



# AAC

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

### Meeting Minutes: November 4, 2019

#### Attendees

Present: Phil Posner (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair) Elver Ariza-Silva (Second Vice-Chair), Darnise Bush, Tino Calabria, Vanessa Coles, Charlie Crawford, Rico Dancy, Melanie Jackson, Steve Kaffen, Mary Kay McMahon, Phillippa Mezile, Anthony Oberg, Doris Ray, Paul Semelfort, and Patrick Sheehan.

#### Call to Order

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

#### Approval of Agenda

Chair Posner welcomed everyone and started with compliments to the Accessibility Excellence Awards, followed by introductions of the Committee members.

The Agenda was amended to have the Management and Budget prior to the approval of both the Board Report and the previous meeting minutes.

#### Management and Budget

Yetunde Olumide, Vice President, Office of Management and Budget Services, shared an overview of the fiscal year 2021 budget that will be proposed to WMATA's Board of Directors later this week. For better understanding of the process for new members, Chair Posner asked Ms. Olumide to explain the Capital and the Operating budgets, as well as the sequence of the events that the Board will go through with the Office of Management and Budget Service before approval. Ms. Olumide stated, she would be discussing the \$2 billion operating budget for Metrorail, Metrobus, MetroAccess, and service maintenance throughout the region. Roughly 45% to 46% for these services are paid for by revenue generated by passenger fares and non-passenger revenues. The balance is paid for by funding of our jurisdictions: Maryland, District of Columbia, and Virginia.

The budget development process begins early in the Fall with staff going through a series of document and information gathering, ensuring we have detailed information of what builds up the \$2 billion budget. We review this process with internal and external stakeholders. Within the organization, each department is engaged, making certain their maintenance and operational activities are considered. The workforce it takes to provide the service is considered as well, including any collective bargaining or any inflationary increases. This process begins in an August-September time frame. In November, the General Manager's budget is proposed to the Board of Directors. In January, we have public hearings and input. We then go to deliberations on what is presented to the Board and the public. The budget is expected in the March time frame and we begin a new fiscal year on July 1, 2020.

The Board of Directors approval for FY20 was used as the base for FY21 and an increase of 3% is added to arrive at FY21 capped subsidy. The capped subsidy means that our budget can grow by no more than 3% year over year. Staff then adds-in legislatively excluded costs to determine the total annual subsidy. Within the legislatures we work with, there are some mandates and expenses that can grow beyond the 3% cap. The Operating budget expense growth includes salaries and wages. Over 70% of our operating expense is based on personnel expenses, including the frontline employees who operate our trains and buses and all the fringe benefits that are associated with employee cost. We also have inflationary growth on services: the cost of our contracts escalates each year, such as the paratransit contracts. Most years those contracts inflate by more than 3%. On the paratransit side, there are some costs that are within the base.

Also factored-in the 3% growth cap are our revenue changes, such as decline in revenue generated from decline in bus ridership for the past few years, adds pressure on how much our expenses can grow and what management does to impact or curb the growth of those expenses. These cost and revenue drivers take us above the 3% mandated growth cap. The General Manager's proposal includes management actions to off-set the growth that is above the 3% cap; this year by about \$8 million. Over the past 3 years between 2018-2020, management has had \$180 million to off-set expense growth and revenue declines. This year, the proposed budget adds-on to that \$180 million. There are several initiatives within the FY21 budget that get us to closing that gap by \$8 million. They include improving service and customer experience as well as enhancing the fare options to drive the ridership.

Given the initiatives of subsidies of about \$8 million, management can get back down to the 3% mandated subsidy growth which gets us to about a \$1.159 billion subsidy request at 3%. We have exclusions to that 3% growth. The allowed costs above and beyond the 3% cap are some of the exclusions, including safety mandate growth, which is a Federal mandate. They also include escalations in the paratransit-escalations in the contract which is also a Federal mandate. Having added those expenses to the base budget we arrive at a total budget subsidy to about \$1.16 billion. The FY 21 budget also has risks and issues associated with it such as changes or agreement to our Labor Agreements. As mentioned earlier, 70% of those costs are labor related. The external factors like major events in the region, federal uncertainty, and starting of the delivery of Silver line phase 2, will impact the FY 21 budget. At this time, Ms. Olumide invited questions.

Ms. Ray asked about WMATA's plans to finance the service to prevent bus service cuts and whether exclusion is related to the services provided being fully ADA accessible. Ms. Olumide stated there are many different initiatives that are reviewed to maintain the 3% growth cap year over year, for example, improving weekend bus service not just reductions. Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Department of Access Services (ACCS), stated we do not use the 3% growth cap on the budget as an excuse for not repairing the elevators quickly or not repairing annunciators quickly, not to continue to make the strides in the accessibility that this agency has done. In terms of the law, and laws as the jurisdictions passed, the ADA paratransit service is the only part of the Metro service that was specifically exempted from the law of the 3% cap. However, our

commitment to accessibility is to have two working elevators at every station, the flashing warning edge lights, and have all those commitments remain within the 3% budget cap.

Ms. Mezile had several questions: paratransit percentage of the over-all budget, enhancement of advertisements, CBA impact on budget, and at what time is the over-time authorized and for what reasons, has it costs a fare hike for passengers? Ms. Olumide stated she can get the paratransit percentage of the over-all budget. Chair Posner stated it is a very small percentage. About advertisement enhancement, Ms. Olumide stated they are always exploring the potential advertisements. Chair Posner stated there is a new contract for the advertisement and that should provide some additional revenues. Concerning the CBA impact, Ms. Olumide stated the current contract expires in June 2020, however, we do include in the budget what we expect for the CBA going forward. We have scheduled and non-scheduled overtime to cover all shifts on buses and rails. The overtime is a small piece of over-all expenses.

Mr. Sheehan inquired whether the Abilities-Ride is part of the paratransit budget. Ms. Olumide and Chair Posner stated it is a way to reduce the over-all cost, similar to free bus and rail rides for MetroAccess customers. Mr. Sheehan further stated the 3% is the new budget constraint; the procurements going through WMATA due to option years must put a strain on WMATA budget. Ms. Olumide stated we have several types of contracts, maintenance services, professional and technical services across the entire organization. What is held above the 3% are the Federal mandates. The Federal mandates include for example: the ADA contracts. We also have safety related mandates that are also exclusion to the 3% rule. We also have legal contracts or expenses for example, that also by definition, are above the 3% growth cap.

Ms. Rush stated the \$.25 cents surcharge on the \$2 cash bus fare payment is almost discriminatory to a group of people who already do not receive the benefit of transfers and most likely pay more in fares due to various reasons. Chair Posner stated there would have to be a Title VI investigation. Ms. Rush stated the Committee it would increase the fare for MetroAccess also and urged the Committee to be at the hearings.

Ms. Coles asked has there been a consideration for an employees' strike to keep things flowing, for example MetroAccess drivers being on strike. Ms. Olumide stated there is a fund for expenses that may impact the region outside of our control, which may be expensed on events. Mr. Blake stated the contingency fund is different than the money for the MetroAccess contractors. We are holding the contractors accountable. We have also given our call center greater flexibility to disperse the trips beyond the language of the contract. The management team of each respective delivery service contractor understands that they are being watched closely and that there are ramifications if they consistently display an inability to cover the routes that have been contractually provided to them. On the other end there are expanding opportunities for the customers to use the accessible fixed routes free service, as well as the alternate services. Some of them have challenges with their drivers. The impact of that would decrease as the customers choose more convenient alternate routes for the MetroAccess service.

Ms. Olumide clarified: the extra-services-funds in the proposal is for special-events outside of our control. The special-regional-events is not meant to cover paratransit services. Mr. Blake further clarified that it is to cover for times when Metro may remain open for extra time due to a game. Ms. Olumide stated that is the proposal.

Chair Posner inquired about an update for the previously requested analysis for expense of MetroAccess flat fare. Mr. Blake stated a detailed analysis is underway. Chair Posner stated in the proposed budget there is no mention of MetroAccess weekend flat fare or a pass. Ms. Olumide stated the Board will go through deliberations on the variety of initiatives being proposed in the General Manager's budget between now and March before approving it in the March time frame. Mr. Calabria stated the Budget is almost \$2 billion and the contingency is \$3 million. He recommended for WMATA to submit a bill to the Federal Government in advance like the District of Columbia has calculated what is owed to them for the inauguration. Ms. Olumide explained in the budget proposal, that is part of the extra-services-funds. Mr. Sheehan asked whether the MetroAccess service providers contract specified penalty for not meeting the on-time performance (OTP) goal. Mr. Blake confirmed that there are penalties for contractors not meeting OTP.

A customer asked the source of funding that funds the entire WMATA budget. Ms. Olumide stated for the Operating budget, there are two kinds of funding: one is from passenger revenue, the other is by State and local jurisdictions. The Federal funds are geared towards the Capital budget. Customer asked about the percent of MetroAccess within the entire budget. Ms. Olumide stated she could provide that information at a later date. The customer asked whether \$1.16 billion was broken down evenly within the jurisdictions. Ms. Olumide stated \$1.16 billion is the number for funds from the local jurisdictions and it is not divided up one-thirds, as there is rather a complex formula for the division. Mr. Crawford commented that he would be interested in knowing about considerations given to incentives created for passengers to have more reasons to ride and Metro gaining more revenue. Chair Posner and Mr. Blake thanked Ms. Olumide for her time.

### **Approval of Board Report and Prior Meeting Minutes**

The Board Report was approved as written.

Chair Posner sent a thank you note to the Board Chair, the General Manager, and the Chief Operating Officer for attending the Accessibility Excellence Awards.

The October 7, 2019 Meeting Minutes were tabled until December 2, 2019 meeting as Ms. Ray brought up some accuracy issues and she would need to provide the accurate information by then.

Mr. Crawford called for a motion for Mr. Blake to provide update on the Abilities-Ride program and the service-providers.

### **Rail-Car Monitor Messaging**

Carol Peredo Lopez, Director, the Office of ADA Policy and Planning (ADAP), has reviewed the side screens and due to the small size, it will be difficult to place additional information. She asked for the Committee to provide their recommendations. Chair Posner recommended to divide the elevators as per the platform side of rail cars. Mr. Calabria asked about an update on the Passenger Information Display Systems (PIDS) after the presentation. Ms. Peredo Lopez informed that the contrast has been increased by 10% which would be incorporated by the end of the month. Ms. Mezile asked if the train operators would also make announcements. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated that the train operators are supposed to be making the announcements. David Shaffer, Ombudsman, ADAP, stated he has been working on this with Rail Management. Chair Posner recommended reminding train operators about making announcements in a monthly staff memo. Mr. Shaffer would share the recommendation. Mr. Ariza-Silva recommended changing the layout on the side screens in rail cars, and to freeze the screens at the time of the announcements and display the elevator announcements. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated the recommendation will be shared.

#### **Pre-Arrival Calls for MetroAccess – Update**

Mr. Blake stated the pre-arrival calls are being made to MetroAccess customers 10 minutes prior to the vehicle arrival and this new addition to service is still being tested. The contractors are ready to roll it out to everyone however, there is some more testing needed to improve the service. The Committee shared their experiences of the pre-arrival calls. Mr. Semelfort stated most of the pre-arrival calls he has received, have been good however, he shared two concerns: (1) an arrival call for a trip that does not exist, (2) the pre-arrival call was made at the beginning of the window whereas the vehicle arrived at the end of the window. Mr. Blake stated sometime things can happen to delay the vehicle by more than 10 minutes by the time you get the call and the vehicle arrives. Ms. Rush stated sometimes the pre-arrival call comes and the vehicle arrives immediately instead of arriving in 10 minutes. Ms. Bush stated 97% of the times, she gets the call 10 minutes prior to the arrival.

Mr. Blake asked the members to provide their preference for the call upon arrival versus the pre-arrival calls. Dr. Posner asked for a vote on it from people who use MetroAccess. The preference was for the pre-arrival calls with 8 votes versus 1 vote for arrival calls.

#### **Other Items:**

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated when taxi comes for his pickup instead of a MetroAccess van, he receives text messages instead of arrival calls. Mr. Blake clarified the texts come from taxi company not MetroAccess. Ms. Ray stated by default taxi companies in Virginia send text messages therefore if customer prefers a call, it must be specified. She also recommended to test the pre-arrival calls with persons with cognitive disabilities, and that announcements ahead of time need to be made to the disability community as well as to provide the information in writing.

Mr. Sheehan asked whether there was any progress on Easter Seals' real-time application (app) that was handed over to WMATA about a year ago. Mr. Blake stated we

just completed the request for information (RFI). Soon we will be going for a request for proposal (RFP) to put out for a bid for MetroAccess scheduling and dispatch software.

**Public Comment:**

A customer asked how is the low-ridership on buses calculated? He sees passengers not paying fares whereas the buses are full of standing room only. Chair Posner advised him to ask the question to WMATA Board and informed of the two ways of calculating: by fare, and by the sensors that count people boarding and exiting the bus.

A customer had a few concerns about information-flow, vacant positions of the AAC, and WMATA website upgrades. He congratulated Mr. Semelfort for being the awardee of the Hedding Award. Mr. Shaffer stated he is working on website enhancements with the Information Technology (IT) department. Mr. Blake stated we have two AAC vacancies which need to be filled by Virginia residents. We also need to be diverse in disabilities therefore, we need to have members with cognitive or intellectual disabilities, however it has been a challenge. The customer asked about a timeline. Mr. Blake stated we do not have a timeline, we are working on it.

Mr. Semelfort submitted a customer email for public comment and for customer follow up.

**Bus/Rail Subcommittee (BRS) Report:**

Mr. Calabria provided the Bus/Rail Subcommittee Report. The new Passenger Information Display Systems (PIDS) were displayed, contrast and messaging were discussed. The automatic train control was discussed briefly. The messages for rail-car monitors were discussed with various recommendations. The Committee's recommendations for rail-car design in the form of a handbook discussed and members would share the draft with the Riders Advisory Council (RAC) for their feedback.

**MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) Report:**

Mr. Semelfort provided the MetroAccess Subcommittee Report. One of the new Abilities-Ride provider was introduced to the Committee. The Director provided information about impact of closed routes on MetroAccess OTP. The MetroAccess Customer Guide update was provided in that meeting. Another update will be provided early next year.

**Other Items:**

Ms. Rush asked whether the Committee participated in recently scheduled WMATA emergency drill. None of the members participated. Dr. Poser stated a motion is needed to be sent to the Board, asking to remove the waiver. Mr. Sheehan moved a motion that this Committee go on record as indicating that we are not in favor of the waiver. We would like to participate in the emergency drills but cannot because of the waiver we have to sign. This Committee is asking that the waiver be eliminated because we would like to participate in the emergency drills as the subject matter experts for people with disabilities. The motion was passed.

Ms. Rush shared her experience of a MetroAccess ride that seemed to have scheduling issues. Mr. Blake provided possibilities of that trip, and that it would be reviewed further.

Ms. Ray shared information from Fairfax area disabilities services award. Mr. Blake thanked her for the information.

**Meeting Adjourned at 7:29 p.m.**