



Accessibility Advisory Committee

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

BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: March 14, 2016

In attendance: Roger Stanley (2nd Vice-Chair), William Staderman (1st Vice-Chair), Elever Ariza-Silva, Brianne Burger, Darnise Bush, Charlie Crawford, Steven Kaffen, Phillippa Mezile, Edward McEntee, Mary Kay McMahon, Randall Pope, Doris Ray, Denise Rush, Patrick Sheehan and Anthony Stephens.

Call to Order

Second Vice-Chair Stanley called the March 14, 2016 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved the March 14, 2016 meeting agenda.

The BRS approved the February 8, 2016 meeting minutes as amended.

In Memoriam

The BRS shared a moment of silence in memory of Michelle Miller, wife of Dr. Brian Miller, BRS Chair. Mrs. Miller suddenly and unexpectedly passed away two weeks ago. Members expressed their heartfelt sympathy and prayers for Dr. Miller and his family.

Public Comment

Brianne Burger made a comment about the incident on the Orange, Silver, and Blue lines at McPherson Square. She stated that for more than an hour, customers waited on the platform until it was announced that the issue on the tracks could not be corrected and customers would be shuttled to the next station. Whenever an incident happens in the system, Metro provides audio announcements but fails to display the same information visually on the Passenger Information Display System (PIDS). For the last two years, the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) has advocated for effective communication with the deaf and hard of hearing community and has recommended the use of whiteboards. Denise Rush stated that at the last Quarterly Meeting with the Executive Board, the issue of communication was raised. The AAC leadership advocated for the whiteboards to augment the public address announcements.

Ms. Burger also expressed an interest in whether Metro would offer refunds for those customers who had been inconvenienced during the shutdown of those three lines at McPherson Square. Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy and Planning, stated that Metro's focus is to restore the service, and at this time there has been no announcement related to refunds for customers.

Ms. Rush reminded members and the public that March 18, 2016 would be the last day to submit feedback on the "Abilities-Ride" MetroAccess alternative proposal. She expressed an interest in the process after the submission date had closed. Mr. Blake stated that Metro will evaluate all the information and build the final solicitation based

on Metro's research and the feedback received. In response to a question about whether telephone options would be included in the final proposal, Mr. Blake stated that at this point, access by telephone remains optional in the proposal and not a requirement of service. Charlie Crawford emphasized the point of equity in services using Abilities-Ride. He stated that a person using the paratransit service or the alternative service should have the same access in terms of communication. Mr. Crawford encouraged Metro to rethink its plans about optional telephone service and make it mandatory. Mr. Blake thanked him for his comments.

Ms. Rush asked whether door-to-door service would be part of the service. Mr. Blake stated that Abilities-Ride is designed as curb-to-curb service.

Darnise Bush expressed an interest in feedback from the planned emergency exercise at the Eisenhower Metrorail station in Virginia; in particular, she was interested in whether the waiver had any impact on participation from AAC members or the disability community in general. William Staderman stated that he and Paul Semelfort, MetroAccess Subcommittee Chair, participated in the planned emergency exercise. Mr. Blake added that his office would follow up with Metro's Office of Emergency Management for their availability to provide feedback on lessons learned from the event.

Ms. Bush also made a comment about the new uniforms for Metro Transit Police. She expressed an interest in when the uniforms will be system wide. Mr. Blake stated that Metro is moving to brighter, more visible uniforms. The neon yellow color block design with reflective trim will help Metro customers locate MTPD officers. Mr. Blake stated that he is not aware of a firm date on the full deployment of the new uniforms.

Barbara Milleville, National Capital Citizens with Low Vision (NCCLV), expressed an interest in an update from the last Station Lighting Work Group meeting. Mr. Blake stated that an update will be added to next month's BRS agenda.

Ombudsman's Report

Ms. Burger expressed an interest in the role of the Ombudsman and whether complaints handled by the Ombudsman are different from those handled by Metro's Customer Service. Antonio Stephens, ADA Ombudsman, provided a brief overview stating that the resources of the Ombudsman office are available to customers with concerns or complaints related to accessibility on Metro's fixed route or paratransit services. He added that submitting concerns or complaints to the Ombudsman should

not be considered an alternative to Metro's complaint process, but an added level of review. Mr. Stephens stated that customers can contact him at 202-962-1100.

The Ombudsman also 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 their lifts for customers with mobility devices, and on several occasions bus operators refused to deploy the lift because of the obstruction. The portable traffic sign is the property of the Metropolitan Police Department. The Ombudsman stated that he was pleased to report that portable traffic sign blocking the pathway has been moved and bus operators once again have adequate space to lower their ramps to board customers.

Anthony Stephens stated that on the 83 Metrobus line (College Park), a bus operator refused him access until he showed identification for his service animal. A complaint was made with Metro's Customer Service and the social media site. Mr. Stephens stated that he received an immediate response from Metro social media office. He was impressed with the quick response and expressed an interest whether the Ombudsman handled those type of complaints too. The Ombudsman stated that he did not receive that complaint; however, he would be happy to investigate the issue and provide feedback.

The Ombudsman stated that he is currently investigating a complaint where a bus operator refused to lower the bus for a customer with a disability. The bus operator has been identified and is scheduled for sensitivity awareness training.

Phillippa Mezile made a comment about information on the PIDS. She stated that on February 28, 2016 at approximately 12:06 pm she entered the system (13th & U street side) for a trip to the Verizon Center. There were signs taped to the pillar indicating that the rail system was single tracking. However, the information was not displayed on the PIDS, nor did the Station Manager appear to be aware of the status of the trains in the system. The Ombudsman stated that he would investigate the issue and provide feedback.

Mr. Crawford expressed an interest in the number and types of complaints Metro receives regarding the fixed route system. Often members (and the public) express issues about the system, and it would interesting to know the top ten complaint categories on the fixed-route system. The Ombudsman stated that Metro's Office of

Customer Service (CSVC) has that information, and he can provide feedback at the next meeting.

Lastly, the Ombudsman reported that Metro has suspended track work for the next four weekends to give riders a break from long delays as the transit system heads into its busy spring season. Metro will operate full weekend service this weekend and for the next three weekends.

Metro's Inclement Weather Policy for Metrobus

As a follow-up to comments made at the February 2016 AAC meeting, the BRS discussed Metro's policy for operating buses during periods of snow. Jim Hamre, Director, Bus Planning (BPLN), provided an overview of Metro's inclement weather policy. Jeremy Franklin, Acting Director, CSVC, was available to discuss CSVC support during inclement weather and other disruptions.

Mr. Hamre stated that Metro has approximately 175 bus lines operating difference schedules across the region. During winter months, when weather conditions throughout the region can be inconsistent, it can be challenging meeting the set bus schedules. For example, northern Montgomery County could receive a large amount of snow with ice, while the rest of the region might only receive an average amount.

To resolve some of these issues, an operations plan for Metrobus was developed. The operations plan consists of four levels for inclement weather: light, moderate, severe, and total shutdown of the system. The light plan is used when there is approximately two inches of snow and the roads are slush-covered with vehicle wheel tracks exposed. Under the moderate operations plan, snow (or ice) accumulation is approximately two to six inches and the pavement has continuous stretches of packed snow without loose snow on top. When there are approximately six inches of snow and the pavement is covered with snow or ice, Metrobus moves to a severe operations plan. A total shutdown of the Metrobus system occurs when weather conditions have reached at least eight inches or more of snow with some roads being impassable. Mr. Hamre stated that all conditions are field assessed prior to making decisions. For example, in the "light" operations plan, some hilly neighborhoods, such as those in West Springfield make it difficult for Metrobuses to navigate safely the roads in certain weather conditions.

Metro's goal is to ensure that Metrobus can operate safely and reliably in all weather conditions. Metro collaborates with transportation departments in each region for information on snow removal. As the weather changes, Metro can reduce or increase

demand for services based on the weather conditions. Mr. Hamre stated that early this year, Metro had to make an adjustment in operations because of an ice storm. A large storm followed shortly thereafter, where snow removal around the region took almost a week and Metrobus service was shut down. It gradually returned to full service as the roads improved.

In response to questions about notifying the public of the operations level during inclement weather, Mr. Hamre stated that Metro uses e-Alerts, press releases, and local media to keep riders informed of the service plan. Additionally, at each service level, route maps for each Metrobus line detailing where the bus will be on the detour are updated on Metro's website. Customer Service is informed at each level and information is shared with local jurisdictions.

Mr. Hamre stated that Metro leads a regional coordination process with the Metropolitan Area Transportation Operation Center (MATOC). MATOC is composed of all the transportation departments around the region. Through this group, Metro is able to speak directly with local jurisdictions and agencies working on snow removal to coordinate service plans so they are consistent throughout the region.

Ms. Milleville stated that it is important to remember that not only streets need to be cleared; sidewalks need to remain accessible as well. She stated that no matter how great the service is (and Metro service is great, she added) if customers cannot access bus stops or get to stations via the sidewalks, then the issue is moot. Ms. Milleville encouraged BPLN to remind members of MATOC that sidewalks are just as important as the roads. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro has been working on awareness and resources to this issue internally and externally. Shortly after the snow, the District of Columbia had a vendor working on removing snow from the bus shelters and creating paths for most customers to access the system. Additionally, most jurisdictions have snow removal ordinances.

Ms. Mezile stated that during inclement weather, the Federal government will shut down, but local governments remain in operations. She expressed an interest in whether the inconsistency poses a hardship on Metro services. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro seeks to have the right balance in service level based on weather conditions and demand. During inclement weather, and as more local governments move to telecommuting, the travel patterns will change along with the service level.

Mr. Stephens expressed an interest in Metro's preparation process for services when government and businesses dismiss employees at one time due to severe weather. Mr.

Hamre stated that when severe weather hits during the day, Metro uses a multi-pronged approach working with the school system, federal and local governments, the business community, and regional transportation providers to reduce the number of people leaving at the same time. Additionally, Metro will stage buses in the downtown area to ease crowding while Metrorail may add additional railcars.

Mr. Stephens also expressed an interest in bus service on the 83 Metrobus Line (College Park) during inclement weather. He reviewed Metro's website during the last storm, but could not locate information in an accessible format related to service level. He suggested that Metro add a narrative to the route maps making the information more accessible for all customers, including those who use screen readers to access information. Mr. Hamre stated that BPLN recently reviewed its materials and would be happy to work with the AAC member on a narrative that would provide additional information to customers.

In a follow up, Mr. Hamre stated that during severe weather, the College Park Metrobus Line 83 frequently runs, while the 81, 82 and 86 lines are reduced. He stated that Metro plans to discontinue the 81 line, which only operates on Sundays.

Mary Kay McMahon stated that she was surprised that Connecticut Avenue was not designated as a main route for Metrobus after the recent snow. Mr. Hamre stated that in the last snow, the bus serviced routes with the heaviest ridership. The Connecticut Avenue (L1 and L2) lines were smaller than the ridership on the Georgia or Wisconsin Avenue bus lines.

In a follow up to Ms. Burger's comments about the incident at McPherson Square and improving signage on shuttle services to communicate with the deaf and hard of hearing community, Mr. Hamre stated that Metro operates two types of shuttle services; (1) shuttle service that is provided to transport customers from the impacted stations to a station in full operation during planned outages (details are coordinated well in advance and the service is seamless); and (2) shuttle service provided for unplanned outages in the rail system (as with the incident at McPherson Square). Mr. Hamre stated that Metro does not have buses sitting around waiting for incidents in the Metrorail system. When an incident occurs, Metro may be able to get a few buses to the impacted area in a short number of time; however, to mobilize a fleet of buses that can move a large amount of people will take a little longer to coordinate. If customers are in the downtown area when an unplanned outage occurs in the rail system, Mr. Hamre suggested that customers walk to the next rail station or location. This way the shuttle service will be reserved for customers who truly need the service.

Ms. Milleville echoed Ms. Burger's comments about signage. She stated that Metro should label the buses, which would make the information more visible for all customers including those in the low-vision community. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro's electronic destination signs are not design to run information not listed in the schedule. Metro provides enough personnel to respond to customers onsite for shuttle service. Ms. Milleville suggested that staff should have a dozen or so paper copies of the map to handout to customers regarding the destination of the shuttle.

Ms. Burger stated that having personnel onsite to respond to customers verbally does not help the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. The AAC has recommended whiteboards to address this issue.

In follow up, Patrick Sheehan stated that the AAC has discussed the issue of effective communication with the Board and the Executive Board on several occasions. He expressed an interest in when the recommendation will be implemented. Mr. Blake stated that his office is investigating the issue and would provide feedback.

Ms. Bush expressed an interest in whether Metro prepares shuttle routes in advance of an emergency. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro has emergency routes prepared in advance across the region. As a situation unfolds, Metro can add to the plan to ensure customers are moved from the impacted area. Mr. Hamre stated that it is important for customers to know in advance another route home if something occurs in the system.

Customer Electronic Bus Shelter Messaging Signage

Mr. Hamre also discussed Metro's new generation of electronic display system for bus shelters. The purpose of the electronic display system is to keep customers informed of transit events while they are in route to their destinations. He stated that the new electronic display system provides bus arrival and service information throughout the Metrobus system.

The electronic bus shelter signs will be installed inside of bus shelters and display three types of information: (1) estimated bus arrival; (2) transit alerts; and (3) route information to include a jurisdiction designation. Metro can also display targeted real-time emergency messages or public service messages on the signs. When there is no bus scheduled to arrive, the signs will also display the next arrival time for each of the buses using that stop.

Metro has installed approximately 169 electronic bus shelter messaging signs across the region to date, with another 17 signs on order to be installed at the Franconia

Springfield Metrorail station and the Takoma Langley Crossroad Transit Center. Metro is also replacing the electronic signs at Friendship Heights Metrorail station. Additionally, with the New Freedom Grant, approximately 87 bus stops will receive electronic display signs in Prince George's County and around the region. Mr. Hamre stated that the electronic signs have proven very useful during the winter months because information could be displayed quickly.

In response to a question about feedback since the implementation of the electronic signs, Mr. Hamre addressed a comment that the information took too long to cycle through. The information was revised to change the way it was presented, making the cycle of information 15 seconds for the busier bus stops.

Steven Kaffen congratulated Metro on adding the electronic bus signs to the shelters. He suggested BPLN review the cycle of information again to improve timing on major connecting points. Mr. Kaffen also expressed an interest in what the letter M means on the electronic bus signs. Mr. Hamre stated that the M stands for Metro. Because some jurisdictions use the same route numbers as Metro to avoid confusion, the letter designating the transit operator will be shown prior to the bus information.

Mr. Stephens stated that he likes the audio boxes on the electronic bus signs. The information is clear. He expressed interests in whether the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit Center in Silver Spring will have a public address system. Mr. Hamre stated that Silver Spring does not have a public address system. An audio box is part of the installation at every shelter where the electronic bus signs are installed. There is a speaker at each bus shelter with information about the buses at the stop.

In addition to the electronic bus signs with the audio boxes, Metro has also installed a public address system at the Pentagon and Pentagon City Metrorail Station that provides announcements throughout those locations on the upper and lower bus bays.

In response to a question about where to send comments when the information on the electronic bus signs is not accurate, Mr. Franklin stated that customers can contact Metro Customer Service via the website or by telephone at (202) 637-7000. Mr. Franklin also stated that CSVC is interested in responding to some issues through social media and is currently recruiting for customer care representative in the Metro Call Center. By September 1, 2016, Metro will be providing social media access to customers for complaints. Additionally, customers will be able to chat with CSVC on social media about their experiences in the system starting in July 2016.

Lastly, Mr. Hamre requested input from the BRS on the following issues from the public hearing: (a) Where to stand to catch a bus at the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit Center in Silver Spring, BPLN is interested in developing a way to identify that area for customers; and (b) BPLN is interested in a way to identify the street a bus is on via the annunciator in a uniform fashion to customers on the bus. Mr. Crawford stated that with the Montgomery County Ride-On bus, when the next stop is announced, the current intersection is also announced, giving the customers information about the current street and the next stop.

The BRS thanked Mr. Hamre for such an informative presentation on Metro's inclement weather policy. Members stated that they now better understand the process and the importance of knowing alternate routes to get home if something occurs in the system. The BRS also congratulated BPLN for the improvements to the shelters. Knowing when a bus is going to arrive will be a big help to all customers. The BRS is committed to assisting BPLN with resolving the issues from the public hearings.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:59 p.m.