



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Bus and Rail Subcommittee Meeting Minutes: September 9, 2019

Attendees

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

Call to Order

Chair Calabia called the Bus Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:03 pm.

Chair Calabia started with introductions of the Committee members.

Approval of Agenda and Prior Meeting Minutes:

The meeting agenda was approved.

The July 8th, 2019, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

Chair Calabia congratulated WMATA on re-opening of the Blue/Yellow line stations.

Metrobus Procurement Process:

Franklin Riley, Project Manager, Office of Bus Maintenance and Engineering, stated there is an existing detailed 10-year Metrobus plan that was created in 2016 and was approved by the WMATA Board. The plan provides information about configuration, size, maintenance, and management of the fleet. Currently, we are in the second year of a 5-year procurement of the New Flyer buses. We buy 100 buses per year with additional articulated buses. We rehabilitate 100 buses a year at 7.5 years life so that they last for 15 years. We retire 100 buses per year. We can maintain average fleet of 7.5 years. A team is currently working on new specifications for the upcoming proposals. The negotiations take place after the contract is awarded.

The Technical Summary lists all the major components on the bus and is used for the pre-production meeting. During the pre-production meeting we review the process of bus inspections, as well as the configuration audit. WMATA has three types of buses: diesel, articulated, and the compressed natural gas (CNG). The order for the upcoming 25 diesel buses will start at the end of September. At the end of November, we will have 75 CNG buses. The cost and maintenance of the diesel buses are high, and they are not as clean, which is why we have moved over to the CNG buses. The diesel manufactures could not meet the EPA emissions, which brought us towards the use of Hybrids. However, high battery cost for the Hybrids brought us back to the diesel buses.

There was a discussion about the seat configuration on the buses, width of the buses, aisle space, and difficulty for the wheelchair customers.

Dr. Posner asked about the step-up in the back of the buses and commented about customers in wheelchairs having difficulty in turning around. Mr. Riley stated the step-up exists in the low floor buses as the space is needed for the tires. Ms. Lopez clarified if

there is no wheelchair on board then there is no problem. However, when large wheelchair customers board the bus, especially when there is a wheelchair across from the operator, and another larger wheelchair customer tries to turn-around and get situated behind the operator, they have difficulty. If we create more space, the increased turning radius will impact the priority seating and that is a seat-spacing challenge. Mr. Riley stated the front configuration is the same. Dr. Posner thanked him for the explanation.

Ms. Ray commented about the reduced number of seats in the front of the bus and the trouble seniors and persons with disabilities may experience by having to step up for the seats in the back of the bus. Mr. Riley stated the seating configuration has not changed on Metrobuses and it remains 40 to 41 seating on the 40-foot buses and 60 seating on the articulated buses. Most of the seating is in the front of the bus, as there are fewer seating (18) in the rear deck. Ms. Ray talked about the side facing seats. Mr. Riley stated it is the Metrorail that has more side facing seats not Metrobus.

Ms. Mezile stated the buses are narrower. Mr. Riley informed neither the bus width nor the seats have changed. The installation of the seats may have changed, possibly causing the encroachment, therefore he can do a survey on the buses. Mr. Kaffen complimented the interior of the buses versus other domestic and international buses. Mr. Riley stated the interior will continue onto the newer buses. Mr. Kaffen stated the farebox slows down the fare-payment process and he would like to review the design of a modified farebox. Mr. Riley stated the manufacturer of the fareboxes have a monopoly on the business. The trend is to move away from cash transactions and even the fareboxes. Chair Calabria stated the Committee is against moving away from the cash transactions.

Ms. Jackson asked about the autonomous and the electric buses. Mr. Riley stated the autonomous buses are not as far out as perceived. A department with American Public Transportation Association (APTA) is reviewing that option. The autonomous buses can be implemented in garages and be parked closer. The operators can have control of the buses until a certain point and then the autonomous system can take over. Dr. Posner stated the Fairfax County is piloting the autonomous buses. Ms. Bush stated the wheelchairs and the scooters are increasing in size and many people are traveling with roll-on bags, thus recommended a rack on the bus for people to place their bags on it. Mr. Riley stated that can be reviewed however, that is not going to be a quick resolution.

Chair Calabria commented about the AAC recommendations for the design of the Metrorail cars and possibly doing so for the design of the Metrobuses. Dr. Posner stated we are not experts, however, we know about the needs. There are experts to work on the design and he mentioned about the upcoming meetings that can be attended by the members. Chair Calabria thanked Mr. Riley for coming and sharing the information.

Dock-Less Scooters/Disability Safety:

Chair Calabria stated the dockless scooters can be a problem on or around the Metrorail stations. David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated he has

observed the issue and has received reports about the same. WMATA interprets the bike policy for the scooters and policy enforcement would be required. Dr. Posner mentioned a previous policy that was established for the Segways could also be enforced for the scooters. Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, stated we have a non-conventional mobility device policy that tries to capture large wheelchairs and other devices that do not look like the traditional wheelchairs. The scooters for disabilities could fall under that policy, however, it is going to be the AAC advocacy to expand the prohibition beyond accessibility if there is a belief that the scooters are more problematic than they are worth in our system. Dr. Posner stated the Segways were banned before the AAC made recommendations. The scooters are unlicensed motor vehicles that can go 30 miles per hour. Mr. Blake recommended to bring up the topic with Chief Safety Officer, at the AAC meeting in October.

Mr. Oberg stated his experience that people leave the scooters on the platforms and that is an accessibility issue. Ms. Ray recommended for the scooters to be banned except for mobility device and for the device not to have a speed of more than 10 miles per hour. Dr. Posner stated there is no reason for customers to ride the scooters inside the stations unless they own the device. Mr. Sheehan informed that the manufacturers are meeting with some groups in California, to design scooters for disabilities. Mr. Oberg stated that going forward, the AAC wants to keep an eye on how people who use the scooters affect the disability communities. Mr. Shaffer stated the Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD) will enforce the policy and station managers will inform the customers.

Mr. Kaffen stated the first step is determination of the policy that we want and then the implementation. It is the responsibility of District's Department of Transportation (DDOT), to provide a policy on usage, as there needs to be dissemination of the policy. After some discussion, Dr. Posner proposed a motion: the AAC recommends the banning of rental dock-less scooters on Metro property unless they are certified mobility devices, using WMATA standards, be established by their Safety Office/Police Department. The reason is that there is no rationale for the use of a dock-less scooter to get from one location to another using Metrorail or Metrobus because these vehicles can be left at the entrance of the Metrorail or Metrobus and a new one can be procured when they exit the system.

Ms. Ray seconded the motion with a friendly amendment to add e-bikes. Dr. Posner asked are they dock-less e-bikes or owned e-bikes? If they are owned e-bikes, then customers can take it with them and use on the other side. Mr. Blake stated there is a point to be made that there is currently a bike policy. If a person owns the electronic bike, then you cannot deny them the right to the bike policy. The motion was seconded and affirmed by all except Ms. Ray who abstained because of an incident on the platform with an e-bike with two riders riding it, she recommended the ban of e-bikes until the policy has been established, is disseminated to the public, and is enforced. Chair Calabria stated this will be passed to the AAC. Dr. Posner will add it to the Board Report as well.

Ombudsman Report:

Mr. Shaffer provided an update about the issues that were brought forth to his attention in a previous meeting. Mr. Shaffer stated the issues was raised about a growing number

of strollers that are wheelchairs for disabled children. These strollers have attachment points like the wheel chairs for persons with disabilities. Once the policy is approved and all staff are informed, he will be involved in training the personnel. The next item was the Beacon project and it is undergoing. The lighting issue that Ms. Ray brought up for the Judiciary Square, is being reviewed as per WMATA specifications. The AIRA proposal is also being reviewed. Some of the accessibility issues at the Judiciary Square station are under review and an update will be provided.

Dr. Posner stated at stations like Ballston that have more one bank of escalators, when one of the escalators is not operational without any notification, all the escalators should be turned off so that a person with disability is not stuck on an escalator. Ms. Lopez stated we have a certain volume of people who need to be moved in and out of the stations. She understands the reason of the recommendation, however, turning-off all the escalators may be counter active. However, better signage and information may be better solutions. Dr. Posner stated better signage is needed with an understanding for people to know about the outage. He does not understand the concept of rushing out of the station, just like the street elevators used to be at the bottom instead of street level.

Ms. Mezile provided information about a tripping hazard at the Pentagon City station by the street elevator near the call button. Ms. Ray stated there are new high intensity lights by the escalators at the Judiciary Square and that makes it difficult to know location of the station. Similar situations exist at a few other stations such as Courthouse and Ballston.

Briefing on Status of “Handbook” for Model Metro Train

Mr. Oberg will create a newsletter based upon a narrative from the previous meeting minutes. A list of recommendations for the 7000 series will be created, adding to the recommendations for the 8000 series. Dr. Posner will provide communications with the engineers and recommended to also include the points discussed by the Committee. He also recommended that the newsletter should be provided to Ms. Lopez and Mr. Blake for review before making it available for public. Mr. Oberg stated the goal is to connect with people who attend the meetings regularly. It can be emailed to regular attendees and the AAC members. Dr. Posner stated it can be like an executive summary and can be emailed to other disability organizations, as well.

New/Old Business and Work Plan Updates:

The following topics would be part of the future discussions: Metrorail announcements, Messages on the monitors in railcars need to be easily viewable, and the Automatic train control. Mr. Sheehan shared a discussion from the Riders’ Advisory Council (RAC) about a pre-budget meeting for the next year’s budget. If there would be a fare increase, then WMATA should implement the efficiency before raising fares. Dr. Posner stated Metro wants the automatic door operations and it will reduce the dwell time. However, after trying it on the Red line for two days, they had to abandon it due to some glitches. Dr. Posner stated the AAC has submitted proposals on fare changes and fare policies on MetroAccess. The Bus Transformation Project (BTP) will propose a fare policy. Ms. Ray stated on the Blue/Orange/Silver lines the automatic announcements have not changed as “this is the 7000 series” announcement is still being played. The doors opening announcement comes after the doors have opened. The announcement comes about the

line, destination, however, the next stop is cut off as the operators close the doors early and then they do not make the announcement manually. Mr. Sheehan stated he has not heard the 7000-series announcement on the Red line, however, if there is a communications glitch, we need to fix it. Mr. Shaffer stated when any issues are experienced, then we need specific information to get it reviewed. Dr. Posner stated during the rush hours, the announcements have been shortened to provide line, direction, and the next stop. Ms. Lopez stated the messages are being changed when trains go through the maintenance process, perhaps there are some trains that have not gone through the process yet. The specific information will be helpful.

Bus Transportation Project Update:

Mr. Kaffen provided an update from a meeting of the strategy advisory panel, one of many committees working on the project. During the meeting, a strategy summary of over 25 recommendations was presented which identified the priorities and the projected results. The recommendations were placed in to four categories: Frequent and Convenient bus service, Bus Priority on Roadways, Customer Experience, and Task Force to implement the strategy. The Action Plan will take place in the Fall of 2019. Dr. Posner stated the Technical Advisory Committee met yesterday and discussed about the fares.

Chair Calabria asked if new routing or re-routing of the bus routes is being done to provide assistance with the bus deserts. Dr. Posner stated the planning and zoning processes were discussed. The communication needs improvement at different levels amongst the planners, i.e. city, county, and state. If there is service change, then service should not be taken away from people, instead the on-call buses should be arranged. There was a discussion about budget and staffing. There was also a talk about the support from the local businesses. The Tysons Corner area is about to become the 4th largest city in Virginia. Getting finances and funds from businesses were also discussed. Increasing the quality of bus service areas were also discussed. It is going to be a slow process.

Mr. Sheehan asked whether Prince George's (PG) County was brought up in any of the discussions. Dr. Posner stated in Virginia, the money goes to Richmond and they give money to Northern Virginia. In Maryland, the money goes to Annapolis and they further give money based on performance. The Planners would like the performance to increase for distribution of the funds and the PG County would have to work on the performance to get the funding. Mr. Kaffen stated some of the recommendations still do not have consensus, such as giving buses priority on roadway. In practice, a lane is taken away from other traffic. DDOT has an issue with this concept.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Meeting adjourned at 6:04pm.