



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Bus and Rail Subcommittee Meeting Minutes: May 13, 2019

Attendees

Present: Tino Calabia (Chair), Anthony Oberg (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Darnise Bush, Erin Coneys, Charlie Crawford, Melanie Jackson, Steven Kaffen, Phillippa Mezile, Phil Posner, Doris Ray, Denise Rush, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

AAC Chair Dr. Posner called the Bus Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:12 pm and started with introductions of the Committee members.

Approval of Agenda and Prior Meeting Minutes

The agenda was approved as amended. The topic "Metro's Platform Improvement Project" was added to the agenda.

The prior meeting minutes were approved as written.

Bus Route Operations

James Hamre, Director, Bus Service Planning & Scheduling (BPLN), and Albert Himes, Planning Manager, BPLN, provided an update on the upcoming bus service changes, effective Sunday, June 23, 2019.

Mr. Hamre stated this is our annual adjustment and is an important event. It reflects new work schedules for 2,604 bus operators and 900 mechanics. The service adjustments are a result, in part, from the budget realities. It incorporates jurisdictional initiatives and recommendations from our bus operational staff. The service adjustment includes new schedules, trips, arrival times of buses, operators' work-shifts, use of buses needed, assignments to garages, and the service management training required to make all of those adjustments work.

Mr. Hamre also stated this is a particularly busy season because Metrobus schedule adjustments go in effect on June 23rd and a major summer shuttle program begins on May 25th. Included in the summer shutdown are some service adjustments to support transit, access, and mobility in the Alexandria area during the summer. In addition, the District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) has initiated a summer bus lane pilot through downtown along H & I streets that will last from June 3rd through the end of September.

Mr. Himes provided information about some of the upcoming service and facility changes. There are several adjustments of the schedules to improve the reliability of bus arrival times at each stop. Mr. Himes provided a list of routes in DC and Maryland that are being adjusted for reliability improvements. The routes in Virginia did not have reliability issues. A few routes are going to be on headway-schedules rather than a time-schedule. This will help in running the service evenly at every 12 minutes.

Due to a major development in the area, Arlington County has demanded 3 bus bays that are being built at the Pentagon City station by the elevator side.

Mr. Hamre stated there are no changes in bus service coverage, therefore, there are no implications on the MetroAccess service area. At this time, Mr. Hamre invited questions from the Committee.

Mr. Kaffen asked if improvement on the H1 route is related to frequency or expansion hours? Mr. Himes stated trips are being adjusted for reliability. Mr. Kaffen also stated that the 52 route is the only route that goes to the African American Museum and asked about its reliability. Mr. Himes stated the total hours of service have not changed. When the service started to the Southwest Waterfront (to the District Wharf), the time was estimated. However, now we have a better idea of actual service, thus, the adjustments are on timings for better reliability.

Dr. Posner recommended for DC residents to contact the DC Government for the Circulator service expansion and sustainability of current routes.

Mr. Crawford asked about changes on the S2/S4 routes. Mr. Himes stated the trip times were reviewed and adjustments are made. It is not impacting the overall service.

Mr. Ariza-Silva asked if bus routes are going to change and if the changes will reflect on maps? Mr. Hamre stated there are no changes in the way buses operate, but the adjustments are for better reliability. The new regional maps may come out at the end of this calendar year. The bus stop panels start getting updated 2 weeks before the service begins, and last until completed. There are about 600 stops that need to be updated.

Mr. Ariza-Silva asked about the seat-heights of the benches at the bus shelters, and if phone chargers will be added. Mr. Hamre stated the stations that will be getting new bus shelters are Braddock Road, King Street, Eisenhower Avenue, Huntington, and the Van Dorn Street stations, whereas Franconia-Springfield has been already completed. The new shelters will have new clean glass, interior lighting, dynamic display signs, and the bench height will be between 17 and 19 inches. The wind shelters at stations will have phone chargers. There is a design discussion underway about the bus shelters. There is a commitment to do something, however, maintenance issues along with the maintenance budget are being discussed. Hopefully, the next set of shelters may have that capability. The bus shelters at the Pentagon City station will be as per Arlington County standards as they are paying for them.

Ms. Bush asked about the audio with verbal information and asked how, in the District, do you notify the public that buses will be scheduled from garage to garage. Mr. Hamre stated most likely for the audio with verbal information. Concerning buses and garages, that matters more to operators. Having the bus go from garage to garage benefits, in case the first bus is delayed, customers as the second bus will not be held up. For the snow schedule when it changes to Saturday schedule, buses coming from all the garages will be helpful.

Ms. Bush asked about modifications on the 96 and B2 routes and about service hours of some routes (rush hour versus all day service). Mr. Himes stated several agencies have moved out of the DC General campus. The road conditions have deteriorated and are unsafe for buses, therefore, buses stop at the gate. Some routes are rush hour only service whereas others are all day service. Ms. Bush asked if most of the buses will be wheelchair accessible? Mr. Hamre stated technically all our buses are wheelchair accessible. This summer the last of the older buses will retire and then all buses (100%) will be wheelchair accessible with low floors, providing added convenience to our riders.

Mr. Kaffen stated the Next Bus system seems to turn over slowly. For example, at the Farragut Square station, sometimes it is as long as 7 to 8 seconds while customers wait for information at 17 & I Streets. Mr. Hamre stated that is a balancing act. We want to scroll all the messages. The movement of the sign is to allow people to read before it flips to the next thing. We made some modifications to reduce the routes and having more signs will also be helpful.

Ms. Rush asked whether the bus routes that were discontinued previously will return? Mr. Hamre stated no new service is being added this year. Any service cuts that happened before are not added for this fiscal year. The focus is to have a reliable running service.

A customer stated he is from Cleveland and asked if the Bus Planning and Scheduling Office is aware of Cleveland's shuttles for buses or plug-ins for phones or I-pads? The customer added that the information is available on the Cleveland Transit Agency's website. Mr. Hamre stated 175 buses purchased this year have been deployed with plug-ins for cell phones.

Ms. Mezile asked about the colors of the display signs. Mr. Hamre stated the colors are Amber on Black, and the annunciator is the feature.

Ms. Bush read an email received from a customer. The main points are as follows: the signs on the bus stop pole were lowered, it is easier for customers; encourages Metro to bring back service and add more Metrobus stops; what actions have Metro taken to avoid experiencing a bus driver shortage; riders need to bring wheeled shopping carts/strollers on buses; Metrobus route alongside the Fairfax County bus route went away not long ago; and Metro should refrain from making further bus cuts/reductions in service.

Mr. Hamre stated he is glad the lowered bus stop sign is helpful for a customer. Concerning the shortage of Metrobus operators, WMATA has been running with a shortage of operators. With the opening of the Cinder Bed division, it has allowed for a full staff. The operators have been running on overtime to cover the routes. The unavailability of individuals who have clean records with Commercial Driver's License (CDL) is not just a regional issue, but a national one as well. A few hundred bus operators change jobs within a year. WMATA hires 45 operators every month. A class graduated with 18 operators last Friday. However, 22 operators became station managers thus Bus is in deficit of 4 operators.

Regarding bus stops, bus routes, and service cuts, the fiscal year 2020 budget will be a challenge (an update on the upcoming bus service changes was provided earlier). About carts on buses, that is an issue to be brought up to the BTP. Recently, there was a focus group and riders were encouraged to inspect the bus, ride on it, and give their feedback. A lot of feedback was received. People who do not ride much, generally liked the buses. People did not like the point of removing the seat for strollers or carts. They wanted more seats rather than having more standing space. Standard seating on a WMATA bus is 40 seats. There is a debate on having seats similar to buses in San Francisco where seat configuration allows wider aisles. Another possibility could be to put time restrictions just as “bikes on Metrorail” used to be, but that puts more administrative constraints as to how to manage the restrictions.

Dr. Posner stated the AAC was not aware of the focus groups and recommended for them to come to the AAC and the Riders Advisory Council (RAC), so members are aware of happenings. He also stated that riders keep baby strollers next to where they sit. The BTP final report will come out at the end of June. The funding could be an issue since the local jurisdictions do not have the funds.

Cashless Bus Pilot Project:

Catherine Vanderwaart, Senior Transportation Economist, Office of Planning, provided an update about the results of the pilot of cash-free boarding on Route 79 MetroExtra that began in June 2018. The objective of the pilot was to determine whether cash-free boarding improved service for Metrobus on the street, and how would cash-free boarding impact customers and operators? For this purpose, Route 79 was selected for operational reasons as there are good alternatives for cash paying customers.

Though there were some known limitations, however, customers and operators on Route 79 liked the pilot. Most surveyed customers on Route 79 and 70 did not report difficulty adapting. Systemwide, customers are hesitant about expansion for various reasons. The biggest reason that came to light was the lack of awareness of existing SmarTrip® reload options. Also, the running times did not improve as expected. It may have improved if there were dedicated bus lanes, etc. Therefore, the conclusion is that the pilot will be allowed to lapse in June 2019. Cash-free boarding should be considered for the future as a feasible option where the available alternatives are sufficient, and in conjunction with more education for riders about where SmarTrip® card loading is available and about the options for unbanked customers. At this time, Ms. Vanderwaart invited questions from the Committee members.

Chair Calabria asked if Ms. Vanderwaart is aware of the Cleveland Health line transit system and if it has an outdoor vending system? Ms. Vanderwaart stated she thought they have some system in place. Chair Calabria discussed the New York bus system and asked if having that facility would have made any difference? Ms. Vanderwaart stated her understanding was New York has outdoor machines at stops and it is a major effort to keep up with the maintenance, and that alone likely would not have made any difference.

Ms. Bush asked if she knew how many people with disabilities rode the buses during the pilot? Since the overall responses were positive, could WMATA implement it one day without any further pilot? Ms. Vanderwaart stated riders were not asked to identify themselves. If the program was ever to be implemented, WMATA would have to do Title VI analysis. Therefore, it would be a process and the pilot could not be just implemented one day.

Dr. Posner stated there was a request of doing another pilot of recharging cards (SmarTrip®). Time spent to recharge cards is much more than cash customers. The pilot recommended having cash-less and no recharge of the card, however, Ms. Vanderwaart stated the recommendation of re-charging would be considered for future.

Ms. Ray stated if the cash-less program was to be implemented and she had to use her card (debit) to recharge the SmarTrip® card, she will not use it as she would not speak her pin code. Ms. Vanderwaart stated concerns of Ms. Ray will be shared with the team and she hopes that the retail network will be expanded, and that the mobile app would also help when it comes out.

Vote on Elevator Call Buttons:

Mr. Oberg stated he emailed the final version to the Committee members last evening. If there are any minor changes that may be adopted, however, no major changes are warranted. Mr. Oberg stated it will be added to Dr. Posner's Board Report. There was a motion by Mr. Sheehan to accept the version presented by Mr. Oberg. The motion was approved. Mr. Sheehan also recommended for Dr. Posner to present it to the RAC.

Metro's Platform Improvement Project Summer 2019:

Mr. Hamre provided an update on Metro's Platform Improvement Project Summer 2019. The background for this project is the state of platforms that concrete repair is a necessary safety project. The shutdown includes 6 stations south of the National Airport: Braddock Road, King Street, Eisenhower Avenue, Van Dorn, Hunting, and Franconia-Springfield. The shutdown schedule is from May 25th until September 8th, 2019. The project is not just about platform improvement, but it also includes track repairs as well as structural repairs. The correction of the Braddock Road Station hump was added to the project. The work will be done 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. There are several alternatives for customers including free shuttles, free parking at some of the stations, and enhanced local and regional bus services. There will be five express shuttles and local options, added an express route between Landmark Mall and the Pentagon to provide access to private shuttles. On the weekend of May 4th and 5th, there was a dry run for the shuttles and a set-up for the upcoming shutdown. This is a well-planned and thought-out effort.

At this time, Mr. Hamre invited questions from the Committee members.

Chair Calabria stated the Braddock Road hump was a 36 years old problem, which was not ADA compliant and now it is being corrected.

Ms. Ray inquired about the frequency of shuttles for Blue Line riders and expressed her concern about accessibility at the Crystal City station. Mr. Hamre stated the frequency will be 5 minutes during rush hour, and up-to 10 minutes during non-rush hours. People will go to the Yellow Line shuttle as the King Street station is a very challenging location. Staff members also will be there to answer questions. About the Crystal City station concern, there is an elevator entrance. It will be a great location as we have a clear plaza and have an advantage of having US 1 for rain coverage. This location is subject to a lot of traffic. The Pentagon station will be the core for express shuttles.

Dr. Posner asked how would a customer get from Rosslyn to Eisenhower Avenue? Mr. Hamre stated the customer could take Metrorail from Rosslyn to Crystal City and then take the Yellow Line shuttle to Eisenhower Avenue.

Dr. Posner asked about the MetroAccess fare calculator. Mr. Blake stated it will be based off Metrobus service and the quickest route.

Mr. Oberg recommended for the Committee members to send their questions via email.

Ombudsman Report:

David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, provided an update on the issues discussed in the last BRS meeting. The audio recording available on Internet Explorer is not on other web browsers. The reason is that the recording speed is very slow. We are asking to learn how to increase the speed of the recording to be able to run on other browsers as well. Concerning the web content testing, Mr. Shaffer was glad to report 95% compliance on web content 2.1, leading AAA, which was better than the aim. Some manual testing is still being done although a lot of progress has been made. Regarding the Orange Line escalator flow, it is under review by the Elevator and Escalator Department (ELES). The escalator direction was set a long time ago and is under re-evaluation. Recommendations received by the AAC are under consideration. The default position of the street elevators is set to default at the street level with the only exception when there is a bank of 2 street elevators. In that case, one will default at the street level and the other elevator will default either at the mezzanine or the platform level.

Concerning elevator cameras, not all elevators have cameras installed, however, with the capital improvements that are under way, this will change over time. Regarding the bus displays that may show inaccurate information, it is under review to determine the cause. Mr. Shaffer asked for specifics to be emailed to the AAC Coordinator. Foot candle lighting at the lower platform of the Metro Center station are down to .2, instead of 10, which is the standard for WMATA. Mr. Shaffer is working with Plant and Lighting and Architects to get this corrected. He asked the Committee to email any questions to the AAC Coordinator.

Ride-Hailing Cars, ADA-designation

In responding to an inquiry from Chair Calabia with regard to Metro using federal funds on projects involving the ride-hailing service Lyft to force them to adhere to ADA requirements, Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services (ACCS), stated there

is concern when a company like Lyft states in its initial public offering documents that it is not a transportation company, but instead a technology company, therefore have no obligations under the ADA. However, in the Abilities-Ride program we required all potential vendors to agree to a core set of accessibility requirements to provide service subsidized by Metro. Such an agreement did not require the use of federal funds, just a contractual agreement. (These standards will be incorporated into the late-night service program as well.) The recommendation to use the federal funds in order to enforce the ADA on to Lyft may not work. If Lyft was to partner with WMATA under a program with federal funds, they could do so and would have to follow requirements or they would not get the contract. However, that does not guarantee that Lyft would extend similar service to its general ride-hail business, they may simply treat the WMATA contract as a separate business.

Metrorail Between-Car-Barriers

Mr. Blake informed the Committee about a proposal to retrofit all the Metro railcars currently in service with a new between-car-barrier (BCB). This proposal will not impact the current retrofit project involving the 7000-series clamshell BCBs. We believe the new barrier is even better. It is different from the traditional chain barriers in the following ways:

1. Like the clamshell barrier there are two sides to the barrier, one on each car of a married pair, and there is a space between them.
 - a. Unlike the clamshell barrier, the space between the two barriers is not wide enough for a cane to pass through the middle and cause it to be mistaken for a door opening.
2. The new BCBs has three horizontal rows, gray barriers with a yellow outline. There is space in between the three barrier rows, much like the space between the chain barriers.
3. The three rows each connect to a vertical end line that is outfitted with orange and white chevron tape to provide contrast.
4. The two barriers from the married pair of railcars form the BCB.

The new barrier would be new to Metro, and it provides more detection for people who are blind/low vision. The Committee members along with other disabilities community stakeholders are invited to the demonstration on Tuesday, June 4, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Greenbelt Metro Station.

ADA Parking Spaces

Chair Calabia asked for the Committee members to provide their feedback if they notice any reduction on the ADA designated parking spaces, for a discussion at a later meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 6:02pm.