



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: October 7, 2019

Attendees

Present: Phil Posner (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva (Second Vice-Chair), Darnise Bush, Tino Calabia, Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Melanie Jackson, Mary Kay McMahon, Philippa Mezile, Anthony Oberg, Doris Ray, Paul Semelfort, Patrick Sheehan, and Kelley Simoneaux.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Agenda, Board Report, and Prior Meeting Minutes

Chair Posner welcomed everyone and started with introductions of the Committee members and the guests.

The meeting agenda was approved as amended. The Executive Vice-President and Chief Safety Officer, Theresa Impastato, was not able to attend the meeting due to an ongoing investigation on the Blue/Orange/Silver lines. Kirti Suri, Legislative Assistant, Office of DC Councilmember Robert White, attended the AAC meeting to listen-in for matters regarding the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions.

The September 3, 2019, meeting minutes were approved as amended with minor edits.

The Board Report was approved as amended with recommendations from Ms. Ray.

WMATA Board Chair Meet & Greet

Paul C. Smedberg, Chairman of the Board attended the AAC meeting for a meet and greet session post his election in June 2019. Board Chairman Smedberg first joined the WMATA Board as an Alternate Director in January of 2016 representing the City of Alexandria and was appointed Principal Director in January 2019 representing the Commonwealth of Virginia. Recently, the Board implemented revisions to the Board Code of Ethics. The Board is reviewing various matters more strategically in partnership with the General Manager, Paul Wiedefeld. Board Chairman Smedberg was interested in hearing the recommendations of the AAC and was pleased to be invited to the meeting. Board Chairman stated it has been very interesting to listen to the Committee discussions in person even though the Board receives the AAC monthly reports. In answering to Mr. Calabia's question about progress of the 8000-series procurement process, Board Chairman Smedberg stated the Board does not get involved in procurement processes.

Hedding Award

Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, provided information about the nomination process, timeline, and the date of Access Services Excellence Awards program where the Hedding Award will be presented.

Rental Dock-Less Scooters/Disability Safety

Chair Posner shared a train experience where a customer with an e-scooter was blocking the aisle and the accessible seats. Chair Posner recommended improved signs be displayed on trains, as they used to be on all rail-cars prior to the 7000-series. There was a discussion about e-scooters in Metrorail stations and Metrobuses, followed by proposed motions. Mr. Calabria stated some jurisdictions are using Geo-Fence for e-scooters and asked whether that can be implemented as a solution. Chair Posner stated there are dedicated parking spaces for e-scooters in Arlington. Mr. Ariza-Silva shared his experience of e-scooters in elevators blocking access to the unit. Ms. Coles recommended that e-scooters have automatic wheel locking system preventing them to be taken out of the designated area. Chair Posner stated that is a great idea.

Mr. Sheehan asked if Chair Posner had the proposed policy that would be presented to the Board? Chair Posner asked David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy and Planning if there is a policy draft about e-scooters. Mr. Shaffer informed the committee that a proposed policy is underway. Mr. Sheehan asked if the e-scooters are not prohibited, would they fall under the bike policy? Chair Posner stated e-scooters would fall back under the Segway policy. As per Ms. Ray's recommendations, Mr. Sheehan proposed a motion: the e-scooters/shared mobility devices/non-conventional devices are not permitted on Metrorail property, and that patrons are expected to park/dock them at the proper/designated locations at rail facilities and pick them up as desired upon exit, unless compliant with WMATA's non-conventional devices requirements.

Mr. Sheehan stated there is a registration process for the non-conventional devices. Continuing with the discussion, Chair Posner stated Arlington is reviewing that e-scooters park in a similar manner as bicycles and enforce the speed prohibitions. Ms. Bush shared her experience of e-scooters left around the stations and being driven faster than a mobility device speed. Ms. Jackson stated e-scooters are left on Metrorail stations by young riders, and docking locations are needed. Some e-scooters are foldable and can be carried. Chair Posner talked about a study in Arlington, that states people will use e-scooters on the roadways with 30 mph, however, at lower speed on the sidewalks.

Mr. Calabria shared information about possible solutions that are being adopted by various jurisdictions. The commercial (rental) companies may not offer foldable e-scooters however, people can buy the foldable e-scooters. The City of Alexandria is proposing possible solutions on the speed. He hopes other local jurisdictions take responsibility and control the speed as well. The docking is being handled by some jurisdictions by painting the designated areas for e-scooters and e-bikes. As for young riders leaving e-scooters at stations, there are some jurisdictions that require driver's license to rent the e-scooters.

A customer, who is a resident of the District of Columbia, shared information about rapid forth-coming expansion of e-scooters within the city. The scooters cost \$450. The device speed that is allowed on the street is 30 mph. These devices are last-mile first-mile transit and people use them to connect to Metro. The e-scooter is a device of choice, an alternate to reduce traffic congestion and fuel consumption, therefore, enforcement by companies would have to be the solution.

Mr. Blake stated since Chair Posner asked the Ombudsman about a policy draft, he would like the Committee to know that the Access Services has an existing policy for a non-conventional mobility device therefore, we may not need to revisit that matter with the Board. Chair Posner stated an e-scooter is a safety hazard for people with disabilities and cause tripping hazard therefore, the AAC would like to know what can WMATA do about it? Some of the recommendations by the Committee are that the access on rail property, rail vehicles, and Metrobuses should be banned. Since bus shelters are not WMATA property, jurisdictions can be contacted by WMATA on these concerns.

Mr. Sheehan proposed a modified motion: The shared mobility devices and non-conventional devices be banned from Metrorail property, that these devices are expected to be docked appropriately according to that jurisdiction, and if such devices are allowed on the trains, that they be subject to same restrictions as we have for the non-conventional devices, and that would be the Segway policy. The motion was seconded, whereas a discussion for wording was asked for by Ms. Ray. There is an existing policy on mobility devices, unless it can be shown that the device is compliant with WMATA's policy on non-conventional mobility device, which allows for mobility devices used by disabilities through a formal reasonable accommodations process. Mr. Sheehan stated shared non-conventional mobility devices follow the existing policy. The motion was passed.

Ms. Ray recommended for the motion to be amended to be inclusive of Metrobuses. Chair Posner recommended to have separate motions, one for Metrorail property and the other for Metrobuses (not bus stops). Ms. Ray motioned that the Committee recommends to the Board a policy that bans shared mobility devices from being brought on to Metro buses in light of the potential safety hazard that storing such a device on a bus might present to persons with disabilities, seniors, and even the general public, and the obstacle that it would also present to riders being able access an accessible feature, such as a wheelchair securement place on Metrobuses, given a current design on the buses. Chair Posner recommended that WMATA develop a rack for e-scooters like the one for bikes, that is placed in the front of the buses, and that would not influence ingress and egress of the bus. The motion passed.

Chair Posner hopes that the Chairman of the Board would bring these topics to the Board.

Public Comment:

A customer provided a positive feedback about Abilities-Ride that he uses frequently in the Suitland area. He stated that the Silver cab has advanced their technology and has improved the service. The customer receives a text with information about the driver, cab number, and a call when the driver arrives. The customer commended the person in-charge (Mr. Blake) of the process and the improvements. Mr. Blake thanked the customer and stated some modest changes are being implemented to improve the service along with additional competition. Mr. Blake would like to test the Abilities-Ride service with the AAC members at the next Bus/Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting, to demonstrate that Abilities-Ride can be used successfully. The Eligibility trips from the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia are already being provided by Abilities-Ride providers.

Chair Posner stated the Abilities Ride is private taxi program, it is not a door-to-door service, and the customers reach their destinations quicker. Mr. Blake stated we are subsidizing the program, it is not MetroAccess service but a private service. One of the companies that is about to join the Abilities-Ride program, will provide door-to-door service. Mr. Semelfort asked about customer training concerning how to use the service providers that are application (app) based companies. Mr. Blake stated a showcase of providers will be arranged. As per Ms. Ray's recommendations, we can have more than one expo where customers can meet the providers and get the needed information. Mr. Dancy asked about monthly-pass for persons with disabilities. Chair Posner stated we can discuss it in the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting and that it has already been shared with the Board.

A customer shared her concerns about late pick-ups by MetroAccess and drivers not being well-trained. The customer stated she pays money and deserves respect. One of the dispatch supervisors disconnected the customer while she was on hold. Mr. Blake stated specifics would be reviewed and we will follow up on the trips, the specific driver, and her conversation with dispatch supervisor(s) by reviewing the calls. The customer hopes her future trips will be better. Mr. Blake stated her trips can be monitored to determine what is causing delays and how to correct the issue. Mr. Blake clarified to Ms. Rush that there is no "watch list", the trips will be monitored to remedy the issue.

A DC resident customer shared information about the Transport DC program. A fourth provider is added to the program. The technology this provider uses, would enable customers to track their rides. The customer asked if Curb, an Abilities-Ride provider, is an application (app) only company? Mr. Blake confirmed and stated that Curb has presence in the District of Columbia and Virginia, however, the company will start providing service as they gain presence in parts of Maryland. The customer informed that Transport DC is paying additional \$5 to wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV), therefore, drivers are incentivized to do more wheelchair trips. Customer mentioned that there is a high demand of the WAV service at the Union Station location.

Ms. Coles stated it would be helpful if MetroAccess drivers can be provided with the building name along with the address somewhere besides the Comments, as drivers do

not always check it. It would be helpful for pick-ups and drop-offs as some locations have more than one buildings under the same address. Mr. Blake stated he has been trying to emphasize for everyone to do their part of the job. The drivers need to come to work on time and review all the information provided to them. The dispatchers need to ensure all the trips are dispatched. If everyone does their job, it will help us and the customers.

Ms. Rush asked why does it take so long for a road supervisor to come in case of an accident? Mr. Blake stated our goal is 30 minutes and we are working on it. Ms. Rush stated she was in an accident last week. She was not hurt therefore, she did not wait for the road supervisor however, no one called her for follow-up either. Mr. Blake stated he did not see her name on an incident report otherwise he would have called her. Ms. Rush stated the other person who waited for the road supervisor did not get home until 8 pm. Mr. Blake stated he is glad Ms. Rush is okay and the office will follow up.

Ms. Ray asked to clarify a policy regarding MetroAccess drivers carrying at a minimum, a pen and ink (paper) to communicate with persons with hearing impairment consumers and she has been advised of an incident that was significant and severe that involved in part, lack of pen and ink (paper) and any other device to communicate with a deaf customer. Ms. Ray also asked about MetroAccess policy regarding if there is a disruption, and if driver feels that disruption is caused by the customer in some form of threat, is there an Union agreement that says drivers get off the vehicle and wait for police rather than proceeding with what they are doing. Mr. Blake stated each van does have the writing utensils and paper, if for no other reason, for customers to sign, and the same pen and paper can be used for communication with hearing impaired customers. Mr. Blake asked Ms. Ray to provide the specifics so that the office can follow up on that incident. Regarding the disruption issue, the driver is not supposed to stop the vehicle and call a road supervisor or the police unless they feel unsafe for themselves, customer(s), or the vehicle. If a customer is yelling, there is no reason for the driver to stop. However, in instances, if a person is getting out of their seat, trying to get out of the vehicle, hitting or touching another customer or the driver, then the driver should stop and call a road supervisor.

“Grandfather” MetroAccess Customers Following Bus Changes in Good Operation

Chair Posner stated for a MetroAccess customer who lives in the service zone, but loses service because of bus service cut, that customer should be grandfathered in to the service. The bus service cuts may happen due to insufficient ridership. Since the number of customers is so small in those instances, grandfathering them should not be an issue, rather than having to do a Title VI analysis. Ms. Ray made a motion: given with current circumstances, with so many people without service, WMATA simply do away with the $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile policy and go back to the original service. Many people can afford housing only in the outer-skirts and they cannot get bus and/or MetroAccess service. Mr. Blake's predecessor had stated there are not that many people who will be out of service, yet she receives a lot of calls from people who have no service.

Ms. Rush stated if Metro can go to Dulles, why not to BWI or a store in Clinton. The service is being reduced in Prince George's county and the reasons are obvious. Chair Posner stated MetroAccess has no rider-left-behind policy. The expansion of Abilities-Ride program would be helpful. Mr. Blake stated the Committee should continue to advocate. He receives customer calls from throughout the region and not just from Prince George's county. We want to adhere to the ADA and that is where the $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile rule came from to keep the service uniform. MetroAccess is public transit. The Abilities-Ride is not restricted to the $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile rule and not limited to days of service either. We purposely left the service days/times/distance off from the Abilities-Ride program as part of some of the solutions that are being implemented.

Mr. Calabria stated the ADA is supposed to help the persons with disabilities, let us go with the spirit of the law, not further straight-jacket us. Mr. Sheehan proposed a motion: to enable $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile limit for MetroAccess patrons who have been reliant upon the service to maintain the service. Ms. Ray asked for a study done to see cost impact for regions to redraw the lines. The motion was seconded and called for discussion. Ms. Ray stated people who already had MetroAccess and were living in the service area had to move because of section 8 voucher, and thus lost service. They were not grandfathered even though MetroAccess is the only way for them to commute. This would give a disparate treatment, it just gives benefit to MetroAccess customers. There is nothing in the ADA that stops WMATA from providing service away from $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile.

Ms. Coles stated she knows of an individual who does not have weekend privileges in Waldorf, MD, and the Abilities-Ride has never come to pick up that customer. Mr. Blake asked for Ms. Coles to provide specifics for further review. Mr. Sheehan made a second motion that in the spirit of the discussion we had: we would look at the cost of expanding the MetroAccess service to original lines. Chair Posner amended for people who are in nursing home, who used to have MetroAccess and do not have the service now, get it back. The motion was passed. Mr. Sheehan stated when they change the buses, use the same protocol. Chair Posner concurred.

Bus/Rail Subcommittee Report

Mr. Calabria provided his report and background for the "handbook" that has been worked on by him and Mr. Oberg. The AAC has provided active feedback for the 7000 series rail cars. The AAC would like to discuss with the design and construction (when finalized) and provide feedback for the 8000 series rail cars, as well. Instead of working on it afterwards, Mr. Oberg has put together a wonderful package to illustrate to the contractors what they have done thus far in the 7000 series and lessons learned for the 8000 series. Mr. Oberg stated the purpose is to have a discussion in the Bus Rail Subcommittee meeting. Chair Posner recommended to share the information with the Riders Advisory Council (RAC) as well and receive their feedback.

MetroAccess Subcommittee Report

Mr. Semelfort provided his report. The expansion of the Abilities-Ride Program was briefly discussed in the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting. There was a presentation about the next generation of paratransit vehicle. An update was provided about the ranger system. The customers had comments about the call center and provided their feedback. The on-time performance was also discussed. MetroAccess is struggling with the on-time performance because of operations and the Committee's stand is the established 92% on-time performance level should not be curtailed to 90%. Ms. Rush stated since Mr. Blake refers to the ADA for everything, at some point, we need to review the ADA and get it updated. Currently, we have a pilot of 90 minutes reservations window. In a year, it is going to be two hours reservation window, however, who is determining if the pilot is working? Chair Posner stated Mr. Sheehan asked for the deliverables. Mr. Semelfort stated he made a motion to request the data collected be presented to the Committee every 3 months.

Other Items

Ms. Ray asked about the next Bus Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting. Chair Posner stated Monday is the Columbus Day holiday, therefore the BRS meeting is on Tuesday.

Mr. Dancy expressed his appreciation for the support the Committee showed after the passing of his parents.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30pm.