



Accessibility Advisory Committee

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BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: July 18, 2016

In attendance: Charlie Crawford; Steven Kaffen, Suzanne Kamel, Marisa Laios, Phillippa Mezile, Mary Kay McMahon, Dr. Phil Posner, Denise Rush, Paul Semelfort and Will Schell.

Call to Order

Former AAC Vice-Chair Posner called the July 18, 2016 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved the July 18, 2016 meeting agenda as amended.

The BRS approved the June 13, 2016 meeting minutes as written.

Ombudsman's Report

Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy and Planning (ADAP), provided an update on a complaint related to SafeTrack. On June 24, 2016 at approximately 8:30 a.m., the customer stated she was traveling on a Blue Line train towards Arlington Cemetery. Due to SafeTrack, Arlington Cemetery was the last stop on the Blue line. When the train arrived at the Pentagon station, a Metro employee entered the railcar and announced that the current location was the last stop, and requested that everyone exit the train. Although there were others still sitting on the train, the customer stated that she felt that the staff member focused on her getting off. The customer stated that she exited the train and after a brief discussion, the staff member recognized that incorrect information had been given. The customer stated that she felt singled out because of her disability. Mr. Blake stated that he reviewed the tape and it showed two instances of all customers being asked to exit a train, but he could not find any instance of a Platform Attendant boarding a train, escorting a single customer off, and spending additional time with the customer on the platform. He will try to gather additional information from the customer.

Metrobus External Announcement

At the request of the BRS, Phil Wallace, Managing Director, Bus Maintenance (BMNT), discussed the volume level of external stop announcements on Metrobus vehicles.

In an overview of BMNT, Mr. Wallace stated that Metro currently has 1,583 buses in its fleet, including 295 new low floor buses, 198 of which are in service. The newer low-floor buses allow customers to board and ride at the same level as the curb. Mr. Wallace stated that it is anticipated the remaining number of new buses will be placed into service by the end of the calendar year. By the end of 2016, Metro will also phase out the remainder of the fleet with the lift/ramp configuration. To support the SafeTrack initiative, BMNT has put an additional 63 buses into service. Mr. Wallace stated that all of the buses in the Metro fleet are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Dr. Posner expressed an interest in whether the new buses included an enhanced mobility device landing pad. The BRS has discussed approaches to accommodating larger mobility devices on Metrobus. Some larger mobility devices have difficulty accessing the service. He suggested that Metro design its newer fleet similar to the DC Circulator, whose vehicles have larger landing pads for mobility devices and wider aisles to allow customers with mobility devices to turn around with ease. Mr. Wallace stated that Metro's new buses are the same configuration as those currently in the fleet. He stated that he would review the DC Circulator configuration for consideration.

Mr. Wallace stated that Metro introduced voice annunciators into its bus system in 1997. As the equipment aged, Metro upgraded and standardized the technology across its entire fleet of buses.

Mr. Wallace introduced John Collins, Project Manager, Clever Devices to address the audio issues. Mr. Collins stated that Clever Devices reviewed all the buses in Metro's fleet, and after an upgrade in technology, determined that the annunciator systems were averaging a range of 90 decibels. That range was significantly higher than Metro's average level for the annunciator system of about 77 decibels. Mr. Collins stated that the system was reprogrammed, so as each bus is placed into service the annunciator system automatically calibrates to the appropriate level for the environment, and can go higher than 77 decibels. All buses have an ambient sensor that will allow the volume to go higher or lower depending on the surrounding environment.

Charlie Crawford expressed an interest in a demonstration of the annunciator equipment on Metrobus. Mr. Blake stated that the meeting schedule did not lend itself to a demonstration; however, the demonstration can be added to the BRS work plan.

Steve Kaffen expressed an interest in the types of announcements on Metrobus. He stated that some customers, including those with disabilities, have problems with announcements. Recently on the 42 line (Mount Pleasant), he overheard a customer in a mobility device request the announcement related to fares be turned off. Many customers view the additional announcements related to fares as an annoyance. The announcements were so loud that customers were putting earplugs in their ears. The bus operator advised the customer that the announcements were automated and bus operators have no control over the announcements.

Mr. Kaffen stated that the announcements related to the fares are not for customers paying with cash or using a SmarTrip card. These customers know the fare. The only group that would benefit from this type of information is tourists. He stated that the

fare announcements tend to slow down service because tourists become confused by the announcements of the fare on Metrobus with the fares on the Metrorail system. Additionally, the information is disruptive and spoils the customer experience when traveling on the bus system. Mr. Kaffen suggested that Metro remove the announcements on fares because of the negative impact on customers and the service. Mr. Wallace stated that up until last March, Metro Bus Operators were required to announce the base fare to customers. To reduce the number of assaults on Bus Operators, Metro added the announcement of the base fare on all its buses in the fleet.

Mr. Kaffen also expressed an interest in the announcements related to the back door opening and closing. He stated that these types of announcements may have good intentions, but do not help the system nor contribute positively to the customer experience. The customers who could benefit from the announcement do not use the back doors. Mr. Wallace stated that the announcement is for safety. Some customers tend to lean on the doors and may fall out, so Metro has an announcement to remind customers not to lean on the doors.

Dr. Posner added that it would be more useful to tell customers not to enter or exit the bus before it has been kneeled. Too many customers with disabilities have fallen because the bus is being lowered. In a follow-up, Mr. Kaffen stated that this type of safety announcement would be more useful than other announcements like the one about the back door. He suggested that instead of an announcement about the doors, Metro should consider using a flashing light with a message that scrolls across the accessible signage on bus displays to alert customers of any safety issue. This would speed up the process and reduce the announcements.

Mr. Crawford cautioned Metro to review the cross-disability implications when reviewing whether to add or remove an announcement. He stated that what may be noise for one person may be information for another. Mr. Crawford also reminded members to be considerate and careful about eliminating services. He stated that many things customers need the BRS may not always be mindful of, but the services are necessary.

The BRS thanked Mr. Wallace and Mr. Collins for a thorough discussion on announcements. The BRS stated that they look forward to a demonstration of the annunciator system and all the accessibility features on Metrobus.

BRS Election

The BRS briefly discussed leadership positions of the subcommittee. With the temporary absence of the Chair and vacancies for both vice-chair positions, Dr. Posner stated that the BRS needs new leadership to step in. Mary Kay McMahon expressed an interest in

whether the Bylaws outline the responsibilities of the officers. Dr. Posner stated that when he served as Vice-Chair of the AAC, he viewed his responsibilities as: moderating the meeting when the Chair was not available; chairing work group meetings; and engaging the Board by attending regular Board and subcommittee meetings. Dr. Posner stated that the Vice-Chair is the Chair's closest advisor. Mr. Blake stated that members will have a month to review this issue and at the September BRS meeting, members can hold an election.

Dr. B. Moore-Gwynn, AAC Coordinator, provided a brief updated on Brian Miller, BRS Chair. She stated that Dr. Miller sent his sincere thanks to members and staff for their thoughts and prayers during this difficult time. He has been keeping abreast of the issues by listening to the meetings via Spreaker. Dr. Miller noted that he hopes to return back to the work of the AAC soon.

BRS Lighting (Update)

Barbara Milleville, President, National Capital Citizens with Low Vision (NCCLV), provided an update on lighting in the Metrorail system. Together, the BRS and NCCLV have worked to improve lighting in the Metrorail system. In May 2016, NCCLV, along with the AAC Chair, met with Metro's General Manager and had a robust discussion about lighting. Ms. Milleville stated she left that meeting renewed by Metro's commitment to improve lighting in the Metrorail system.

In June 2016, NCCLV also had an opportunity observe proposed wall and track-bed lighting. The demonstration was performed in the overnight hours at the McPherson Square rail station. The demonstration offered a firsthand lesson on the work that is performed when the system is closed. Ms. Milleville stated that there is quite a bit of traffic that occurs in the system after it closes.

The proposed lighting uses light-emitting diodes (LED), which will create an even and much warmer illumination. This type of lighting is state-of-the-art and would last longer than the current fluorescent lighting in the system. The new LED bulbs are encased, which will allow Metro to clean the lights without removing them from the fixture.

Dr. Posner expressed an interest in the lighting in the Metro garages. He stated that Metro contracted with Philips Lighting for LED lighting in its garages. He expressed in interest in whether Metro will contract with the company for the track bed lighting or continue to do maintenance itself. Ms. Milleville stated that lighting in the garage was not discussed in her meeting with the GM or during the demonstration.

Ms. Milleville gave kudos to Metro's lighting team. She stated that the lighting team was very detail-oriented, asked lots of questions, and understood that lighting needed to be even to prevent customers from experiencing dark spots while traveling.

Dr. Posner stated that the Virginia Square – GMU station has a streetlight at the top of the escalators for safety. However, the light is so bright that it temporarily blinds some customers traveling up the escalator to exit the station. He stated that other stations might have the same problem. Dr. Posner suggested that the Station Lighting Work Group review outside lighting at the rail stations to ensure that the proper lighting is in place.

Mrs. Milleville stated that a lot has been happening around lighting, and she is grateful to members of the Work Group and the AAC for keeping lighting in the front of Metro.

Mr. Crawford commended Ms. Milleville and NCCLV for the work that they have done on lighting in the system. The BRS agreed that the subcommittee could not have accomplished the success of this effort without the support of the community.

Public Comment

Dr. Posner made a comment about information not being readily available on the website about SafeTrack. He stated that the fifth maintenance cycle was beginning tomorrow and Metro had not posted any information on its website. This makes it difficult for customers to plan their commute. Mr. Blake stated that a review of the website shows that information about SafeTrack Surge #5 is on Metro's website.

Phillippa Mezile made a comment about the TransportDC Program. She stated that recently the program made some changes to limit the service which could have a negative impact on customers who use the service. Dr. Posner said that the issue will be discussed at the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting.

Old Business

Dr. B. Moore-Gwynn reminded members that there will be no meetings of the AAC, subcommittees, or work groups during the month of August 2016. The AAC and its subcommittees will resume meetings in September 2016.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m.