



## Accessibility Advisory Committee

600 Fifth Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001

### **BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE VIRTUAL MEETING MINUTES: May 11, 2020**

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

#### **Call to Order**

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

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

The BRS approved the May 11, 2020 meeting agenda as amended. Guest speakers were invited from the District of Columbia Department for Hire Vehicles.

The BRS approved the April 13, 2020 meeting minutes as written.

#### **DC Government Department of For Hire Vehicles**

Wendy Klancher, Senior Policy Advisor, and Michael Tietjen, from the DC Department of For Hire Vehicles (DFHV), shared information about a new program.

Mr. Tietjen discussed the Taxi2Rail (T2R) taxi program. Due to the emergency, the program expanded from trips to rail, to allow city-wide essential trips to grocery stores, pharmacies, and medical appointments. This week essential workers traveling to and from work will also be allowed to use the program. Trips can be booked at least 30 minutes in advance by either a phone call to a designated number: 202-727-3827, or by visiting the website: [taxi2rail.com](http://taxi2rail.com). The T2R program will cover fare up to \$20 within the DC borders. Any fare above \$20 will be paid by the customer. There is no limit of trips per person and is not limited to DC residents. This is a temporary program that will last as per the budget.

Ms. Rush asked who funds this program. Mr. Tietjen stated this is funded by DFHV, the budget is \$200,000.00, and has no impact on WMATA budget.

Dr. Posner asked about tipping the taxi drivers. Mr. Tietjen stated if customers would like to tip for the service that is always welcome, however DFHV is compensating the drivers with a specified flat amount that goes to the drivers, and not just to the taxi companies.

Chair Calabia asked if there is a similar program in Maryland or Virginia. Ms. Klancher stated she was not aware of any similar programs in Maryland or Virginia. Chair Calabia stated we are hoping WMATA explores a similar program in other areas and asked about

how this program came about. Ms. Klancher stated they already had a program as a fill-in service where there was no Metro service and was already in place before the pandemic. The number of trips is down during the pandemic, they had the funds, and were able to open it up for essential workers.

Mr. Sheehan asked about the relationship between the Transport DC and T2R program. Ms. Klancher stated there is no tie-in within the two programs. They are not comfortable opening the Transport DC program for personal care attendants (PCAs). They are temporarily able to use funds for essential travel. Mr. Sheehan asked about advertising for the program. Ms. Klancher stated they will do another round of marketing for the program and asked for recommendations from the Committee.

Mr. Kaffen asked Ms. Sharma for a list of PCAs and who might be able to get this information. Ms. Sharma deferred the question to MetroAccess Management.

Chair Calabria asked for recommendations for WMATA to take initiative to start a program in Maryland and Virginia, and thanked Ms. Klancher and Mr. Tietjen for the information.

### **Bus Arrival Screens Orange Line Rehab Stations:**

Chief Asante, Senior ROCS Application Service Specialist, presented information about the new Bus Arrival Screens that will be placed on the Orange Line stations that would be going through the rehabilitation program effective May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020. The Bus Arrival Screens will show bus arrival predication above the fare-gates, available to customers exiting the station. Bus predication screens are exactly like the train arrival prediction screen with an alteration of reversing the colors to distinguish between the train-arrival versus bus-arrival. For the Bus Arrival Screens, the white color background has black lettering with the logo of the bus provider, destination, and arrival time in minutes, in real time. This is an at a glance look. Mr. Asante invited questions from the Committee.

Dr. Posner recommended not including information on buses leaving within two minutes, just as done on the mezzanine passenger information display systems (PIDS) to avoid passengers running for buses. Mr. Asante stated the buses run slower than trains, the bus predictions would show the number of minutes to bus arrival at the stop.

Ms. Mezile asked whether the signs will be placed up high or at eye level. Mr. Asante stated these will be placed up high, adhering to the ADA rules of 3-inch size of fonts/texts. Ms. Ray stated she is a person with vision impairment and asked where these signs would be hung. She stated most of the PIDS are way too high for a person with vision impairment. Ms. Ray also commented that the screen colors with white background and

black lettering is very difficult for people with vision impairment, especially with a distance issue. Ms. Ray asked why the signs are not placed lower for better visibility. Mr. Asante stated the exact elevation will be available soon, however the signs will be closer to the fare-gates. The information will be real time. The white background with black lettering is to distinguish between rail and bus prediction signs. The signs would indicate service providers. Ms. Ray asked would the time be flashing. Mr. Asante stated the bus arrival time in minutes would not be flashing.

Mr. Sheehan stated the flashing icons cause epileptic seizures and he was glad to hear there will not be any flashing.

Carol Peredo Lopez, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated the bus arrival time signs would be very helpful for people who would be able to see them. The signs would be very helpful for a large number of our customers. When we provide signage, we make sure that everything is ADA compliant. The reverse contrast is to distinguish between rail and bus arrival signs.

Mr. Asante stated these are not going to replace any signs but will be in addition to the existing ones.

Vice-Chair Oberg asked how difficult would it be to make changes afterwards if needed. Mr. Asante stated because these are electronic signs, making changes would be rather easy, and can be made at a later time if needed. Vice-Chair Oberg stated that is important to know as not everything may be decided now.

Ms. Ray stated we need accessible information as per the established standards and hopes these issues would be reviewed. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated this is just one element being installed in our system. We also have other bus arrival signs at each bus bay, with the right font size, as per the Access Board requirements. In addition, our office requested audio push buttons. We have information in different layers. Ms. Ray stated we have requested the information be provided in audio format as well. The purpose of these devices is to give information about when the bus is going to leave. Why can't there be audio on these particular signs? Ms. Peredo Lopez stated this information is also provided on our website. Providing audio on the station would be difficult as too many elements are involved. The matter of push buttons would be difficult to include. Adding audio to our fare machines is an example that we are adding more information. This is an effort that many customers have requested to have at the gates, we are also trying to provide information at the eye level, and we are advocating the audio on those as well. The

technology is complex and it is difficult to merge them together. The bus arrival does not communicate with our rail arrival system.

Ms. Coles asked if the software can be utilized on smart phones. Mr. Asante stated this information is already published on WMATA website. This is the same real-time data and can be accessed by website and on smart phones.

Dr. Posner stated there are also several applications (apps) that would provide information as per passenger's bus stop and can be accessed on smart phones.

Ms. Ray asked a question is about real time, including if it will tell you how many minutes until the bus arrives, and if it also needs a bus stop number. At Vienna, a customer may not know the bus stop number and having that information is helpful in the audio format. Even if a customer calls the Information Office, the automated system requires a bus stop number. Mr. Asante asked for clarification of the question. Ms. Sharma clarified that Ms. Ray may be referring to the NextBus ID numbers at stops. Mr. Asante stated these signs are in conjunction with the existing information and signs. Customers can also get information from the station managers. There is no way to have all of the information on the signs.

Chair Calabria thanked Mr. Asante for sharing the information. Mr. Asante stated it will be impossible to add audio to these devices at this time, however the recommendations will be reviewed for future projects.

**MetroAccess Services for PCAs:**

Chair Calabria stated is it possible for the AAC to recommend WMATA Staff look into a program similar to DC's T2R, in Maryland and Virginia.

Ms. Rush stated it is up-to the local jurisdictions to review, not WMATA.

Mr. Sheehan agreed with Ms. Rush and stated that he has been looking in to Montgomery County and found a program with Uber. The DC program was outside of the scope of Transport DC program, the paratransit system. They already had the budget in place. It is not appropriate for WMATA staff to approach the WMATA Board because it is out of the scope and jurisdiction. It is a welcome matter for the individuals to contact their jurisdictions. Chair Calabria stated the AAC makes recommendations to WMATA Board and if they think it is appropriate then they inform the Staff to look into it. Mr. Sheehan stated it is inappropriate for the AAC to make the recommendation to WMATA Board as it is out of scope of the AAC to make such recommendations since this is not what the AAC does,

there is no jurisdiction at all. Within Montgomery County, there are some groups that are already providing services, and some of those programs could be extended. A review of the existing programs to provide the recommended service may be helpful. Chair Calabia stated he has contacted Montgomery County for them to review the program in the District of Columbia.

Dr. Posner stated it was enlightening to see how the program in DC arrived, they had \$200,000 in the budget, and when an idea was brought to their attention, they had the money to use. What was done in the District of Columbia, is exactly what we would need to do with other jurisdictions: ask if they have money to use for a similar program.

Mr. Semelfort stated MetroAccess ridership reduced during COVID-19, however now the system is tasked to take customers to their essential trips. It is already a stress on the system with the lack of drivers. The MetroAccess customers have a civil right to use the service. It is out of WMATA's legal scope of business to provide service to the PCAs.

Vice-Chair Oberg stated as the AAC, we cannot tell WMATA what to do. We also have to be very clear about direction. This is outside of the scope of WMATA.

Ms. Ray agreed with comments made about the scope. She recognized the importance of personal care assistance of MetroAccess customers. To assist the PCAs, this is in the purview for people with low income, people who qualify for Medicaid as they provide transportation in various counties from human service departments. That is where she sees the advocacy being brought forth. There is a divide between people who use agency services. The agencies are receiving extra money for administrating services.

Mr. Kaffen stated his concerns about the legality on extending the use of MetroAccess vehicles to whom it is prescribed. He stated this adds additional contagious nature risk to MetroAccess customers who are riding in the vehicles. He concurs with comments made by Mr. Semelfort and other members. Chair Calabia stated we did not intend for MetroAccess vehicles to be used for PCAs. Mr. Kaffen stated if a PCA can manage to get to the DC border line, they could take advantage of the T2R program for rides within DC as it is not limited to DC residents.

Mr. Semelfort stated in Prince George's County, the only cab option is the Silver Cab and they are overwhelmed due to the reduced number of drivers.

Mr. Crawford recommended utilizing the resources that the government already has for emergencies. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has the same responsibility. The AAC does not have the necessary gravitas to work on issues like these. Chair Calabia asked for recommendations. Mr. Sheehan recommended moving this out to commissions of the jurisdictions to move the program forward. Dr. Posner recommended tabling the motion and following Mr. Sheehan's advice. The representatives of local jurisdictions can be contacted. The motion was tabled.

### **Ombudsman Report**

David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated one of the issues raised was the NextBus GIS not working and the other was about the Notice to Operators (NTO) about servicing passengers using wheelchairs. Ms. Sharma read the portion of the NTO that mentions the policy where the operators would allow passengers using wheelchairs and mobility aides to board/exit from the front doors of the bus, when requested. Mr. Shaffer stated he has received very few complaints from passengers using wheelchairs and/or mobility devices. The ones he received were immediately addressed.

### **Public Comments:**

There were no public comments for this meeting. Ms. Sharma stated public comments can be received via email: [MetroAACChair@wmata.com](mailto:MetroAACChair@wmata.com), or via a phone call message at 202-962-1100.

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

Ms. Peredo Lopez stated WMATA is going to provide reserved accessible spaces, beginning with the Orange Line stations that will be rehabilitated this summer. We will include two reserved accessible van spaces at each of those stations, and the spaces would be identified by the end of October this year. From that point forward, we will include reserved accessible parking spaces (from 5am to 10am on weekdays) as WMATA remodels parking facilities. Accessible parking spaces as per the ADA Standards will continue to be fully compliant at all WMATA facilities, as they have been in the past.

### **Adjournment**

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