



Accessibility Advisory Committee

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

BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: May 9, 2016

In attendance: Roger Stanley (2nd Vice-Chair), William Staderman (1st Vice-Chair), Brianne Burger, Darnise Bush, Steven Kaffen, Edward McEntee, Mary Kay McMahon, Randall Pope, Dr. Phil Posner, Doris Ray, Patrick Sheehan, and Anthony Stephens.

Call to Order

Second Vice-Chair Stanley called the May 9, 2016 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved the May 9, 2016 meeting agenda as amended. The BRS approved the April 11, 2016 meeting minutes.

Public Comment

Elver Ariza-Silva made a comment about the Passenger Information Display System (PIDS) on the mini-mezzanine level at Tenleytown-American University station. He stated that the device sits on top of the fare vending machines with lots of exposed wires. He believes that this poses a safety issue because anyone of average stature can access the wires. With that said, Mr. Ariza stated that he thinks the PIDS is useful. Carol Lopez, Accessibility Design Review Manager, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, thanked the member for identifying the safety issue. She stated that she will investigate and provide feedback.

Mr. Ariza-Silva also made a comment about the escalators at the Waterfront station. A platform-to-mezzanine escalator abruptly stopped while he and other passengers were riding. The elevators at the station are being rehabilitated, so a large number of people are using the escalators. Ms. Lopez stated that she will follow up on the issue and provide feedback.

Anthony Stephens made a comment about the electronic display system for bus shelters. He stated that on a recent trip in the system he had an opportunity to experience the new displays. Mr. Stephens wanted to give Metro kudos for being innovative because the displays are a huge improvement to the shelters, and he is looking forward to the new shelters in his area of College Park.

Ombudsman's Report

Antonio Stephens, ADA Ombudsman, provided follow-up on a comment about Metrobus drivers who refuse to lower the buses for customers. To address the issue, Metro is requiring some bus operators to receive refresher training on ADA compliance. Metro has also issued a Notice to Operators (NTO) regarding wheelchair lift and ramp operations. The NTO states "Operators are required to deploy the lift, ramp or kneeling device at the request of any and all customers." The document reminds operators that

not all disabilities are visible; therefore, any customer who makes a request for the lift, ramp, or kneeling device must be accommodated.

The Ombudsman announced that this would be his final report to the BRS because he was retiring. He shared that he has worked over 20 years at Metro serving the disability community. With a round of applause, members thanked the Ombudsman for his professionalism and his service to the disability community.

Metro Select Pass (Pilot Program)

Shyam Kannan, Managing Director, Office of Planning, discussed Select Pass, a new pilot program aimed at giving customers more choice among transportation options and payment.

Travel in the region is changing. New transportation models such as Uber, Lyft, and even walking have emerged at the same time Federal transportation subsidies are being reduced. This is also a period of record low gas prices, which has altered the way customers use public transportation. Another development that has changed travel is customer preference in paying for services. Many customers prefer to pay for a set amount of services on a monthly basis. When a customer wants additional service, an upcharge is applied for the overage. Mr. Kannan stated that these trends prompted Metro to re-evaluate its service model to address these changes.

To understand customer payment preferences and travel patterns, Metro surveyed 1000 Metrobus and Metrorail customers. The survey results identified the following points about customers on the fixed route system: 1) half of Metro's customers traveled less than one-day per week; 2) 20% of customers travel four or more days per week; and 3) 15-25% of customers were traveling a few days per-week. The survey also found that customers would be more interested in using the fixed route system if the cost was more affordable. In the survey, customers identified cost as being more important than crowding, hours of operation, or trip information on the system. These points were also less important when measured against safety and reliability of the system. More than half the customers surveyed expressed an interest in a monthly pass that allowed for unlimited travel for a low price.

Mr. Kannan stated that Metro benchmarked other transit properties and found that some adopted a variety of models to address the changes in customer preferences and travel patterns. Metro has a distance-based fare, and the transit organization that most closely resembled Metro was the Seattle-area Transit, which includes King County Metro Transit and Sound Transit. These organizations have a variety of flexible passes that

allow customers to choose the way they like to travel for a set monthly fee. In response to a question about the number of trips, Mr. Kannan stated that with the Select Pass customers could take an unlimited number of trips on the fixed route system as long as the trips were in the range set by the customer. When a customer's trip falls out of the range, the customer will pay the difference in the fare for the trip.

In 2016, Metro launched the Select Pass Pilot program, which aims to provide customers with a choice in transportation options and payment. The pilot program offers passes at two price points: \$80 (one-way fare \$2.25) and \$135 (one-way fare 3.75), and all trips at the value set or less are included. In response to a question about customers' reaction to the new program, Mr. Kannan stated that Metro has seen great interest in the program. In the first two weeks of sales, the Select Pass has outsold Metro's regular monthly pass. In addition, the Select Pass has more than doubled in sales compared to the existing 28-day pass. For customer convenience, the Select Pass is only available online and has an unlimited Metrobus option for an additional \$45 per month.

In response to a question about the benefits of such a pass, Mr. Kannan stated that the main advantage to the customer is the unlimited travel on the fixed route system for one set low price. This means customers can make a stop without incurring any additional charges. The program is billed on a monthly basis, which allows customers to budget their travel expenses. The Select Pass is also a win for Metro because it can increase ridership and customer satisfaction, and reduce revenue risk because customers pay one monthly bill in advance.

Phil Posner expressed an interest in whether the Select Pass included Metrobus and Metrorail transfers. Mr. Kannan stated the pass is already discounted therefore there is not another discount with the transfer.

The BRS expressed an interest in outreach. Mr. Kannan stated that Metro advertised the pilot program through its main website, the Amplify rider community, direct emails, and through music sites like Spotify.

Dr. Posner expressed an interest in whether the Select Pass was available to customers who receive the federal transportation benefit. Mr. Kannan stated that the passes are available to customers who receive the federal transit benefit.

Additionally, Dr. Posner expressed an interest in whether the pass could be stopped and started again. Mr. Kannan stated that the program can be suspended; however there is a 30-day processing period before service can be resumed.

Mr. Stephens expressed an interest in whether the program had a reduced fare option for customer with disabilities. He stated that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York City has a similar program. Mr. Kannan stated at this time that is not an available option for the Select Pass. Mr. Stephens recommended that Metro include an option for customers with disabilities using reduced fare. He stated that he uses Metro on a regular basis as the family car, and a reduced fare Select Pass would allow him to budget his travel as well.

The BRS thanked Mr. Kannan for the informative presentation. The BRS stressed the importance of including passes for the disability community in future iterations of the Select Pass.

Metro's New Safety Plan

The BRS discussed Metro's GM new plan to improve Metrorail safety and restore service reliability. The plan, known as Safe Track, will accelerate three years of maintenance work on the rail system into one year. There will be changes in the hours of operations; single tracking on certain rail lines; and, a complete shutdown of certain parts of the rail system. Many members agreed that this approach was necessary for the safety of all customers, but had some concerns about the plan.

Mr. Stephens stated that the new safety plan poses some challenges for the blind community. Many people with the blind community rely on the fixed route system as their family car. Having clear and timely information will be critical. He expressed an interest in whether Metro will run eight-car trains to ease crowding at the other stations. Mr. Stephens also stated that good customer service will lessen some of stress and tension of customers during this yearlong safety blitz. He suggested that Metro staff be ready to deal with any situations that arise.

Brianne Burger stated that members of the deaf community are equally concerned about the new safety plan. She stressed the importance of proper signage on the shuttle buses.

Doris Ray stressed the point of good announcements. Good announcements and information will be a lifeline for the disability community.

In a follow-up to Mr. Stephens' comment about Metrorail, Doris Ray and Randall Pope underscored the importance of dwell times and train operators looking down platforms to ensure they are clear before closing the train doors. Mr. Pope stated that navigating the system is a challenge for the deaf-blind community.

Ms. Ray also stated that Metro should collaborate with other local transit providers, such as Fairfax Connector, The Bus, Ride-On, and Dash, to run service more frequently to help customers connect with the Metro system, especially in the impacted areas.

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that safety and accessibility are closely associated. One point should not have an advantage over the other.

The BRS made the following comments and recommendations related to the disability community:

- Metrobus will be used to shuttle customers between stations that are closed due to system repairs. Most buses can only accommodate two mobility devices at one time. Recommendations: 1) use the paratransit service to shuttle the overflow of customers with mobility devices or 2) use D.C. Circulator buses, which can accommodate more mobility devices;
- Communication and traffic flow may be hampered during the process. It is imperative that the PIDS, Kiosk Information Display System (KIDS), and e-Alerts have the most updated information. Recommendation: 1) hire travel trainers to help direct customers including those with disabilities and facilitate communication; 2) use whiteboards for immediate communication; and 3) make large print maps available throughout the Metrorail and Metrobus systems.
- With the number of closures planned, Metro should consider adjusting its fare policy due to disruptions in service. The Rider's Advisory Council is proposing a reduction in fares. Paratransit customers should also receive an adjustment in fares. Recommendations: Fare policy for paratransit customers should be twice the bus fare.

Safe Track is scheduled to begin on June 3, 2016. Upon motion, the AAC added the list of concerns and recommendation to the Board report.

Old Business

Members were reminded that the BRS Station Lighting Work Group would hold a meeting immediately following the Subcommittee meeting in the Lobby Level Meeting Room. All members are welcomed.

Adjournment

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