



Accessibility Advisory Committee

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

BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: January 11, 2016

In attendance: Brian Miller (Chair), Roger Stanley (2nd Vice-Chair), Darnise Bush, Phillippa Mezile, Edward McEntee, Mary Kay McMahon, Randall Pope, Denise Rush, Elver Ariza-Silva, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Second Vice-Chair Stanley called the January 11, 2016 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved the January 11, 2016 meeting agenda.

The BRS approved the December 14, 2015 meeting minutes as amended.

Public Comment

A customer discussed follow-up to the January 2016 AAC meeting, during which she made comments about recommendations in the MetroAccess Long-term Sustainability Study. The customer stated that the study was presented to the Board in November 2015 at the Customer Services and Operations Committee, and members can locate the Study on Metro's website under the heading Board of Directors. Ms. Rush thanked the customers for the information and additional comments regarding the study. Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy and Planning (ADAP), stated that all AAC members were provided accessible copies of the study as well, and added that at the conclusion of the Board presentation, there were no directives to staff or votes taken specifically on the contents of the study. Mr. Blake added that it is important to note that some of the recommendations listed in the study are initiatives already being implemented like aligning the service area with the provisions in the ADA, and pilot transportation programs in the District of Columbia and Maryland. Other recommendations needed additional feedback from the AAC and disability community at-large before implementation. Mr. Blake stated that the Department of Access Services (ACCS) has been very transparent about the recommendations and any process to evaluate and possibly implement some or all of them.

Marisa Laios made a comment about the lack of MetroAccess Road Supervisor staff support during BRS meetings. She stated that in an effort to not disrupt the meetings, many members and customers tend to turn their phones on low or off. Without a MetroAccess Road Supervisor present, this action is not possible because members need to listen for their alert call and then leave the meeting, so their trips will not result in no-show or late cancelation of trips. Ms. Laios stated that the absence of this assistance is a huge disincentive for members and customers to attend BRS meetings.

Edward McEntee stated that lately, it has been difficult to secure a MetroAccess trip that will be available near the end of the BRS meetings. Usually, the next available trip times are around 40 to 50 minutes after the meetings are over and there is no one available to assist them leaving the Jackson Graham Building. The area for vehicle pick-ups is dark, and in the absence of a MetroAccess Road Supervisor, it is not always apparent whether drivers will perform door-to-door.

Mr. Blake stated that compared to AAC and the MetroAccess Subcommittee, the MetroAccess ridership at the BRS meetings has tended to be much smaller; however, he hears the members' concerns, and he will discuss the matter with MetroAccess management to find a feasible solution.

Ms. Rush stated another issue is access to wheelchairs for meetings. She stated that she cannot walk long distances and the wheelchairs are an accommodation. Ms. Rush requested that she be notified in advance when wheelchairs are not available, so she can make other arrangements. Mr. Blake apologized for the inconvenience and stated that there are two wheelchairs available for each meeting. He took personal responsibility for the wheelchairs not being near the meeting room during two of the meetings in November.

On behalf of AAC Emeritus Member Carolyn Bellamy, Ms. Rush made the following comment: During Ms. Bellamy's recent trip to the Montgomery County Circuit Courthouse, the elevators at the rail station were out of service. Ms. Bellamy indicated that she went to the next station; however, the elevators at that station were also out of service, and the outage was not listed on the website. Although Ms. Bellamy eventually arrived at her destination via shuttle service, she missed her appointment. Mr. Blake thanked Ms. Rush for reporting the incident on behalf of Ms. Bellamy and stated that the issue will be forwarded to the Ombudsman follow up.

Ombudsman's Report

Antonio Stephens, ADA Ombudsman, provided follow-up on a comment made at the October 2015 BRS meeting regarding a portable traffic sign blocking the pathway to the bus stop on 7th & H Street. The customer stated that the traffic sign prevents bus operators from lowering the lift for customers with mobility devices, and on several occasion bus operators have refused to deploy the lift because of the obstruction. The Ombudsman stated that the portable traffic sign is the property of the Metropolitan Police Department and very unlikely to be removed. Metro is looking into moving some of the newspaper racks to provide bus operators adequate space to lower their ramps in order to board customers.

Additionally, the Ombudsman provided feedback on the elevator outage at the Waterfront Metrorail station. Information was requested from the Office of Elevator and Escalator Services (ELES), which stated that the wiring in the elevator at the Waterfront station had shorted the system and the issue was not immediately noticed or reported. The issues have been corrected and the elevator at the Waterfront station is back in service.

Emergency Exercise

At the December 2014 BRS meeting members reflected on Metro's Emergency "Volunteer" Exercises. Ron Bodmer, Director, MTPD Emergency Management, discussed emergency volunteer evacuation in the Metrorail system. He stated that emergency exercises are designed to train first responders in the critical skills needed to rescue customers from the system in an emergency. In 2015, Metro trained over 6000 first responders, and more evacuation exercises are planned for 2016, and Metro plans to conduct them in real-time. Mr. Bodmer introduced the presenter from OEM: Denton Rourke, Manager, Emergency Operations. Also presenting was Captain Russell Blinkhorn, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Department, and Deloris Scott, D.C. Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA).

Captain Blinkhorn thanked members for their participation and echoed Mr. Bodmer's comments about the evacuation training being the most suitable learning experience for first responders.

Ms. Scott stated that HSEMA mission is to lead and plan efforts to ensure that the District of Columbia is prepared to prevent, protect against, respond to, mitigate, and recover from all threats and hazards. HSEMA prefers to use people with various types of disabilities in its exercises. Ms. Scott stated that she welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with Metro on this important issue.

Some members reported attending one or more of the exercises over the years. They recounted their experiences of how first responders appeared not to be interested in the directions offered by members of the disability community on how best to handle a person's body or service animal during the evacuation. Some stated that the emergency exercises were too dangerous for people with disabilities, and felt they would be in more danger of not being evacuated safely or being injured during an evacuation should an actual emergency occur in the system.

The BRS discussed their concerns over the requirement to sign a waiver in order to participate in these exercises. Ms. Rush said it appears that Metro was attempting to absolve itself from liability should something occur during the exercise. She stated that the potential for a person with a disability to get injured or hurt is too great. Ms. Rush stated that she can no longer participate in the exercises if a waiver is required. She added that Metro transports millions of people on a daily basis and no one is asked to sign a waiver.

Mr. Bodmer stated that the emergency volunteer exercise at the Forest Glenn Station was the first time Metro required a waiver. He stated that the requirement of waivers is an industry standard practice, and the main point of the waiver is to have written documentation that the person has been made aware of the significant and relevant risks that they are assuming by participating, voluntarily, in these exercises. Other organizations such as the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority and HSEMA require waivers in order to participate in their evacuation exercises. In response to a question about the demographic of other volunteers, Mr. Bodmer stated that at the Forest Glenn exercise there were a total of 45 volunteers, many who were Metro employees and all were required to sign a waiver.

Mr. Sheehan stated that he signed a waiver after the exercise and suggested that Metro have better logistics and coordination for the process. Mr. Bodmer agreed that the waiver should be done before or during the check-in procedures. In response to a question about whether waivers will be used moving forward, Mr. Bodmer stated Metro's Counsel's office is reviewing the issue, but that is the intention.

Mr. McEntee stated that the disability community is interested in participating, but is apprehensive because of the lack of protection. A comment from the public stated that one of the reasons that prevent more people with disabilities from using fixed route is the fear that something could happen. Allowing customers to participate without signing the waiver would allow the jurisdictions to meet the need for training first responders and reduce the fears of the disability community on the fixed route system. The customer stated that nullifying the waivers is a win-win for everyone.

Barbara Millville, President, National Capital Citizen with Low Vision, stated that many people with low vision do not use service animals or white canes, yet navigate the system every day. The issue about waivers and some members declining to participate is of major concern. She expressed an interest in how the first responders will handle a customer with low vision. Mr. Rourke stated that customers need to self-identify and share the type of assistance needed. Ms. Millville suggested that engaging and assisting

the low vision community should also be included in the computer based training (CBT). Mr. Rourke stated that he will include this in all the training. She stated that the number one priority of customers is to get out safely and her organization is open to assisting Metro with its training in that area.

The BRS stated that communication is at the root of the issue because first responders, the on-site Commander, Metro staff, and others are not listening to the individual person's needs. As an example, during the exercise a volunteer with a service animal made several attempts to explain how best to handle her and the service animal. The volunteer explained that a service animal should never be separated from its handler. After an inordinate amount of time, first responders and Metro staff conceded. In a real emergency, the time taken to resolve this issue could have resulted in a catastrophe for everyone involved. Mr. Rourke stated that the evacuation drill in Montgomery County was the first time a service animal was used and acknowledged that there is a gap in training in that area.

Mr. Sheehan added that during the exercise, it took almost 30 minutes before any communication about the problem on the train. The two-way radios used by staff were a distraction that lead to some confusion and possible miscommunication. In a real emergency, communication should be more effective and not take so long. Mr. Sheehan suggested that Metro consider using ear pieces for communication. For customers who wear hearing aids, the background noise from two-way radios would sound like lots of commotion. Captain Blinkhorn stated that the use of ear pieces has been discussed; however, they are not feasible because they take away from situational awareness.

Additionally, Mr. Sheehan stated that his wife, who has a service animal, participated in the exercise. During the evacuation portion of the exercise, Ms. Sheehan requested protocol for evacuating ambulatory disabled customers. The choices were to walk through the train or walking down the side of the car to safety. The first responders, on-site Commander, or Metro staff would not give her the option. Mr. Sheehan stated that providing full information and giving a person the option to choose based on the instructions given is crucial.

Dr. Miller stated that he had a similar experience during the Silver Line exercise. He stated that he uses a white cane and expressed an interest in walking back to the platform. However, he was not allowed to walk to the platform, but instead was forced to use the Emergency Tunnel Evacuation Cart (ETEC) cart. Dr. Miller stressed the importance of giving a person the option to choose.

Mr. Rourke acknowledged that communication is one of the keys to making the exercises successful and member experiences can be differ. At the Silver Line exercise, first responders did not allow an ambulatory blind person to walk back to the platform; however, at the evacuation exercise in Greenbelt a blind person was allowed to exit the train and walk along the track back to the platform. He stated that first responders assess a situation to make the decisions.

In a follow up on communication, a comment from the public stated that first responders should get in the habit of identifying themselves and explaining the environment in and out of the railcar. This would allow customers to know who they are speaking with and be able to visualize the task at hand.

Another issue brought forth by the BRS was use of the gurney and ETEC cart. For a person with a disability and cannot control their neck or arms, such as customers with cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis, the gurney has too much flexibility and may result in that person being injured when transported. Additionally, the fasteners on the ETEC should be changed to prevent the possibility of trauma. To prevent a possible injury, the BRS recommends that padding be added around a customer with a disabilities neck and shoulders. Also, the fasteners on the ETEC be changed to Velcro, so they break away and prevent further injuring the person. Additionally, a blanket or towel should be used underneath service animals to prevent their paws from getting stuck in the diamond shape surface of the cart. Mr. Rourke acknowledged the BRS concerns, stating that the equipment is designed to be functional not comfortable. In response to a question about evacuating customers with disabilities in imminent danger, Mr. Rourke reported that all customers are evacuated according to the severity of their injuries. He added that customers who use mobility devices may be initially evacuated without the device, but are later reunited with it. The top priority of every first responder, the on-site Commander, and Metro personnel is to evacuate all passengers to a safe area.

Mr. Sheehan encourages Metro to open up the process and give first responders an opportunity to work with more types of disabilities. The Washington Metropolitan area has a plethora of disabilities to choose from for these exercises. There are individuals and groups that are interested and willing, and want to be educated on this issue just as much as the next customer. He suggested that Metro consider using the new customer community Amplify to obtain a cross section of disabled and non-disabled participants.

Ms. Laios encouraged Metro to consider a later start time for the exercises because many people with disabilities require assistance from a personal care attendant (PCA) to begin their day, and most PCAs are not available until later in the morning, especially on Sundays.

The BRS expressed an interest in how lessons learned from each exercise were taught to first responders in each jurisdiction. It appears that feedback from the exercises is not being internalized by first responders because the same issues are continually occurring. Many members stated that this issue is one of the main reasons they no longer participate in the exercises. Captain Blinkhorn stated that Montgomery County Fire and Rescue (as well as the other areas) receive feedback on each exercise and his team heeds all the comments and observations in the lessons learned. Captain Blinkhorn also stated that Montgomery County uses some volunteer fire and rescue personnel, and acknowledge there are some gaps in the training with that group.

The BRS expressed an interest in the possibility of pre-brief meetings prior to each exercise. These meetings would be used for explaining details, and for information sharing about an evacuation. Mr. Sheehan suggested that Metro and the jurisdiction where the exercises are occurring should invite resources like Ms. Scott at HSEMA and Cecilia Warren at the Maryland Department of Disabilities. They are the subject matter experts. Dr. Miller stated that the pre-brief meetings should be regional because it minimizes redundancy. Mr. Rourke stated that OEM has been in touch with Ms. Scott and Ms. Warren, and they have agreed to be on the planning team to help Metro design the exercises and recruit members of the disability community to participate.

In an effort to prevent some of the obstacles of the last exercise, Captain Blinkhorn stated that he plans to develop a training program for engaging people with disabilities on Metrobus and Metrorail in an emergency. Mr. Rourke stated that OEM is also reviewing its CBT for all first responders and plans to tailor a portion of the training to working with people with disabilities in an emergency. Ms. Laios stated that a CBT can be helpful, but offers little room for feedback, personal interaction, or questions. Mr. Rourke stated that CBT is only one part of the exercise; hands-on training is also a big part of the training.

Mr. Bodmer stated that Metro and the jurisdictions need help from the disability community to train emergency personnel on evacuations in the Metrorail system. The suggestion of a central liaison to handle all the debriefing feedback from each exercise and the distribution of feedback and lessons learned to each the jurisdictions will be strongly considered. He offered to attend the BRS meeting immediately preceding an

exercise to collaborate efforts. In response to a comment about having an emergency exercise focused only on customers with disabilities, Mr. Rourke stated that Metro (and the jurisdictions) gets the best results when a cross section of customers is used in the exercises.

Mr. Stanley stated that the BRS shares the same goal of showing customers how to evacuate the system safely in an emergency. The BRS is pleased with this first step to build a more inclusive evacuation program and thanked OEM, Ms. Scott, Captain Blinkhorn, and others for their input in this process.

New Business

Members were reminded that the AAC Fare Policy Work Group will hold a meeting on Tuesday, January 19, 2016 immediately following the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting.

Mr. Crawford expressed an interest in who would be available to assist MetroAccess customers after the work group meeting. He stated that the MetroAccess road supervisors have not been available for the last couple of BRS meetings and transportation has been unpredictable. Mr. Blake stated that he will address the issue with MetroAccess.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:43 p.m.