



# AAC

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

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### **BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: February 8, 2016**

In attendance: Brian Miller (Chair), William Staderman (1st Vice-Chair), Roger Stanley (2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-Chair), Darnise Bush, Marisa Laios, Phillippa Mezile, Edward McEntee, Randall Pope, Doris Ray, Denise Rush, and Anthony Stephens.

#### **Call to Order**

Second Vice-Chair Stanley called the February 8, 2016 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

#### **Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

The BRS approved the February 8, 2016 meeting agenda.

The BRS approved the January 11, 2016 meeting minutes as amended.

#### **Public Comment**

No members of the public offered comment.

#### **Ombudsman's Report**

Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy in Planning, provided an update on the order of stop announcements on the 7000 series railcars. He stated that a customer requested that the order of the stop announcements be switched to allow line and destination information be given first, so that customers on a station's platform, particularly those who are Blind/low vision, to understand whether they are about to board the correct train. Mr. Blake stated that there is a challenge in regards to changing the order of announcement because it is the opening of the doors that trigger the announcements. He added that a representative(s) of the Office of Transit Infrastructure Engineering Services (TIES) will attend the March AAC meeting to address the specific issue of announcements.

#### **Passenger Information Display System at Mini-Mezzanine**

Chief Asante, Engineer, Rail Transportation, provided an update and demonstration on the Passenger Information Display systems (PIDS) for the mini-mezzanine levels in Metrorail stations. He stated that at some Metrorail stations access to the platform level is provided through mini-mezzanines that are not directly attended by Station Managers. Metro is enhancing the Single Line PIDS on these levels with new 4-Line liquid crystal display (LCD) screens that display train arrival information and scrolling elevator outages. The display is designed to complement the customer experience at these stations where information is needed to determine a course of action in traveling when there is an elevator outage.

Mr. Asante stated that in July 2013, the BRS and other stakeholders provided the following feedback on the design of new PIDS:

- The contrast of the red font on the black background was not ideal, and needed to be changed
- The previous scrolling text feature was appreciated more than the page flipping feature
- Additional information and content should be displayed

In a live demonstration, Mr. Asante displayed the information on the LED monitor that included which station elevators are out-of-service and which stations are operating bus shuttles to those stations. He stated that to enhance the contrast, the new PIDS have a black background with white text. This high contrast will make the information more visible for customers with low vision. Additionally, the scrolling information on elevator outages is helpful for customers who use mobility devices to alter travel plans prior to reaching the station with an outage.

Ms. Rush expressed an interest in audio for the PIDS at the mini-mezzanine level. Mr. Asante stated that the information displayed on PIDS on mini-mezzanines will mirror the PIDS on the platform level, and they will scroll information to customers without audio. He stated Metro makes announcements through the public address (PA) system in the rail stations and on the trains. Marisa Laios agreed stating that audio would make the new PIDS more functional and user friendly for all customers, especially customers who are Blind/low-vision. Ms. Rush stated that it is unacceptable that Metro is presenting new technology that is not fully accessible. It is an embarrassment to the AAC and the disability community.

Mr. Blake reminded members that that the new PIDS are designed as supplement to other sources, including audio via the PA system, of information already provided to customers traveling in the system. The enhanced PIDS are an additional resource Metro offers to inform customers of service status. The information gives customers an opportunity to decide whether or not to enter the system based on the information available.

William Staderman expressed an interest in the contrast. He agreed that the black background with the white text provided the highest contrast; however, he was curious to understand why the scrolling information of elevator outages did not offer a different contrast making the information prominent; adding that the current colors used make all the information blend together. Mr. Asante stated that the gray banner on the header and bottom was used to differentiate the information. While an improvement over the current PIDS in the system, which are black background and red lettering, he agreed that the contrast of the header and bottom was not the most ideal.

Given that the header line is related to the train arrival information, Dr. Staderman expressed an interest in whether the header information could remain one color while the bottom scrolling information remain another color demonstrating a distinct difference between the two sets of information. Mr. Asante stated that making such an adjustment should be a simple software change, and in future iterations of the PIDS at the mini-mezzanine levels the information can be grouped.

Doris Ray stated that train arrival, color, and destination are important information, however the number of railcars is not a significant feature and Metro may consider removing that information. Darnise Bush stated that it is important for her to have all the pertinent information including number of cars along with train arrival time, line color, destination, and elevator outages. For long trips in the system Ms. Bush states that she uses her motorized scooter and knowing all of this information ahead of time allows her to better plan her route.

Dr. Staderman stated that the spacing between the header and second line with train arrival information is misaligned. Mr. Asante stated that the current spacing shown is the same as the PIDS on the platform. For rail stations with longer names, such as NoMa-Gallaudet University, they would align better, so it is designed to accommodate all station names.

Phillippa Mezile stated that as an avid rail customer who has low vision, the colors on the new PIDS are an immense improvement over the former devices. She expressed an interest in where the PIDS will be placed on the mini-mezzanine level. Mr. Asante stated that the PIDS will be ceiling mounted replacing the older models in the system.

Ms. Ray agreed with Ms. Mezile stating that where the PIDS are mounted make a huge difference in how customers who have low-vision access the information. She also agreed with Ms. Rush's comments about the need for the replacement PIDS to have audio. Mr. Asante reiterated his point about Metro making announcements through the PA system and the PIDS on mini-mezzanines are designed to mirror the PIDS on the platform level. He stated the new PIDS are a sealed sign, which limits their capabilities for audio. In a follow-up, Ms. Ray stated that without audio, the PIDS on the mini-mezzanine level will not be as effective as a form of communication.

Brian Miller stated that the San Francisco Municipal Railway (SF Muni), Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), and the Chicago Transportation Administration (CTA) all offer audible announcements. The speech is synthesized and easy to understand. Dr. Miller encouraged Metro to follow the lead of other transit properties by making audio information available. In response to a question about audio announcements at some

bus stops, Mr. Blake stated that at the new Paul Sarbanes Silver Spring Transit Center each bus bay is equipped with audio capabilities to provide static bus information to customers. He is investigating ways to introduce current audio information in the rail system. The BRS expressed an interest in a presentation on Metro's Next Bus technology. Mr. Blake stated that the information would be added to the work plan.

Ms. Ray suggested that Metro consider using a plug-in jack for audio information for the PIDS at the mini-mezzanines level. This approach would provide information to customers who are Blind/low vision using the system. In a follow-up to Ms. Ray's suggestion for plug-in jacks, many members agreed that it is an option, but added that they need to be able to access real-time information without having to wait through a series of announcements before obtaining the information needed for trip.

Anthony Stephens expressed an interest in other technology such as wireless or mobile applications to expand the capabilities of the new system. Additionally, he expressed an interest in the shelf life of the new device. Mr. Asante stated the ability to add audio is not available for the new PIDS. In a follow up on mobile application, Mr. Asante stated that all of Metro mobile applications are from third-party vendors. Dr. Miller added that at some airports, i-beacon technology with wireless capabilities is available now. He stated that in his experience, that type of connected communication works really well in areas where connectivity can be problematic like in the rail system.

Mr. Stephens stated that for years, some electronic manufacturers have been making LCD devices with accessible capabilities. He offered to provide guidance on manufacturers and options. Mr. Asante stated that he would be interested in discussing the information further with the members after the meeting.

Mr. Stephens expressed an interest in expanding the current information from the PIDS and making it available to more customers. Far too often, customers make a mad dash to reach the platform when a train is entering the system. With the effective use of technology, information can be shared through wireless technology about safety, train arrival times, destination, line color, and number of railcars. This is a simple intranet solution allowing one device to interact with another device within the station. Mr. Stephen suggested that the AAC should engage the Rider's Advisory Council on the issue.

Metro is exploring several ideas to increase information in the system. Mr. Blake stated that mobile applications, and touchscreen displays with audio, are some the ideas being explored in order to achieve this goal, with smartphone apps being considered the

easiest and most cost-effective way to quickly roll-out information to more customers. Metro's Office of Planning has invited businesses to discuss their technology and how they would like to utilize Metro-provided data to develop apps. Mr. Blake stated that he plans to participate in this dialog and advocate that app developers not only remember customers with disabilities, but actively focus on producing apps specifically targeted at such customers. Mr. Stephens stressed the importance of 508 compliance and stating that all accommodations are not expensive. Concerns were raised about the reliance of apps and the fact that many low-income people with disabilities do not have smartphones. It was stated that through the Lifeline Assistance Program, low-income individuals can obtain a cell phone from the federal government. This would enhance the number of people using the system connected to technology. Ms. Rush stated that the federal program for cell phones for economically disadvantaged customers is a good resource; yet the program may not be an option for everyone.

Metro is also looking at the use of audio maps and iBeacon technology through its partnership with the Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind. The Click-and-Go project has developed audio maps and soon beacons will be installed in seven stations, feeding additional real-time information to customers, providing increased independence and flexibility.

Mr. Blake stated that another approach to increase information to customers in the system is through touchscreen displays with audio. Metro's Office of Marketing is in the early phases of testing electronic signs to provide customers information along with advertisement. In response to where the signs are located, Mr. Blake stated that there is an electronic sign at the Gallery Place Metrorail station, F street side inside the fare gates. The device is a touch screen display, but not one with an audio option. Many members stated that they liked the potential of this type of technology because it can meet the needs of all customers regardless of technology capabilities or lack thereof.

Ms. Bush stated that Metro needs to be more creative in its approach to increasing customer information in the system. She stated that Metro should allow institutions that specialize in transportation to provide research and development in that area. She stated that there may be some up-front cost to Metro for equipment or a dedicated intern, but the product and value that Metro will receive in the end will be tremendous. Mr. Blake stated that idea of the collaborating with institutions that specialize in transportation is a great approach.

### **New Business**

Members were reminded that the BRS Station Lighting Work Group will hold a meeting immediately following Subcommittee meeting. Also the AAC Fare Policy Work Group will hold a meeting on Tuesday, February 16, 2016 immediately following the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting.

Members were shown a new TV program developed by Metro's Marketing Team called Metro Focus. The Metro Focus program will highlight interesting destinations along the rail system and other Metro-related topics. This first episode includes a segment called Beyond Barriers, which showcase the experiences of a customer with a disability on Metro. The new TV program will air on public access TV stations in DC, MD, and Northern VA and the first episode includes Anthony Stephens. In response to a question about future taping, Mr. Blake stated that Metro is currently taking its next episode, which will include Brianne Burger.

The BRS added the following items to the work plan: automated phone service for bus information and a discussion on bus route information during snow emergencies.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.