



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

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Dear Chair Evans and Members of the Board,

It is my pleasure to present you with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) report for the month of October 2018. The primary issues we reviewed were: 1) Open Baby Strollers on Metrobus Proposal, 2) Elevator/Escalator Update, 3) Cashless Bus Routes, and 4) MetroAccess Emergency Policy for drivers.

Issues of the Month

Open Baby Strollers on Metrobus Proposal

The AAC received an update on Metro's consideration to establish a policy that would allow open baby strollers on fixed route services, particularly Metrobus. The AAC is very concerned about this proposal. From the impact it can have on customers in need of the Priority Seats, customers using mobility devices and seniors, as well as the increased responsibilities placed on the bus operators for resolving issues between customers with disabilities in need of the space and customers with open strollers, this policy has a lot of risk for little in proven potential returns.

Currently WMATA bus does not have a policy regarding the size and placement of large items on buses such as mobility devices, baby transport devices, luggage, shopping carts. We believe that the policy when crafted should address the following issues: safety for people using mobility devices; safety and ease of movement for all passengers; effects on boarding and exiting the bus as well as dwell time and burden on the driver. Just as the AAC began and continues to review the design & development of the upcoming 8000-Series trains, we hope to do the same for the next series of buses. The child stroller matter is a reminder that appropriate space at the front of buses be allotted to accommodate users of wheelchairs and other mobility aids, seniors, and families with child strollers.

The current policy used by the DC Circulator appears to address these issues:

PRIORITY SEATING:

There are three categories of priority groups for the accessible seating area.

- First priority: People using wheelchairs and motorized mobility aids
- Second Priority: Persons with disabilities, seniors and people with walkers
- Third priority: Children in strollers

All other passengers are asked to allow riders within these categories use of the accessible seating area first. We rank priority seating to accommodate individuals using wheelchairs or scooters who are unable to stand and fold their equipment.

STROLLER SIZE LIMITATIONS:

- The maximum size for a stroller is 48" long by 24" wide. Strollers larger than 48x24, such as most jogging strollers, will not be allowed on buses. The DC Circulator does not allow play buggies such as plastic pull-along cars or wagon carts at any time.
- The bus driver has complete discretion to operate the bus in a safe manner. If the driver thinks that the stroller is compromising the safety of passengers, he or she may direct the passenger to move the stroller to a safe location or to fold the stroller.

BOARDING AND DISEMBARKING:

- You may request that the driver kneel the bus or that the ramp be deployed to make boarding the bus easier. Remember, you may still be required to collapse your stroller once on board. Have your fare ready before the bus arrives and always let passengers exit first.
- When space permits, children may remain in a stroller. Keep strollers out of the aisle and lock the wheels. Hold on to your stroller at all times.
- If you take your child out of the stroller, please fold the stroller to avoid taking up more seats than necessary.
- When the bus approaches your stop let the driver know that you will be getting off with a child and stroller.
- To avoid tipping your child out of the stroller, board the bus forward and leave the bus backwards.

The AAC recommends adopting the circulator policy for use on Metro Bus.

Elevator/Escalator Update

The AAC received a second update regarding elevator reliability. This issue is causing significant concern among AAC members and the disability community in general. Metro staff reported that most of the elevator challenges have stemmed from water issues resulting from the heavy rains the region has faced. Other elevators have been out of service due to capital improvement projects, safety reasons, and jurisdictional inspections. Overall elevator availability has consistently trended slightly lower than the accepted level of 96%.

Metro reported being focused in an attempt to ensure all current and potential water issues are resolved when elevators are returned to service, and new elevators are installed. For unscheduled outages Metro strives to meet its own protocol of responding within two hours of any reported or identified outage, even at locations with redundant elevators. When discussing the option of having the street to mezzanine elevators default to the street, staff said that having the elevators at street level would be advantageous to reducing water intrusion. The AAC will continue to monitor the performance and reliability of Metro's elevators as well as the implementation of mezzanine to street elevators defaulting to street level.

Cashless Bus Routes

WMATA has not released the data analysis from the “cashless bus trial”, the AAC continues to request that a trial of cash allowed, but no card reloading be carried out before any final decision is reached on implementation. Comparing the deliverables and effectiveness of the 3 options (no change, no cash and no card reloading, or no card reloading) will be critical to having the most effective and least harmful solution. Before proceeding with implementation of the policy, we strongly believe a benefit versus cost analysis should be done that addresses these points: cashless buses may actually slow down boarding, as riders board with Metrocards with insufficient funds; if they are asked to descend, the line is disrupted by up to 15 seconds or MetroBus forfeits the fare revenue, and they ride free. Riders without sufficient funds but who "urgently must get home" may have confrontations with the bus operators. There is the potentially high cost of this proposal leading to the need to equip and maintain MetroCard machines at express bus stops. Thus a cost-benefit analysis should be required before implementation.

In addition, only express routes that have parallel bus service should be considered. Many of the others subsequently mentioned do not; they provide a unique service that is not duplicated, such as the No.37.

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for MetroAccess Emergencies

Currently, MetroAccess vehicles carry no first aid equipment. In the case of emergencies, drivers are instructed to call the OCC before 911 is contacted. Customers have reported long waits before drivers can get through to the OCC, thereby causing long delays in contacting 911. The AAC recommends streamlining this policy by establishing a “hotline” for emergency situations between drivers and OCC or permitting drivers to contact 911 directly.

Sincerely,

Philip Posner
Chair