



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: March 2, 2020

Attendees

Present: Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva (2nd Vice-Chair), Darnise Bush, Tino Calabia, Vanessa Coles, Charlie Crawford, Rico Dancy, Melanie Jackson, Steven Kaffen, Mary Kay McMahan, Phillipa Mezile, Anthony Oberg, Paul Semelfort, Patrick Sheehan, and Phil Posner (Remote Participation).

Call to Order

Acting-Chair Rush 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 topic "Summer Shutdown – Bus Planning", was moved to a future meeting whereas the topics "Accessible Faregates – Update", and "Accessible Documents", were added to the agenda.

The February 3, 2020 meeting minutes were approved as written.

The Board Report was approved as amended. The Board Report would include parts of discussion from today's meeting regarding the accessibility issues of a public hearing venue.

Other Topics:

Dr. Posner stated a concern of an inaccessible restroom at the public hearing venue in Virginia. This concern was brought forth by Mr. Oberg's experience. Carol Peredo Lopez, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, inquired about the aspect of accessibility, and stated she would visit the site and provide an update. As part of the discussion, Mr. Oberg recommended better information signage. Dr. Posner stated the doors were too heavy to open and close by a person using a wheelchair. Acting-Chair Rush stated it may be difficult to gauge the space unless the person uses a wheelchair. Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services stated that the venues were reviewed previously. Mr. Oberg stated he tried only one restroom at the venue and is not implying that there was no other facility to use. Mr. Blake asked whether Mr. Oberg shared the information with WMATA staff that were present at the venue, and he had not.

During the ongoing discussion, Mr. Blake called the venue and spoke with a manager informing him of the issue. The Committee was assured that the venue would be reviewed again. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated the venues are reviewed as per the ADA standards requirement for a facility to be accessible. If it complies with the ADA standards, then it is accessible. Acting-Chair Rush stated the ADA needs to be brought up to standards as things have changed since the time ADA was written.

Accessible Faregates - Update

Michael Lynch, Superintendent, Automatic Fare Collection, provided an update about the functioning of the accessible faregates in the Metro system. Mr. Lynch who has been with WMATA less than 2 year shared his experience and observations from when he started working with WMATA and the changes that were implemented for improvement of accessibility. Mr. Lynch shared data over a nine-week period where the availability of accessibility has increased tremendously. A 97% improvement in accessible faregates and 95% reduction has been noticed. At this time, Mr. Lynch invited the Committee to share their experience.

Acting Vice-Chair Ariza-Silva stated he has not seen improvement at the Gallery Place/Chinatown Station. Mr. Lynch asked him to provide specifics of the station for further review. Mr. Oberg stated his concerns about Judiciary Square where if the gates are not working and there is no way to get through, that there is no way to contact the station manager. Mr. Lynch stated that is very helpful to know the mezzanines that are away from the station managers. Mr. Oberg also stated concern about Ballston and Tenleytown Stations. Mr. Dancy asked how a deaf person would communicate to get help. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated there may be cameras for the employee to see the person, also a deaf person can tap on the speaker and they will know someone needs help and send assistance for the customer.

A MetroAccess customer stated a concern of unfamiliarity of the station, especially at nighttime, and asked how she could get help. Ms. Peredo Lopez provided information about the travel training program, and informed the customer about the help buttons at various places: elevators, pylons at the platform, etc.

Acting-Chair Rush thanked Mr. Lynch for coming and presenting to the AAC.

Accessible Document

Mr. Blake stated that when a document is not accessible, generally we can quickly convert it into accessible format. The budget document was not made in Microsoft Word, it was made in design software and then converted in pdf. When it was discovered that the document was not accessible, David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, tried to fix it unsuccessfully. Afterwards, Mr. Blake himself tried to make it accessible, unsuccessfully. Eventually, we had to reach out to a third party to get it accessible by re-typing the entire document, word by word in Microsoft Word, every chart had to be converted, and it was made accessible. The accessible budget document has been posted on the website and the survey submission date has been extended by a week, therefore, his office will no longer accept comments.

Mr. Sheehan asked whether WMATA conforms by **WACG 2.0** standards of 508. Mr. Blake stated our practice is that every document should be accompanied by a text version. Mr. Sheehan stated it is not easy for every document to be compliant in web and the document as per 2.0. as it is specific to the authors. Therefore, the authors need to have

clarity how to make the documents accessible. For complicated documents, such as a budget document that is done once a year, perhaps hire a third party to make is accessible.

Acting-Chair Rush asked if the AAC By-Laws are accessible. Mr. Blake stated yes, and a copy was provided to all the members. Mr. Sheehan stated he does not remember the AAC By-Laws as a problem with being accessible.

Mr. Oberg asked about plans moving forward to mitigate for future accessible documents. Mr. Blake stated we have a procedure where we will have a text version of all the documents. We are also going to have graphical impression to the general public. For future, a budget would be set aside for the cost of making a document accessible.

Mr. Kaffen described the diversity and intensity of the fonts and the designs used, the complexity of the prepared document. Mr. Blake's effort of going to the source document appropriate was much more efficient. Ms. Peredo-Lopez stated the more graphics used in documents tend to be accessible to people with cognitive disabilities, therefore, we need to ensure documents are accessible to all.

Mr. Sheehan stated a concern about the place where the document was listed on the website, it was not easy to find. Mr. Blake stated Dr. Posner had contacted the General Manager and he responded promptly informing that the placement of the budget document and has been there since February 10th, 2020. Dr. Posner stated he thanked the General Manager for such a quick action to his email. Dr. Posner also mentioned that finding the AAC information is not accessible. Mr. Blake stated the Information Technology Team could be invited to one of the future meetings to discuss placing of the information on the website and recommended the accessibility symbol on the homepage. Mr. Crawford stated it is a good point regarding adding a symbol of accessibility to the website.

Budget Hearing - Update

Acting-Chair Rush provided an update about the budget hearings. The rooms were packed with people who advocated for no bus service cuts, rather than the fare increase. Mr. Oberg stated he attended the public hearing in Virginia, and it was packed. Illustrating the high number of attendees, Mr. Kaffen stated at 4:45pm on the last public hearing, his number was over a 100. Mr. Sheehan stated Acting-Chair Rush was quoted on the radio station WTOP, and that was nicely done. He counted that at-least 20 people talked about the same issues: document accessibility, flat fares, etc. Acting Chair Rush commended Mr. Blake for providing Abilities-Ride for MetroAccess customers who attended the public hearings and stated that was very much appreciated. Ms. Coles stated a concern about the longer speaking times taken by the District Officials. As a result, general public did not get sufficient time to speak and some people had to leave as their rides were arranged.

Mr. Semelfort stated he was the first one to speak in Maryland and hopes WMATA would take this as a lesson learned regarding the high number of people and being better prepared for future hearings. Mr. Calabria shared his observation about the number of people from various parts of the city and the impact of the proposed bus service changes.

Acting Chair Rush stated if fares increase, it will impact MetroAccess fares. Mr. Blake stated if a person pays \$6.50, their fare will not change, however, for other fares, there may be an impact. Dr. Posner stated there won't be any change in the way MetroAccess fare will be calculated. Mr. Sheehan stated the pilot of flat fare would be helpful. Acting Chair Rush stated for the person who does not go to the hearings, they would not know, and their fare may change from one day to the other. Dr. Posner stated that happens every hearing. He also commented about the change in process of Board questions and answers and the amount of discussion. There used to be three sessions however, this year, there was only one session about it. The questions from the Board were presented to the General Manager in writing and were not made public.

Mr. Calabria shared information about a new program that initiated in the District of Columbia, where people would receive \$100 monthly from sponsors. Dr. Posner stated based upon the amount used during the month, funds would be added to bring the balance back to \$100. This is for someone who is not a government employee, or anyone who receives supplemental assistance. People with SmartBenefits are excluded. It might be similar to what is done for school age children. The promotion is being offered; the Council has to discuss before it gets implemented.

Public Comment

There were no public comments for this meeting.

Bus/Rail Subcommittee Report

Mr. Calabria provided the Bus/Rail Subcommittee Meeting Report. The bus service cuts were discussed as part of the WMATA Budget. The number of bus routes being cut mentioned during the meeting was 25. After the Budget Hearing, Mr. Hamre informed Mr. Calabria that the bus routes that could be cut could be between 30 and 35. The topic of fare evasion was discussed. Mr. Calabria asked Ms. Peredo-Lopez whether the intern would be able to assist the AAC. Ms. Peredo Lopez clarified that the intern would be dedicated to the Office of ADA Policy and Planning, and if the Committee needed some assistance, we would try to assist as possible.

MetroAccess Subcommittee Report

Mr. Semelfort provided the MetroAccess Subcommittee Report. As part of the discussion, the Subcommittee discussed WMATA Budget, Abilities-Ride, and the Grant. There was a customer complaint about the policy of two attempts by one reservationist, which is contradicting to a previous meeting discussion, and asked for a clarification. Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated effective July 1, 2019, we changed the process to give better customer experience, however that caused the hold times to extend

tremendously. In order to assist customers better, we modified the process and allowed customers to be connected to a different reservationist. In order to provide even better customer experience, we provide three attempts and at that point, it is considered denial of trips. Mr. Semelfort and Acting Chair Rush asked when the processes changed, why was the AAC not informed and why there was no communication with the customers. Ms. Williams-Hall stated the intent was to provide better customer experience.

Ms. Coles asked whether the wait time between trips has changed. Mr. Semelfort asked about the next showcase for the Abilities-Ride. Mr. Blake stated the next showcase would be in Virginia, however, a date is not decided. He informed the Committee that Silver Cab wants to come to a meeting to share information about their services. Mr. Blake stated with respect to MetroAccess Reservations process, the changes are in place for better customer experience. It may not be feasible for us to wait and contact the AAC for every change as it gets implemented to provide better customer experience. As Ms. Williams-Hall explained, we were trying to provide better customer experience by giving 5 tries to customers with a reservationist. That negated the effort. We are still evolving. We may not afford to come to the AAC every time a change is needed to be implemented. The situation Ms. Coles shared does not relate to reservation process. We are trying to make MetroAccess service equivalent to fixed route service. Acting-Chair Rush asked for clarity on the wait time for the return trip. Mr. Blake stated the one hour of wait has not changed, however, a vehicle has to be available.

Mr. Sheehan asked about updates for sedans, the marketing of the Abilities Ride, a dedicated vehicle for add-on clients, and Trapeze/Ranger. Mr. Blake stated the deadline has been extended till March 25th, thus the process of the sedans is still underway. The process of the intern is also under way. The grant would help in this matter. Regarding the strategy, Mr. Blake stated there are too many MetroAccess vehicles on the road and the scheduling needs to improve. If something goes wrong with a vehicle, then all the passengers on that specific vehicle would be impacted. The strategic vehicle would be able to take care of trips of the impacted customers. We are trying to bring it to MetroAccess as does Metrobus. Thus far, we had three months of 90% on-time performance.

Acting-Chair Rush asked whether the Eligibility Office is informing customers of the fixed route equivalent service. Chris Colbert, Director, Eligibility, stated the staff is sharing information about fixed route equivalency, travel training, and Abilities-Ride, amongst other information. Mr. Blake stated we are doing outreach and it will be in the updated Customer Guide. He very well understands the concerns.

Mr. Sheehan asked about the process of adding names to the list of organizations for outreach list. Mr. Blake referred it to Ms. Peredo-Lopez. Mr. Semelfort commented about the ADA Newsletter that Mr. Blake sent to the Committee and other organizations. He also urged the message to be on the IVR for the next Abilities-Ride showcase.

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Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 7:28 p.m.