



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

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

BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: July 13, 2015

In attendance: Brian Miller (Chair), William Staderman (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Tapan Banerjee; Brianne Burger, Darnise Bush, Charlie Crawford, Marisa Laios, Phillippa Mezile, Edward McEntee, Mary Kay McMahon, Randall Pope, Phil Posner, Denise Rush, Anthony Stephens, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Chair Miller called the July 13, 2015 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved the July 13, 2015 meeting agenda as amended. The BRS approved the June 8, 2015 meeting minutes.

Public Comment

No public comment was offered.

Ombudsman Report

Antonio Stephens, ADA Ombudsman, provided feedback to a comment made at the June 2015 BRS meeting regarding Passenger Information Display Systems (PIDS) in the Metrorail system. He stated a member had reported that whenever a major incident occurs in the system, Metro provides audio announcements but fails to display the same information in printed on the PIDS. The member was interested in knowing whether Station Managers have access to the PIDS system, thus allowing them to update PIDS information in their respective stations.

To obtain a response, Mr. Stephens followed-up with colleagues in the Rail Transportation, Operations Control Center (ROCC), and was informed that Station Managers do not have the access or authority to make in-station changes to the PIDS. The changing information on the PIDS is done through the ROCC, which vets all information being displayed to the public.

Brianne Burger stated that she is concerned about customers who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing. When an issue occurs, the Deaf and hard-of-hearing customers are the last to know what is going on in the system. She stated that in her experience using Metro's system, she often encounters Station Managers who indicate that they do not have access to pen and paper for communication. This limits information and access to Deaf and hard-of-hearing customers. Mr. Stephens stated that when customers encounter such situations, customers should report them to Metro's Customer Service at 202-962-1328. Customers should be prepared to give the date, time, station, and the Station Manager's name. The customer should also report the information to the Ombudsman office at 202-962-1100 for additional follow up.

Ms. Burger stated that the deaf and hard-of-hearing community has waited far too long for equal access. She added that cellular access in the system is limited in some areas and non-existent in others making eAlerts unreliable. Dr. Posner stated that all Station Managers have access to pens because they have forms that must be completed.

Ms. Burger would like for Metro to improve in the ways it communicates with the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community when traveling in the Metrorail system. Dr. Posner suggested a touch pad messaging system, so that deaf and hard-of-hearing customers can easily communicate with Station Managers. He stated that the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) can also share this concern during the AAC Quarterly meeting with the Board.

Dr. B. Moore Gwynn, AAC Coordinator, stated that Dr. Posner's suggestion may violate Metro's Electronic Device policy, which prohibits front line staff from actively engaging with electronics during the course of their duties. Dr. Posner clarified his point stating that he is suggesting a low-tech solution such as a pad with dry erase markers for writing.

Randall Pope stated that it is important to include Deaf-Blind customers too. The mechanism or device Dr. Posner is discussing must meet the need of a wide range of customers. As an example, deaf customers who are low vision would need a wide marker to view information on a pad.

Ms. Burger stated that what she is proposing is something similar to a white Board. Such boards are ideal because of their small size; they can attract the attention of customers; they are easy to wipe clean for new messages; and they are handy for one-on-one communication with a customer. She stated that this approach is used by transportation properties overseas, such as London's.

Mr. Pope stated that Braille needs to be included in the discussion on effective communication. Charlie Crawford echoed the same point stating that the discussion on communication should be inclusive.

In response to a comment about the PIDS and inclusiveness, Ms. Burger stated that the PIDS are limited because they cannot address immediate issues in the system when a customer is standing on the platform. The audible or overhead announcements are counterproductive because they only meet the need of some customers, not all customers.

Dr. Posner stated that increasing communication at the platform level would mean an increase in staff. This may not be a feasible solution nor address the issue. Ms. Burger stated that on a regular basis Metro personnel are on the platforms making verbal announcements. Customers could be better served if the announcements were available in print as well as audible.

Upon motion, the BRS recommended that Metro develop a mechanism by which Station Managers at kiosks and personnel on the platforms can communicate with customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

Discussion – Effective Communication in the Metro System

The BRS had a discussion on effective communication for audio and print for customers traveling in the Metro system.

Dr. Posner expressed an interest in Metro's benchmarks for effective accessible communication on Metrobus, Metrorail and, MetroAccess. The benchmarks should include communication on devices, such as the Interactive Voice Response system and the PIDS in Metrorail stations.

Anthony Stephens expressed an interest in current data on this issue. He stated that members can use this information to compare with other transportation organizations to begin to develop best practices for effective accessible communication.

Dr. Miller stated that Easter Seals has a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to provide accessible transportation programs. He added that Easter Seals has a broad range of tools and kits for training related to communication in public transportation. He suggested that Easter Seals be asked to provide the BRS with another presentation on the topic.

In a follow up to Dr. Posner's comments, Mr. Crawford suggested that effective accessible communication should also include announcements on when the next train is approaching, color of the line, destination, and number of railcars. He stated that this type of information is provided on Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. Dr. Posner stated that the Metrorail system is a noisy place and therefore additional announcements may get drowned out from the noise.

Dr. Miller stated that the information on the number of railcars is important for customers who have visual disabilities because it helps them determine where they should stand on the platform to access the train.

Anthony Stephens stated that Chicago Transit Authority, New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and the Seattle (King County Metro) Transit System have made strong efforts to incorporate accessibility into transportation.

Dr. Banerjee expressed an interest in a presentation from Frank Roth regarding his visit to the Seattle (King County Metro) Transit System. The BRS could gain some insight on their efforts that may be applicable to Metro. Cheryl O'Konek, Operations Manager, Office of Eligibility Certification and Outreach, stated that she would inform Mr. Roth of the request.

Ms. Burger asked what the specific purpose of this discussion was. She stated that the subject matter is interesting, however may be pointless if the discussion does not lead to some recommendations or action items. Dr. Posner stated that Heidi Case made a case for allowing the Committee to brainstorm. At the time, she stated that staff guided the AAC and its subcommittees on all the things that must be done and the committee does not have the opportunity to freely discuss topics on their own. He stated that he recalled other members agreeing and voted to add topics for discussion onto the work plans. Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that he has always felt that the committee has had the freedom to guide the discussion even with staff present.

Anthony Stephens expressed an interested in how the BRS can be more effective with accessibility communication and other enhancements on a new line such as Maryland Transit system's Purple Line project. He suggested that this topic should be further explored and added to the work plan.

Dr. Miller thanked members for the discussion, adding that it yielded a few new items on the BRS work plan.

Work Plan

The BRS added the following items to its 2016 work plan: Metro's benchmarks on effective accessible communication on Metrobus, Metrorail, and MetroAccess; Purple Line Project; Easter Seals; and a presentation on the Seattle (King County Metro) Transit System.

New Business

Ms. Rush, referencing the recent resignation of a member of the AAC, stated that all AAC members should be informed when a member leaves the AAC. Dr. Miller asked about the process for resigning from the AAC. Dr. Moore Gwynn stated that, as outlined in the By-laws, a member is required to put their intent in writing to the Board.

In response to a comment about precluding members from speaking with former members, Dr. Moore Gwynn stated that most members have the contact information of other members and members are free to contact former members. Metro does not preclude current or former members from communicating with one another.

Ms. Rush and Dr. Miller both agreed that it helps to know when a member has left or resigned from the AAC. Dr. Moore Gwynn stated that it has been practice to finalize all procedures before any member is advised of another member's decision to no longer serve. It is not staff's intent to limit information from members.

Dr. Banerjee stated that in the past, most members have been open about their intent to leave. Some leave for health reasons, or family, job or other commitments. It is up to the member to give us the reason.

Dr. Moore Gwynn reminded members that due to the renovations in the Board and meeting rooms, all AAC and its subcommittee meetings, to include work groups, will be canceled for the month of August 2015. Staff will announce the dates for the September 2015 meetings soon. Additionally, the Emergency Exercise in D.C. and the Silver Spring Transit Center tour are open for members to participate.

Old Business

Dr. Posner provided an update on Fare Policy. He stated that this is the year that Metro may consider raising fares. Metro has had a difficult fiscal year; therefore, it is important for the AAC to begin its discussion on this issue. Dr. Posner stated that the Fare Policy Work Group will hold its next meeting in September 2015.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:38 p.m.

Attachment: Work Plan