



Accessibility Advisory Committee

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BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: December 11, 2017

In attendance: Edward McEntee (Chair), Tino Calabria (1st Vice-Chair), Hazell Brooks, Darnise Bush, Charlie Crawford, Phillippa Mezile, Anthony Oberg, and Denise Rush.

Call to Order

Chair McEntee called the December 11, 2017 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved the December 11, 2017 meeting agenda.

The BRS approved the November 13, 2017 meeting minutes as written.

Public Comment

A member of the public stated she heard a report that the 5000-series railcars would be the next set of cars taken out of service, but she had hoped it would be the 2000-series railcars due to the limited space for wheelchair using customers. She added that the 5000-series railcars have wider interiors and they do not have the old mold smell of the older railcars. She wanted to know if that decision ever came to the AAC or if the AAC would take a position on it.

The customer also raised the issue of the remodeling at Union Station. She stated that the plan looked wonderful, but said there was no mention of upgrading the elevator, which happens to be one of the smallest in the system. Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy and Planning (ADAP), stated that he previously reviewed the Union Station remodeling plans. He stated that he recalls a discussion about the possibility of adding a second elevator, and not allowing the current elevator to be moved or removed. He did not recall any plans to enlarge the current elevator. He added that ADAP will have more details on its review of the Union Station redevelopment during the next BRS meeting.

8000-Series Railcar

Mr. Calabria reminded the committee AAC Chair Philip Posner's suggestion that the BRS consider the creation of a working group to monitor the development of the 8000-series railcar much like was in place for the development of the 7000-series railcar. Mr. Blake stated that the 7000-series was such a radical redesign, such a group to monitor the inclusion of needed accessibility features and consideration was prudent.

Mr. Blake added that it does not seem to be the case that the design of the 8000-series will be so different from the 7000-series that a separate working group will be required for the AAC to have its voice heard. However, the decision should come following tonight's presentation once the committee gets to know where the project stands as it relates to the committee's priorities.

Nahom Debessay, Rail Engineering, presented to the BRS Metro's development and design plans for the 8000-series railcars. He began by addressing a concern raised during public comment as to which series of railcars will the 8000-series cars be replacing. While not commenting on Metro's immediate plans for the 5000-series, he stated that the 8000-series cars will replace the 2000 and 3000-series cars, both of which are reaching their 30 year life cycles. The number of 8000-series cars purchased will be determined in the future.

Mr. Debessay stated that this project has been underway since January 2017, and it is now in the stakeholder review phase, of which the AAC is a primary stakeholder. This aspect of the project will last until the end of February 2018. The procurement phase will be between March 2018 and June 2018, with a solicitation by July 2018.

Prior to the BRS meeting, Mr. Debessay was provided a list of recommendations from the AAC, which he addressed individually:

1. Inter-Car Barriers: The first recommendation related to returning to traditional inter-car barriers between all cars in a train set. Mr. Debessay stated that the 8000-series will have the traditional chain barriers installed between all cars. Mr. Calabia mentioned the possibility of the accordion-style inter-car barriers used in New York.
2. "No Bicycle Sign Location: The next recommendation was moving the "No Bicycle" signs back to their traditional location; on the window of the center doors. The 7000-series cars have them on the side of the body next to the center doors. Mr. Debessay stated that the 8000-series cars will have the signs on the windows of the center doors.
3. Priority Seating: There will be signage enhancements for priority seating, which will be discussed further in the design phase, and shared with the AAC in the near future.
4. Wheelchair Parking Location: The AAC would like the wheelchair spaces moved to the ends of each car. At this point, the 8000-series design has the wheelchair space in the traditional Metro location, near the center doors. These spaces are going to receive signage enhancements on the floor and on the walls. Mr. Debessay stated that having one wheelchair at each end door will be very difficult to accomplish, and there are no cars in our system with that configuration.
5. Maps/Information Systems: The 8000-series will have an updated systems simply because technology has improved. There will be larger screens and more screens per car, and they will be visible from different angles.
6. Operator Visibility: 8000-series trains will have outside mounted cameras that will help operators see one end of the train to the other.

7. Handrail on the First Seat: The team is looking at the possibility of adding a handrail to the first seat, but no decision has been made yet.

A member of the public agreed that, like the 7000-series, there is no need to add poles to the 8000-series. The lack of poles allows full access to customers using mobility devices.

Mr. Oberg stated that the cameras are a good idea, adding that he recently witnessed a case in which a customer could not get her wheelchair out of a train at East Falls Church, but the operator kept opening and closing the door on her. The cameras could alleviate some of this from happening.

Chair McEntee asked if customers in mobility devices have the right to occupy the designated wheelchair spaces. Mr. Blake stated that yes, customers in mobility devices have the right to the space, and the signage is there to support the right. However, there is no enforcement mechanism to have other customers move out of the way. Therefore, through this project with enhanced signage; through additional signage and operator announcements, Metro is working to raise awareness among all customers to be courteous when occupying space needed by and designated for people using mobility devices. Ms. Bush added that she also has noticed that people standing in the designated areas don't move, and that supports the AAC's position to have the wheelchair spaces moved to the ends of the cars.

Mr. Crawford asked if the 8000-series cars are being used on any other transit system in the nation or worldwide, and what has been the experience. Mr. Debessay stated that Metro does not want its 8000-series car to be an experimental car, but we do want it built to our specification. At this point, we don't even know who is going to build it, so there is no vehicle in use at this time that we can point to for direct comparison. However, it will not be that much different from the 7000-series.

Ms. Bush asked about the box above the priority seating in one of the photographs. That is the LCD screen, and it will be made larger for the 8000-series and have more than four screens, perhaps as many as eight.

Chair McEntee asked if there any of the new technology enhancements will interface with smartphones? Mr. Debessay stated that he is not sure at this point, but will ask.

A member of the public asked about the safety of the flooring on the 8000-series and if they will be “anti-slip” surfaces. She stated that if customers drop any liquids in the 7000-series, it becomes very hazardous for people using walkers and wheelchairs. Mr. Debessay said that he has not heard any complaints about the floors in the 7000-series, but will check. He added that the floors on the 7000-series have anti-slip coating.

Ms. Mezile asked if there would be an opportunity for the committee to view the vehicle prior to Metro mass ordering the cars. Yes, there will be a mock-up for review by interested stakeholders.

Mr. Oberg asked about the follow-up to items discussed moving forward. All items are still open for discussion. Mr. Calabria asked about the 8000-series survey. Mr. Blake will find the link to the survey and send to members.

In-Station Communication with Customers who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Donald Goings, Superintendent, Rail Infrastructure, stated that in January 2017 Metro deployed white boards with markers and pre-printed messages at each kiosk at all of our stations. Since that time, it has come to management’s attention that some of the white boards have been misplaced. In those instances, Metro staff attempts to replace the white board as soon as possible.

Mr. Goings stated that Metro is now looking at going to the next generation of communication. Metro is now installing larger pre-printed message boards on mezzanines; it is a longer term project to get this type of signage on the platforms.

A member of the public said this was a cheap, low cost, and low tech solution that should have been done a long time ago. Mr. Blake attempted to clarify the status of white boards by asking the following questions of Mr. Goings: (1) Did Metro place white boards in every kiosks at every station. Yes, along with instructions on how to use them and for what purpose; (2) when a customer says there is no white board at the stations, if the board is stolen or missing, Metro replaces them promptly. Yes; and (3) Has there been any direction or instruction to station managers to not only use the white boards for one-to-one communication for people who are hard of hearing, but to also use them as a walking billboard during an emergency. No, because during an emergency the station managers have other specified duties and responsibilities during an emergency.

Mr. Calabria stated that during a trip with a Metro Board member, he asked the station manager about the white board, but the station manager did not know what he was talking about. Mr. Calabria then went on to describe the white board, and then the station manager pulled out a white board that had never been opened. The station manager said “these were provided during the Trump inauguration, but we have never used

them.” Mr. Calabria suggested that above-ground staff be issued white boards to communicate with customers above ground.

Mr. Calabria also asked about the status of the “tear-off” information messages. Metro is trying to procure these, but the one brought before the AAC included numerous colors causing a more challenging procurement. The new “tear offs” will be black and white, and will be coming soon.

Ombudsman’s Report

David Shaffer, ADA Ombudsman, provided an update on Metro policy regarding escalator direction when one escalator is out of service. The procedure is when, for example there are three escalators and one is out, one should be going up and one should be going down. If there are only two, the remaining one should be going up. Station managers are responsible to monitor the escalators to ensure the procedure is being followed. Metro Elevator and Escalator staff is also monitoring the escalators remotely. Mr. Shaffer is still looking at Metro’s challenges with notifications.

Mr. Shaffer also provided an update on the traffic re-direction at Gallery Place. This project has been placed on hold for about a month. The guidance tiles, however, should be installed this week, but the other changes will likely not occur until after the holidays.

Mr. Calabria asked about Metro’s granite stairs lacking edge warnings. He stated that to some people, the stairs can look like a slope as opposed to a set of stairs, which could present a safety hazard. He wants to know what can be done to improve to appearance of the stairs. Ms. Brooks suggested Metro install rubber edges or strips on each step. Mr. Shaffer stated that he will talk with Plant Maintenance on this subject.

New Business

Ms. Mezile discussed the changes Metro has made to the station ahead list signs. She made a motion that Metro cease and desist the removal of SALs. Mr. Blake said he will report this concern to staff, and have them return to the BRS for a discussion. The BRS approved the motion.

Mr. Calabria discussed the possibility of the AAC recognizing the members of the press who are dedicated to covering transportation issues, particularly those who highlight accessibility issues. It was advised that this issue return to the full AAC for discussion during the January 2018 meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:25 p.m.