



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

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Washington, DC 20001
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BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: November 9, 2015

In attendance: Brian Miller (Chair), William Staderman (Vice-Chair), Darnise Bush, Phillippa Mezile, Edward McEntee, Mary Kay McMahon, Randall Pope, Denise Rush, Elver Ariza-Silva, and Roger Stanley.

Call to Order

Vice-Chair Staderman called the November 9, 2015 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:07 pm.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved the November 9, 2015 meeting agenda as amended. The BRS approved the October 13, 2015 meeting minutes, as amended to include Mr. Ariza-Silva in the roster of meeting attendees.

Wayfinding

Brandon Cox, Senior Director, Rehabilitation Services, Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind (CLB), and Director of the ClickAndGo DC Station Wayfinding project, presented an overview and status update of the project. The wayfinding support can be accessed via an iPhone app or on the CLB.org web site. Currently, there are virtual tours to entrances available for 10 stations, as well as 110 routes into and out of the Gallery Place/Chinatown station. All were developed by orientation specialists. This work represents the completion of Phase 1, which was funded by \$100,000 of New Freedom 5310 grant funds.

Phase II of the project is being funded by an additional grant of \$300,000. This phase involves work at seven of the stations with virtual tours: L'Enfant Plaza, Silver Spring, Metro Center, Rosslyn, Gallery Place, Fort Totten, and Navy Yard. (Most of these are transfer stations, and can be more difficult to get in and out of.) The work will involve improved routing (step-by-step), landmark identification, high-resolution low-vision maps, and the introduction of iBeacon technology. The beacons will communicate to the iPhone application to inform the customer of landmark, point of interest, and directional information. CLB hopes to have this phase completed in 6-9 months.

Customers who are blind/low vision remain the focus of this project, but this information should be useful to customers in need of elevators as well. While the app is currently available on iOS (iPhones, etc.), development of an Android app is underway as well. ClickAndGo Wayfinding Maps is CLB's partner organization for this project. They are further along than other companies in this arena, and they are the first to take disability-tech and make it universally accessible to the general public.

Dr. Staderman asked for clarification on how the beacons work. Mr. Cox stated that they are small, inexpensive devices that last about three years. They communicate via Bluetooth with the app on the individual user's smartphone. As the customer moves along a specific route, beacons on the route will communicate with the app to inform the customer about landmarks, route information, and other informational points.

Ms. Mezile said it sounds like exciting development, and she looks forward to using it in L'Enfant Plaza station.

Mr. Ariza-Silva asked about information for customers who are not blind. Mr. Cox stated that "blindness" data is the most detailed data needed to use the system. However, a person using a mobility device should be able to use the app to be directed to a specific elevator, for example, as well as pre-trip planning. Mr. Silva followed-up with a question about additional Metro information being made available through the app, such as elevator outage information. Mr. Cox stated that he hopes to include the RSS feeds, but they are reluctant to make this a catch-all app, because that can become overwhelming.

Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy and Planning, stated that Metro is excited about this project. The wayfinding and advertising potential of the beacons will help this initiative quickly grow beyond the niche of disabilities and into the general population, which can only further our efforts to demonstrate that by doing good for people with disabilities, we are helping everyone.

Randy Pope asked if the app would work on an iPad. Mr. Cox stated that it is designed for the iPhone. Mr. Blake added that iPads with cellular chips can perform the same on-going communication with the app, just as an iPhone.

Chair Miller asked for the number of stations currently covered. Mr. Cox stated ten with virtual tours, and seven will be part of Phase 2 with the beacons. Chair Miller also asked about the project timeline. Mr. Cox stated that the project should take six months beginning in January.

Public Comment

A comment was made about bus stop accessibility, and the cluttering of bus stops with trash cans, newspaper stands, mailboxes, etc., all of which can impact accessibility. Pictures of various stops in the region are being shared with the DC Council in an effort to have this problem addressed.

The customer added a comment about the lack of accessible spaces on bus routes that travel in and near communities of poor and disabled customers. Often those areas require a greater need of accessibility due to the number of people with disabilities who are poor and clustered in certain communities. She highlighted the X2 bus line, pointing out that in one instance, it took three different buses to pass by before she could get on with her mobility device. Mr. Blake stated that long-term route planning is critical, but in the meantime Metro has revised the standard operating procedure bus operators must follow in instances where then they cannot accommodate a customer in a mobility device. Previously, in such instances, the operator is required to ask customers to move from the foldable seats. If they did not, the operator was to advise the customer that there is no space available on the vehicle and proceed. The new policy requires the operator to not only inform the customer that there is no space, but also call in the fact that there is no space, get an estimated time of arrival for the next bus, and share the estimated time with the customer.

Barbara Milleville, National Capital Citizens with Low Vision (NCCLV), provided an update on station lighting. Through some spot checking, NCCLV volunteers have discovered that many of the rail stations have new lighting in the mezzanines. She mentioned that U Street, Anacostia, and Congress Heights do not yet have the new lighting installed yet. She added that the Green line needs more focus in this regard, and that there are still dark areas throughout the system. With regard to lighting maintenance, there are fewer lighting outages in the system. It seems that lighting improvement work has been stopped in the lower level of the L'Enfant Plaza station as well as the vending area of the Pentagon station. Severe lighting issues remain on some stairways, particularly in the Navy Yard and Shady Grove stations.

Chair Miller has asked that the Station Lighting Work Group meet soon to get feedback from Metro staff regarding the report from Ms. Milleville. Mr. Blake thanked Ms. Milleville and her team for their very valuable work on behalf of Metro.

Ombudsman's Report

Dr. Staderman wanted clarification on the report of the ombudsman as it relates to his previously filed complaint regarding a train at the Waterfront Metrorail station, in which the door closed on him as he was on the edge of the platform. He questioned the video that was used during the investigation of the incident. He added that an Orange line train shut the doors on him today as he was trying to get on the train on his way to today's meeting. Given the reoccurrence of these incidents, he is unlikely to encourage others to use Metro.

Antonio Stephens, ADA Ombudsman, stated that he reviewed footage from the Waterfront station on the day of the reported incident. He then requested footage of the Navy Yard station, but by the time of the request, the video had expired. The ombudsman will follow-up immediately on today's reported incident at the Virginia Square station (Orange line towards New Carrollton). Dr. Staderman believes that today's incident could have been a result of trains being bunched up, and the operator feeling the need to move on quickly.

Chair Miller asked Mr. Stephens what salient points of information are needed to allow him to promptly investigate matters such as the one being reported by Dr. Staderman. Mr. Stephens stated station, date, time, rail line color, and direction.

Mr. Ariza-Silva wants to look into the timing of the door closing to identify a solution for people using mobility devices. Chair Miller reminded all that the BRS has been discussing potential strategies including possible dwell time adjustments, platform positioning, etc.

Mr. Ariza-Silva asked why the platform elevator at the Waterfront station is still out of service. He said the website describes this as a minor repair, and it was scheduled to return to service today, but did not. Mr. Silva stated this has taken too long, and would like to know what is going on with this particular elevator.

Old Business

Mr. Blake reminded members that the Accessibility Excellence Awards presentation will be held on November 18th at 5:30pm.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 p.m.