



## Accessibility Advisory Committee

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### **BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: March 9, 2020**

In attendance: Tino Calabia (Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Darnise Bush, Rico Dancy, Steven Kaffen, Mary Kay McMahon, Phillippa Mezile, Denise Rush, Kelley Simoneaux  
Remote Participation: Phil Posner, Patrick Sheehan.

#### **Call to Order**

Chair Calabia called the March 9, 2020, Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

#### **Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

The BRS approved March 9, 2020, meeting agenda as amended. The topic of WMATA Budget substituted Orange/Blue/Silver Lines Capacity and Reliability Study discussion.

The BRS approved the February 10, 2020, meeting minutes as written.

#### **WMATA Budget**

Chair Calabia started the discussion with an article on WMATA Budget in local newspaper. Ms. Rush commented about the high cost of two bike racks in Virginia, that would cost \$4 million. Carol Peredo Lopez, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated these are not just the bike racks, these are full-service facilities. Ms. Rush stated she would like to research this matter further. Ms. Bush stated with possibility of rail service extension by an hour and bus routes being cut at the same time, it does not provide adequate transportation to people who need the service at night. Ms. Bush also commented about the 25 cents surcharge on cash payment for bus fares. Chair Calabia stated his testimony at the public hearing, included bus routes proposed for elimination even though those lines service the night life area, serve the people in low-income group, the southeast part of the city, and would cause hardship to people.

Ms. Mezile asked whether the proposed bus routes cut would that impact the MetroAccess service? Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, stated the MetroAccess service area would remain as is even if there is no bus service or fixed route within the  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile. We are going to evaluate the demand for service for that particular area as well as the quality and availability of the alternatives.

Chair Calabia discussed a letter from a MetroAccess customer sent to a local newspaper. Mr. Blake stated the customer has taken three trips in the last three months, and one of those trips was delayed. Therefore, making 1/3 of the customer's trips delayed, however, it must be put in perspective. We have made a lot of improvement that will allow for greater independence and flexibility of all the customers. The paratransit service could be the safety net, but not the poor quality. Also having the resources not all put in to

one service, can then be resourced to give more options. There were a few months where the on-time service level was low. We have completed three consecutive months where the on-time service level was 90% and the hope is to have this month at 90 or higher rate. Mr. Blake quoted Chair Calabria on his advocacy for free public transit, and MetroAccess has been providing free rides on Abilities-Ride service. Therefore, currently, MetroAccess has been providing free public transit.

Ms. Simoneaux asked about the process of booking trips. Mr. Blake stated he is booking trips for now. Uber has a voucher program, and he is trying to corral all of the ways, a customer can contact these companies. Under the promotion, the free trip is for a particular location. However, he is in the process where customers may be able to book trips. Dr. Posner stated in collaboration to what Mr. Blake stated, it is expensive for MetroAccess whereas it is not any additional cost to have passengers on fixed routes. Similarly, the Abilities-Ride is an option and provides a win situation for all.

There was a question about the Ride-Along with the DC WMATA Board Member, Mr. Ariza-Silva stated he has volunteered to do a MetroAccess trip and the schedule will be finalized soon. Mr. Kaffen also volunteered for a MetroBus ride if that gets arranged.

A customer commented about WMATA Budget, the bus routes proposed for cuts, and impact on MetroAccess service. Mr. Blake stated the statute requires service within  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile of fixed route. The customer stated WMATA could go beyond the  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile and increase the higher service. He also recommended that there should be a transit agency that provides total service without separating bus and rail, and bus in various jurisdictions. Mr. Blake stated at one point, there were hardly any options. However, at this time, there is a plethora of options for MetroAccess customers. The customers would prefer more options for their travel, especially when they get time flexibility as well. The customer stated the riders should have adequate choices. Inherently, it is more effective and cost efficient for a transit system that provides service to have all bus, rail, and paratransit service. He does not think WMATA should seek private providers.

### **Blue/Orange/Silver Lines Capacity and Reliability Study**

Mr. Kaffen has been participating in the Blue/Orange/Silver Lines Capacity and Reliability Study groups and shared information. Getting in to the city can be done by using the tunnel at Rosslyn which is currently being used by three different lines. As the population increases particularly in Northern Virginia and in the rest of the area, the bottleneck would be more of an issue because there will be three lines that would use that connector point. In anticipation of the forthcoming issues, Metro is looking into different alternatives including re-routing several lines and re-routing of the Blue line. Another alternative is

to expand certain lines to alleviate the congestion, and even build an alternate tunnel. It would involve cost analysis. Dr. Posner stated there is an overlap from the first station from the District of Columbia. The concept was similar to the service in New York City and to possibly end the Blue line into Rosslyn and people going to the District of Columbia would get off and transfer on to other lines.

### **Handbook for Metrobus Design**

Chair Calabia stated the Rail car design handbook is the forerunner of a series of design handbooks taken by the Committee. The handbook of the rail car design was to help WMATA and the contractors for future references. Chair Calabia stated as per an article retrofitting of the vehicles was just more clunkier. WMATA purchases buses more frequently than rail cars, therefore, the recommendations on bus designs should be looked at sooner rather than later. Mr. Kaffen stated transit systems in two major cities in Australia have gone free of charge. People board and disembark quickly using both doors. People prefer to take above ground transportation. The farecards are used while connecting to Metro. Mr. Kaffen recommended to have a disembarking side and a boarding side at the front door. It might take one extra seat but will allow passengers to move in and out much more quickly.

Mr. Ariza-Silva asked if the purchase of buses is going to happen soon, do we have a time-line for bus design book. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated buses are purchased on yearly basis with minor changes, that makes the procurement process quicker. Mr. Sheehan stated it is worth looking at the new features for the buses, timeline to be able to decide, and review as to what would be beneficial. There could be improvements coming up and it could be worth for the AAC to review them.

There was a discussion about hearing aid devices on rail cars. Chair Calabia stated the New York system is purchasing 946 open-gangway cars and will have hearing loops for each car. He recommended hearing loops on trains should be included in the list of recommendations. He asked if a motion could be made for the hearing loops to be considered in the 8000-series rail cars. Mr. Kaffen made the motion that the hearing loops be considered. Ms. Bush stated the matter should be investigated prior to being motioned. Chair Calabia stated NY City must have done substantial review. Mr. Dancy stated we must consider people with Cochlear implants and ensure compatibility. He also recommended to invite President of the Gallaudet University.

Ms. Peredo-Lopez stated there is a lot of available technology and recommended for the Committee to explore the variety. Chair Calabia stated currently there is nothing on the trains for deaf persons. Ms. Peredo-Lopez clarified the ADA requires text for voice

messages which we have. The 7000-series have aligned text messages and we do have pre-packaged messaged displays.

Mr. Sheehan recommended for the motion to be amended to include "to consider hearing loops or other technologies to support the hearing impaired." Mr. Kaffen stated a lot of work must have been done by the NY City Transit system, in conjunction anything that we do, we may coordinate with them as well and learn what solutions would they resolve with the technology they will be using.

Ms. Peredo-Lopez recommended a speech to text software for the operator announcements as the pre-packaged messages are already displayed in text. Mr. Ariza-Silva provided a couple of examples of speech to text software. He recommended for the entire screens to be used while these messages display. After the announcement, the screen goes back to its normal function.

Chair Calabria stated the motion is to consider the technology after feedback from the President of the Gallaudet University and feedback from the NY Transit. Ms. Bush stated we should explore by (1) contacting New York Transit Agency, (2) contacting Gallaudet University President, and (3) speech to text software. The motion passed.

### **Other Matter: Parking**

Ms. Simoneaux revisited the issue of non-existing reserved parking for accessible spaces in Metro operated garages. Ms. Peredo-Lopez stated in WMATA parking facilities, we have accessible parking spaces reserved throughout the day. From 5 am until 9 am, there are also paid reserved parking spaces. Customers who come before 9 am, can park in those reserved parking spaces as they are not designated for individuals. Mr. Blake stated it is first come first serve basis. Ms. Simoneaux stated as per the ADA, there are accessible parking spots however, there are no reserved accessible spots offered by WMATA. She shared an experience when she had trouble with parking in those vacant spaces after 9 am. Mr. Blake asked where would the parking spots be reserved for accessible spots? Ms. Simoneaux stated she is not sure about the location, however, there are multiple curb cuts where the accessible reserved spots could be placed. Ms. Peredo-Lopez stated at stations other than East Falls Church, the accessible parking spots which are almost always available, therefore, we did not receive any complaints before.

Chair Calabria stated there are accessible parking spaces however, people with disabilities are not able to reserve them by paying the fees in the same way other people can, and have them reserved up-to 9 am, regardless of the specific station. Mr. Sheehan asked if Ms. Simoneaux could go to West Falls Church Station, would she be able to get a reserved

accessible parking there? Mr. Blake stated currently Metro is not charging people for the designated spaces. At most of the stations accessible spaces are available and we have not had this issue come up before. Ms. Simoneaux stated several of the parking lots are going to be closed starting this week and it could be an opportunity to fix this problem until the parking lots reopen. Ms. Peredo Lopez will follow up.

### **Ombudsman Report**

David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated the Rosslyn station lighting issue was not found and asked for the specific location. Chair Calabia asked about Friendship Heights lighting status. Mr. Shaffer stated it was supposed to be completed and if there are any issues, for the members to report them. Chair Calabia stated he will go to Friendship Heights and inform of any issues, if found. Dr. Posner stated the lighting issue at Rosslyn was on the lower platform. The light was very low, and the walls were dirty. Mr. Shaffer stated the walls were found dirty, but the lighting issues were not found. Dr. Posner stated lighting was very low, the signs could not be read on the track side. He will inspect the location. Ms. Peredo-Lopez stated sometimes disparity of lighting, a lot of light in one area due to improvement, makes the other areas appear darker. We do not know the schedule for completion of lighting improvements, however, she would review the matter and a follow up will be done.

Chair Calabia asked about an update on the waiver for the Emergency Evacuation Exercise. Anu Sharma, Accessibility Advisory Committee Coordinator, reminded the Committee that the question was presented to the Chief of Safety. We would invite the Chief of Safety for the Committee to receive feedback. Chair Calabia asked about the next date for the exercise. Ms. Sharma informed as the date becomes available, the AAC will be informed for participation as usual.

### **Old/New Business and Workplan Updates:**

Chair Calabia reviewed the Old/New Business and Workplan Updates. There was a question about an update on the Cashless Bus Pilot. Ms. Sharma informed that the pilot lapsed last June. Dr. Posner further stated the Board stated the pilot was unsuccessful. The next question was asked about the Open Stroller Policy. Mr. Shaffer stated he would provide training on the open stroller policy to the operators and that there would be a pilot first, due to the resistance from the operator. Ms. Sharma stated the pilot is for Landover Division and after the pilot is complete, the policy would be re-evaluated. Chair Calabia asked for an update about the accessible faregates. Ms. Sharma reminded the Committee that we had a guest who provided an update in the March AAC meeting. Chair Calabia asked about an update for the fare evasion. Ms. Sharma stated as per the presentation on the new faregates, the fare evasion is hoped to reduce when the new

faregates are installed. Ms. Peredo-Lopez stated we have data about fare evasion. Mr. Sheehan stated the Committee reviewed various alarm sounds for fare evaders in the new faregates, however, we did not like any of the sounds and different sound review is pending. Dr. Posner stated WMATA is trying to prevent fare evasion, it was decriminalized by the District of Columbia whereas Maryland and Virginia review it much more strictly. It is beyond the level of this Committee. Mr. Sheehan stated the new faregates alarm would go off if someone jumps the gates, which are higher than the existing ones. This is not an accessibility issue. Dr. Posner stated part of the problem is that WMATA gets Federal funding according to ridership. With fare evasions, not only WMATA loses the fares, but also the funding.

**Current Matters:**

Simoneaux asked about prevention methods for the Corona Virus being implemented by WMATA. Chair Calabia stated in past WMATA cleansed trains once a month, now they are doing it once a week. Mr. Blake stated he does not have exact numbers or schedule however the cleaning has been increased. He would wait until Metro puts out an official statement. Regarding MetroAccess vans, the cleaning is done every day, including dusting, vacuuming, and wiping. The once a week detailed cleaning would increase to two to three times a week if not every day. The frequency of detailed cleaning would depend upon the number of cases. Dr. Posner stated individuals must take personal responsibility of keeping wipes, personal sanitizers, and take precautions.

Ms. Bush asked about the deadline to submit WMATA Budget Survey. Mr. Blake stated the deadline is 9:00 am on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Dr. Posner stated the Board's Finance Budget Committee is meeting on Thursday. They must give a summary on the budget.

Mr. Kaffen commented about the dock-less scooters in the District of Columbia. The issue still exists at some of the busy Metro Stations and the District Department of Transportation has not placed enforcement. Chair Calabia stated the number of companies providing scooters is decreasing whereas the number of scooters is increasing.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.