



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

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

BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: April 13, 2015

In attendance: Brian Miller (Chair) William Staderman (Vice-Chair), Heidi Case (2nd Vice-Chair), Charlie Crawford, Marisa Laios, Phillippa Mezile, Edward McEntee, Mary Kay McMahon, Phil Posner, Anthony Stephens and Roger Stanley.

Call to Order

Chair Miller called the April 13, 2015 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved the April 13, 2015 meeting agenda as amended. The BRS approved the March 9, 2015 meeting minutes.

Public Comment

No members attending the meeting had comments.

Ombudsman Report

Antonio Stephens, ADA Ombudsman, provided an update on comments made at the March 2015 BRS meeting. During that meeting there was a comment regarding accessible pedestrian signals. At certain intersections in the District of Columbia, the pedestrian signal activates automatically, which allows customer to safely cross without pushing the signal button. Other intersections do not have this feature. The customer expressed an interest in the appropriate office to contact to report the issue. The Ombudsman shared the following contact information: DC Department of Transportation, Stephanie Dock at 202-671-1371.

As a reminder, the Ombudsman stated that Bus Training is still accepting comments and feedback related to stop announcements on Metrobus vehicles. The comment period began on Friday, April 3, 2015 and will end on Friday, May 1, 2015. The feedback should include: date, time, bus number, bus route or line, route direction and whether automated or manual announcements were made, and if they were acceptable or inadequate. The Ombudsman stated that bus numbers are in raised lettering and Braille on the front of the fare box, and all responses should be forwarded to the AAC Coordinator. This feedback will allow Metro to investigate and correct the issue.

In a follow up to an email regarding discontinued bus stops, the Ombudsman discussed routes changes to the 42/43 lines. He stated that the bus stop has moved to 9th and F Street NW due to changes on the X2 line (Benning Road H Street). This change to the 42/43 lines are permanent, and during the week every other trip is being routed to the Gallery Place stop. With the X2 line, every other bus will go to Lafayette Square and on the weekends the bus will turn right on to 9th & F Street toward the Grand Hyatt. The Ombudsman stated that he will contact the customer who raised the concerns about

this stop regarding travel training services to assist the customer in navigating to and from the new bus stop location.

The BRS expressed an interest in how customers are notified of bus service changes. Christiaan Blake, Director of ADA Policy and Planning (ADAP), stated that signs are posted at the bus stop regarding the proposed change(s) and the information is posted on Metro's website. In response to a question about public hearings, Mr. Blake stated that public hearings are not required for bus stop changes. The BRS suggested that Metro adopt the strategy from the DC Circulator: when a bus stop changes, the Circulator posts a person at the old bus stop with handouts to inform the customer about the new bus stop. The BRS also suggested that Metro add the information about the changes to the bus public address system along the impacted route and allow bus operators to announce the change to customers. Mr. Blake stated that both are good ideas and he would investigate the possibility of implementing both.

A comment was made about Metrorail's return to Automatic Train Operation (ATO). The Ombudsman stated that Metrorail has returned to ATO on a limited basis. For those trains running on ATO, the trains will accelerate, decelerate, and stop under computer control, making for a smoother ride for customers. In response to a question as to when all lines will return to ATO, the Ombudsman stated there is no information at this time.

In response to a question about travel training, Christopher Colbert, Operations Manager, Office of Eligibility Certification and Outreach, stated that Metro's Travel Training program is a one-on-one individualized training program that teaches customers with disabilities to use fixed route public transportation services. Training sessions can range from half-day to one day appointments. These tailored sessions vary with the needs of the individual customer, and can range from a short refresher to week-long intensive training. Metro also offers groups travel training sessions to K-12 audiences. These sessions include accessibility features on a bus; adding fare; conduct; and a trip to the nearest Metrorail station for a review of accessibility features. Mr. Colbert stated that early training leads to independence in using public transportation. Metro has a staff of four Travel Trainers and six contractors that service the region, and in the Fall of 2015 Metro will host a two-day Train-the-Trainer Workshop on Travel Training.

Public Comment

Dr. Staderman made a comment about inoperable elevator button lights at the Ballston (platform to mezzanine) and at Judiciary Square Metrorail Station. Mr. Blake stated that his office will investigate and provide feedback.

Ms. Ray announced that the ADA Legacy Festival celebrating 25 years of progress since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The bus tour celebrating the rights of people with disabilities will stop in Virginia at Endependence Center of Northern Virginia.

New Business

Pedestrian/Bike/Accessibility Study

Ms. McMahon stated that she participated in the U.S. Department of Transportation Pedestrian/Bike/Accessibility study. This national study is part of the Safe Streets initiative taking place throughout the country. Ms. McMahon stated that her group reviewed safety at the VRE station at L'Enfant Plaza, which included accessibility of the station and many of the pedestrian routes to the station. An accessibility issue that stood out about the VRE station was the long ramp to the platform was at the opposite end of where customers board the train. In a response to a question about agency participation, Ms. McMahon stated that there were representative from federal transportation agencies, to local agencies such as DC Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Police Department, and WMATA. She enjoyed the experience because of all the different perspectives on traffic safety from the array of agencies and organizations in attendance.

7000 Series Railcar

On a packed platform at the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, several dignitaries, politicians, Metro Board members, media, and members of the AAC and Rider's Advisory Council (RAC) witness the unveiling of Metro's new 7000 series railcar. The new 7000 series railcar features include slightly larger seats with greater back support, larger aisles, more handrails and bars for holding, privacy screens, and new display signs for describing the train's location. Dr. Miller stated that the unveiling was an exciting event. He stated that the audible signage was most impressive and cannot wait until the trains will serve the Yellow Line. Mr. Stephens agreed with Dr. Miller stating that the audible signage was the best feature. The vocals were a pleasant sound and the train was significantly quieter than the current models. Additionally, the new floor surface allows for greater traction for walking. Dr. Staderman stated he was able to move about the in the new 7000 series railcar with ease, moving from one end of the car to the other. The wider aisles really make a difference in how mobility device users navigate the new railcars. Additionally, alighting the new trains was effortless.

Dr. Posner stated that the event was well organized, and all of the AAC's eighteen recommendations were included except two points: the placement of the wheelchair parking spaces; and the inclusion of arm rests on the first forward facing seat near

priority seating. Although the new cars feature more handrails and bars for holding, those safety features are missing in the first forward-facing seating, leaving customers with limited capacity nothing to hold onto or push upon to rise from their seats. Upon motion, for accessibility purposes, the BRS recommends that the arm rest be returned to the first forward facing seats near priority seating on the 7000 series railcars.

Other features include an emergency call button near the priority seating area, automated stop announcements, additional storage underneath seats, new station maps, visual displays on the outside of the railcar displaying the line and closed caption TV to allow Train Operators to view passengers at closing doors.

Public Transportation to National Harbor

Dr. Posner also expressed an interest in fixed route service at the MGM Casino in National Harbor. He stated that access to the venue is limited to cars or a ferry boat from Alexandria. In the initial plans, public transportation was included; however, since that time, the casino has declined any public transportation to its facility. Prince George's County is working to rectify the issue, and Metro has written a letter of support. Dr. Posner stated that he is bringing this issue forward in the absence of AAC member Denise Rush. Mr. Blake stated that the project is approximately 18 months away from completion. He suggested that members continue to stay abreast of this issue and advocate for bus service as it get closer to opening. As a Prince George County resident, Mr. Stephens stated that he will advocate for bus service. It is absurd that anyone would think that mass transit is not necessary and vital to the success of the MGM.

Metrorail Gap Reducers (Issues and Solutions)

Several members expressed an interest in discussing the challenges to access the railcar when there is a gap between the train and the platform. Gaps between the train and platform can make it difficult for some mobility device users to access the railcar without getting their wheels caught in the gap. Mr. Blake stated that Metro has gap reducers which are designed to minimize the gap between railcars and platforms. He stated that gap reducers are a safety device that enhances accessibility of mobility device users in the rail system.

Mr. Blake stated that the focus of this discussion is to develop new ideas and solutions to this issue. Metro is interested in learning about new solutions to this issue. In making recommendations, he asked the Subcommittee to keep in mind the historical setting of the Metrorail station, shifting platform ground, and the budget. Mr. Blake introduced Carol Lopez, Accessibility Design Review Manager, ADAP, as the lead on the discussion.

Ms. Lopez stated that Metro has developed a standard to correct some of the issues such as the horizontal gap by moving the railcar closer to the platform. This reduces the gap while maintaining the train's mobility. All new stations have met that criterion. Ms. Lopez stated that Metro has also developed vertical standards; however, these standards are limited by the structure of older Metro stations. With this in mind, Metro is replacing some platforms along the Red Line to reduce the gaps. Ms. Lopez stated that Metro's newest railcars have the modifications.

Ms. Case expressed an interest in the horizontal gaps. She stated that the issue is much more a problem for mobility device users than vertical issues. Mr. Stephens and Ms. McMahon agreed, stating that they too have had difficulty with horizontal gaps. Ms. McMahon stated that her crutch fell in the gap and broke. Although not as common, many members agreed that vertical gap can also be challenge when the black cord (inter-car barrier) is not enough. Ms. Case stated that in her opinion, the black cord between the cars is too high for a white cane user to detect. Dr. Miller stated that it easy for a person who is blind/low vision to mistake that opening between the railcars for a door.

In response to a question about problem areas, Ms. Lopez stated that ADAP is developing a list and seeking recommendations. Ms. Case suggested that ADAP review the platform at L'Enfant Plaza on the Green Line toward Branch Avenue. She stated that there is such a difference in the gap on that platform that she usually backs into the railcar. Mr. Stephens expressed an interest in where new commuters to the system find this information. Dr. Posner stated that there are lots of blogs that provide tips on how to work around some of these challenges in the system.

Ms. Case suggested that Metro also consider the use of a ramp which would allow mobility device users to have a smooth transition from the platform to the train and vice versa. The device is something that Metro already owns, and it should be used at only on platforms where the gap is considered to be challenging. Dr. Miller stated that other transit properties such as Sacramento Regional Transit and Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) use boarding ramps to assist mobility device users. Mr. Stephens stated that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York City has a platform that extends from the train similar to an accordion to cover the gap.

A comment from the public stated it is important to benchmark other transit agency on their efforts to mitigate the gaps. MBTA has many other gap mitigation efforts such as customer with mobility devices board the train in the middle railcars because the gap is

less significant. The customer stated that Amtrak has also made strides in improving access in this area.

Dr. Posner suggested that Metro develop a list of locations where this issue is pervasive and add it to the website. Additionally, Metro should provide shuttle bus service at these areas. This will assist customers with mobility devices in planning their trip. Mr. Blake reminded members to take into consideration physical and financial feasibility when making suggestions.

Mr. Crawford suggested that Metro elevate this issue to the Council of Governments and collaborate with the U.S. Access Board to develop uniform standards and designs on this issue. Ms. Lopez stated that the U.S. Access Board does have standards for transportation and Metro exceeds those standards. She stated that the U.S. Access Board has used Metro's system as the standard on many of the issues.

Priority Seating Work Group (Update)

Ms. Case and Dr. Staderman, Co-Chairs of the Priority Seating Work Group, stated that the group along with six members of the RAC held their first meeting immediately following the March 2015 MetroAccess Subcommittee. The discussion focused on the research needed to determine how widespread (if at all) the problem was. The Work Group presented several questions to staff that were responded to via email. The next meeting will focus on the legality of the issue and held on May 6, 2015 prior to the RAC meeting.

Station Lighting Work Group (Update)

Mr. Stephens, Co-Chair, BRS Station Lighting Work Group provided an update, stating that the discussion centered on funding. Shortly after the meeting, the Work Group learned that funding for lighting was included in Metro's FY2016 budget. The work group is extremely pleased and wants to add this point to the Board report. The next Work Group meeting will be held on May 11, 2015 immediately following the BRS meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

Attachment: Work Plan