair Posner stated stroller policy was also discussed. Chair Calabria stated cashless bus pilot and expansion was discussed. Falcon Transportation's vehicle was viewed, and some problems were found, which were brought to their attention. The BRS also discussed work plan updates. Chair Posner stated there were customer comments from Ms. Rush and Ms. Bellamy.

There was a discussion about the white boards. Mr. Calabria asked about the status of white boards. Chair Posner stated some station managers may not know what a whiteboard is. They may have it, but not know about it. Mr. Blake provided his feedback of white boards during an inspection performed at the NoMA station. He looked for it and found it. Mr. Blake stated that he would request for the Quality Assurance Inspector to add white board to his list of additional items for station inspections. Many of the station managers may have them, but not know about the white board as they have not been used much. Chair Posner motioned for WMATA to implement for the white boards, ensure everyone has a white board and knows how to use it. The motion was approved.

Direction of escalators was also discussed. Chair Posner stated the down escalators are farthest from the turnstile. If it is a 6-car train, it lets customers out at a location from where they must come back to board the train. Whereas, the up-escalator lets you out right by the turnstiles. Is there a policy which escalator goes down or up or is it at the discretion of the station managers? We need to know the policy. Mr. Calabria stated the escalator direction can be reversed. Mr. Ariza-Silva stated not all stations are the same therefore, it may be quite difficult to create a policy. Mr. Calabria requested to have a guest speaker from the Escalator Department. Mr. Sheehan stated with the expansion of 8-1-car trains, it may require a review of an existing policy or creation of a new policy.

MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) Report:

Mr. Semelfort stated that the Easterseals project had been discussed, there had been 3rd meeting and 4th one will be on January 16th. Chair Posner had provided an update on the budget proposals including a recommended \$2 flat weekend fare, which may result in a \$4 flat weekend fare for some of the MetroAccess rides, and the recommended MetroAccess pass. Fare calculation was also discussed. An open discussion took place with Abilities-Ride service providers. Mr. Semelfort offered to help train their drivers and that offer is still available. Ms. Rush mentioned about the customer, with Abilities-Ride service complaints. Regency service provider stayed the entire meeting and seemed to be concerned about fixing the problems, whereas, she did not get that feeling from Silver cab service provider.

Attendance of Members:

Mr. Calabria brought up the attendance issue of new members and some of the old members, and asked what can be done about attendance and lack of responses? Chair Posner said we have 2 new members this evening. One member is present and the other is hearing the call. Steve McGann just emailed that he is out of town. Mr. Blake stated we will follow up on attendance.

Chair Posner and Ms. Rush informed of the upcoming meetings that they will miss due to travel.

Meeting Adjourned at 7:30 p.m.