

WMATA Riders' Advisory Council

Wednesday, June 3, 2015
6:30 P.M. Regular Meeting

MINUTES

Place: Lower Level Meeting Room, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Headquarters (Jackson Graham Building), 600 Fifth Street NW, Washington, DC

Present: *Members*
Barbara Hermanson, Chair, VA, City of Alexandria
Bob Fogel, Vice-Chair, MD, Montgomery County
Jeremiah Bush, VA, Fairfax County
Stephanie Beechem, District of Columbia
Pablo Destefanis, District of Columbia
Sherry Doster, MD, Prince George's County
Debra MacKenzie, At-Large
Pat Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee, Chair
Frederick Walker, Vice-Chair, VA, Fairfax County
Theresa Wells, MD, Prince George's County
Wil White, MD, Prince George's County
Mary Ann Zimmerman, MD, Montgomery County

Other Individuals

Mr. Jim Bongiorno, Treasury Technical Manager, Office of the Treasurer, WMATA
Mr. Allen Hoppe, Treasurer, Office of the Treasurer, WMATA
Ms. Jennifer Ellison, Board Corporate Secretary, WMATA
James N. Jackson, RAC Staff Coordinator, WMATA

Absent: *Members*
Benjamin Chou, At-Large
Avani Gala, VA, Arlington County
Thaddeus Johnson, District of Columbia
Caroline Kim, District of Columbia
Katherine Kortum, MD, Montgomery County
Ryan Nalty, District of Columbia
Lorraine Silva, VA, Arlington County
Deborah Titus, VA, Fairfax County
Daniel Turk, Vice-Chair, District of Columbia

Presider: Barbara Hermanson, Chair, VA, City of Alexandria

I. Call to Order:

Ms. Hermanson called the June 2015 meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) to order at 6:38 p.m.

II. Public Comment Period:

Ms. Hermanson recognized members of the public who were signed up to speak.

Mr. Jeff Larrimore, spoke regarding improving service on the Metrorail blue line.

Ms. Laura Larrimore, spoke regarding service issues and conditions on the Metrorail blue line.

As there were no other members of the public who were signed up to speak, Ms. Hermanson closed the public comment period.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Without objection, the agenda was approved.

IV. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Walker moved, seconded by Ms. Zimmerman, to approve the May 6, 2015 minutes of the Riders' Advisory Council.

Ayes: Ms. Beechem, Ms. Doster, Mr. Fogel, Ms. Hermanson, Ms. MacKenzie, Mr. Sheehan, Mr. Walker, Ms. Wells, Mr. White and Ms. Zimmerman

Nays: None

Abstentions: Mr. Bush and Mr. Destefanis

The motion was approved.

V. WMATA Paper Farecard Elimination Update

Mr. Jim Bongiorno, Treasury Technical Manager, Office of the Treasurer, WMATA was present to update the Council on the elimination of paper farecards in the Metrorail system. Mr. Bongiorno stated that it was the goal of this project to eliminate the use of paper farecards by customers and implement a SmarTrip®-card only fare payment system. To accomplish this goal, he said that the fare payment machines would be retrofitted to only dispense SmarTrip® cards. The machines would otherwise continue working as they did currently. Mr. Bongiorno outlined the next steps of the farecard elimination process:

1. June 2015: Begin marketing campaign and coordination with social service agencies.
2. August/September 2015: Lab testing and live pilot of retrofitted ticket vending machines at three stations.
3. October 2015: Start full deployment of retrofit kits. Paper farecard sales end station-by-station as completed.
4. January 2016: Retrofit completed. All paper farecard sales end.

5. March 2016: Only SmarTrip® cards accepted at Metrorail fare gates.
6. June 2016: Trade-in of paper farecards ends.

Further, staff would conduct public outreach to customers. Mr. Bongiorno reviewed many of the advantages of eliminating the farecards and implementing a SmarTrip®-card only fare system.

Ms. Hermanson inquired about options for homeowner associations that provided discounted paper farecards to residents. Mr. Bongiorno commented that he was only aware of one such similar program, but that he did know that many community-based and social service organizations provided paper farecards to clients under varying circumstances. He said that there would be two options available for community-based organizations:

1. Set up a compact point of sale device at a location to allow clients of such organizations to add value to their SmarTrip® cards; and/or
2. Allow such organizations to utilize the SmartBenefits® program, thereby allowing them to assign a dollar value of clients' monthly commuting benefit directly to a SmarTrip® cards.

Mr. Walker inquired about instances in which SmarTrip® cards were “turned off” after 30 days of non-use. Mr. Bongiorno responded that he was unaware of any instances in which that practice occurred, but that he would follow-up with the Office of Customer Service.

With regard to senior citizens and customers with disabilities, Mr. Sheehan asked how discounted fares would be issued to customers (visitors in particular). Mr. Bongiorno responded that discounted fares for senior citizens and customer with disabilities would not be sold at the SmarTrip® fare boxes, as was the current practice. He continued saying that because customers must provide documentation validating their disability and/or seniority, discounted fares would continue to be sold through the Metro sales offices and/or by customers contacting Metro prior to their arrival when visiting the area.

Ms. MacKenzie expressed concern regarding the minimum purchase of \$20 to use a credit card at the fare payment machine to load funds on a SmarTrip® card. Mr. Bongiorno responded stating that there was a minimum purchase of approximately \$2, not \$20 as Ms. MacKenzie remarked. He continued saying that the starting point for loading funds was currently set at \$20, but that customers could lower that amount as needed to the \$2 minimum. During the retrofitting of the fare payment machines, that \$20 starting point would be lowered to \$10 to better serve customers.

Ms. Doster commented on instances when online SmarTrip® fare purchases were “lost” when the cards were not used for 30 days after the purchase. Mr. Bongiorno advised Council members and customers to register their SmarTrip® cards to obtain the highest level of customer service in the event that they should need to contact WMATA for assistance regarding SmarTrip® cards. He then said that following an online sale, that the SmarTrip® card must be tapped against the point of sale target at a fare payment machine to “download” the funds to the card and finalize the transaction. If the funds were not downloaded to the card within the 30 day allotment, that customers should contact customer service to have the timeframe extended. He also commented that SmarTrip® fare purchases may take up to three hours to process if completed online.

Mr. Bush inquired as to the status of the New Electronic Payment Program (NEPP). He commented that the alternative electronic methods may provide another option for fare payment given the proposed elimination of the paper farecards. Mr. Bongiorno stated that the elimination of the paper farecards worked in conjunction with the NEPP as the next generation fare gates used in the pilot program do not have slots to accept paper farecards.

Mr. Destefanis asked if additional fare payment machines would be added during the pilot phase of the paper farecard elimination. Mr. Bongiorno responded in the negative stating that new machines would not be added, only retrofitting machines that were currently in place. Mr. Destefanis then inquired if SmarTrip® cards could be captured or recycled given the number of cards sold each year. Mr. Bongiorno also responded in the negative stating that the cards were not physically recyclable due to their electronic components and that refurbishing/reselling the cards was cost prohibitive.

Mr. Fogel asked what type of training was being provided to Metrorail station managers regarding the paper farecard elimination. Mr. Bongiorno replied that SmarTrip® classroom training and customer brochures would be provided. Mr. Fogel also expressed confusion regarding the minimum purchase to use a credit card at the fare payment machine to load funds on a SmarTrip® card.

Mr. White commented about the number of people who did not use SmarTrip® cards and continued to pay with cash. He asked what, if any, provisions would be made for these customers. Mr. Bongiorno stated that following the elimination of the paper farecards for Metrorail, that cash would still be accepted as payment at the fare payment machine to apply to SmarTrip® cards. With regard to Metrobus, cash would still be accepted at the fare box as a form of payment.

Mr. Bongiorno encouraged Council members and the public to begin trading in paper farecards and to register their SmarTrip® cards. He also asked that customers consider the SmarTrip® auto-reload and online loading program to ensure the timely loading of funds to their cards.

Ms. Hermanson thanked Mr. Bongiorno for his attendance.

VI. RAC Meeting Schedule Discussion

Due to the pending renovation of the Lower Level Board Room and Lower Level Meeting Room at the WMATA Headquarters (Jackson Graham Building), the two rooms were unavailable July 24-September 9, 2015.

The Council discussed the feasibility of changing the venue, canceling or postponing the RAC monthly meetings scheduled for August 5, 2015 and September 2, 2015.

Mr. Walker moved, seconded by Mr. Bush, to cancel the RAC monthly meeting scheduled for August 5, 2015.

Ayes: Ms. Beechem, Mr. Bush, Mr. Destefanis, Ms. MacKenzie, Mr. Sheehan, Mr. Walker and Ms. Zimmerman

Nays: Mr. Fogel, Ms. Hermanson and Mr. White

Abstentions: Ms. Doster and Ms. Wells

The motion was approved.

Mr. Walker moved, seconded by Mr. Bush, to postpone the RAC monthly meeting scheduled for September 2, 2015 until September 16, 2015.

Ayes: Ms. Beechem, Mr. Bush, Mr. Destefanis, Ms. Doster, Ms. Hermanson, Mr. Sheehan, Mr. Walker and Ms. Wells and Mr. White

Nays: Ms. MacKenzie

Abstentions: Mr. Fogel and Ms. Zimmerman

The motion was approved.

VII. Committee Reports

- Chair's Report to WMATA Board of Directors (May 2015) – Ms. Hermanson

Ms. Hermanson stated that the Chair's Report for the month of May 2015 was included in the agenda package for review.

- Chair's Report from WMATA Committee Meetings – Ms. Hermanson

Ms. Hermanson stated that she attended the WMATA Board of Directors committee meetings held on May 14th and May 28th.

- Budget and Finance Committee – Mr. Bush

Mr. Bush provided a brief report. He stated that the Committee had met with Mark Schofield, Director of Financial Planning and Analysis, WMATA, regarding the status of WMATA's fare simplification efforts. Mr. Bush distributed a report outline of WMATA's conceptual research regarding fare simplification and reviewed the document with the Council. Mr. Bush concluded by saying that the next steps included reviewing and restructuring the fare simplification options in question, engaging in debate on those options, deciding on the most practical or beneficial option(s) and presenting it to the Board. Mr. Sheehan commented that the AAC conducted a fair policy workgroup that would be interested in the Committee's findings. Due to a lack of membership, Ms. Hermanson encouraged all available RAC members to join the Budget and Finance Committee.

- Customer Service Committee – Mr. Fogel

Mr. Fogel stated that the Customer Service Committee had four priorities and reviewed each briefly:

1. Improve Communications: Clarity, Timeliness, Accuracy (Specifically related to incidents delays and safety)
 2. Metrorail Silver Line and Blue Line Ridership
 3. Stations Operations: Role of the Station Manager
 4. Improve Trip Planning Information for Metrobus Customers
- Programs, Projects and Planning Committee – Mr. Turk

In Mr. Turk's absence, Ms. Zimmerman provided a brief update to the Council.

She stated that the Programs, Projects and Planning Committee had six priorities and briefly reviewed the current status:

1. Collaboration with AAC on Recommendations for Priority Seating: Scheduled second meeting of joint work group.
 2. Research WMATA's Approach to Mobile Application Technology and Provide Recommendations as Appropriate: Reviewed a draft resolution regarding mobile applications to present to full RAC at July monthly meeting.
 3. Investigate Possibilities to Receive Feedback from Customers Through Internet Technology: Reviewing strategies and approaches to further this initiative.
 4. Obtain New Electronic Payment Program (NEPP) Pilot Feedback and Provide Recommendations as Appropriate: Met with Mr. Thomas Randall, Director, New Electronic Payments Program, to discuss the status of the pilot.
 5. Research Current Status of Cellular Phone Service Usage Expansion in Metrorail Stations and Tunnels: Brainstormed
 6. Research WMATA's Operational Coordination With Regional Transit Systems in Context of Service Reductions: Brainstormed
- Leadership/Governance Committee – Ms. Hermanson

Ms. Hermanson stated that the Leadership/Governance Committee met via teleconference on May 11, 2015. She briefly discussed two agenda items from that meeting:

1. Identified and implemented processes to improve the RAC's contribution to WMATA.
2. Refined committee guidelines and expectations.

VII. Announcements

Mr. Walker announced his attendance at several public meetings regarding proposed improvements to address traffic congestion on Interstate 66 in Fairfax County, Virginia. He commented that members of the public questioned why WMATA was not involved in the improvement process.

VIII. Adjournment

Without objection, Ms. Hermanson adjourned the regular session meeting at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

James N. Jackson
Riders' Advisory Council Coordinator