



Accessibility Advisory Committee

600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
202-962-6060

Meeting Minutes: April 4, 2016

ATTENDEES

Present: Patrick Sheehan (Chair), Denise Rush (1st Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva (2nd Vice-Chair), Dr. Tapan Banerjee, Carolyn Bellamy, Brianne Burger, Darnise Bush, Charlie Crawford, Steven Kaffen; Marisa Laios, Phillippa Mezile, Edward McEntee, Mary Kay McMahon, Randall Pope, Paul Semelfort, Anthony Stephens, Dr. William Staderman, and Roger Stanley.

Call to Order

Chairman Sheehan called the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA, BOARD REPORT, AND PRIOR MEETING MINUTES

The meeting agenda was approved as amended.

The March 7, 2016 meeting minutes were approved.

The Chair's Report to the Board, dated April 4, 2016, was approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Debbie Brown, President, Sligo Creek Chapter, National Federation for the Blind (NFB) and former AAC member, made a comment about the use of paratransit funds for the use with Transportation Network Companies (TNC) such as Uber and Lyft, as being proposed with Abilities-Ride. The Sligo Creek Chapter passed a motion for NFB of Maryland regarding the rate charged. When customers use the fixed route system, everybody pays the same rate and receives the same service. With the Abilities-Ride proposal, there appears to be a two-tier system for payment and access. Customers must have a smartphone to access the service, and customers who use mobility devices will pay more to use the service. The NFB of Maryland has taken the position that Metro paratransit funds should not be spent on TNCs. Mr. Sheehan requested that the organization forward a written motion to the AAC.

Ms. Brown also stated that in all her years of advocacy, she has never had a General Manager to speak so frequently to the disability community. She stated that she appreciates his interests and suggested that others can take a page from his book and do the same.

A customer expressed an interest in the process to become eligible for MetroAccess. Cheryl O'Konek, Manager, Office of Eligibility Certification and Outreach, stated that she would provide the customer with an application and information on applying for services at the end of the meeting.

A comment was made about the Metro's Travel Training Workshop on March 24-25, 2016. The customer stated that the workshop was informative and she especially liked the tour of the system. She offered kudos to Metro for an outstanding workshop on the fixed route system.

Barbara Milleville, President, National Capital Citizens with Low Vision, expressed an interest in an update on station lighting. She stated that the work group met last month, but she was unable to attend the meeting. Mr. Sheehan stated that the topic was listed on the agenda for an update.

Discussion with Metro General Manager/Chief Executive Officer

Paul J. Wiedefeld, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer, greeted members of the AAC and the public for the second time since his appointment as GM/CEO four months ago. He discussed the importance of customer feedback, stating that it allows Metro the opportunity to correct any shortcomings and restore pride to the public transportation system. He thanked the members of the AAC for their feedback on ways to enhance accessibility on the fixed route system as well as with the Request for Information (RFI) on the Abilities-Ride proposal. Additionally, he thanked members of the AAC for participating in Metro's emergency exercise trainings for first responders, recognizing Dr. William Staderman and Paul Semelfort for participating in the most recent emergency exercise, which took place in Virginia.

Last month service on the Metrorail system was suspended for a full day. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that this allowed staff to inspect all 91 stations and address deficiencies. Metro is a two-track system and a review of the maintenance procedures demonstrated that Metro needed to take a different approach. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that the decision to suspend service was made for customer and employee safety. Metro is taking a comprehensive look at the fixed route system and is exploring several options; however, no decisions have been made. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that he prefers to take a holistic approach to resolving the issues. Metro is working on a plan to address the deficiencies identified in an efficient and effective manner.

Other issues on Metro's agenda include lighting and bus stop accessibility improvements. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that Metro is reviewing lighting at the entrances and throughout the stations. The Judiciary Square Metrorail station was used as a lighting test site; however, it did not offer the recommended outcome; therefore, Metro will be testing different kinds of lighting for the platform and mezzanine level in the stations. Metro is interested in getting this right so the appropriate amount of light is used throughout the transit system. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that Metro will continue to move forward on accessible bus stops. He added that improving bus stops will give all customers, including those with disabilities, greater access to the fixed route system.

Tapan Banerjee commended Mr. Wiedefeld for choosing safety first and closing the system to address deficiencies in the system. Safety is one of the biggest concerns for the disability community in using public transportation.

Brianne Burger also thanked Mr. Wiedefeld for taking fast action on safety issues in the Metrorail system. Ms. Burger expressed an interest in safety as it relates to communication. She stated that when an incident occurs in the system, Metro provides audio announcements but fails to display the same information visually on the Passenger Information Display System (PIDS). For the last two years, the AAC has advocated for effective communication with customers who are deaf/hard of hearing and has recommended the use of whiteboards. Additionally, the AAC leadership has also discussed the issue at the Quarterly Meeting with the Executive Board; however there has been no resolution. Ms. Burger stated that the Washington metropolitan area has one of the highest populations of deaf people, and Metro needs to do a better job of communicating with this community. Mr. Wiedefeld said the issue of communication was raised, and whiteboards are a common sense response for the purpose of communicating with the deaf community in the Metrorail system. Christian Kent, Assistant General Manager, Department of Access Services (ACCS), stated that Metro's computer based training on Serving Customers with Disabilities that is offered to all staff addresses how to communicate with customers who are deaf/hard of hearing. ACCS has discussed the issue of customer communication with Metro's Office of Rail Transportation (RTRA), which is considering the most effective way to implement the recommendation. There are some logistics to work out with implementing the procedure, and ACCS will follow up with the AAC next month on the issue.

Steve Kaffen thanked Mr. Wiedefeld for returning to the AAC for the second time to discuss issues that concern to all riders including those in the disability community. He expressed an interest in internal oversight, independent guidance, and prioritization of repairs to the system. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that Metro was reorganized in early March and part of the reorganization included an Internal Auditing and Compliance section. The Internal Auditing and Compliance section will offer an independent review of issues, allowing Metro to be more proactive, rather than reactive on issues. The current focus is Metrorail. In response to a question about Metro's Inspector General Office, Mr. Wiedefeld stated that the Office of the Inspector General reports directly to the Board; however, the Internal Auditing and Compliance Section reports directly to him.

Charlie Crawford expressed an interest in Metro's budget cycle. He stated that adequate funding is an ongoing challenge for the system. Given the aging system's condition, Metro cannot continue to add to its capacity without repairing its infrastructure. He asked whether the AAC could be of assistance in educating the local jurisdictions about the viability, impact of the freezes, and temporary shutdowns of the system. To understand Metro's finances, Mr. Wiedefeld stated that the budget has been reset to allow him an opportunity to review it. Looking forward to the next budget cycle, the AAC may be helpful in assessing what is being proposed and offering feedback.

Another issue of concern related to the budget is the fare calculation for MetroAccess service during major track work and long-term temporary shutdowns. Mr. Sheehan stated that MetroAccess fares are calculated using the fastest fixed-route option.

Because track work can slow the system, and a shutdown of the rail system can stop service all together, the fastest route should no longer be based on Metrorail service. The AAC has put forth the recommendation of using twice the Metrobus fare to calculate the paratransit fares, which would make fares more accurate. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that if there are any Metrorail system shutdowns, Metro would continue to offer the full service to paratransit customers as it offers today. He stated that he would follow-up on the AAC recommendation on fares during such periods.

Mr. Crawford expressed an interest in comments from the local media regarding future shutdowns of the Metrorail system. Many people with disabilities rely upon the fixed route system for all their transportation needs. Having a clear understanding in advance would allow customers to prepare for alternate transportation arrangements. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that Metro is working hard to restore pride in the region's public transportation system. If there is an issue of safety, and it warrants a closure of the system, Metro will close the system. Metro will communicate with the public as quickly as it can, so customers have an opportunity to make adjustments. Mr. Wiedefeld reiterated his comments about taking a holistic approach to correcting the issues in the system.

Ms. Milleville stressed the importance of improving lighting in the Metrorail system. Metrorail stations are inherently dark, and adequate lighting is a critical safety issue for all customers including those with disabilities. She stated that NCCLV has been working closely the AAC on the issue of lighting in the system and has audited almost 80% of Metrorail stations. From the audit, NCCLV shared a prioritized list of stations that should be addressed. Ms. Milleville requested an update on lighting improvements and maintenance in the system. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that Metro is completing lighting work at some of its mezzanines in the system. As mentioned earlier, Metro is taking an inventory of lighting throughout the stations, and is testing different kinds of lighting for the platform and mezzanine levels of the stations to ensure the appropriate amount of light is used throughout the transit system. Lighting is a significant investment and Mr. Wiedefeld stated that he will review the AAC's list of prioritized stations for lighting improvements.

A comment from the public expressed an interest in the Abilities-Ride proposal. The customer stated that ACCS has been open with the disability community in discussing the proposed service; however, there is still some confusion about the program as it relates to accessible taxi service. Currently, when a customer requests accessible service via a TNC, the customer is referred to existing taxi service and is required to pay regular taxi rates, which are higher than the TNC rates. The customer requested information on Metro's plan to ensure customers pay the same rate on Abilities-Ride regardless of vehicle type requested. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that Metro is interested in increasing transportation options by adding more alternatives to the paratransit service. Mr. Kent added that the RFI for Abilities-Ride proposal closed on March 18, 2016. The information will be synthesized and follow-up provided to the AAC.

The AAC thanked Mr. Wiedefeld for his interest in the needs of people with disabilities in public transportation. With a round of applause, the AAC thanked Mr. Wiedefeld for returning to the AAC and putting safety first.

ACTION ITEMS FROM THE DISCUSSION WITH THE GM

Members of the AAC expressed an interest in discussing the action items from the meeting with the GM, which were as follows: 1) enhancing communication with the deaf/hard-of-hearing customers using the fixed route system; 2) MetroAccess Fare Policy; and 3) improving lighting in the Metrorail system.

The AAC recommendation to use whiteboards for the purpose of communicating during emergencies has been brought up several times; however, Metro has been slow to respond. Mr. Kent stated that there is a process to implementing a recommendation. ACCS has discussed the issue with RTRA. Mr. Kent requested clarification on the AAC recommendation of whiteboards and asked whether the request consisted of stationary equipment, and/or portable device, or pen and paper for front line staff to use. Ms. Burger stated that staff in the Metrorail system often report that they do not have access to pen and paper and therefore cannot communicate with customers who are deaf/hard of hearing. She stated that in her travels locally and abroad, she noticed that other transportation properties were using whiteboards to communicate with people who are deaf/hard-of-hearing. Whiteboards are a green, low-tech option that can be both portable and stationary.

Ms. Burger also stated that the device could also be used on Metrobus. For example, when there is an outage in the Metrorail system and shuttle service is being provided, the Metrobus operator can use the portable whiteboard to write down the destination of the bus. Having the destination information available for customers to read would alleviate the confusion for lots of customers as well as the bus operator. Customers can read the destination information and drivers would not have to communicate the information as often.

Mr. Kent acknowledged Ms. Burger's frustration and asked the AAC to keep in mind that Metro, in particular RTRA, has been prioritizing and responding to other requests. Mr. Kent stated that the implementation of a new policy has to be done in a coordinated fashion, and more substantive information will be available by the next AAC meeting.

Mr. Crawford stated that Metro needs to enhance its communication with all customers. He stated that the enhancements in communication with people who are deaf/hard-of-hearing can also be a limitation for other disabilities, such as the Blind community. Ms. Burger stated that the whiteboards are for immediate communication between a customer and staff in the fixed route system and respects the needs of other types of disabilities. Metro offers all types of announcements through its public address system that customers who are deaf/hard-of-hearing cannot access. Metro does offer information on the PIDS and e-Alerts; however, the information that is displayed is not timely.

Ms. Burger stated that, in her view, enhancing communication by using whiteboards does not limit the communication of other disabilities, such as the Blind community, but increases communication across the board for all disabilities, including the deaf/hard-of-hearing community. She added that a resolution to this issue is long overdue.

The AAC also discussed MetroAccess Fare Policy. With all the delays, single tracking, and temporary shutdowns occurring, Metrorail should no longer be the default fastest route used for calculating MetroAccess fares. Mr. Sheehan stated that the AAC recommendation of "twice the Metrobus" fare means that all paratransit customers are paying the correct fare. Mr. Kent stated that the AAC fare policy recommendation may have significant budget implications. As Mr. Wiedefeld stated, Metro has already passed the operating budget for this year. Metro's Board has the option to change fares every two years. With that said, Mr. Kent requested clarification on the Committee's recommendation for implementation. The AAC requested that staff investigate the possibility and impact of amending the MetroAccess Fare Calculator, so that it adequately reflects actual fares during a shutdown of the Metrorail system.

A comment from the public expressed an interest in whether the AAC fare policy recommendation had any ADA implications for Metro. To ensure all the questions and issue are addressed, Mr. Kent requested that the AAC provide a formal problem statement. This will allow staff to investigate on the specifics and provide feedback. Mr. Sheehan forwarded the issue to the AAC Fare Policy Work Group. Marisa Laios stated that she will work with Phil Posner on development of the problem statement.

A temporary shutdown of the Metrorail system would be critical for all customers including customers with disabilities. Both Anthony Stephens and Mary Kay McMahon expressed an interest in whether Metro would allow fixed route customers with disabilities to use the paratransit service during a temporary shutdown of the Metrorail system. Paul Semelfort stated that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York City (NYCT) once shutdown a section of its system, and the Access-A-Ride, NYCT paratransit service, provided customers with disabilities paratransit service during the shutdown of the rail line. Mr. Kent stated that situation was an equity issue because during the shutdown, only a section of the system was inaccessible to customers with disabilities and offering paratransit service was the remedy. At Metro, the possibility of the shutdown would mean that the system could not be accessed by any customers.

The AAC also discussed lighting in the system. Mr. Kent stated that the prioritized list of stations was used to guide Metro through the first set of lighting of improvements. He stated that ACCS will follow up with staff and provide feedback. Additionally, staff will forward the prioritized list of station lighting projects to the General Manager.

Lastly, Mr. Kent thanked the AAC for their kind words regarding the working relationship of ACCS and staff. He stated that staff is committed to improving quality of life through transportation.

STATION LIGHTING WORK GROUP

Mr. Kent provided a brief update on the lighting in the Metrorail system. He stated that Metro has not lost interest in advancing lighting improvements in the system. Lighting is a significant investment that is affixed to the Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) side of the budget. Improvements in lighting are also tied to other work occurring in the system. Often times, there are a lot of different repairs occurring in the system competing for a small amount of time the system is closed to make repairs.

Ms. Milleville stated that during the General Manager's discussion, it was noted that Metro was unhappy with the outcome of lighting at Judiciary Square. The comment was surprising since NCCLV approved the lighting station as being acceptable. She stated that the Bus/Rail Subcommittee (BRS) Station Lighting Work Group along with NCCLV had worked hard on assessing lighting and prioritizing a lighting list of stations and do not want to lose support for the issue. Ms. Milleville stated that the previous CIP has funds that were unspent and should be used for new lighting in the system. She suggested that the issue be added to the Board report along with the prioritized lighting list of stations. Anthony Stephens stated that the next BRS Station Lighting Work Group will be held on Monday, May 9, 2016 immediately following the BRS meeting.

AAC RECRUITMENT 2016

Dr. B. Moore Gwynn, AAC Coordinator, discussed the AAC recruitment process for new members. She stated that the AAC is recruiting volunteers with disabilities and senior citizens for existing vacancies from the District of Columbia, Prince George's County, Montgomery County, Fairfax County, Arlington County, and City of Alexandria to serve on the AAC. To qualify, volunteers must be regular riders of Metrobus, Metrorail, or MetroAccess, and not be an elected official or a Metro employee.

The AAC consists of 18 jurisdictional-representative members, two members from the Access for All Committee, and an emeritus member. Members serve for four-year terms, and Metro's Board appoints all members. AAC members interested in renewing their membership must re-apply. Metro retains all applications received from individuals interested in serving on the AAC for two years from the date submitted.

BUS/RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

With the snowy winter, the BRS discussed Metro's policy for operating Metrobus during inclement weather with the Office of Bus Planning (BPLN), and the Office of Customer Service (CSVC).

Metro's goal is to ensure that Metrobus can operate safely and reliably in all weather conditions across the region on all its 175 bus lines. Because weather conditions throughout the region can be inconsistent, an operations plan for Metrobus was developed. The operations plan consists of four service levels for inclement weather:

light; moderate; severe; and total shutdown of the system. Metro collaborates with transportation departments in each region for information on snow removal; and, as the weather changes, Metro can reduce or increase demand for services based on the weather conditions.

To keep the public informed, Metro uses e-Alerts, press releases, and local media to keep riders informed of the service plan. Additionally, at each service level, route maps for each Metrobus line detailing where the bus will be on the detour are updated on Metro's website. Metro's Office of Customer Service is informed at each level and information is shared with customers and local jurisdictions alike. The AAC reminded Metro that in addition to clearing streets, sidewalks also need to remain accessible as well.

BPLN also provided an update on Metro's next generation of electronic display systems for bus shelters. The purpose of the electronic display system is to keep customers informed of transit events while they are en route to their destinations. Metro has installed approximately 169 electronic bus shelter messaging signs across the region and has another 17 signs on order to be installed at the Franconia Springfield Metrorail station and the Takoma Langley Crossroad Transit Center. Metro is also replacing the electronic signs at Friendship Heights Metrorail station. Additionally, with funds from a grant, Metro plans to install approximately 87 bus stops electronic display signs in Prince George's County and around the region.

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) continued its discussion on the Abilities-Ride proposal. Metro received a great deal of feedback from the community and stakeholders. The next step in the process is to evaluate the information. The service is anticipated to begin later in the year, and if successful, may be expanded beyond Maryland at a future date.

The MAS also discussed the upcoming April agenda. The subcommittee expressed an interest in the following information: 1) safety video that will demonstrate the consequences of not wearing a shoulder harness; 2) impact of a collision on different types of mobility devices; and 3) MetroAccess accident procedures for the customer and drivers. Omari June, Director, Office of MetroAccess Service thanked members for the information and stated that staff will be prepared for the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.



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STATUS OF FY 2016 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Info/Action Item Number	Description	Date Initiated	Originating Group	Status	Completion Date
Info – 12	Customer safety	5/2/16	AAC	Presenter: Chief Ronald Pavlik	
Info – 06	Age-Friendly DC Task Force (Update)	12/5/16	AAC	Update (Follow-up discussion after event - November 2013).	

Note: Quarterly Meeting Recommendations are marked with an asterisk symbol.

COMPLETED - FY 2016 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Info/Action Item Number	Description	Date Initiated	Originating Group	Status	Completion Date
Info - 01	Proposed 2016 Bus Route Changes	7/6/15	AAC	Presenter: Julie Hershorn	7/6/15
Info – 02	25 th Anniversary of the ADA	7/6/15	AAC	Open Forum	7/6/15
Info - 03	Proposed 2016 Bus Route Changes	7/6/15	AAC	Presenter: Julie Hershorn	7/6/15
Info - 05	Establishing A Customer Community	9/14/15		Presenter: Jason Minser	9/14/15
Info - 07	Metro’s Diversity and Recruitment Initiatives	10/5/15		Presenter: Ikemia Arrington	10/5/15
Info – 08	Momentum and Long Range Plan (update)	12/7/15	AAC	Presenter: Jennifer Weeks	12/7/15

COMPLETED - FY 2016 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Info - 09	Maryland – Abilities Ride Proposed MetroAccess Alternatives	2/1/16		Presenter: Christian Kent/Christiaan Blake	2/1/16
Info - 04	AAC Quarterly Meeting with Board Executive Committee	2/1/16	AAC	New approach: Joint AAC/RAC meeting	2/1/16
Info - 10	Announcements 7000 Series	3/7/16	AAC	Presenter: Debo Ogunrinde	3/7/16
Info - 04	AAC Quarterly Meeting with Board Executive Committee	3/7/16	AAC	Feedback	3/7/16
Info - 11	A discussion with Metro’s GM	4/4/16	AAC	Presenter: Paul Wiedefeld	4/4/16

Note: Quarterly Meeting Recommendations are marked with an asterisk symbol.