



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: July 1, 2019

Attendees

Present: Phil Posner (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Tapan Banerjee, Carolyn Bellamy, Darnise Bush, Tino Calabria, Erin Coneys, Charlie Crawford, Rico Dancy, Melanie Jackson, Steven Kaffen, Mary Kay McMahon, Phillippa Mezile, Anthony Oberg, Doris Ray, Paul Semelfort, Patrick Sheehan, and Kelley Simoneaux.

Call to Order

Chair Posner called the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting to order at 5:30 pm and started with introductions of the members.

The Committee members thanked Dr. Banerjee for his services and wished him well.

Approval of Agenda, Board Report, and Prior Meeting Minutes

The meeting agenda was approved as modified. Chair Posner proposed to discuss an article about persons with low vision having difficulties during the shutdown, along with a few other items to be discussed.

The June 3, 2019 meeting minutes were approved as written.

The Board Report was approved as modified. It will be addressed to the new Board Chair, Mr. Smedberg. The word "modified" will be added for the pantograph style car barriers.

Topics of Discussion:

Chair Posner stated the following topics are for discussion: The Abilities-Ride Program, MetroAccess, sedans, and an improvement for shuttle service.

Sedans:

Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services (ACCS), stated the previously chosen vehicle as per the criteria set and Committee recommendations, was the Chevy Malibu Hybrid. However, the process of choosing a vehicle may have to be repeated due to the General Motors company discontinuing the manufacturing of the Chevy Malibu Hybrid sedans. An alternate sedan would have to be reviewed, including the committee testing and provide feedback. Upon reaching a decision, the procurement process may begin.

Abilities-Ride Program:

Mr. Blake stated there is no announcement about the expansion of the Abilities-Ride program at this time. Chair Posner asked whether the current ride-scheduling process will continue forward. Mr. Blake stated yes, MetroAccess customers would choose what works best for them.

Ms. Ray asked about the fare structure of various service providers in the five jurisdictions of Northern Virginia. Mr. Blake stated each company has its own fare structure and the fares will be informed to customer at the time of booking the trip.

Ms. Simoneaux asked if the service providers guarantee wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV); is there a requirement for number of WAVs in the fleet; and is there a set time in which providers must provide the trip? Mr. Blake stated having WAVs is part of the contract, however, there is no required specified number of WAVs in the fleet. We require data of all the trips to help us analyze WAVs trips and non-WAVs trips to review if there is any disparity in the time in which trips are serviced. If any disparity is found, we require the providers to inform us how they plan to remedy the issue.

MetroAccess:

Mr. Blake stated the new scheduling window has started. At this time, the pre-arrival calls are limited to 30 customers. When the pilot is tested and found successful then it will be rolled out to all MetroAccess customers. Within the area of the summer shutdown, MetroAccess fares are not calculated based on Metrorail fares, but on Metrobus fares.

Shuttle-Service:

There was a discussion about shuttle service and the difficulties along with possible solutions to assist customers with visual disabilities. Chair Posner stated the low vision community is having difficulty at the stations affected by the shutdown because buses are not able to stop at the same locations every day and customers have not had any travel training. As a recommended solution, can a customer be found eligible for MetroAccess, and when the Metrorail service re-opens their eligibility will no longer work? In that case, can they receive expedited eligibility? Can staff be present at the stations to expedite the process?

Christopher Colbert, Director, Office of Eligibility Certification and Outreach, stated given the current staffing it may not be feasible to have staff physically present at the stations. However, we have some methods electronically and could possibly expedite the process. David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated people who reported the issues were already MetroAccess customers. Mr. Blake stated shuttle buses not stopping at the same locations is a concern. He was informed that the bus bays were changed. For any future changes there would be a robust dialogue to inform customers.

Chair Posner stated people who have visual disabilities have proof of blindness, therefore, he recommends temporary eligibility. Mr. Blake stated customers need a doctor's note and waiting 21 days to get a doctor's note may not be feasible for an expedited process. Mr. Colbert stated we look for a person's disability and a proof of disability. With the doctor's note, we get information about the doctor license number and other needed information as well. If the person has a disability with proof, we could perhaps review this matter.

Chair Posner stated we make a motion that your office make a legal expedited process for blind individuals. Mr. Blake stated if we say temporary just for blind, that is

discriminating against persons with other disabilities, however, if the Committee wants to make a motion for expedited temporary eligibility, we will make it without disability specific for emergencies. Mr. Crawford recommended presumptive eligibility for a person with disability, being impacted by the summer shutdown. There was a vote on the motion. The motion carried.

Mr. Sheehan discussed the AIRA program. With a pair of glasses or using a smartphone connects customers to trained agents and to get navigation help. For more information about the program, Mr. Sheehan provided a point of contact in the Washington DC area. Chair Posner asked for a motion to ask WMATA to review the ability of developing a contract with AIRA for the shutdowns, for customers with visual disabilities, and used the example of the late-night service where WMATA provides \$3.00 subsidy. Mr. Sheehan proposed the motion as recommended by Chair Posner. The motion was approved.

Ms. Rush stated AIRA would cost extra money to the customers. There is another service "Be My Eyes" which is free of charge. Mr. Sheehan stated the AIRA glasses are free and they provide free service to any of the 19 museums in Washington DC. Ms. Ray stated there are many people with a disability who do not wear any kind of lenses nor do they have smartphones. There should be another alternate.

Ms. Ray stated due to construction at stations, it is extremely difficult to know where the shuttles are and recommended for MetroAccess to provide shuttle service. Ms. Bellamy stated there are already established shuttles by Falcon Transportation. Ms. Ray stated regularly serviced bus routes servicing the bus bays at stations is problematic, especially at the Pentagon station. Chair Posner stated for the next shutdown, it would be helpful to have tactile signage and Braille maps. Mr. Blake stated the Braille maps at the Silver Line stations were just updated and the matter will be reviewed further.

Mr. Blake stated all the stations are very busy with existing regular bus service and the added shuttle service. We are trying to ensure the shuttles service the specific bus bays on a regular basis. We are also emphasizing the importance of buses servicing the correct stops and all operators announcing the stops and the destinations. Chair Posner stated the annunciators also need to work properly. Mr. Sheehan requested the information to be shared with the Riders Advisory Council (RAC) as well.

Pantograph Style Inter Car Barrier:

Mr. Blake stated at this time, there is no schedule for the retrofit as it is not official yet. He is certain the retrofit will begin with the 7000-series followed by others. Mr. Calabia stated the barriers are relatively small and asked for a demonstration to the Committee when the set to be used is finalized. Mr. Blake stated we could ask for a demonstration. Mr. Sheehan thanked Mr. Calabia and Ms. Rush for attending the demonstration. Ms. Rush stated anytime we are invited, out of 20 at least 5 members should represent the disabled community. When given an opportunity to provide feedback it should be availed.

Faregates:

Chair Posner asked about the new faregates. Mr. Blake stated we have been involved in that project and a lot is going on. Mr. Blake said the Project Manager will be invited to a future Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to provide a brief presentation about the new faregates. The next generation of faregates have not been bought, though the contract has been awarded, and the design has been adopted. The design adopted, as recommended by the AAC, has multiple targets. There will be 6 targets for the accessible gates including a target on the left side, which was a direct recommendation by Elver Ariza-Silva.

Chair Posner stated the last time the Committee looked at the faregates was when they had the clamshells. Mr. Blake stated that was for the New Electronics Payment Program (NEPP) project. Mr. Calabia asked if it is possible for pictures to be emailed for illustrations. Mr. Blake stated he will do that. Dr. Posner mentioned several items where the AAC provided feedback, received updates, and were effective in making a change.

Bus/Rail Subcommittee Report:

Mr. Calabia stated the draft of meeting minutes will be approved in the BRS meeting.

MetroAccess Subcommittee Report:

Mr. Semelfort proposed three motions of recommendations:

- 1) A written format should be distributed to all current MetroAccess customers, briefly describing recent MetroAccess policy changes: Expanded MetroAccess 90-minute Scheduling Window; pre-arrival call, 10 minutes before the estimated arrival of the vehicle; expanded option of the customer negotiate the desired pick up window time for a requested trip with a reservationist.

With Ms. Ray's amendment, alternative formats should be available to customers. Chair Posner recommended for future reference, all public information should be available in all the appropriate alternate formats. Ms. Ray seconds it, however, would like to defer from the word "appropriate", as the consumers may not know the definition of "appropriate" and it is the responsibility of the AAC to ensure that the "proper" is defined accurately.

- 2) Abilities-Ride Expo gets scheduled during weekdays after 4 pm at WMATA headquarters sponsored by the Access Services Department.

Mr. Blake stated the Abilities-Ride Expo was recommended for a Saturday as more people can attend on a day when they do not have to take off from work. Perhaps, the Abilities-Ride Expo can be scheduled for two days, on a weekday late afternoon and on a Saturday. Chair Posner stated if it is on a weekend, perhaps the inability of bus service can be observed. Mr. Blake stated the Abilities-Ride could be an option as that also provides an opportunity to educate customers about the service.

- 3) The statistics of MetroAccess new scheduling window collected during the pilot be incorporated into the monthly MetroAccess statistics report.

- 4) MetroAccess customers receive a paper flyer with the following critical information: Name of provider and contact information (phone, email, website); Region(s) of the MetroAccess service area they will specifically cover; Hours of service; Number of Accessible vehicles each new provider has available in their fleet; Pricing system for each provider (number of miles/flat \$5.00 fare). An amendment by Ms. Ray was added about using the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and other accessible technology means to provide this information in an alternative format to the MetroAccess customers.

There was a discussion about this motion. The matter was addressed that all information placed on the website will be in accessible mode.

Mr. Blake appreciated the motion and stated we have a very specific and direct marketing campaign involving colleagues from the Marketing Department as well. The marketing plan has been worked on and the customers have been identified. Information is going to be available on WMATA website as well. This particular motion is about mailing the paper flyer. The mailing of materials will be targeted to certain individuals, at least in the beginning. Mr. Blake stated the committee can move forward with the motion, however, at the moment he cannot say if the marketing campaign will change as a result of this motion.

Chair Posner asked if this marketing may cause any legal problems if targeted only to certain individuals? Mr. Shaffer stated we will ensure to have accessible ways for people to receive the information; everything goes on the website will be in an accessible mode. Mr. Blake stated this mailing is going to the general customers. Mr. Semelfort stated he would like to proceed with the motion. Mr. Crawford stated a possible solution consistent with the motion is to make sure MetroAccess IVR could inform people about additional Abilities-Ride service providers and allow them an option to leave a voicemail for a call back if additional information is needed.

Ms. Bellamy stated majority of our riders do not have smartphones nor do they have computers. She prefers printed materials with information for distribution to customers. Ms. Ray stated the printed materials need to be mailed first class. The motion carried.

Board Activities Report:

Chair Posner stated the Committee's proposals were received well by the WMATA Board. The new Board Chair Mr. Smedberg is very prominent in Northern Virginia transportation. He also provided information about other WMATA Board Members.

Public Comments:

A customer asked about changes in the MetroAccess policy, specifically the pre-arrival calls. If a ride arrives outside of the pick-up window, however, within the 10 minutes duration specified as per the pre-arrival call, would a customer receive the late trip credit? Mr. Blake stated the pre-arrival call is to provide more convenience to customers. It does not affect late trip credit policy nor any other MetroAccess policies or procedures.

Ms. Rush asked what happens when the phone system goes down? Mr. Blake stated all the phone calls are a courtesy to customers.

The customer further asked if a particular phone number can be specified for pre-arrival calls in case a person has multiple phone numbers? Currently, the system does not call on the specified number per trip. Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated we are trying to go through our Trapeze software and identify which phone number belongs to which trip. Chair Posner stated on STAR (Arlington County service) they confirm (for every trip) the phone number customer wants to use as per the trip. For online reservations, the phone number can be entered as per the trip.

A second customer stated concerns about his MetroAccess rides and asked if Uber or Lyft would be part of the Abilities-Ride program in Washington DC or just in Maryland and Northern Virginia. He commented that the TransportDC operates until late at night. He also asked about driverless vehicles being part of MetroAccess fleet. Mr. Blake stated the customer's trips would be reviewed by MetroAccess management. Mr. Blake has not announced any specific company as part of the Abilities-Ride program. The TransportDC is a Washington DC program, and that the driverless vehicles probably will not be part of MetroAccess fleet any time soon.

Ms. Rush asked if a customer's trip information can be retrieved by ID number? Ms. Williams-Hall stated that is exactly what is supposed to happen.

Ms. Bellamy stated the reservation confirmation number is not a useful feature. Chair Posner stated for a change of reservations process staff needs the reservation confirmation number.

Ms. Bush stated her complaints about distance and the types of rides she has had to share. She provided information about a trip and the routing that was inefficient.

Ms. Ray shared her experience from a recent trip at the College Park Station that there is no taxi stand at that station. She rode a 7000-series train and the announcements were cut off due to door closings. In the front of the train, the sign for rail line was not indicated whether it was a Green Line or a Yellow Line. The annunciator was not working properly. It took her 3 hours to get to the Pentagon Station from College Park. As a result, she missed the connecting bus and had to wait for additional half an hour. Ms. Ray commented about public phones not being available inside the stations.

Mr. Blake stated he has taken a note of the 7000-series train announcements. The public phones were taken out of the system by the phone companies a while ago and there was a presentation providing data about it. Chair Posner stated telephone companies decided to remove their phones. Mr. Sheehan asked if the message "this is the 7000" is being removed from the train announcements and Chair Posner confirmed.

Chair Posner thanked Dr. Banerjee for his volunteer services to the AAC.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30pm.