

Metro Riders' Advisory Council
March 14, 2012

I. Call to Order:

Dr. Bracmort called the March meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:37 p.m.

The following members were present:

Kelsi Bracmort, Chair, District of Columbia
Joseph Kitchen, Maryland Vice Chair, Prince George's County
Carl Seip, District of Columbia Vice Chair, At-Large
Lorraine Silva, Virginia Vice Chair, Arlington County
David Alpert, District of Columbia
Ben Ball, District of Columbia
Chris Farrell, Montgomery County
Kara Merrigan, Arlington County
Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Council Chair
Deborah Titus, Fairfax County
Ronald Whiting, Montgomery County
Victoria Wilder, Montgomery County
James Wright, Prince George's County

II. Public Comment Period:

Linda Lee noted her concerns about development that is talking place at the Rhode Island Avenue Metro station, specifically the construction of parking garages as part of this development. She explained that the entrances and exits to/from the garages interfere with bus traffic traveling into and out of the station. She said that she has spoken with Metro staff, along with the Metropolitan Police and with the District Department of Transportation about this issue, though she hasn't had any success in getting it resolved.

Dr. Bracmort asked whether the garage mentioned was a Metro-owned facility. Ms. Lee said that the garage is part of the new development at the station and is privately-owned. Dr. Bracmort suggested there may be opportunities for Metro, the developer and the city to work together to find a solution.

III. Approval of Agenda

Without objection, the agenda was approved as submitted.

IV. Metro's Strategic Plan:

Dr. Bracmort introduced Metro Board member Mary Hynes to discuss Metro's strategic plan.

Mrs. Hynes explained that the Board was working with Metro to develop longer-range plans, including a multi-year budget and a multi-year business plan for the Authority. She said that the Board was seeking input on its strategic planning from various stakeholders, and would be incorporating that input into its final strategic plan.

Mrs. Hynes then reviewed Metro's proposed mission, vision and goals and asked for members' comments as to whether or not those captured their idea of what Metro should be striving to become.

Mr. Ball noted that there is no mention of "increased ridership" as part of Metro's goals. He asked whether this was an oversight or intentionally excluded from the goals because Metro is already overtaxed. Ms. Hynes asked whether the mission or the vision statement should also discuss increased ridership. Mr. Ball said that he thought that should be included.

Mr. Alpert said that he thought that the proposed vision statement sounds too much like a slogan, and suggested that the vision might better express the goal of having "a transit system for everyone in the region." He said that it might be helpful to think about Metro's vision in terms of what Metro's role would be if it had unconstrained resources available.

Mr. Seip said that the vision and mission needs to make clear that Metro isn't necessarily an alternative, rather, that it is the primary means of transportation for many people in the region. He suggested that the vision needs to be more quantifiable and should be more aspirational. Dr. Bracmort added that the vision, as presented, isn't inclusive.

Mr. Sheehan said that he like the idea that Metro service is a primary choice for transportation and that Metro's goal should be to make itself the "first choice" for transportation. Ms. Titus added that there needed to be something in the statement to capture that Metro service is for everyone.

Regarding the proposed Board strategic goals, Mr. Seip said that the goals needed to include not just improving the region's mobility, but also expanding it. Mr. Ball added that the vision calls for a great system, but neglects to mention the system's riders. He said that the goals should include enhancing use of the system.

Ms. Wilder suggested that the operational goal of "Creating a safer organization" should also include maintaining that organization.

Mr. Seip said that the goals need to include language about supporting commerce or commercial activity. He added that the goals could be made more clear regarding “complete communities,” as few people know what complete communities are.

Mr. Kitchen said that one of Metro’s issues is that it only engages with stakeholders when something bad happens or when it has to. He said that there needed to be something in the goals about engaging with stakeholders. Mr. Ball added that the goal of “Maintaining and enhancing Metro’s image doesn’t relate back to the mission statement.”

Regarding communications, Ms. Titus said that Metro needs to do a better job of letting riders know what is going on, and Dr. Bracmort suggested adding a goal about engaging in two-way communication with its riders. Ms. Silva added that Metro needs to reach out more, and not just using electronic communication tools.

Ms. Hynes thanked members for their feedback and said that if they had any additional comments that could contact her through the Board Secretary’s office.

V. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Seip moved to approve the November 2011, January 2012 and February 2012 meeting minutes *en bloc*. This motion was seconded by Mr. Ball. Without objection, the meeting minutes were approved as presented.

VI. Public Hearing Recap/Budget Committee Update:

Dr. Bracmort then asked members to share their impressions of the recent public hearings that Metro held to discuss its proposed FY2013 budget and fare increases.

Mr. Ball noted that the MetroAccess users who testified at the hearings were well-organized, had clear messages and effective testimony. He said that one of the messages that he got from the hearings is that MetroAccess riders’ concerns can’t be ignored. Mr. Sheehan noted that these individuals had a clear set of point to focus on and that it was effective for riders who testified to share their personal stories. He added that he wanted the Riders’ Advisory Council and the Accessibility Advisory Council to work together on developing a cohesive position on the proposed fare increases. He also noted that the Board has asked for additional information about MetroAccess services because the testimony provided at the hearings didn’t necessarily match with the information provided to Board members by Metro.

Mr. Wright said that he was very impressed by the speakers who talked about MetroAccess issues and noted that he hadn’t known a lot about the service prior to hearing their testimony.

Mr. Ball told the Council that one of the take-aways he didn't get from the hearings he attended was what the Metro Board members were thinking about the proposed fare increases. He said that he expected more reaction from Board members to the testimony provided. He added that it would be useful to hear Board members' thoughts on the FY2013 budget as the Council develops its position.

Mr. Sheehan noted that Metro was conducting an online survey to get rider feedback on the budget issues. Mr. Pasek said that he would send around a link to the survey to members of the Council. Mr. Ball asked whether the Council would be able to get the results of the survey. Mr. Pasek said that he would check with Metro staff.

Mr. Whiting said that he wasn't surprised by riders' testimony asking for better service if they were expected to pay increased fares. He suggested that any additional revenue in the FY2013 budget from fare increases be matched by increases in jurisdictional subsidies.

Ms. Titus noted that the people who testified at the hearings didn't focus on the fare increase proposals contained in the docket. Dr. Bracmort said that she recognized this as well. She said that people often use hearings as an opportunity to interface with Board members and don't necessarily restrict their comments to the subject of the hearings.

Ms. Merrigan said that she did want to give Board member Mary Hynes credit for being engaged and reacting to riders' testimony at the hearing in Arlington.

Mr. Seip said that there is a Budget Working Group meeting scheduled for Monday, March 19th to refine the Council's proposed position on the various aspects of the fare increase. He said that the group needs to have a position on fares for the full Council to discuss at its April meeting.

Dr. Bracmort asked whether there were any particular items among the fare increases proposals that generated a lot of discussion. Mr. Seip said that the elimination of the peak-of-the-peak fare and the proposed changes to the way off-peak fares are calculated engendered the most discussion.

Mr. Alpert asked why the working group didn't support a greater increase in the maximum fare. Mr. Seip said that the working group supported an increase in the maximum fare charged by the same amount as other fares are proposed to rise – around 6%. Mr. Alpert noted that the working group supported a greater-than-6% increase in off-peak fares since they weren't raised as part of the last round of fare increases, and was unclear why it wouldn't adopt a similar position regarding the maximum fare. He noted that the maximum fare wasn't raised as part of the last round of fare increases, so a greater-than-average increase in the maximum fare would restore some equity between long- and short-distance riders.

Ms. Titus asked whether the group considered proposing charging for parking at Metrorail stations on the weekends. Mr. Seip responded that because that option wasn't included in the docket, it couldn't be considered as part of this budget proposal.

Mr. Farrell asked Mr. Alpert his thoughts on the peak-of-the-peak surcharge, since he advocated its implementation. Mr. Alpert responded that he had hoped that it would lead to more riders shifting their trips out of the most crowded travel times. Mr. Seip said that some members of the budget working group had expressed interest in a larger peak-of-the-peak surcharge that might do more to shift riders' behavior, but that option wasn't included in the docket. Mr. Alpert said that it might make sense to reduce the time period during which the surcharge was levied to 60 minutes, since a shorter period may make it more possible for riders to shift their trips to avoid the surcharge.

Mr. Ball said that he had concerns about equity as it relates to the proposed fare increases, especially the proposed bus fare increases. He said that he would prefer to have a larger increase in off-peak rail fares if that would allow for bus fares to remain the same. He added that, as proposed, the unlimited monthly rail pass wouldn't be able to be purchased using SmartBenefits, which is an issue that the Council should look into. He said that the Council should review the proposed pass' underlying structure and that what was proposed for the public hearings may not have been ideal.

Mr. Sheehan said that the AAC's Fare Policy Workgroup has developed several recommendations regarding MetroAccess fares, specifically a flat fare for MetroAccess service, along with recommendations on cash fares for buses and paper farecard surcharges and their effects on low-income individuals. He said that he would provide the AAC's recommendations to RAC members for their review.

Mr. Seip said that the Council's budget working group would be meeting the following Monday to refine its recommendations and would welcome seeing the AAC's recommendations.

Mr. Seip noted that Metro expects to install SmarTrip® vending machines at all Metrorail stations. Mr. Pasek explained that if Metro implemented any of the "flat fare" farecard proposals, it would install SmarTrip® vending machines in all rail stations. He said that if any of these proposals were approved, implementation would occur around Labor Day.

Dr. Bracmort said that this item would come back to the Council at its April meeting for further discussion and told members that if they had any comments to send those to either Mr. Seip or Mr. Pasek.

VIII. Community Meetings:

Dr. Bracmort and Mr. Pasek provided an overview of a community meeting that they attended in the Edgewood Terrace community in Northeast Washington, DC, along with staff from Metro's Bus Planning department.

Dr. Bracmort also told members about the Ward 7 Transportation Summit which was held on February 25th. She said that one of the ideas that was discussed at the summit was the development of a youth advisory council for Metro, and asked members what they thought of the creation of such a group.

Mr. Kitchen said that he would support the idea of such a council. Mr. Wright added that he is supportive of youth, though it may be better to have a youth member either on the Metro Board or on the Riders' Advisory Council.

Mr. Alpert said that he thought that it was a good idea for youth to have a voice, but that the key value is providing opportunities for Board members to hear from youth. He asked if there might be a more direct way for youth to engage the Board.

Ms. Titus said that the creation of a youth advisory council would be a good way for students to start providing input and suggested that an adult from DC Public Schools could help facilitate.

Ms. Merrigan said that such a group would be helpful to put issues directly to the young people affected by them and make them more aware of the services that they are using. She added that the group could have more of an impact if it dealt with issues raised by other young people.

Dr. Bracmort said that it sounds like the Council would be supportive of youth address the issues that they have with Metro, even if there isn't agreement on how to best address those issues. She noted Mr. Kitchen had volunteered to explore this issue further. Mr. Kitchen said that youth have been discussing this idea for the past several years. He added he heard members' concerns about this topic and also that it wasn't clear what format this youth input would ultimately take – whether it would be a youth council or youth town hall meetings or some other format. He also noted that many of the concerns expressed were similar to the concerns raised about public involvement with Metro when the Riders' Advisory Council was formed. Mr. Pasek said that he would help Mr. Kitchen find information about youth advisory issues at other transit agencies.

Members noted upcoming community events including:

- A public meeting on the Y-line scheduled for March 15th in Wheaton;
- An upcoming meeting on the 14th Street line to be held in April;

- A meeting in Prince George's County concerning a study on the F4/F6 bus line.

Mr. Pasek said that he would send out information on upcoming bus corridor study meetings.

Mr. Kitchen told members that he would provide them with information about a meeting of a Prince George's County transit advocacy group that holds regular monthly meetings.

Mr. Alpert said that he would support the creation of a youth council if that's what youth would want to happen.

IX. Questions/Comments on RAC and AAC Chair Reports:

Dr. Bracmort said that the delivery of the February RAC report to the Board went well and that Mr. Downs, a Board member from the District of Columbia, asked that the Council look into ways to improve bus stop accessibility throughout the Washington region. She also told the Council that Mr. Bulger, another Board member from the District, said that he hoped that Board members and Council members would be able to meet again in 2012.

Mr. Sheehan asked whether the RAC would be interested in working on the issue of bus stop accessibility with the AAC, as the AAC has been working on this issue for the past several years. He said that the AAC has a lot of data that it could share with the RAC.

Mr. Sheehan noted that the AAC is also working on MetroAccess fares, as he noted earlier, and is also providing comments on the new MetroAccess contract.

IX. Open Mic:

Dr. Bracmort told members of the Council that she is proud of the work that members are doing with regards to a number of issues – transit service to the airports, the idea of a youth advisory council, and providing comments on Metro's budget, for example. She said that she wanted to raise the issue of some Council members not attending meetings.

Mr. Alpert said that the Council could suggest that the Board look into this issue further, which wouldn't require two-thirds of the members be present, unlike a vote by the Council to request that the Board terminate a member.

Mr. Kitchen moved that the Council direct staff to draft a letter to the Board asking them to look into the situation with regards to Council members' attendance and noting that the members in question have fallen out of communication with the Council. This motion was seconded by Mr. Alpert, who suggested that the letter also note that the Council was unable to vote to recommend a member's termination because it lacked the two-thirds of members present to do so. Without objection, this motion was approved.

Mr. Ball said that he is still working to schedule a meeting for the airport transit service group. He added that he is working on a proposal for a monthly list of questions from the Council to Metro staff. He said that he hoped to have a proposal to put forward at the Council's next meeting.

Ms. Titus said that she would be interested in Metro hosting another emergency drill to provide preparedness training for riders with disabilities.

X. Adjournment:

Without objection, Dr. Bracmort adjourned the meeting at 8:32p.