

Riders' Advisory Council
November 2, 2011

I. Call to Order:

Mr. DeBernardo called the November 2011 meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:34 p.m.

The following members were present:

Frank DeBernardo, Chair, Prince George's County
David Alpert, District of Columbia Vice Chair
Penny Everline, Virginia Vice Chair, Arlington County
Chris Farrell, Maryland Vice Chair, Montgomery County
Kelsi Bracmort, District of Columbia
Jamie Bresner, City of Alexandria
Stephen Clermont, Fairfax County
Sharon Conn, Prince George's County
Joseph Kitchen, Prince George's County
Chris Schmitt, Fairfax County
Patrick Sheehan, At-Large, Accessibility Advisory Committee Chair
Lorraine Silva, Arlington County
Deborah Titus, Fairfax County
Carol Carter Walker, District of Columbia
Ron Whiting, Montgomery County
Victoria Wilder, Montgomery County
Diana Zinkl, District of Columbia

II. Public Comment Period:

Linda Lee of the District of Columbia described a recent incident during which her bus was stuck in traffic for approximately 30 minutes while trying to access the Brookland station due to a traffic accident. She noted that there is a second entrance to the Brookland station that is used by automobiles and asked whether it would be possible to allow buses to use this entrance as well. She added that this would allow for better bus operations during incidents.

Approved March 14, 2012

III. Approval of Agenda:

Mr. DeBernardo moved approval of an amended agenda that added an item, “Letter on Station Names” between agenda items VI (“Regional Transit System Plan”) and VII (“Public Hearing Recap/Comments”). Mr. Alpert seconded this motion.

Without objection, the agenda was approved as amended.

IV. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes:

Without objection, the September 7, 2011 meeting minutes were approved as presented.

Without objection, the October 5, 2011 meeting minutes were approved as presented.

V. Metrorail/Metrobus Fare Structure Model:

Mr. DeBernardo introduced Michael Eichler with Metro’s Department of Long Range Planning, to provide a presentation on Metro’s ongoing study of possible changes to the fare structure for Metrobus and Metrorail. Mr. Eichler noted that Metro is conducting this study in response to comments it has received about the complexity of its fare structure, to evaluate the fare structure as Metro prepares to implement its New Electronic Payments Program, to assess how well the current structure aligns with the Board-approved fare policy principles and to evaluate possible fare increase scenarios as part of Metro’s FY2013 budget.

Mr. Eichler provided an overview of Metro’s current fare structure and its fare policy. He then gave an overview of the study and its evaluation processes and the various fare concepts that Metro was studying, including:

- Higher fares for limited-stop “MetroExpress” bus service;
- Integrated transfers between bus and rail;
- Integrated monthly passes;
- Elimination of the peak-of-the-peak surcharge;
- Zoned rail fares;
- Flat rail fares.

Mr. Eichler then provided the timeline for the next steps in the study. Following the presentation, Mr. DeBernardo opened the floor to questions and comments from members of the Council.

Mr. Farrell asked whether Metro had seen any change in ridership patterns after it implemented “Peak of the Peak” fares. Mr. Eichler responded that about 3% of customers had shifted their trips out of the peak-of-the-peak period.

Mr. Sheehan explained that because of the way that MetroAccess fares are calculated, they are very complex and can vary greatly, even for the same trip. He noted that the discussion on Metrorail and MetroAccess fares is critical for MetroAccess customers because MetroAccess fares are based off of fixed-route fares. He added that the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Riders' Advisory Council should coordinate their recommendations and comments on this study.

Mr. Clermont noted that some of the fare concepts being evaluated as part of the study, such as providing bonuses on high-value fare purchases used to be done by Metro. He added that if a revised fare structure results in higher fares for Metro customers, Metro will need to also develop a plan to improve the level of service it provides its customers.

Mr. Whiting noted that many infrequent users of Metrorail are confused by the complexity of its fares. He asked Mr. Eichler whether Metro has looked at simplifying fares by combining some of the concepts it is studying. Mr. Eichler responded that Metro is looking at and evaluating all of the options as part of this study, including different options for fare zones, as a way to reduce the number of possible fare combinations.

Mr. Kitchen noted that the study's use of the term "equity" in discussing possible rail fare concepts might more accurately be described as "fairness," rather than equity, which focuses more on individuals' ability to pay.

In response to a question from Ms Wilder, Mr. Eichler explained that if Metro were to adopt a flat fare, it would still have four separate fares – half-fare for elderly/disabled riders and a surcharge for paper farecards on both regular and elderly/disabled fares.

Ms. Silva asked how Metro would implement zoned fares on Metrobus. Mr. Eichler replied that distance-based or zoned bus fares are not being considered because there is no practical way to implement these types of fares on the bus, unlike on rail, which requires riders to scan their cards both when entering and exiting.

Mr. Bresner asked what Metro's next steps would be after Metro completes its model. Mr. Eichler said that Metro wants to get an idea of how the concepts would affect ridership and revenues and would then combine those concepts into scenarios. Mr. Bresner also requested that Metro make the rider survey and its responses available for the RAC to review, which Mr. Eichler agreed to do.

Dr. Bracmort said that she would be interested in getting the breakout of responses to Metro's fare survey based on whether respondents were bus-only, rail-only or combination bus/rail riders to see if the responses differed between these groups of riders. She also asked whether Metro had

looked at raising fares on its express (not limited-stop) buses as part of this fare study and noted that if Metro raises its fares it will also need to provide increased levels of service to its riders.

Ms. Titus noted the relationship between revenue and ridership and asked how that might change if some of these proposals were implemented. Mr. Eichler responded that there would be additional opportunities for input prior to Metro making any decisions about its fare structure.

Ms. Zinkl asked whether there had been any consideration of taking the three-tiered fare structure used for off-peak fares and using that for peak-period fares. Mr. Eichler responded that one option would be to round fares to the nearest dollar. He noted, however, that the current fare structure is the result of years of jurisdictional negotiations and that this system couldn't be simply discarded. He also noted that if Metro "flattened" its fares, some riders' fares would increase and others would decrease from their current levels.

Dr. Conn said that she appreciated the simplicity of a flat fare and also advocated Metro rounding its fares to the nearest 25¢ increment. She also said that Metro should maintain the differential between peak and off-peak fares, even if Metro went to a flat fare option.

Mr. Alpert said that he is glad that the Council is able to look at all of the different options early in the process. He suggested that Metro also explore a "tourist zone" fare that would allow for a flat fare to cover fares within a specified zone within the core of the city.

Mr. DeBernardo thanked Mr. Eichler for his presentation and said that the Council may offer a more formal response to Metro's fare proposals at a later time.

He then recognized James Dyke, a new Metro Board member representing Virginia, who was in the audience.

VI. Regional Transit System Plan:

Mr. DeBernardo introduced Tom Harrington to provide an overview of the Regional Transit System Plan (RTSP) study that Metro was undertaking. Mr. Harrington explained that the RTSP is a plan to develop a long-range transit plan for the region. He said that he would provide the Council with an overview and status of the project and solicit input from members on what elements should be in a long-range transit plan for the region.

Mr. Harrington told members that the last time the Board looked at long-range plans for transit in the region was in 1999, when the original 103-mile system was nearing completion. He noted that the goals of the 1999 plan were to double the transit ridership in the region by 2025 and add 50% more fixed-guideway transit miles in the region in that timeframe.

Mr. Harrington said that the RTSP was a 30-year look-ahead that is looking at multiple modes of transit, including buses and streetcars, no matter the operator of the service. He added that the plan supports the regional goals developed by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and would also support Metro's strategic plan that is being developed by the Board.

He provided an overview of the study and the information being used to evaluate various transit concepts, including:

- Regional growth trends;
- Key long-range issues the study needs to address;
- Strategies evaluated;
- Measures of effectiveness;
- Strategies for dealing with core capacity issues;
- Strategies to improve access to transit;
- Strategies to improve surface transit; and
- Strategies for new connections between activity centers.

Mr. Harrington provided the Council with information on where the study is in its process. He said that staff wanted to bring possible future scenarios to the Board, the public, the RAC and other stakeholder groups for input to try and get consensus on what should be in the plan in the summer 2012 timeframe.

Mr. Farrell asked whether the study looked at linking the Maryland and Virginia commuter rail systems. Mr. Harrington said that this is something that could be looked at to help relieve core capacity issues.

Mr. Sheehan noted that the United States Access Board is taking comments on pedestrian and bicycle access to rights-of-way, and asked whether the study was looking at these changes and how they might affect station access. Mr. Harrington responded that Metro had done its own study of bicycle and pedestrian access to its stations but would also look at the Access Board's study.

Mr. Whiting asked whether any consideration has been given to adding another set of tracks to the Metro system to allow for greater capacity and operational flexibility. Mr. Harrington said that retrofitting the system in this manner would be prohibitively expensive and would present operational difficulties because Metro operates through the core, meaning that its lines carry heavy traffic in both directions. He noted that one of the strategies that Metro is considering is separating lines in the core (the Blue/Orange and Green/Yellow lines), which would provide increased capacity.

Mr. Kitchen asked whether Metro would maintain current headways on the rail system if it separated Metro lines through the core, as this interlining allows for a doubling of frequency on segments shared by two lines. He also asked whether Metro will run up against capacity constraints in these scenarios and whether Metro had looked at encouraging “disincentivizing” parking lot use by riders who live close to stations. Mr. Harrington explained that one way Metro could discourage parking lot use would be to raise the price of parking, but that it must be careful not to raise the price too high, which would cause riders to abandon the system and drive. He also discussed various strategies to deal with capacity issues, including railcar, electricity and storage needs and proposals for new rail lines within the core.

In response to a question from Ms. Silva about coordination between Metro and the various proposed streetcar systems in the region, Mr. Harrington said that these studies have always coordinated with Metro and within the last year have increased their coordination with each other.

Dr. Bracmort suggested that Metro look at making improvements to the bus network, as improvements could be made relatively inexpensively. She also suggested that Metro review its bus routes make sure that they are aligned with current trip patterns. Dr. Bracmort also talked about the need for improved access to/from Metro stations, either walking, on transit or via cabs.

Ms. Zinkl noted that an area’s “walkability” is an important factor in allowing for pedestrian access to transit, and suggested that the study needed to take pedestrian conditions into account when looking at access strategies. She also said that there needs to be more frequent bus service to encourage people to use transit.

Dr. Conn asked about the proposed rail extensions to Waldorf shown in the study, which Mr. Harrington said could be extensions of the Green or Orange lines. She also noted the need for better transit service to connect to the Naylor Road station.

Ms. Everline asked whether Metro or other providers have looked at providing shuttles to suburban Metro stations which often don’t have good transit or pedestrian access. Mr. Harrington said that Metro is studying the potential for shuttles or opportunities for dynamic ridesharing systems at stations.

Mr. Alpert thanked Mr. Harrington for his presentation and said that he was excited for there to be specific transit proposals that riders and other members of the public could advocate for with their elected officials.

VII. Station Naming Policy:

Mr. DeBernardo moved approval of a letter to the Board concerning its impending decision on station names. This motion was seconded by Mr. Alpert.

Without objection, this motion was approved, with Mr. Kitchen abstaining from voting.

VIII. Public Hearing Recap/Comments:

Mr. DeBernardo explained that this item was placed on the agenda to provide Council members with an opportunity to provide their observations about the public hearings held in mid-October.

Mr. DeBernardo said that he attended the hearing held in Hyattsville and several people attended to discuss the proposed elimination of the R3 route. He added that he had been informed that staff was looking at making changes to its proposal in response to the comments received

Mr. Sheehan said that there were hearings on MetroAccess service on October 24th, 25th and 26th that were well-attended. He said that the riders attending these hearings discussed their concerns with MetroAccess' scheduling, fare policy and dispatchers. Mr. Sheehan noted that these hearings provided good input for Metro and the Accessibility Advisory Committee to use when dealing with the current MetroAccess contract as well as in structuring the new contract which would take effect in mid-2013.

Dr. Bracmort reported that she and Ms. Zinkl attended the hearing in Anacostia, which was well-attended. She said that attendees had the opportunity to speak out about not just what was on the docket, but about their transit service in general, meaning that riders had an additional opportunity to talk with Board and elected officials face-to-face. She noted that outside of hearings, the public doesn't often have this opportunity for comment and suggested that the RAC might want to advocate that these types of meetings, either with Board members or Metro officials, should happen more often.

Mr. Farrell said that he attended the public meeting in Bethesda concerning escalators at that station and said that he will try and send around the news article on that meeting to Council members.

Ms. Everline said that she and Ms. Silva attended Arlington hearing. She noted that attendees were very much in favor of the proposed changes.

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

Schmitt moves that the RAC express its disappointment to the Board regarding the denial of the Council's request for information and appeal to the full Board to reconsider this decision.

This motion was seconded by Dr. Bracmort.

Mr. Whiting said that there needs to be a procedure for making these kinds of requests and that he was concerned that the Council will develop poor relations with the Board if it takes this action. He suggested that there should be a screening process to bring information requests before the full Council before sending them to the Board.

In response to a question from Ms. Wilder, Mr. Schmitt provided a history of his request for train arrival information from Metro, noting that he felt his request for information languished Mr. Pasek

Mr. Kitchen said that he didn't oppose request for information, but noted that Metro staff have offered meet with Council members and provide a presentation on this topic. He said that this should be our first step, before sending letter to Board on the issue.

Mr. Alpert said that he agreed with Mr. Kitchen, though he added that he did not understand why Metro is being secretive with the information requested and was disappointed that this request was denied. He noted that he had discussed this issue with a member of the Metro Board, who was supportive of the request. Mr. Alpert suggested that the Council should to develop explanation as to how having this information can advance the Council's goals to build a case as to why the information should be provided.

In response to a question from Ms. Walker, Mr. DeBernardo noted that this was a change to the Board's bylaws. Ms. Walker said that agreed with Mr. Kitchen and that the Council should revisit how it approaches Board. Mr. DeBernardo noted that this request was submitted individually, not from the group. He added that the Council had previously discussed having a procedures for these requests and may need to revisit that discussion.

Dr. Bracmort said that during her tenure on the Council, there has always been an issue with getting information beyond what Metro wants to provide. She said that the Council needs to work out a procedure to get information because there will be more issues such as this, and the Council will need to get information in order to effectively advocate on riders' behalf.

Ms. Zinkl noted that the Council's chartering documents didn't provide access to information beyond that which would be provided to the general public, though she noted that, in the past, she was able to get otherwise-inaccessible information by speaking with Board members. She added that she didn't understand the expected outcome if the Council were to receive the information it requested.

Mr. Schmitt said that it wasn't possible to predict the outcome, but that his aim was to use the information to conduct preliminary research on a matter that may later come before the Council. He said that there are two issues crucial to riders where Metro hasn't been forthcoming with information and the Council should have the right, on behalf of its constituents, to ask for this information.

Mr. Alpert asked Mr. Schmitt why he didn't want to say, specifically, why he requested this information. He said that it would help the group to explain why he had chosen these two particular issues. Mr. Schmitt responded that he has tried to be vague because he didn't want to prejudge the outcome. He added that he doesn't believe Metro's statistics on its on-time performance and that he wanted more information regarding Automatic Train Control to see if it was something the Council should investigate further, or if that wasn't necessary.

Ms. Wilder said that she was concerned that this request seems to have been made on behalf of the group and was not shared with the entire group. Mr. Schmitt said that he made the request as an individual and was not trying to be secretive about it.

Dr. Bracmort said that she felt it was important for the Council to have access to this data. Mr. Clermont added that he supported the request as well. He noted that if the Council is a representative body, Metro has to be responsive to reasonable requests for information that it makes.

Mr. Whiting said that he didn't understand how, if the request was from an individual as opposed to from the group, that the group would be expressing its disappointment in not receiving the information. He said that this situation highlights need for a procedure for requesting information.

Mr. Alpert suggested that it may be more effective to meet and discuss the issues with the key staff members for those topics, rather than trying to get the information from other sources. He said that he did agree that the type of information requested is the kind of information that the Council should be getting, but if the Council makes the request how it is currently structured, it likely won't be successful.

Mr. Alpert then called the question to close discussion on the motion. Without objection, the discussion on Mr. Schmitt's motion was closed.

The Council then took a vote on Mr. Schmitt's original motion to appeal the denial of his request for information to the full Metro Board of Directors.

In favor: Mr. Clermont, Mr. Schmitt

Opposed: Mr. DeBernardo, Mr. Alpert, Ms. Everline, Mr. Farrell, Dr. Bracmort, Mr. Bresner, Dr. Conn, Mr. Kitchen, Ms. Silva, Ms. Titus, Ms. Walker, Mr. Whiting, Ms. Wilder, Ms. Zinkl.

Abstentions: Mr. Sheehan

This motion failed.

Dr. Bracmort moved to meet with staff from the Office of Performance to discuss these issues further. Mr. Alpert seconded this motion.

In favor: Mr. DeBernardo, Mr. Alpert, Mr. Clermont, Ms. Everline, Mr. Farrell, Dr. Bracmort, Mr. Bresner, Dr. Conn, Mr. Kitchen, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Silva, Ms. Titus, Ms. Walker, Mr. Whiting, Ms. Wilder, Ms. Zinkl.

Opposed: none

Abstentions: Mr. Schmitt, Ms. Walker

Ms. Walker asked that the Council revisit the procedure for requesting information from Metro at its next meeting.

Dr. Bracmort said that she would convene the meeting with staff from the Office of Performance.

X. Council Elections:

Mr. DeBernardo reminded members that, under the Council's bylaws, elections for officers will be held in January and all offices will be up for election. He further described the election process.

Without objection, Mr. DeBernardo adjourned the meeting at 8:38 p.m.