



## Accessibility Advisory Committee

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### **BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: October 11, 2016**

In attendance: Brian Miller (Chair), Darnise Bush, Charlie Crawford, Larry Haile, Steven Kaffen, Edward McEntee, Mary Kay McMahon, Randall Pope, Dr. Phil Posner, Denise Rush, and Patrick Sheehan.

#### **Call to Order**

Chair Miller called the October 11, 2016 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00PM.

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

The BRS approved the October 11, 2016 meeting agenda.

The BRS approved the September 12, 2016 meeting minutes as written.

#### **Ombudsman's Report**

David Shaffer, Accessibility Policy Officer/ADA Ombudsman provided follow-up on a comment made at the September 2016 BRS meeting regarding early closing hours and improving the accessibility of the complaints process with Metro's Office of Customer Service (CSVC).

The customer had stated that there are four different scenarios that are under review for the proposal to change the hours of service on Metrorail. The Ombudsman stated that Metro will hold a public hearing on the proposed restriction of Metrorail operating hours scheduled for Thursday, October 20, 2016 at Metro Headquarters. An Open House is scheduled from 12:00PM to 9:00PM and the Public Hearing will take place from 12:30PM to 10PM. In response to a question about why Metro was having only one public hearing, the Ombudsman stated that the Compact only requires one public hearing. Through the Public Participation Plan, Metro is conducting outreach through the community-based organizations, administering surveys in multiple languages, and targeting the impacted areas with literature at the rail stations to communicate with those customers.

Additionally, the Ombudsman provided feedback on the Title VI Equity Analysis for the proposal to change the hours of service on Metrorail. The customer stated that the minority pool that this change would impact is very small and asked whether the calculations would be adjusted to support a smaller subset. The Ombudsman stated that the Title VI analysis will focus on the effect of the service hour changes on the targeted population who are primarily customers with low-income levels and use the system in those hours. The analysis will also look at how the use of the system is reduced by the change, and the impact it will have on minority groups in those hours. The Ombudsman indicated that if the analysis demonstrates that there is a disparate

impact on a protected group, the Board must demonstrate that the choice is the only feasible alternative.

Phil Posner expressed an interest in how Metro would obtain the data of customers who are at the low-income levels and use the system during those hours. He stated that if the analysis is taken during the late hours when there is a sports game, that data will be skewed. The analysis should occur after hours during a normal work week. The Ombudsman stated that Metro uses a statistical sampling of the ridership population over a period of time. This should produce a representative sample of the population.

The Ombudsman also provided feedback on the ability to make a complaint, compliments or comments by phone during the system's hours of operation, not just business hours. He stated that when customer service closes, calls are transferred to Metro's Information line (202-637-7000). The office takes the complaints and forward it to the customer service team at the next work day. As for as adding instructions on how to make a complaint, compliments or comments by phone, the Ombudsman stated that CSVC is reviewing the issue of adding instructions to the Interactive Voice Response (IVR). He encouraged customers to express their preferences on the issue during Metro's discussion on the FY 2018 budget.

In response to the comment about survey information, the Ombudsman stated that Metro collects data on the usage and habits of MetroAccess customers on Metrobus and Metrorail. There is also survey information on the Reduced Fare Program for People with Disabilities and Seniors. Metro's Office of Customer Research will provide an analysis of how people with disabilities are using the system as it relates to complaints in the system. The Ombudsman will continue to provide updates on this issue.

### **Metrobus External Announcements**

At the July 2016 BRS meeting, the Subcommittee discussed the volume level of external stop announcements on Metrobus vehicles with Metro's Office of Bus Maintenance (BMNT). The BRS requested a demonstration of the annunciator equipment on Metrobus.

Metro introduced voice annunciators into its bus system in 1997. As the equipment aged, Metro upgraded and standardized the technology across its entire fleet of buses. After an upgrade in technology, it was determined that the annunciator systems were averaging a volume level of around 90 decibels. That range was significantly higher than Metro's average level for the annunciator system of about 77 decibels. To address the higher decibel levels, the system was reprogrammed so as each bus is placed into

service, the annunciator system automatically calibrates to the appropriate level for the environment, and can go higher than 77 decibels, if necessary. All buses have an ambient sensor that will allow the volume to go higher or lower depending on the surrounding environment.

A demonstration took place with a bus in front of the headquarters building and played two Metrobus stop announcements. Charlie Crawford compared the sound of the automated announcement on the Metrobus to the automated pedestrian safety signals. The tone on the pedestrian safety signals are required to be audible between 6 and 12 feet from the actual signal. When there is high traffic volume, the sound of the automated pedestrian safety signals can sound low, making it difficult for some customers to locate using the device. A loud tone can disturb the public. Mr. Crawford stated that in this situation, it is difficult to find the middle ground. Overall, he indicated that he was happy with the demonstration of the announcements on Metrobus.

Darnise Bush expressed an interest in whether the ambient noise was automatic or connected to the opening or closing of the bus doors. John Collins, Project Manager, Clever Devices, stated that the system is constantly reading the ambient noise until it reaches the time for the bus system to make an announcement. When the announcement is over, the system goes back to reading the ambient noise. He stated that this is not tied to the opening or closing of the doors.

In a follow-up, Mrs. Bush suggested that Metro add an audible tone to the voice so customers who are hard-of-hearing are alerted to the announcement. Mr. Collins stated that Metro could add a tone to the exterior announcements before the announcement began.

Dr. Posner agreed with Mr. Crawford, stating that the problem is to try to get a system that fits all situations. For example, the announcements on Metrorail during the rush hour are worthless in the rail cars and are hard to hear on the platforms because too many people are talking at one time. Dr. Posner stated that he agreed with Ms. Bush's suggestion about adding a tone. The tone would alert customers that a message is coming. Dr. Posner indicated that he missed the beginning of the announcement; however, had the announcement included a tone people may have quieted down to hear the message. A pre-announcement tone will get customers' attention.

Steve Kaffen stated that the announcements related to the fares are not for customers paying with cash or using a SmarTrip® card because these customers know the fare. The only group that would benefit from this type of information is tourists. The announcements related to fare on Metrobus are disruptive and spoil the customer

experience when traveling on the bus system. Phil Wallace, Managing Director, Bus Maintenance (BMNT), stated that Metro added the announcement on the fare to reduce the number of assaults on Bus Operators. It is a safety issue.

Christiaan Blake, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated that everyone should be clear about the reason Metro is requiring the announcement related to fares. He requested that BMNT address the possibility of shortening the language related to fares, which may alleviate some of the confusion Mr. Kaffen was expressing. Mr. Wallace stated that Safety is the reason Metro has the message; however, he will review the issue with the planning group to determine if the information can be modified. He also stated that he will review the suggestion regarding adding a tone to the beginning of a message.

Larry Haile stated that he views the announcement as a service enhancement. Some bus stops are extremely busy so it is easy to miss an announcement. To address this issue, some transit agencies have circulars announcements that repeat line and destination information Mr. Haile stated that this type of announcement has been helpful to him when approaching a bus and unsure the destination and line of the bus.

In a follow up, Mr. Haile expressed an interest in the reason the initial announcement was really low and whether the customer would hear an announcement at that pitch level. Mr. Collins stated that when the first announcement played, the engine was cut and the ambient noise automatically adjusted and produced a lower volume announcement. Metrobuses automatically cut off after being idle for a period of time. Once the bus was returned to service and the engine was on, the ambient noise changed and the announcement was louder.

Mr. Wallace requested a consensus from the Subcommittee on the overall volume of the messages. Metro gets many complaints after hours from residents regarding the volume. Ms. Bush stated that the tone would be fine if Metro added the audible tone to the front of the message. She also suggested that Metro abbreviate the wording to announce "Your Fare is...thank you for choosing Metro."

Mr. Kaffen also expressed an interest in the announcements related to the back door opening and closing. These types of announcements may have good intentions, but do not help the system, nor contribute positively to the customer experience. Mr. Wallace stated that the back door announcements are for safety. Some customers tend to lean on the doors and may fall out, so Metro has an announcement to remind customers not to lean on the doors.

Brian Miller stated that the announcements were clear and he understands the need to vary the sound of the announcements to maintain good community relations and ensure accessibility.

Darnise Bush thanked BMNT for working so diligently on this issue. She reminded members and presenters that the District of Columbia (D.C.) area has over 20% of people with disabilities and the largest number of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people in residence.

Upon motion, the BRS recommended that BMNT maintain the same volume on all buses as demonstrated to the subcommittee and investigate the recommendations of the Subcommittee to add to the volume (i.e. audible tone prior to the announcement; and modifying the fare announcement).

### **Metrorail Lighting (Update)**

As a follow up to Doris Ray's comments about the color of platform edge lighting, Mr. Blake stated when a train arrives or departs the station, the lights on the platform flash. At some stations, the color of the platform lights are red while at other stations the lights are white. He indicated that Metro plans to change all the platform lighting in the system to white. In response to a question about the reasoning, Mr. Blake stated that it is a maintenance issue. It is difficult for Metro to find red light bulbs to replace all the platform lights throughout the system.

Dr. Posner stated approximately 10 years ago, the Committee selected white because it was determined that spectrum of the red color was not as visible as white. He stated that he agreed with Metro's position to return to white bulbs for the platform lighting.

Mr. Kaffen stated that he agrees with Dr. Posner and finds the white lighting more visible. Many agreed that if there is no advantage over the other color, Metro should move to the white lighting.

Upon motion, the BRS agreed that Metro should move the color platform edge lights to white. Mr. Blake stated that the issue will be discussed again at the November AAC meeting.

### **Administrative Process**

The BRS discussed the appointment of Vice-Chair and Second Vice-Chair positions for the Subcommittee. Dr. Posner nominated Brianne Burger for the Vice-Chair position. He stated that she is extremely active and would represent the committee well on the

issues. Charlie Crawford and Edward McEntee were also nominated for the role of 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-Chair. Appointments for the BRS leadership will take place at the November 7, 2016 meeting.

### **Public Comment**

A comment was made about the proposal to close the Metrorail system early. The customer stated that he is concerned that Metro will not be available to support the local sport events. Dr. Miller stated that members of the Committee have expressed their concern on this issue and there are plans to add that information to the Board report. He encouraged all customers to attend the upcoming public hearings and express your views about the changes in service hours on the Metrorail system.

A comment was made about the challenges some customers using a mobility device encounter when using the fixed route system. While traveling on the Metrorail (railcar 3109) the customer stated she attempted to exit the train but could not because one of the doors on the railcar would not open. Using the emergency intercom, the customer contacted the train operator and at the next available stop the train operator manually opened the door and the customer exited the train. In response to a question about whether the incident was reported, the customer stated that she did not report the incident; however, she appreciated the rapid and professional response from the Train Operator.

The customer also made a comment about inaccessible bus stops. At some bus stops around D.C., the shelter and bench are too close to the curb making it impossible for customers using mobility devices to board or exit a bus from inside the shelter. The customer stated that the jurisdiction should review the criteria again and place the shelters and benches further back from the curb. Additionally, one of the newest bus stops on South Dakota Avenue in D.C. has a trashcan within the shelter making the shelter impassable for customers using mobility devices. The customer stated that with each of these bus stops, she has had to exit before or after the stop in order to get to her destination. Mr. Shaffer stated that Metro has a form for customers to complete regarding inaccessible bus stops. ADAP would investigate the information and request that the obstacle removed. Mr. Blake reminded members that the vast majority of bus stops in the region are not on Metro property. Metro can work with the jurisdictions to correct the issue, but local bus stops are owned by the local jurisdiction.

Mr. Haile suggested that Metro document (by name or bus stop number) all the bus stops around the region and the jurisdiction that has control over that particular bus stop. The list should include contact information for the jurisdiction so customers can

independently contact the jurisdiction about the stop. Mr. Blake reiterated his comments on how a customer can determine whether a bus stop is owned by Metro or the jurisdiction. A few years ago, Metro entertained the idea of a technology based bus stop application; however, the concept was stalled because of issues related to maintaining the information. In response to a question about Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) bus stop application, Mr. Blake stated that MBTA's application describes the amenities of every stop including the accessibility features of all the bus stops in their system.

Mr. Haile stated that the MBTA bus stop application was created by the Perkins School for the Blind.

A customer made a comment about shelters that are occupied by the homeless. These situations as unfortunate as they lessen access for those who need it. Mr. Blake stated that to prevent these types of situations, industry has moved to shorter benches at bus stops to make it less comfortable for people to remain on the bench for a long period.

Dr. Posner stated that Metro should encourage businesses around the jurisdiction to adopt a bus stop. This would get more people involved in transit and keep stops maintained so that they are usable by all customers.

### **New Business**

It was announced that Metro will hold a Public Hearing on the proposed restriction of Metrorail operating hours scheduled for Thursday, October 20, 2016 at Metro Headquarters. An Open House is scheduled from 12:00PM to 9:00PM, and the Public Hearing is from 12:30PM to 10:00PM. In response to a question about the system remaining open until the end of the hearings, Dr. B. Moore Gwynn, AAC Coordinator stated that the system does not close until midnight. Metro has provided multiple ways for customers to make comments.

Mr. Crawford expressed an interest in submitting comments in writing. Dr. Moore Gwynn stated that written statements must be received by 5PM on Tuesday, October 25, 2016 and can be emailed to [writtentestimony@wmata.com](mailto:writtentestimony@wmata.com) or mailed to the Office of the Secretary, WMATA, 600 Fifth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00PM.