



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

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

Meeting Minutes: September 2, 2014

ATTENDEES

Present: Dr. Phil Posner (Vice-Chair), Tapan Banerjee (2nd Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Carolyn Bellamy, Marc Brenman, Brianne Burger, Heidi Case, Charlie Crawford, Marisa Laios, Phillippa Mezile, Edward McEntee, Mary Kay McMahon, Mary Jane Owen, Doris Ray, Denise Rush, Paul Semelfort, and Roger Stanley.

Call to Order

Vice-Chairman Posner 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.

The August 4, 2014 meeting minutes were approved.

The Chairman's Report to the Metro Board, dated September 2, 2014, was approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Ms. Case stated that she was pleased that the Chairman's Report to the Board included comments about enhancing announcements and communication in the system for the Deaf community.

METROBUS VOICE ANNUNCIATOR SYSTEM

As a follow-up to comments made at the August 2014 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting about the volume levels of the annunciator system on Metrobus, the AAC was provided an overview of Metro's automated announcement system by David Michels, Director, Office of Bus Maintenance.

Mr. Michels stated that Metro began using automated announcements on Metrobus in 1997. He stated that the annunciator system makes two types of announcements: interior and exterior. While exterior announcements are limited to the route and destination of the bus, the interior announcements consist of next stop, transfer information, bus stop requested, and public service announcements.

Mr. Michels stated that comments often made by the public are that automated announcements volumes are too high or too low, and that the automated systems are inoperable. Metro has 1,500 buses with approximately 20 different types of bus vehicles. Volume control of the announcements is determined by bus type not by the route. To limit disruption at night, Metro does have a limit on the exterior volume of automated announcements between the hours of 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.

Mr. Michels stated that Metro is interested in improving the volume levels of the annunciators. He requested volunteers to from the AAC to field test annunciator volume levels during regular service hours. Mr. Michels stressed the importance of the environment being as close to normal to ensure any feedback received is as accurate as possible. To further answer questions on how the annunciator system works on Metrobus, Mr. Michels introduced John Collins from Clever Devices. Clever Devices installed the annunciator system on all Metrobuses. In response to a question about whether Metro uses manual or automated announcements, Mr. Collins stated that all of the announcements are automated.

Vice-Chair Posner expressed an interest in the directions provided by the annunciator system. He stated that in the District of Columbia, it is difficult to determine when the system is identifying the next stop especially when some of the bus stops are so close. Ms. McMahan agreed with Dr. Posner stating that on many occasions the bus would announce a particular stop before it has arrived at the location. For customers who are blind or have low-vision this type of announcement could make it challenging to use the system especially when the customer is unfamiliar with the area. Mr. Collins stated that the system announces the next stop approximately 100 feet after the bus leaves the previous stop. Dr. Posner also stated that when the entrances to the rail stations are closed on the weekends due to track work, the annunciator still announces the stop even though the that entrance is closed. Mr. Michels stated that he would investigate and provide feedback.

Mr. Banerjee expressed an interest in automated announcements in different languages. Mr. Collins stated that the next stop announcements are always in English, and while some public service announcements in English and Spanish. In response to question about inoperable annunciator systems, Mr. Michels stated that customers should report inoperable systems to the Bus Operator and to Customer Service. He stated that it is the Bus Operator's responsibility to make announcements of major points when the annunciator system is not working.

Mr. Crawford expressed his concerns about the inadequate volume levels on buses. He stated that from 1997 to present, Metro should have developed a better system. The blind and low vision communities depend on the automated announcements to determine where they are along a particular route. Mr. Michels stated that Metro is working to resolve the issues and reiterated his request for members to participate in the field test of the system. Ms. Ray expressed an interested the training of Bus Operators on the annunciator system. Mr. Michels noted that Bus Operators are trained in the single log-on procedure that operates the destination signs, fare box, and next stop announcements. Bus Operators have no other control over the announcement systems on the bus. Metro's annunciator system operates on global positioning system (GPS). Mr. Collins stated that if there is a GPS error on the bus, the system would not make any announcements except the stop requested announcement. Ms. Mezile agreed with Mr. Crawford underscoring the value the visually impaired community places on clear and concise announcements throughout the system.

Ms. Owen stated that on several bus routes the annunciator system is inoperable, for example the #L2 (Connecticut Avenue Line) and the #54 (14th Street Line) lines. Ms. Ray stated that the #7 (Lincolnia-Park Center/Pentagon); #28 (Tysons Corner/West Falls Church), #2A (Washington Boulevard); and the #3 (Lee Highway/Falls Church) lines have inoperable annunciator systems. Mr. Michels stated that maintenance will follow-up on all those routes.

A comment from the public stated that sometimes the annunciator system is broken and Bus Operators fail to make announcements on the bus or report the issue. Bus Operators need incentives to turn in maintenance issues and other customer concerns. As a user of the system with low-vision, announcements are extremely important and without them, there is no way of determining where the bus is on a particular route. This issue causes many customers with low-vision not to use the fixed route system. Mr. Michels encouraged customers again to report these types of incidents to Customer Service. He stressed the importance of including the bus number, route and time on all complaints.

In response to a question about complaints about the visual display systems, Mr. Michels stated that concerns of customers have primarily been with the voice annunciator system. Ms. Burger stated that visual display systems on Metrobus are just as important as the voice annunciator system. Although deaf customers can see the travel route, when the route is unfamiliar these customers rely on the visual display system. Mr. Michels stated that Bus Maintenance routinely checks the display system and will request maintenance monitor the display system and correct any issues. In response to a question about the timeframe for the field test, Mr. Michels stated that he will contact the AAC Coordinator to schedule a time. A comment from the public stated the importance of the test group being representative of various disability groups with visual and hearing acuity. Staff agreed.

AAC BY-LAW WORK GROUP (Update)

The AAC continued its discussion on the AAC By-Laws. Mr. Semelfort, Chair, AAC By-Laws Work Group, stated that the Work Group has been working diligently to complete the project. A list of questions regarding the AAC governance developed by Christian Kent, Assistant General Manager, Access Services, was forwarded to all the members. Mr. Semelfort encouraged all members to respond to the questions, stating that the feedback is critical to the future operations of the AAC.

Mr. Kent stated that the governance questions were meant to provoke deeper thought in two areas: 1) the operating procedures and functions of the AAC; and 2) the process of the AAC, and the vision of future achievements of the AAC. The questions allow for great discussion on the different parts of the By-Laws and bring all opinions in view and putting the committee in a position for future success. Upon motion, the AAC agreed that staff would compile the comments for consideration by the AAC By-Laws Work Group with the final draft presented to the full AAC.

In response to a question about obtaining responses from the public regarding the list of questions, Dr. Posner stated that input of the public is important. Each member of the AAC represents a jurisdiction and comments from the public should be made through the AAC members. In spite of the complicated issue By-Laws represent, many members commented about the congenial email dialogue.

Mr. Semelfort stated that the Work Group will meet again on September 15th immediately following the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting. All AAC members are welcome to participate.

AAC ADMINISTRATIVE DISCUSSION

Dr. B. Moore Gwynn, AAC Coordinator, provided an update on the William Staderman's request to present at the upcoming TASH Conference. Dr. Staderman's proposal entitled "Experiencing, Addressing, and Improving Accessibility within WMATA: WMATA Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC)" was accepted for the TASH Talk segment of the conference. The TASH Talk segment is defined as an informal discussion regarding a topic that is not meant to provide answers rather creates thinking deeply about an issue (e.g. personal experience, story, point of view, system change ideas based on studies, etc.). TASH's 2014 Conference will be held December 3 through December 5, 2014 in Washington, D.C.

BUS/RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The BRS discussed Metro's new electronic display systems for bus shelters. The purpose of the electronic display system is to keep customers informed of transit events while in route to their destination. The electronic signs will display three types of information: 1) estimated bus arrival, 2) transit alerts, and (3) route information. The electronic signs will also have an audio and dim feature, and have information in English and Spanish. The signage includes Braille and raised lettering, and the volume can be adjusted by pushing the button multiple times. Metro will install approximately 800 electronic bus shelter messaging signs starting at the end of 2014 at Metrorail stations and at locations of high ridership.

The BRS also increased its knowledge of station technology with a discussion of two systems in the rail station: Passenger Information Display System (PIDS) and the Kiosk Information Display System (KIDS). The purpose of the KIDS is to provide customers with major transit information, service disruptions and alerts prior to entering the station. The PIDS provide information to keep customers informed while in route to their destination. The BRS reiterated its motion from the July 2014 meeting regarding overhead announcements in the system, that states in addition to auditory announcements, Metro should provide the same announcements in a written format to scroll across the KIDS and PIDS for customers to read as part of Metro's Standard Operating Procedures. This change would enhance the access to all customers and improve the riding experience especially for customers in the Deaf community.

The BRS also received an update on Metro's collaboration with Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind (CLB) and Click-and-Go Maps to develop an accessible wayfinding system for the Metrorail. The new technology would seamlessly bridge indoor and outdoor environments by providing a voiced description of the physical features of a rail station. The first phase of the project will launch in October 2014. In the first phase of the project, CLB developed an accessible wayfinding database for its model station, Gallery Place. The second and third phases of the project will include all Metrorail stations and all bus stops around the region. The AAC and the disability community are really excited about the wayfinding tool for the rail system because of its universal access allowing customers to travel in the system more independently.

The BRS also discussed its FY15 work plan and upon motion, the AAC approved the plan.

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The MAS discussed MetroAccess stops on non-Metro property. Metro is looking to establish designated MetroAccess stops at high-density locations on non-Metro property such as government buildings, hospitals and malls. There are currently 46 MetroAccess stops at bus bays at Metrorail stations. The initial phase has been very successful and has eliminated confusion regarding locations of drop-offs and pick-ups.

The next step in this effort is to extend beyond Metro property. Metro has developed a list of criteria for MetroAccess stops on non-Metro property. They include the following: 1) must have a flat and firm landing surface; 2) that is at least five by eight feet wide; 3) connects to the curb; 4) have an accessible pathway from the stop to the first exterior door of the building at the destination, and 5) be within 150 feet of the first exterior door entrance. The first MetroAccess stop on a non-Metro property and will be completed in March 2015 and located in Montgomery County, MD.

The MAS also discussed its FY15 work plan and upon motion, the AAC approved the plan.

NEW BUSINESS

Dr. Posner announced the passing of Robert Coward Jr., former Richard W. Hedding Accessible Transportation Award recipient. In honor of Mr. Coward's passing, the AAC held a moment of silence. Ms. Ray stated that the disability community has lost a champion. She stated that Mr. Coward's service will be held at St. Columba's Episcopal Church on Tuesday, September 9, 2014.

Dr. Moore Gwynn announced that the nomination period for the 2014 Richard W. Hedding Accessible Transportation Award is now open. The Accessible Transportation Award is in honor of the AAC's first chairperson who led the cause of Metrorail Accessibility. The award honoree will be recognized at Metro's Accessibility Excellence Awards in November 2014.

In response to a question about whether one of Metro's paratransit providers is changing its name, Mr. Blake stated that Veolia's new name is Transdev. He stated that there is no change in paratransit service at Metro.

Ms. Mezile expressed an interest in the next meeting of Metro's Board of Directors. Dr. Moore Gwynn stated that the next Board meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 24, 2014.

Ms. McMahon expressed an interest in more seating on the platform in the rail stations. She stated that when the platform is extremely crowded, there is often a long wait to access the trains. Additionally, seating would make it easier for customers to wait who cannot stand for long periods. Upon motion, the AAC added the topic to the BRS work plan. The ACC also discussed the audiovisual equipment in the meeting room and other spaces. Upon motion, the AAC will add the topic to its work plan for further discussion.

Mr. Crawford expressed an interest in adding the timing of door closing in the rail system on the work plan. Dr. Moore-Gwynn stated that the topic is on the work plan for October BRS meeting.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 7:33 p.m.



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STATUS OF FY 2015 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Info/Action Item Number	Description	Date Initiated	Originating Group	Status	Completion Date
Info – 14	AAC By-Law Work Group	10/6/14	AAC		
Info – 15	Quarterly Meeting with Board Executive Leadership	10/6/14	AAC		
Info – 16	Accessibility Excellence Awards	10/6/14	AAC	Vote – Richard W. Hedding Accessible Transportation Awards	
*Info – 17	MetroAccess Long-term Sustainability Study	11/3/14	AAC		
Info – 18	Age-Friendly DC Task Force (Update)	11/3/14	AAC	Update (Follow-up discussion after event - November 2013).	
Info - 19	Momentum and Long Range Plan (update)	12/1/14	AAC		

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

COMPLETED - FY 2015 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Info/Action Item Number	Description	Date Initiated	Originating Group	Status	Completion Date
Info - 1	Silver Line Tour	7/7/14	AAC	Reflections	7/7/14
Info – 2	Silver Line Emergency Exercise	7/7/14	AAC	Reflections (request from EOM during the Metrorail evacuation procedures review)	7/7/14
Info – 3	Bus Stop Working Group (Update)	7/7/14	AAC	Presenter: Chris Blake	7/7/14
Info – 4	Quarterly Meeting with Board Executive Leadership	7/7/14	AAC		7/7/14
Info – 5	Metro’s Signage Program	8/4/14	AAC	Update – from June 9 th BRS meeting	
Info – 6	Quarterly Meeting with Board Executive Leadership	8/4/14	AAC	Feedback from July 2014 meeting	

COMPLETED - FY 2015 COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Info – 7	AAC By-Law Work Group	8/4/14	AAC		8/4/14
Info - 8	Metrobus Voice Annunciator System	9/2/14	AAC	Phil Wallace, Bus Maintenance	9/2/14
Info – 9	AAC By-Law Work Group	9/2/14	AAC	Governance Questionnaire	9/2/14
Info – 10	AAC Administrative Items	9/2/14	AAC	AAC Subcommittee Work Plan (approvals) TASH Proposal	9/2/14
Info – 11	AAC By-Law Work Group	9/2/14	AAC		9/2/14
*Info – 12	Accessible Meeting Locations	9/2/14	AAC	Public Hearings (Bus Service)	9/2/14
*Info – 13	Annual Report: Bus Stop Accessibility	10/6/14	AAC	Moved to BRS – Discussion at October 2014 meeting	9/2/14

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