



# AAC

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

### **MEETING MINUTES: MARCH 4, 2019**

#### **ATTENDEES**

Present: Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Tappan Banerjee, Carolyn Bellamy, Darnise Bush, Erin Coneys, Charlie Crawford, Melanie Jackson, Steve Kaffen, Phillippa Mezile, Anthony Oberg, Doris Ray, Paul Semelfort, and Patrick Sheehan.

Remote participation – Phil Posner.

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

Vice-Chair Rush called the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

Vice-Chair Rush started with introductions of the Committee members and the guest speaker.

#### **GENERAL MANAGER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (GM/CEO)**

Paul Wiedefeld, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer (GM/CEO), thanked the members for serving on the committee and for providing the monthly Board Reports.

Mr. Wiedefeld stated that the current service hours will continue. This decision was decided during the last Board Meeting. This decision was made, in part, to ensure Metro continues to perform the preventive maintenance that is needed for safety reasons. The topic of budgeting included the capital and operating budgets. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) is going through very challenging times on the operating side. On the capital side, WMATA is in a very good shape. The program is restored based on the dedicated revenues received last year. Capital spending is primarily focused on safety and state of good repair. One focus is on platform work, to improve physical deterioration and the accessibility level.

The operating budget is more complex. This is the first year WMATA had to develop the operating budget with the three percent cap on the operating subsidy. Several things have been proposed to improve customer service and customer initiatives. WMATA must generate more revenue by providing better services. The proposals are: no fare increase; no service cuts; \$2 flat fares on weekends; the return of automatic train operations; and a few pass enhancements. Additional proposals for discussion are new services, but those are above the 3% cap. Any new service should be funded above the cap.

The proposals for consideration by the Board are: extend the Yellow Line from Fort Totten to Greenbelt; extend all Red Line trains to Glenmont; all 8-car-trains; and extend the rush hour service from 9:30am to 10:00am and from 7:00pm to 8:30pm. This is designed to show the customers that WMATA is performing better and that we want them to come back. On March 14<sup>th</sup> there will be a report to the Finance and Capital Committee and the Board may take the final action in the second week of March for the upcoming budget. At this time, Mr. Wiedefeld invited questions from the AAC.

Chair Posner thanked Mr. Wiedefeld for coming in and added the AAC supports all that the General Manager has done. Chair Posner stated the flat weekend fare of \$2 on fixed route should result in flat weekend fare of \$4 on MetroAccess rides. The extension of peak-hour-service, with peak-fares in-effect, will adversely affect the MetroAccess ride fares as they will be double the rush hour price without getting increased service. Mr. Wiedefeld thanked Chair Posner for his support and said that with the proposals of \$2 flat fare and the rush hour service extension, the effects on MetroAccess riders are also being reviewed.

Mr. Sheehan thanked Mr. Wiedefeld and said he is pleased to hear his comments about the \$2 flat fare proposal. The change of fare calculator would mean an immense amount of work. Mr. Sheehan recommended consideration of a MetroAccess pass. Mr. Wiedefeld has heard the concern about the fare change and it is under review by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), and that the fare pass recommendation is being reviewed.

A customer asked if a monthly pass for people with disabilities was under consideration? Mr. Blake stated that, just as Mr. Wiedefeld just responded, the pass concept is under review.

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated he will follow up with Mr. Wiedefeld about the Ride-Along Program. Mr. Wiedefeld stated he uses the system daily, and constantly experiences and observes what is happening, and would like to participate in a ride-along. He added that a member of the Board recently participated in a ride with Ms. Rush.

Mr. Kaffen shared his experience about customer service. When he contacted the office, their response was very quick and generic, however, there is no subsequent follow up on the resolution. Mr. Wiedefeld stated we get hundreds of comments a day, therefore there is a lag time on the response, however, customers should get feedback. Mr. Kaffen also recommended that in conjunction with some of the recommended weekend changes, WMATA should introduce a free transfer between rail to bus. It may get people to try services on both ends. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that idea was reviewed, however there was decision to focus on getting the flat \$2 weekend fare first to show customers that we understand the impact of the weekend work. Mr. Kaffen also stated that WMATA has a lot of passes. If tourists know there is a pass they can utilize, WMATA can benefit.

Mr. Semelfort stated the AAC is discussing purchase of sedans for MetroAccess fleet and hopes the committee can see more models and can provide input. Mr. Semelfort attended the pre-proposal conference for the Abilities-Ride Program, sent his questions to the Procurement Office and would like to get an update. The AAC wants to make sure the vendors handle customers with disabilities with respect, and that they have better reservation procedures. Mr. Wiedefeld stated the process leading to the possible purchase of sedans for MetroAccess fleet will ensure the AAC gets to review and give feedback. Concerning the Abilities-Ride Program, AAC feedback has been instrumental in our efforts to provide MetroAccess customers with more options.

Ms. Mezile stated there is constant flooding at the U Street station on the 13<sup>th</sup> Street mezzanine by the entrance and added that people have slipped. Mr. Wiedefeld stated he will follow up on this immediately.

Ms. Jackson, a Red Line rider shared her experience of a 30 minute longer wait times at the Glenmont station than at the Silver Spring station, and asked if there is any improvement coming up? Mr. Wiedefeld stated the proposal is to extend all Red Line trains to Glenmont. Ms. Jackson uses the reduced fare SmarTrip® card and recently lost \$20, and she is having a difficult time getting that money back. Mr. Wiedefeld asked if she recently wrote to him about it and added that he spoke with the CFO about this situation, and that she should have a resolution soon.

A customer stated WMATA was planning to reduce Metrorail service. A suggestion was made to plan/coordinate with the ride-hailing/taxi services. What is the status? The customer added that since WMATA has never operated MetroAccess service directly, why not consider operating MetroAccess service directly and expand the general paratransit service? Mr. Wiedefeld stated we are still exploring on the taxi and the Transportation Network Companies (TNC) services. We may be put in a Request for Proposals (RFP) and see what kind of response we get. Anything we do must be per Federal regulations.

Mr. Sheehan stated the AAC appreciates all the support Mr. Wiedefeld and the Board have given on the on-going lighting project. Studying the findings in the Easterseals project on real-time information for MetroAccess vehicles and putting those in to effect will give a boost for MetroAccess riders. The AAC will have a presentation about the Bus Transportation Project. A robust bus system that not only feeds into the rail stations, but also supports riders who do not have rail stations nearby is needed. Mr. Wiedefeld stated out of the million passengers that WMATA serves a day, roughly 400,000 of those are on Metrobus. The effort was initiated to ensure efficiency in serving the most people. It is beyond just the Metrobus. As a region, there are a lot of bus operators (transit agencies) and more efficient and better ways to serve our customers make sense.

Mr. Wiedefeld thanked the AAC for having him. Vice-Chair Rush thanked Mr. Wiedefeld for coming and that the AAC looks forward to seeing him again in the year.

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA, BOARD REPORT, AND PRIOR MEETING MINUTES**

### **The February 4, 2019 Meeting Minutes were tabled.**

Vice-Chair Rush had commented about the silent increase on MetroAccess and the presenter had said yes, however, “yes” was missing in the minutes. Mr. Blake stated it will be added. Vice-Chair Rush stated a gentleman wanted to get on the list (MetroAccess) and stated that Mr. Blake responded by saying “there is no list.” Vice-Chair Rush stated she cannot agree with that, and she does not want it on record that she acknowledged that there is no list. In fact, she wants the record to reflect that she knows there is or at least was a list at the time of the meeting.

Ms. Bellamy stated nothing she said to Mr. Blake is in the minutes. Mr. Blake stated let us review the recording, and if necessary, submit a set of updated minutes to the AAC. Mr. Blake reminded the AAC that the meeting minutes are designed to capture the salient points only, not replicate a court reporter recording of the meetings.

Ms. Ray asked for clarification if at the next AAC meeting the committee is going to adopt two sets of minutes? Mr. Blake clarified that yes two sets of meeting minutes will be voted on during the next meeting.

**The meeting agenda was approved as amended.**

Ms. Bellamy proposed to have a discussion on the purchase of sedans for the MetroAccess fleet.

**The Board Report was approved as amended.**

Chair Posner stated he has added the information provided from Mr. Ariza-Silva. Ms. Ray asked if the letter includes the importance of having sufficient room in the sedans for a white-cane? Chair Posner stated if Ms. Ray provides him with the verbiage that she wants added, it can be added in the Board Report.

**BUS TRANSFORMATION PROJECT**

Dalia Leven, Consulting Manager, AECOM, provided an introduction and overview of the project. The genesis of this project has been the fact that the region has evolved continuously, and transportation and mobility have evolved significantly over the last 10 to 20 years. An argument could be made it has evolved in the last few years, but the bus system has stayed largely the same over that time. The aim is to review and see how to re-think the bus system to better serve the region. Some of those changes have been the introductions of TNCs for the last five years, but also the buses are getting slower. Bus speeds have decreased in the last decade and are projected to get slower as traffic in the region is going to get worse. Ms. Leven provided a presentation followed by questions from the AAC.

Mr. Crawford thanked Ms. Leven and asked if there is a vision of what can be realistically achieved for the people with needs? Ms. Leven stated that is still being drafted. This is a long-term project.

Ms. Ray stated in the surveys, shared in the presentation, there was no mention of persons with disabilities and finding out of their usage. The TNCs were mentioned, but not taxis, why? How you are looking at funding and the operations? The District of Columbia and Montgomery County put in more money in the bus system and they get more operating money. Same is the case with the Arlington County. Fairfax County does not do that. How can we correct some of this? Much of the cross-county service has changed into shorter bus routes with transfers or intercounty bus services. Ms. Leven stated in the survey she did not believe questions on disabilities were asked, but she can check on that. They had taxi in responses, but because the number was very small it was not included in the presentation. They are looking at the effects of funding, and how

funding shapes as far as how the service is provided. They are looking at service in the region with regional needs and benefits, and on how the funds are utilized.

Mr. Oberg asked regarding the core challenges, is the project going to be dynamic enough potentially dealing with upcoming changes? Ms. Leven stated they know that the things will change. They hope the strategy they are developing will work with jurisdictions on how they function and decide, is going to impact the project.

Mr. Sheehan recommended that the disability community needs to be one of the primary focus groups to talk with. The accessible intersections will be helpful, but the floating bus stops is not a good idea.

Vice-Chair Rush thanked Ms. Leven and hopes to have the project team again.

### **WMATA BUDGET: COMMITTEE DISCUSSION**

Chair Posner stated that the discussion will be based off the last Finance and Capital Committee meeting and asked are there any questions about the budget?

Ms. Coneys asked if a flat weekend fare of \$2 on fixed route will result in a flat weekend fare of \$4 on MetroAccess rides? Mr. Sheehan stated that is what we are advocating. Chair Posner talked about WMATA's current free-transfer policy from bus-to-rail and rail-to-bus within 20 minutes. Mr. Sheehan clarified the reason for the 20-minute time limit is so that riders do not take a bus in the morning and still avail a free transfer at night.

Mr. Oberg asked what is on March 14<sup>th</sup>, as mentioned by Mr. Wiedefeld. Chair Posner stated the final (budget) will go to the Finance and Capital Meeting, and then to the full Board on March 14<sup>th</sup>. Both meetings will be on the same day.

Ms. Ray stated she sees the transfer from rail-to-bus, however, not from bus-to-rail when utilizing the Fairfax Connector buses. Chair Posner clarified the free transfer policy is on Metro vehicles and apparently Fairfax County does not honor that.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

The first customer asked how to report a complaint on a bus operator, and what is the process of reporting the complaint. Mr. Blake stated if your complaint is specifically about disability or accessibility then David Shaffer, Ombudsman, ADAP, is the right person. If your complaint is about a bus driver being rude, you can still call Mr. Shaffer at 202-962-1100, however, you should also contact the Customer Relations Office and report it.

The second customer provided three concerns:

- 1) No-showed for a trip on February 25<sup>th</sup>, and a refund for \$25 to her destination.
- 2) The inadequate scheduling for today's ride that caused her to be delayed.
- 3) Does the AAC or WMATA have any say/control on the Transport DC Program?

Mr. Blake addressed customer's concerns. The customer was advised to write to the office about her first complaint. Concerning the second comment, the matter of scheduling

will be reviewed. Regarding the Transport DC service, WMATA does not have control over that. WMATA helped facilitate the start of the service, but Transport DC is a DC Government service.

#### ABILITIES-RIDE and TRANSPORT DC:

There was a discussion about the Abilities-Ride and Transport DC Programs.

Vice-Chair Rush stated when a customer has problems with the Abilities-Ride or Transport DC services, even though WMATA introduces them as alternate services, they say that they have no control over them. Mr. Blake stated WMATA does help introduce the services to MetroAccess customers in a subsidized manner, but WMATA does not control these privately owned and operated services. The contracts WMATA has with these providers relate to the payment of a portion of a customer's fare in exchange for the companies agreeing to a set of standards WMATA outlined. WMATA establishes these partnerships to give customers more choices. When something goes wrong WMATA wants to hgear about it and will follow up with the company. Vice-Chair Rush stated and if customers do not like alternate services, they can use MetroAccess, is that what you were going to say? Mr. Blake stated yes, MetroAccess is our business. Alternate services are there for customers to have more options and flexibility.

Ms. Bush stated as advocates, we are supposed to help our constituents. Mr. Blake stated if you want us to help facilitate, please write a letter, that may be the best route. Ms. Bush stated her letter is already on the way to the DC Mayor's Office.

Mr. Sheehan stated WMATA can indicate whether a certain company is going to be a part of the Abilities-Ride or not, therefore, has the leverage to help modify the behaviors of the service providers. Mr. Blake confirmed and stated we have tried to improve the systems and performance of the existing providers, and with the expansion, more competition is being introduced. If one service provider does not provide the service needed, there will be other providers customers can choose from.

Ms. Ray stated regarding the Abilities-Ride Program, WMATA has leverage since the Metro operating subsidy for MetroAccess is being used for the alternate services. Mr. Blake stated if the alternate service providers do not perform up to standards, we just do not provide the subsidy to them and the customer may decide to use MetroAccess or another alternate service. Ms. Ray asked about subsidies for the Transport DC program. Mr. Blake stated TransportDC is a Government of DC program. Instead of sending money for MetroAccess, they use their own money and is utilized for Transport DC. Mr. Sheehan asked if DC Government is using the money for Transport DC? Mr. Blake stated yes, the customer pays \$5 and the DC Government pays \$23, and they can use the remaining savings for other projects as needed.

Mr. Crawford stated his concern about relationship of Abilities-Ride and Metro, amount of dollars paid to comply with the RFP. The RFP provides conditions that Metro expects. If those conditions are not met, then Metro can take them off the program, has that been a realistic leverage that has been utilized? They should consistently get better. Mr. Blake

stated so far, we have not found any action so egregious to remove a company from the program. We have told them they can still improve. We are now adding competition. If a company does not provide better service, they are going to be out through customer choice.

**BUS/RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT:**

Mr. Oberg provided the Bus/Rail Subcommittee Report. Main topics discussed were: update on the station lighting, information about the Bus Transformation Project, information on dwell and the running times, and a presentation on Mobility Device safety.

**METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT:**

Mr. Semelfort proposed two motions:

- 1) Provide more time for the discussion on MetroAccess vehicles on the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting (MAS) Agenda, on March 18, 2019.
- 2) Have an insert added in the Customer Guide to include names of the current service providers, contact information, hours of operation, and modes of payment accepted.

Ms. Ray recommended to have the insert after the service providers have been decided. Ms. Bush recommended to include, under contact: digital, text, or telephone voice. Both motions carried.

Mr. Semelfort provided a report on the MAS meeting from February. There was a discussion on the sedan that the members saw last month. Mr. Semelfort asked Mr. Blake what does the non-binding vote mean, and what information is being brought by the Easterseals representative?

Mr. Blake stated he does not have the specifics that the Easterseals representative will be presenting. In the MAS meeting, after the members saw the vehicle there was a robust discussion. He wants to hear from the committee members. There will be a voting process after all the vehicles have been seen by the AAC. Mr. Semelfort stated this would need to come back to the AAC Meeting. Mr. Blake stated he would like all the members to experience the vehicles.

The discussion about sedans continued and Vice-Chair Rush asked what does non-binding mean? Mr. Blake stated it means that the AAC is making their voice heard, but WMATA is not bound to purchase the vehicle make and model that the AAC votes in favor of. Vice-Chair Rush stated that means you are going to buy the vehicles that you are going to buy. Mr. Blake stated Metro is going to make a business decision. If the decision is against the vote of the AAC, we are showing you the vehicles ahead of time and taking your feedback. The AAC decision is not final, it will be inclusive of the factors leading to the final decision.

Vice-Chair Rush stated since there is no RFP you may have already purchased the vehicles. Mr. Blake stated that WMATA has not purchased any new sedans to be added to the MetroAccess fleet, but if members believe that the vehicles have been purchased,

you can request Public Access for Records Policy (PARP) from our lawyers. Vice-Chair Rush stated if 10 of the members like one vehicle and 5 like another vehicle, why even bother to have the words non-binding? Mr. Blake stated because WMATA is trying to be transparent and learn from the previous experiences, particularly the introduction of the Ford Transit. He wants to hear from the AAC in an official capacity.

Chair Posner stated he has discussed with Mr. Blake about what is important in the purchase: price, accessibility, and mileage. When the committee reviews the vehicles and then votes, we want to not just say we like a car, but also for what reasons. We like a car because it has good mileage, or it is for less price, etc. Mr. Blake stated one very important factor is comfort to the customer. Riders should be comfortable while riding.

Mr. Semelfort asked Allison Anderson, MetroAccess, if there are any materials for the Customer Guide, and if so to please forward them to the committee before the meeting.

Ms. Bellamy provided comments and history about the sedans being taken out of the fleet. She said they were not comfortable. People think they are going to be riding alone. She added that you are going to discriminate against the drivers; dogs sit on the seats, and cars must be washed afterwards. People with disabilities get bigger in size and have difficulty getting in and out of the cars. More people will be forced in a car that means more touching against each other. You will get us any car you can get cheap. Ms. Bellamy also said if she makes comments, why are they not in the minutes?

Mr. Blake stated if the AAC wants to write their own minutes, it is allowed. We capture the salient points. Ms. Bellamy stated she was arguing with Mr. Blake in the last meeting. Mr. Blake stated arguing is not a salient point. Regarding the sedans, during the last fiscal year we did 120,000 MetroAccess trips in cabs of various shapes and sizes. During this fiscal year we anticipate almost 200,000 MetroAccess trips in cabs of various shapes and sizes, makes and models, with customers of various shapes and sizes, and drivers of various shapes and sizes. There is no discrimination in the use of sedans for the delivery of paratransit public transportation services.

#### **COMBINE BRS/RAIL MEETINGS - COMMITTEE DISCUSSION:**

Vice-Chair Rush stated we need the two hours and separate meetings. Chair Posner stated this will be a discussion, not a vote. Ms. Bellamy stated there are too many topics to be discussed. Ms. Ray stated she agrees with Vice-Chair and hopes we will not combine the two meetings. Vice-Chair Rush stated Dr. Banerjee brought up the topic that attending three meetings is too much and having two meetings will improve the attendance. If someone is not able to attend the meetings, then with dignity you need to step down. Mr. Oberg stated for all the reasons mentioned he agrees that the meetings should not combine, and as per the by-laws, members must attend only two meetings.

The topic is tabled again.

**MEETING ADJOURNED AT 7:30PM**