



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: May 6, 2019

Attendees

Present: Phil Posner (Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Tapan Banerjee, Carolyn Bellamy, Darnise Bush, Tino Calabia, Erin Coneys, Charlie Crawford, Melanie Jackson, Steven Kaffen, Philippa Mezile, Anthony Oberg, Doris Ray, Denise Rush, Paul Semelfort, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Chair Phil Posner called the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting to order at 5:30 pm, welcomed everyone, and started with introductions of the Committee members.

Approval of Agenda, Board Report, and Prior Meeting Minutes

The Agenda was approved.

The minutes from April 1, 2019, meeting were approved as written.

The Board Letter was approved.

Mr. Semelfort recommended to include the topic of the MetroAccess Scheduling Window to the Board Report. Chair Posner stated it will be added to the Board Report verbally this month, and in the written report next month.

Bus Transportation Project Presentation

Chair Posner presented the Bus Transportation Project (BTP) report. He also provided an update about the Cashless Bus Pilot (CBP), that for now, the CBP is on hold.

The BTP is comprised of an Executive Steering Committee, WMATA Leadership Team, Technical Team that consists of the regional transit agencies, and an Advisory Strategy Panel that has representation by members of various groups from the region.

The strategy of the BTP was to identify and implement steps to make the local bus network a world class travel option for all the region's residents. Some of the challenges identified are growing congestion, affordability, and mobility. The BTP re-envisioned the bus network as a coordinated regional transportation solution that addresses the changing needs of customers, leverages innovative technology, and employs a sustainable cost structure. More than 25 key recommendations were introduced for consideration for the broad range of public stakeholders in this region. The vision is that bus will be the mode of choice on the region's roads by the year 2030. To accomplish this vision a regional strategy, goals, recommendations and collaboration of local jurisdictions/agencies is needed. One of the strategies of the BTP is to transform bus service from being a last resort for a customer to being more appealing and desirable. Currently the bus service is divided within regions. The BTP transforms to a stronger bus service that connects the region.

The BTP also shows how the strategies can be put into action. For instance, there are recommendations and emphasized importance about how the bus system should be customer focused and an easy to use option that people want to ride. At this time, Chair Posner invited questions from the AAC members.

Mr. Oberg asked how the sudden road changes will be communicated regionwide? Chair Posner stated the effort is to have one entity guiding the regional transit. The local transits will be guided by the local Operating Control Centers (OCC). The Global Positioning System (GPS) will have a big role to play as well. The local jurisdictions are going to be involved in this effort.

Dr. Banerjee stated the various kinds of GPSs need to be updated frequently. Chair Posner stated the technical team is aware of the issue.

A customer stated a lot of the issues had been discussed for years and should have been implemented already. The BTP full draft report is available only online, but not everyone might be aware of it. How will people with various disabilities will have access to it? Chair Posner stated there are 3 open houses scheduled and feedback is invited from as many people as possible. For everyone who has been involved, it is requested they make contact with their contacts and get the information out to as many people as possible.

Mr. Calabria stated the AAC members involved could have kept us abreast of happenings since September. He talked about a Cleveland transit service that runs 24 hours all week.

Mr. Kaffen stated the AAC was the most highly represented group and that made a difference about a few topics that were brought forth. If the issues from the past are brought up again, that shows that there is enough investment of time and energy on those topics. There is a lack of customer involvement and it needs to be increased.

Ms. Ray stated the service has changed in Fairfax County. It brings customers to the closest Metro station and then different bus routes take them to various parts. The regional bus service provided by Metro had a larger service area with extended service hours. The project is important, therefore, for better public feedback there should be hearings about extended hours in all 6 Virginia service areas. Chair Posner stated he will mention this in the next Board Report.

A customer asked if interpreters will be available at the open houses? Chair Posner stated yes, interpreters will be available at all open houses.

Ms. Ray asked if the assisted listening device will be available and whether the Job Access with Speech (JAWS) and MAGic will be used? Chair Posner stated it will be mentioned.

A customer stated Metro serves across jurisdictional lines. When a local jurisdiction takes over the bus route, service gets cut. While the route is serviced by Metro, hours and days

are served better in comparison to when the local jurisdiction takes over the route to serve. The jurisdictional lines should be given back to Metro.

Chair Posner stated when service is cut MetroAccess customers are also adversely impacted if they were not grand-fathered. Customers need to contact their local jurisdictions to have an impact.

Mr. Crawford stated the purpose of the AAC is to provide a perspective of persons who use the transportation system with disabilities and that the transportation system is amiable to our needs. The transportation system changes may be advantageous to one segment of population, but disadvantageous for other population segments. The changes can be made, but not at the expense of the disabled community.

Mr. Sheehan asked if there would be a coordination with the OCC with respect to the bus routes and bus locations within regions and jurisdictions, and Metro buses and regional buses? It will be interesting to see how it gets coordinated.

Chair Posner stated that is one of the suggestions. The District's Department of Transportation (DDOT), Virginia's Department of Transportation (VDOT), and Maryland's Department of Transportation (MDOT) are all going to review that. Chair Posner proposed for the discussion to continue in the Bus/Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting.

MetroAccess Scheduling Window – Upcoming Changes

Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services (ACCS), provided information about the upcoming changes for the MetroAccess Scheduling Window. Mr. Blake provided information about MetroAccess scheduling terms: pick-up request time, scheduling window, pick-up time, pick-up window, and appointment time.

Mr. Blake stated, currently MetroAccess uses a 1-hour scheduling window, i.e. 30 minutes before through 30 minutes after the pick-up request time. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title 49, Part 47, Subpart 37131, Sections A3-B2, allows for a 2-hour scheduling window, i.e. 1-hour before through 1-hour after the pick-up request time. Effective June 1, 2019 until June 30, 2020, MetroAccess will use a 90-minute scheduling window. Beginning July 1, 2020, MetroAccess will use the ADA 2-hour scheduling window.

Mr. Blake provided information about a new Appointment Time commitment. For trips booked by appointment time, MetroAccess is determined to arrive before the appointment time. However, MetroAccess is now adding the commitment to not drop a customer off more than 30-minutes prior to the Appointment Time.

Mr. Blake responded to Mr. Semelfort's questions received via an email.

1) How will the first part of this MetroAccess policy change, which begins on July 1, 2019 be clearly communicated to customers to minimize confusion and complaints? Simply adding it as part of the IVR message and/or FAQ as an option (on the telephone) is not enough. Since this is a policy major policy change, I strongly suggest that customers are

afforded the opportunity to have this policy in writing (if feasible) before beginning full implementation.

Mr. Blake stated the date is June 1st. We plan a four-stage type of communications: Phone calls will be made to every customer who had a dial-up trip in the past 90 days. We have 45,000 customers who are eligible for MetroAccess. More than half of those customers never use the service. We are going to reach out to customers who have either called the call-center to book their trips or used the online web-booking. There will be an "on-hold messaging", an "email/text alert", and information will be on the website.

2) As part of this new policy implementation, what is the plan for training MetroAccess reservations staff as one could presume they will need to use a revised script when communicating to customers? What is your timeline for having this training complete?

Mr. Blake stated MV Transportation, OCC contractor, has been made aware of this decision, and the reservation system is being prepared. Once MetroAccess management gives MV the official word, MV will prepare its team members for this adjustment. All the MV team members will be fully versed of this policy by May 31, 2019.

3) As part of this new policy implementation with reservations, will customers be still allowed the opportunity to be given the two chances to accept a desirable pick up time based on the reservation agents' computer search before being transferred to another agent if they do not find the pick-up time offered to them acceptable on this first round which is the current policy?

Mr. Blake stated yes, customers will still be allowed to negotiate the pick-up times, however, whereas customers may get closer to the times they desire, there could be a possibility they may end up getting further away from the desired time. That is the case today also. Going forward the window time will extend by 15 minutes at each end.

4) Will this new policy be clearly explained and incorporated in the revised MetroAccess Customer Guide that customers will be receiving at some point this year?

Mr. Blake responded yes, it will be explained and incorporated in the Customer Guide.

5) Will this new policy affect the length of the pick-up window and time traveling based on a customer's appointment time?

Mr. Blake stated this will not result in changes to either the pick-up window or the fixed route equivalency for allowable trip length time.

6) Please explain and justify your rational for both parts of this major policy change and timing of the implementation of each reservations change using data and statistics and whether this is allowable under the ADA.

Mr. Blake stated the rational for this change is to further align the MetroAccess service with the strict language of the ADA and further distinguish differences between the

MetroAccess public transportation service and the more individualized services being offered through the expanded Abilities-Ride program.

7) With this new major policy change in reservations, will Trapeze be able to accommodate this new change in time before the date of implementation to minimize major technical errors with online booking?

Mr. Blake stated yes, however, if we find that there are some technical aspects that are not addressed properly and will cause some disruptions in service, we will delay the implementation date.

8) For the guarantee or promise of WMATA for not dropping off MetroAccess customers no earlier than 30 minutes before their appointment time, please explain in detail how will this plan be fully implemented and communicated to customers, that is, accessible to all customers and given to customers in writing. Is it feasible that MACS staff can deliver on this promise/guarantee with consistency and fidelity? There are certain situations, I can predict and share where it is feasible and other where this might be impossible to fully implement.

Mr. Blake stated it is a commitment not a guarantee for not dropping off MetroAccess customers any earlier than 30 minutes prior to their appointment time.

Mr. Semelfort had a follow up question, would there be leaflets dropped in the vehicles? Mr. Blake stated that is something we can do if it is a recommendation by the AAC.

Chair Posner asked if the 2-hour window is going to have any impact on the fare calculation? Mr. Blake stated yes, the Fare Calculator is going to be programmed to look for trips 45 minutes prior and after the scheduled time for the lowest fare. When it gets changed to 2-hours in 2 years, the Fare Calculator is going to be programmed for it to look for an hour prior and 1 hour after the scheduled time for the lowest fare.

Chair Posner stated that bounces customers out of the non-rush-hour service. That would require a public hearing as that is going to have a fare change, and that is going to require a Title VI. Mr. Blake stated we have reviewed this. It has been determined that a change in the MetroAccess Scheduling Window will not have an impact on the customer fare, which is why this proposed change is not going to a public hearing.

Chair Posner stated he assumes that the customers will not be driven around for an hour to keep the commitment of not getting dropped off 30 minutes prior to the appointment time. Mr. Blake stated fixed route equivalency is the key language. If it takes more than 2 hours on bus and rail from point A to point B, it can take more than 2 hours on MetroAccess. Our key is to create routing and scheduling that maximizes our fixed route equivalency of time in the delivery of passengers. Chair Posner asked Mr. Blake if the AAC could be provided with data as to how many customer reach destination more than 30 minutes prior to the appointment time. Mr. Blake stated we are already evaluating, and we will happy to tell you the progress we are making.

Ms. Ray asked for clarification on the 2-hour scheduling window for a request time of 4 pm. She stated her concern is that customers are going to be forced to be picked up much earlier or later than their needs. She suggested to pull back the implementation date and allow the time for communication to MetroAccess customers. Mr. Blake clarified that for a 4pm Pick-up Request Time the 2-hour scheduling window will begin at 3 pm and end at 5 pm. The pick-up window will remain 30 minutes; 15 minutes before thru 15 minutes after the Pick-up Time.

Dr. Banerjee asked for clarification about the dwell time with respect to the new commitment of customers not getting dropped off 30 minutes prior to the appointment time. A wheelchair user would require additional time. Would that time need to be added towards the appointment time? Mr. Blake stated the earliest drop-off time would be 30 minutes prior to the appointment time. The dwell time is taken into consideration along with other things, such as fixed route equivalency. He is recommending for personalized dwell time as it may be different for each customer. MetroAccess wants to take customers to their destination on time, but not too much earlier than the appointment time.

Ms. Rush stated to Mr. Blake, since you have been acting as AGM-ACCS you have made more changes than we have had in years. The upcoming change is going to majorly affect the cost of the service and encourage MetroAccess users not to use MetroAccess. Customers are going to get much earlier or later pick-up times. The system is doing everything for people not to use MetroAccess and use the alternatives, which are not that great either.

Mr. Blake clarified that if the trip is booked based on appointment time, there will be no impact by the change to the Scheduling Window. The new commitment is not to drop off the customer any earlier than 30 minutes prior to the appointment time. He added that all MetroAccess trips have a fixed route equivalent trip time. About the fare, if a customer is traveling during rush hour, they will pay a higher fare. By expanding the scheduling window, the possibility of the fare reducing also increases. This should encourage customers to book their trips by appointment time and have subscription trips.

Ms. Bush stated customers are going to pay more. Chair Posner stated as per the weekly data, 2/3 of customers pay much less and only 1/3 of the customers pay the maximum fare. Mr. Blake recommended for Ms. Bush to get subscription trips for better scheduling.

A customer stated it is indeed done to move more people off MetroAccess. They are hoping to move people on Abilities-Ride. So far, MetroAccess has indeed provided more luxuriated service than required as per the ADA.

Mr. Sheehan stated if subscription trips provide better scheduling time, why not to give discounts to customers for having subscription trips. Chair Posner stated if we can get more people on to subscription trips, we can have better scheduling and routing.

Ms. Bellamy asked Mr. Blake if drivers or routes are cut every day? She said you are cutting choices for people. When is it going to be not about business, but about the

people. Mr. Blake stated on a daily basis we look at the overall demand for the service, we match that demand with routes, and if demand does not reach the level of our total route supply, we do cut routes for that particular day.

Chair Posner recommended to call it a pilot policy change.

Elevator Call Buttons

Mr. Oberg stated this should be the last discussion for the elevator call buttons and he had shared the draft with all the members via email to have the final approval today.

Ms. Ray asked for a discussion and stated she had sent email with concerns and those were not cited. Ms. Ray recommended to have specifics from Chapter 7 and would like her comments incorporated in the final version. Mr. Oberg had added the comments in general, and had addressed all the comments. Since he did not hear otherwise, he was under the assumption that it was approved. Chair Posner recommended to add Ms. Ray's comments in the appendix as an addendum.

Public Comment:

A customer stated Florida and Chicago have a monthly paratransit pass. Why we do not take advantage of that here. The customer also asked how does Metro Police communicate with a deaf person? David Shaffer, Ombudsman, ADAP, stated he is working on scheduling a meeting with the Safety Chief about the issue of Police Department's communication with a deaf/hard of hearing customer. Mr. Blake stated the AAC should continue to advocate for the passes, if that is a priority of committee.

Mr. Calabia stated there was an article to increase Metro funding in yesterday's Washington Post. The House has a bill to increase the Federal funding to \$300 million. Senator Chris Van Hollen, Maryland, is asking for only \$200 million. Mr. Calabia recommended everyone to give their feedback for higher funding.

A customer commented about more ridership be provided to the Abilities-Ride providers, especially to the Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV). There are 50% more Uber and Lyft drivers in the Washington DC area, and they may all be part of the Abilities-Ride program. Ridership is going to be dumped on limited resources that are already in use. Mr. Blake asked for clarification, did the customer say that there are a lot of WAVs sitting? If that is the case, then we need to get them off the lots and in use. We are projecting 2.5 million trips on 750 MetroAccess vehicles and 150,000 trips on the Abilities-Ride program.

Ms. Ray stated there is a safety issue at lower level of the Metro Center station. The lighting is worse than it was before the installation. It is very dark and there is no overhang light. Ms. Ray cannot see the yellow stripes on escalators because of the high intensity lights on escalators. The new escalators have less tactile warning because the gap is less.

The issue was moved to the BRS.

Ms. Bush commented about a MetroAccess concern. Mr. Blake asked for her to send details in an email and to bring it to the MAS Meeting.

Bus/Rail Subcommittee (BRS) Report:

Mr. Calabria stated everyone has the minutes. At the BRS meeting, the Lyft service was mentioned - that they do not consider themselves under the ADA, he had also sent an email about it and that should be taken up in the next meeting. Mr. Calabria asked Mr. Blake if the retro-fitting of the security barriers would be finished this month?

Mr. Blake stated yes, they will be finished this month.

MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) Report:

Mr. Semelfort had 8 questions regarding the upcoming scheduling policy on MetroAccess.

Meeting adjourned at 7:32pm.