



Accessibility Advisory Committee

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

BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE VIRTUAL MEETING MINUTES: June 8, 2020

In attendance: Tino Calabia (Chair), Anthony Oberg (Vice-Chair), Darnise Bush, Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Melanie Jackson, Steven Kaffen, Mary Kay McMahon, Phillippa Mezile, Phil Posner, Denise Rush, Patrick Sheehan, and Kelley Simoneaux.

Call to Order

Anu Sharma, Accessibility Advisory Committee Coordinator, started the meeting by taking a roll call. Thereafter, Chair Calabia moved the meeting forward.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved June 8, 2020, meeting agenda.

The BRS approved the May 11, 2020, meeting minutes as written.

Summer 2020 Shutdown – Bus/Shuttle Update:

Nick Perfili, Assistant Planning Manager, Office of Bus Planning, provided an update about the Bus/Shuttle service during the Summer 2020 Shutdown. The Platform Rehabilitation Project started on May 23rd, 2020, on the Orange line stations west of Ballston. The shuttle buses exchanged the Orange line between Vienna and Ballston, and on the Silver line between Wiehle Reston East and Ballston. As expected, the ridership has been low, about 1800 to 2000 on weekdays and approximately 800 to 1000 on weekends. The current numbers from combined shuttles have the same as rail ridership as rail after COVID - 19, carrying only 5% of the ridership. Mr. Perfili stated thus far we have had no loss of bus operators, and have had a positive show of the shuttle service. Some stations are comparatively busier, for example Vienna and Ballston, and Wiehle Reston East and Ballston on Orange and Silver lines, respectively. At this time, Mr. Perfili invited questions from the Committee.

Chair Calabia inquired whether the shuttle ridership experienced an increase on Saturday as a result of the protest in Washington DC. Mr. Perfili stated although we expected and prepared for it, the shuttles did not experience increased ridership beyond 10 passengers.

Mr. Kaffen asked whether the ridership from past Saturday reflected riders' sensitivity to the safety aspects of the system when we go through phase two and three. Mr. Perfili stated on weekdays trains run every 20 minutes and the shuttles run every 10 minutes, whereas, on the weekends, trains run every 30 minutes and the shuttles run every 15 minutes. With 15 minutes of headway ample capacity was still available, thus we did not have much of an impact this past weekend. Some people would not ride public transit due to health safety concerns. WMATA is prepared with strategic buses for use as needed.

Mr. Calabia asked what about social distancing. Mr. Perfili stated the signs are posted on bus stops to inform riders that they should be using the service for essential traveling, face covering is required, social distancing is to be maintained at the stop while waiting, and there is limited capacity on buses. Mr. Perfili further explained limited capacity on buses means we are filling these buses to half the capacity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was advising people not to ride trains to work. Mr. Calabia stated the CDC has received negative feedback for their recommendation and they have backed off from the recommendation.

Chair Calabia asked whether riders are complying with face coverings. Mr. Perfili informed most of the riders are complying as there was only one rider who boarded without face coverings. Mr. Kaffen shared his experience while riding the regular bus service and stated majority of the passengers are complying and are wearing face coverings. If a passenger does not wear face coverings, operators do not make any comments to those customers, probably as per their instructions.

Mr. Sheehan asked if masks are being provided to customers without face coverings. Mr. Kaffen stated that is not his experience, whereas, New York City has announced to have face mask dispenser. Chair Calabia stated it should be offered not only on buses but on trains as well. Ms. Mezile expressed her concern as it only takes one person to spread the virus.

At this time, Chair Calabia thanked Mr. Perfili for this update to the Committee.

Bus Securement Devices:

Chair Calabia shared information about a securement device that is designed for passengers using wheelchairs aboard a bus. He clarified that there is no personal interest or gain for him by recommending this kind of device, nor does he have any interest in the company. Prior to the meeting Chair Calabia shared videos of the device stating that it is ADA compliant. The device is rear facing and allows most wheelchair users to get on the bus and in the specific location quickly. With the touch of one button, the arms of the device come down to secure the wheelchair, providing 25 pounds of pressure on each side. The bus operators do not have to move from their seat. At this time, Chair Calabia invited questions from the Committee.

Vice-Chair Oberg stated his concerns about the wheelchair securement device on a bus. With 25 pounds of pressure on either side, the passenger using a wheelchair has to be properly positioned for the machine to work, however, if not positioned properly then what happens, can it damage the wheelchair? Electric wheelchairs are heavier than

manual wheelchairs. The foldable seats closest to the bus operators are designated for wheelchair users. From what was shown in the video, the device takes the space of those two seats. Versatility of having those two seats would be eliminated by the securement device. Chair Calabia stated with social distancing fewer people are riding buses. Vice-Chair Oberg stated eventually we will be out of social distancing and we will lose two seats on either side. Chair Calabia commented about seat configuration on trains.

Ms. Rush about a safety feature in case something happens to bus operator, then who releases the passenger? Chair Calabia informed that there is an emergency release to address that issue. He also informed that buses in Delaware have this device, and 15 of the Ride-On buses will also have these devices. The AAC can test the device when implemented on the Ride-On buses.

Ms. Simoneaux stated her concerns about the current bus restraints and would not want to see those on Metro trains. The bus operators enforce the current restraints as per the policy whereas, she prefers to have the flexibility to be able to move when needed, especially while traveling with a child. Chair Calabia stated there is no enforcement, if a customer refuses to use the device, bus operators should accept that response. Ms. Simoneaux explained that is not the reality, and if WMATA invests in an equipment, it will be implemented.

Carol Peredo Lopez, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning stated the foot print the device takes is 18 by 30 inches, and in addition due to the location of the device 2 foldable seats will have to be taken out to clear the space for wheelchair alignment. This particular device makes the passenger face backwards, it is slightly awkward to exit that way and it creates more crowded situation. When all the maneuvering dynamics are reviewed, ADA required forward facing priority seating may need to be moved back and WMATA may lose up to 5 seats. It may also encroach on the maneuvering space for the other wheelchair location, it is a very involved process. If Ride-On is implementing this device then that can be a pilot for us and we can test it when implemented on Montgomery County transit buses. This should not be considered a pandemic solution as it takes a long time for procurement and then to install the device.

Calabia stated WMATA purchases 100 buses regularly, perhaps modifications can be made.

Ms. Rush emphasized that if Metro places an equipment, it must be used, unless a waiver has been granted. Mr. Rush would like to test the device once it is implemented on the Ride-On buses. She also mentioned about the budget constraints WMATA is facing.

Ms. Bush stated from the video, she is not sure if the device will secure a scooter, a manual wheelchair, or it will secure only a medium size wheelchair. Chair Calabia informed the device accommodates scooters as well.

Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services stated that Ms. Peredo Lopez has stated many concerns that need to be addressed. Mr. Blake asked Chair Calabia, what are you trying to accomplish that this device may solve. Chair Calabia shared an experience where a person using a wheelchair who had to be secured, which took a long time. This kind of device not only secures passengers using wheelchairs, reduces operator and passenger contact, it will also reduce the dwell time immensely and may encourage ridership. Mr. Blake stated the questions raised by Ms. Peredo Lopez, need to be addressed. Metro has attempted to reduce the dwell time with various pilots such as cashless buses, however, he really would steer more solutions about fare and bringing equality than risking safety of people with disabilities due to some device. Mr. Blake stated Chair Calabia can continue to advocate as needed.

Bus Rear Boarding – Impact on Blind Customers:

Mr. Kaffen stated a concern of rear doors not kneeling for customers as the front doors.

Mr. Sheehan recommended for the Committee to discuss WMATA's re-opening plan and present any concerns to WMATA, as being done by the Riders Advisory Council (RAC). Chair Calabia asked whether the re-opening plan can be shared with the Committee. A customer who initially shared with Mr. Sheehan, will share with it with the AAC members. The customer stated her concerns about the re-opening that is tentatively scheduled for August or September. She recommended for the Committee to create a list of concerns that can be presented to WMATA for review and resolution. The customer also shared her concerns about boarding the bus from rear doors, and that she prefers the front door boarding for various reasons.

Ms. Peredo Lopez informed that we are planning to put signage to inform customers that rear boarding is required except for people with disabilities and seniors, who may board from the front doors as needed.

Dr. Posner shared with all the members (via email), the CDC recommendations for re-opening and stated that can be a basis of comparison for WMATA's phased opening for seniors and people with disabilities. The New York system opens today and can be a helpful tool for lessons learned. Dr. Posner asked Ms. Sharma to add this topic to July AAC Agenda.

Ms. Mezile commented if New York is sealing off their drivers how do we prioritize when everyone exits from the rear doors. Ms. Rush stated due to the current stay at home recommendations and lack of ridership, it is difficult to gauge. Chair Calabia stated as per a local newspaper, a person 75 years old is 10,000 times more susceptible in comparison to a 15 years old. That is concerning to seniors and persons with disabilities.

Ombudsman Report

David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, did not have any outstanding items and asked the Committee for any concerns that need to be addressed.

Mr. Kaffen thanked Mr. Shaffer for the NextBus being operational, a concern he previously reported. Mr. Shaffer clarified that NextBus is working on some but not on all the buses.

Chair Calabia asked for an update on lighting issues at the Friendship Heights station. Mr. Shaffer stated that is a complicated issue and it is still underway.

Public Comments:

There were no public comments received for this meeting. Ms. Sharma provided information about modes of receiving public comments: via email: MetroAACChair@wmata.com, or via phone call message by calling 202-962-1100

Old/New Business and Workplan Updates:

Ms. Sharma read the list of all the topics on the Old/New Business and Workplan Updates document.

Chair Calabia stated due to COVID-19, restaurants are expanding on side-walks, making them congested. He recommended to discuss this topic as it relates to impact on sidewalks leading to Metro stations and buses.

Dr. Posner inquired for an update about the Way Findings, Beacon, and Aira; along with upgrading of bus shelters and benches before the work is complete.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:57 p.m.