



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: April 6, 2020

Attendees

Present: Phil Posner (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Darnise Bush, Tino Calabia, Charlie Crawford, Steve Kaffen, Mary Kay McMahan, Anthony Oberg, Paul Semelfort, Patrick Semelfort, and Kelley Simoneaux.

Call to Order

Due to COVID – 19, the AAC meeting was held virtually. Anu Sharma, Accessibility Advisory Committee Coordinator, started the meeting at 5:30 p.m. by admitting all the participants from “waiting room” in to the “meeting room”, followed by taking a roll call at 5:40 p.m. Thereafter, Chair Posner moved the meeting forward.

Approval of Agenda, Board Report, and Prior Meeting Minutes

The meeting agenda was approved.

The March 2, 2020, meeting minutes were approved as written.

The Board Report was approved with an amendment to include a gratitude for all the essential front-line WMATA employees for their continuous service at this difficult time.

Safety Concerns: Current Pandemic:

Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, stated if the Committee had questions to be shared with Chief Impastato for response. Chair Posner shared some concerns received from the Riders Advisory Council (RAC) Meeting about some passengers using walkers and crutches who had difficulty boarding the bus using the rear doors. Chair Posner sent an email to Paul Wiedefeld, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer (GM/CEO), and he replied stating he would send a memo to the Bus Operations informing passengers using mobility devices are permitted to board from the front of the bus.

There was a discussion about the safety of the bus operators and other front line employees. Mr. Calabia raised a safety concern for the bus operators if they are required to physically assist passengers boarding the bus from front doors. Chair Posner clarified that the lift and/or ramp can be utilized for people using mobility devices thus operators do not need to physically assist. Mr. Sheehan asked whether the bus operators and other front line employees are permitted to wear masks. Mr. Crawford stated continuous wearing of the mask can be problematic for the wearer. Mr. Kaffen stated our comment should be availability to the operator in case the front doors are used. Chair Posner stated it should be noted that we support providing the N-95 masks for the bus operators' safety.

A customer who uses a wheelchair shared her positive experiences of boarding buses from front doors.

MetroAccess Changes due to Corona Virus Impacts on Service Changes:

Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated that MetroAccess runs full service area and hours. The number of vehicles have been scaled back based on demand. Daily disinfecting of the vehicles has been in effect. The Chief Safety Officer is notified if and when a passenger suspected or confirmed positive with COVID – 19, travels through a MetroAccess vehicle. Alternative modes of transportation are being provided. As far as the scheduling is concerned, minimum passengers are boarded on a vehicle to allow social distancing. MetroAccess maintains daily and weekly contact with service providers to obtain on-the-street updates. MetroAccess maintains proactive forecast on the service delivery contract solution inventory to disinfect, and partners with the procurement office to procure and augment as necessary. Ms. Williams-Hall invited questions at this time.

Chair Posner asked whether there would be a change similar to the service in Arlington, VA. Mr. Blake stated Ms. Williams-Hall stated it accurately that today we have not made any change. However, we cannot lock ourselves that we will not change anything in our service as things change so rapidly. Our goal is to maintain the Monday through Friday service as much as possible, with reduced resources as per the demand. Chair Posner inquired about options for people who may need to go to the hospital. Mr. Blake stated Abilities-Ride providers are being utilized for passengers who may have been exposed to a person with COVID-19 or have had it themselves.

Mr. Semelfort asked about protection (masks, gloves, etc.) provided to MetroAccess drivers. Ms. Williams-Hall stated we ask service delivery to share their needs and they have been authorized to purchase those tools. Metro has been vigilant and committed to ensuring safety. Some of the service providers have been even more proactive and providing even more, such as suits for operator to wear. Mr. Semelfort stated he has heard from drivers that they are using their personal tools. Ms. Williams-Hall stated for that to be reported. Mr. Semelfort asked about number of passengers per trip and door-to-door service. Ms. Williams-Hall stated the effort is to have one passenger and their personal care attendant per vehicle. Service-providers provide and update and all of the options are reviewed as they come up to best serve the customers and ensure the safety of the drivers.

Chair Posner asked how the money for fares is being handled. Robbie Werth, Diamond Transportation, stated all the drivers are mandatorily wearing gloves. They have offered masks made out of t-shirts. He and his wife made 80 masks to offer to the operators however, the use of masks is up to the operators. Chair Posner stated drivers should be advised to disinfect gloves after each contact and not to touch their face. Mr. Werth stated they had not discussed money and would be doing so shortly with Ms. Williams-Hall. The disinfectant is being provided for most of the drivers, they are hoping to get some for inside the vehicles. The vehicles are being sanitized after each shift. Chair Posner stated the virus lives on metals, alcohol wipes should be used after every use. Mr. Werth stated possibility of sanitizing vehicles after every customer may be dictated based on the availability and supply of products.

Abilities-Ride Update:

Mr. Blake stated the Abilities-Ride is temporary addition to support our MetroAccess operators and customers as the effort is not to have anyone infected with COVID-19, on the van. The program was running as intended at the beginning of March. February and January numbers were 31000, for March the numbers have been scaled back even more than MetroAccess as it is to supplement the service.

A customer shared information about Transport DC program for DC residents. Trips to grocery stores have been open throughout the month now. Mr. Blake stated for trips such as grocery stores, MetroAccess supports up to 4 bags. The Abilities Ride drivers do not assist customers with bags. We tried to do on the on-set of the program, emphasizing to providers, if drivers provide less service than customers are used to, they are going to go back to MetroAccess. More service provided by Abilities-Ride drivers would entice customers to come back to providers. Most drivers have been very helpful to customers. Mr. Semelfort shared his experience of using Silver Cab, and stated they have been more accommodating, and drivers have informed him they would not have had business if it was not for MetroAccess. Mr. Blake stated demand should still not be an excuse for not providing service. Lack of demand may have forced them to be more responsive. Mr. Semelfort stated drivers would also sit for half an hour to get the return trip, and because of COVID-19, they are wearing gloves and masks. There is less demand for service.

Dr. Posner inquired for short trips to the pharmacy and grocery stores can dispatchers arrange for the same driver to bring the customer back? Mr. Blake stated Mr. Semelfort shared that cab drivers are willing to wait 30 minutes and take the customer back. This is not a practice at MetroAccess due to safety measures for the customer. However, to assist the customer if that works out, then he is willing to try that. Chair Posner stated his perspective was safety, to reduce exposure for customers and drivers.

MetroAccess Sedans Update:

Mr. Blake stated there is no update on sedans at this time as our procurement team is laser focused on COVID-19 related procurement.

Final Approved Budget:

Chair Posner stated the approved budget has been shared with the AAC. The document had to be passed for WMATA to apply for grants. Under the new Federal legislation, WMATA is to receive substantial amount of financial assistance. This is not the final budget. He has reminded the Board to extend the \$2 flat fare to MetroAccess. Mr. Blake asked Chair Posner his reason for stating that the Budget is not final, is it because of a procedural matter or COVID-19. Chair Posner stated it is due to COVID-19 situation. He has also asked the Board to consider if it is safe for workers to be out working, then to schedule the work on Orange/Blue/Silver lines now, that is scheduled for this summer. Mr. Blake stated the recommendation has been shared forward and it is being seriously considered. There are other aspects to it. Due to COVID-19, the fixed route is not getting the revenue thus the Budget may be reviewed before July 1st or even during the fiscal

year. Chair Posner stated WMATA is getting more than \$1 Billion worth grants. Mr. Blake stated we will review how much money gets spent in these COVID months, versus we would have spent otherwise. The cost of service providers is going to increase as well.

Mr. Blake stated he does not want anyone to think there is a huge surplus in MetroAccess. The demand for MetroAccess has increased substantially. If Abilities-Ride was not applied, we would have had to ask for more money from the jurisdictions. He recommended for the AAC to consider to reconvene Budget work-group ahead of next year's budget. This would help with full discussions, and provide education for MetroAccess budget. Chair Posner stated he would consult about it with Mr. Sheehan. Mr. Sheehan supports the idea of educating everyone about MetroAccess budget.

Mr. Calabia stated would there be hearings if Budget was to be revisited? Chair Posner stated that is a requirement.

Mr. Kaffen stated there has been talk to speed the bus service by boarding from front and rear doors. The City is having an experience now. He wondered if this moves along for free service for residents and/or to have customer boarding from rear and front doors. Chair Posner stated that is all part of the Bus Transportation Project (BTP).

Mr. Oberg shared his observation of more attendees at the DC Public hearing than other jurisdictions. A good showing for this budget was good.

A customer stated there should be a discussion about an alternate to fare revenues and transit should be fare free.

Mr. Crawford stated the proposal for the Budget is important. The gasoline tax, could it be used for public transportation?

A customer stated people with disabilities are not able to get help from their care givers.

There was a discussion about providing service to care-givers, in order for them to assist MetroAccess customers. Mr. Calabia proposed a motion that was amended by Chair Posner. The amended motion: the consideration be given to certifying the home care workers to be able to use MetroAccess or other cab services, to get to the homes where the people they serve, live. The amendment was as follows: permit PCAs to use MetroAccess for tasks that are necessary for their clients, getting there, getting home, getting groceries, getting medicines, getting supplies. The amendment was voted and passed. The motion with the amendment was passed.

Public Comments:

Public comments can be received via phone call messages and/or email address that was provided at the meeting, and is posted on wmata.com.

Bus/Rail Subcommittee Report

Mr. Calabia was not prepared to provide a report at this time.

MetroAccess Subcommittee Report:

Mr. Semelfort stated we talked about Abilities-Ride. Now with COVID-19, the second wave of Abilities-Ride is on hold until after this is over. WMATA Budget was discussed. The enhanced mobility grant was discussed – it was to design new MetroAccess vans. It may be on hold as well. Mr. Blake stated the staff hiring cannot happen until July 1st. The AAC will get an update on the van from the Project Manager in a future meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 7:22 pm.