



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
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BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: August 11, 2014

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

Call to Order

Chair Miller called the August 11, 2014 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved the August 11, 2014 meeting agenda as amended. The BRS approved the July 14, 2014 meeting minutes as amended.

Ombudsman Report

Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy and Planning, provided the update from the July 2014 BRS meeting in the Ombudsman's absence. He introduced Anne Carey, Director, Bus Training. Ms. Carey provided an update on Metro's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on Wheelchair securement from the May 2014 meeting. She stated that the current SOP for bus transportation was issued in October 2013 and as it relates to wheelchair securement, the document indicates that customers must apply the brakes and turn off the wheelchair or scooter. The SOP is amended every two years and is scheduled to be revised again in 2015.

Ms. Carey stated that the BRS's recommendation has been incorporated into a Notice to Operators (NTO). The NTO is used to update a policy between revisions of the SOP. The new policy related to wheelchair securement states that the customer should secure or lock the wheels on the wheelchair either with the break on an electronic feature. The NTO also states that customers who need to keep their device on at all times are not required to turn off the power to the wheelchair while in the securement area or using the lift on the bus. Ms. Carey stated that the NTO also reminds Bus Operators that they cannot deny transportation to a customer whose wheelchair is required to remain powered on.

Dr. Staderman expressed his appreciation for the change in the policy. He stated that the confusion in the policy may be attributed to the word 'request' vs. 'required'. Mr. McEntee stated that with some motorized chairs, one button can limit movement rendering the wheelchair inoperable. Ms. Carey stated that having the input on this policy from customers who use these types of devices helps to improve the transportation experience for all customers, not just customers with disabilities.

In addition, Bus Training has also amended the information in its training materials. Ms. Carey stated that the updated training materials include a quiz question about wheelchair securement. Ms. Carey stated that it was important for new and veteran Bus Operators to know this information and apply it in their daily duties.

Ms. Carey also discussed opportunities for members to participate in an instructional training video and photos. She stated that Bus Training uses such tools to enhance the classroom training. Dr. Staderman stated that the photos and video are great tools to demonstrate the differences in mobility devices. In addition to the classroom setting, Ms. Carey stated that this information will also be displayed on the Bus News Network. The Bus News Network provides a wealth of information and updates on policies to Bus Operators and other staff via a television monitor at each of the divisions. Ms. Laios expressed an interest in participating in the video and photo session. Ms. Carey stated that she appreciates the members' willingness to participate. In response to a question as to whether or not bus operator training includes information about communicating and interacting with the Deaf community, Ms. Carey stated that the training includes sensitivity awareness on all disabilities. Metro's policy for communicating with a deaf person is to use pen and pad unless the staff person knows sign language. Bus Training also works with the Office of ADA Policy & Planning on the development of the training materials. Chair Miller stated that the BRS appreciates Metro's responsiveness on this issue.

Mr. Blake stated that he followed up with comments made about the rotation schedule of Station Managers. Metro's Department of Rail Transportation (RTRA) reported that Station Managers have a pick twice a year. The pick allows Station Managers to change a schedule or station, and the pick is based on seniority. Also, there was a comment about Station Managers and other staff who block access to the fare gates. Mr. Blake stated that RTRA reported that the other staff could be maintenance personnel on hand to repair issues in the system or plain clothed transit police officers monitoring activity in the system.

Mr. Blake stated that he also followed up on a comment about the bus annunciator. He stated that on some buses the volume can be adjusted. Mr. Blake encouraged customers to report these issues to Metro's Customer Service. When reporting, it is important to have the bus number, route or line, time and direction ready when making complaints. Mr. Crawford expressed an interest in why the volume was not indexed to the environment and not the preference of the Bus Operator. He stated that as the noise level on the bus increases, so should the volume on the annunciator.

This would make it extremely helpful for customers who are blind and depend on those announcements to determine where they are along a particular route. James Hamre, Director, Bus Planning, stated that his staff generates the announcements and works closely with Metro's Bus Maintenance to ensure that the volume level is appropriate for each type of the bus. He clarified earlier comments stating that bus announcements are automated and software controls the volume depending on the ambient noise in the area. Bus Operators have no control over how loud the announcements are on the bus or when the automated announcements are made.

Metro has approximately 27 different configurations of announcements on the bus. Mr. Hamre reminded customers to report bus annunciators with low or loud volume levels to Metro's Customer Service. He stressed the importance of including the bus number, route and time on all complaints. In response to a question about the bus annunciator on Metro's shuttle buses, Mr. Hamre stated that bus shuttles do not have pre-programmed routes or announcements because they are not scheduled for service. The shuttle service is mainly used during elevator outages or weekend track activity. Mr. Hamre stated that it is the Bus Operator's responsibility to make announcements of major points when the annunciator is not working.

Mr. Blake also briefly discussed the issue brought to light by Ms. Case related to the platform spacing and elevator repairs. He stated that the issue has been forwarded to appropriate staff and Metro is responding accordingly.

Public Comment

Chair Miller made a comment that the street level elevators at L'Enfant Plaza rail station does not have accessible signage on the elevator call buttons. He stated that the elevators were under construction and when it was returned to service, Braille was not included on the elevator call button. Mr. Blake stated that his office would follow-up on the matter.

A comment was made about discourteous Bus Operators. The customer stated that some Bus Operators make rude and distasteful comments about why other customers have to move from the priority seating area to make it available for customers with mobility devices. Mr. Blake reminded the customer to report this information immediately to Metro's Customer Service. For additional follow-up, he encouraged customers to report such issue to the Ombudsman as well.

The customer also stated that at some stations, Metro has large gaps between the platform and the rail car. These gaps make it difficult for customers that use mobility devices to access the trains. Mr. Blake stated that ADAP monitors this issue regularly.

This is an issue that Metro is continuously working to improve. He stated that when a railcar is full, sometimes that railcar sits slightly below the edge of the platform and the opposite can be true when it is not full creating the gap. Mr. Blake reiterated his comments about contacting customer service. In response to a question about emailing complaints to customer service, Mr. Blake stated that customers can also make complaints on-line.

Ms. Case and Ms. Owen stated that they too have experienced this issue while traveling in the system. Ms. Case suggested that Metro use a metal plate to bridge the gap between the platform and the railcar. Ms. Owen stated in a previous presentation to the AAC, the issue was discussed and it was determined that load leveling is a maintenance issue. This load leveling system regulated the height of each railcar. Mr. Blake stated that Metro is looking to improve its gap reducer technology as a way to address this issue.

A comment was also made about the pick-up location for MetroAccess Service at the VA Hospital. The pick-up location for MetroAccess was moved over and now the Metrobus does not have a place to pick up customers especially those using mobility devices. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro is aware of the challenges at the VA Hospital location and has been consistently working to resolve them.

A comment was also made about customers who board the bus with open stroller or roller walker. These devices block the isles and make it difficult for mobility devices to access the wheelchair securement area. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro's policy is that all strollers and other devices should be folded and stored out of the way so the isles remain open. He stated this issue is a challenge that Metro continues to work to resolve

Ms. Case commented that on Metro's webpage under Metrorail, does not list any Silver Line stations. She stated that the new stations are listed in Metro's Trip Planner, but not listed in the Metrorail section of the website. Mr. Blake stated that his office would investigate and provide feedback.

Wayfinding (Update)

Brandon Cox, Director of Rehabilitation Services, Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind (CLB), provided an update on the wayfinding system for customers who are blind, low-vision, or deaf-blind and use the Metrorail system. With funding from a New Freedom grant, CLB collaborated with Metro and Click-and-Go Wayfinding Maps to develop an accessible wayfinding system for the Metrorail.

Mr. Cox stated that there is a lot of interest in wayfinding technology and Click-and-Go is one of the leaders in the industry. Click-and-Go develops and delivers searchable wayfinding information. In a few weeks, the company will launch a new website and distribute a new marketing tool, which gives the sighted community a better understanding of the wayfinding technology and what it is like to travel the system without vision.

In the first phase of the project, CLB will develop an accessible way-finding database for its model station, Gallery Place. The Gallery Place rail station has approximately 100 routes alone. Mr. Cox stated that the first phase of the project will launch in October 2014. The wayfinding information will be available in text, audio and MP3 formats as well as compatible to Smartphones. The interactive voice recognition system will be tied into Metro's Trip Planner phone system. There will be a separate toll free number for customer assistance. Mr. Cox stated that with this tool, customers who travel to different places outside the Washington Metropolitan area can access all the wayfinding information that Click-and-Go offers. The wayfinding information will be included on Metro's webpage under the station descriptions.

Mr. Cox demonstrated the new technology with a short audio route of the Gallery Place station. He stated that the new technology would seamlessly bridge indoor and outdoor environments by providing a voiced description of the physical features of a rail station to include the general layout, entrances, escalators, elevators, stairs, and station manager kiosk locations. The customized audio will include changes in slope and texture, acoustic cues, location of important landmarks, travel distances, and intersections. Information will be provided in three categories: walking directions, virtual tours, and points of interest.

Mr. Cox stated that Phase I will also include virtual tours of ten additional stations in the rail system. Those include the Metro's major transfer stations, and additional stations in Maryland and Virginia. He stated that this feature will be available by January 2015. To ensure the virtual tours are interesting, Click-and-Go has partnered with Audio Description Associates. Mr. Cox stated the descriptions will be enhanced and will lack the electronic voice used by most systems.

Phase I will also have a low-vision application that provides high resolution text instead of audio for each route. Another feature that will be demonstrated in Phase I of the project is the iBeacon technology. Mr. Cox stated that iBeacon technology is the next step in wayfinding technology. When the iBeacon is strategically placed it gives users information about what they are passing along their route. As an example, customers who are Blind or have low-vision sometimes have difficulty locating

elevators. With the iBeacon technology, it will announce that the elevator is up ahead. This technology can be used with a Bluetooth and earbuds. Mr. Cox stated that this feature can also be expanded to business, so customers will information on the business they are passing along their route. All these features will allow customers who are blind or have low-vision to travel more independently. Ms. Burger stated that the wayfinding technology has potential for the Deaf and hard of hearing community as well. Mr. Cox says that the system provides universal access for all types of disabilities. He stated that Click-and-Go has expertise in the Deaf/Blind community and from the start the system was designed to accommodate all disabilities. Mr. Cox stated that the second and third phases of the project will include all Metrorail stations and all bus stops around the region.

In preparation for the launch, CLB is working with orientation mobility specialists and other stakeholders to test the new wayfinding technology. Mr. Cox invited members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) to participate in focus groups that will test the new technology. Additionally, CLB and Click-and-Go are scheduled to brief the Metro's Board.

Chair Miller expressed an interest in whether the wayfinding technology was compatible with the refresher Braille display system. Mr. Cox stated that the information can be downloaded in text format.

Mr. Crawford expressed an interest in the ability of the end user to stay oriented when using the wayfinding technology in a noisy system. Mr. Cox stated that the customers can control the speed of the information. The interactive voice system gives each step-by-step instruction in 2-minute intervals. Mr. Cox stated that the best way to learn a new route with the system is before the actual trip. This way, when a customer takes the trip, the station will feel a little more familiar. CLB does not recommend customers walk and use the system. Mr. Cox stated that the wayfinding technology is no substitute for good travel training. The best way for customers to find an open train door is to listen for it.

Chair Miller stated the BRS is really excited about the wayfinding tool for the rail system and is eagerly anticipating its launch in October.

Electronic Bus Shelter Messaging Signage

Mr. Hamre discussed the new generation of electronic display system for bus shelters. The purpose of the electronic display system is to keep customers informed of transit events while they are in route to their destination.

He stated that the new electronic display system will provide bus arrival and service information that will be available throughout the Metrobus system. Metro will install approximately 800 electronic bus shelter messaging signs starting at the end of 2014 at Metrorail stations and at locations of high ridership.

Metro's first electronic information signage program was the NextBus system that launched in 2006. Those display signs gave customers information on when the next bus would arrive. They were available at the Pentagon, Anacostia, Silver Spring, Friendship Heights, and Bethesda stations.

Mr. Hamre stated that BPLN has worked closely with the Department of Access Services to ensure the electronic signage and features were compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). He thanked Carol Lopez for all her expertise during the various phases of the project. To discuss the project further and demonstrate the new signs, Mr. Hamre introduced Yanthon Gooder, Capital Project Manager; Pravin Gohel, Manager, Electronic Signage Program; and Brian Pickens, Luminator Company.

Mr. Pickens stated that the electronic bus shelter signs will be installed inside of bus shelters. The electronic signs will display three types of information: (1) estimated bus arrival; (2) transit alerts; and (3) route information that includes a jurisdiction designation. Metro can also display targeted real-time emergency messages or public service messages on the signs. When there is no bus scheduled to arrive, the signs will also display the next arrival time for each of the buses using that stop. Mr. Pickens stated that electronic signs in Montgomery County will display the time of day instead of the estimated bus arrival time. Additionally, the electronic signs also have an audio dim feature. This feature allows the signs to adjust the brightness when receiving direct sunlight.

AAC Chair Sheehan expressed an interest in the reason Montgomery County's information was being displayed differently from other jurisdictions. Mr. Hamre stated that the electronic signs are designed to display bus stop information for Metro and all the local transit authority that use that stop. Montgomery County requested to display their information by the time the bus is anticipated to arrive instead of the estimated bus arrival time.

Ms. Owen expressed an interest in displaying the telephone number to report inoperable electronic signs and suggested that other information also be occasionally displayed on the sign. Mr. Hamre stated that he would take the suggestion under consideration.

In response to a question about what to do when a bus does not show up at the bus stop, Mr. Hamre stated that the customer should report that information to Metro's Customer Service. Ms. Case expressed an interest in whether the older electronic signs will be replaced with the newer larger signs. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro will replace all the electronic bus shelter signs with the new signs.

The new electronic display signs all have an audio feature. The audio is located on a post facing inward; includes Braille and raised lettering; and is activated by pressing a button. The audio is available in English and Spanish, and the volume can be adjusted by pushing the button multiple times. Mr. Pickens stated that the button is pressure activated and the tone lets the customer know the audio feature has been activated before an announcement is broadcast. In response to a question about the audio broadcast in English and Spanish, Mr. Hamre stated that Metro's policy is to provide information in a multi-language format.

With a round of applause, the BRS thanked Metro for improving communication with customers by creating signage that universally accessible for all.

Station Technology: PIDS and KIDS

As a follow up to a comment made by a member about the type of information that appears on the Passenger Information Display System (PIDS) and the Kiosk Information Display System (KIDS), the monitors above the Station Managers kiosks, Allison Hall King, Manager, Rail Central Control, and Brian Anderson, Office of Communication, provided an overview of the display system in the rail stations.

Ms. King stated that the Office of Information Communication provides all the overhead announcements related to delays, elevator outages, shuttle bus service information, and the information listed on PIDS. The type of information that is displayed on the PIDS include service disruptions, elevator outages, and shuttle bus location information and next train information. Ms. Hall stated that the weekend closures for track maintenance are also displayed on the PIDS.

Once the outage information is received, it is posted to the PIDS, broadcasted via the public address announcement, and communicated to Bus Operation Central Control to shuttle services. Ms. Hall stated that Metro also post the same information on the media hotline. In response to a question about the number for the hotline, Ms. Hall stated that the number is (202) 962-1212. She encouraged members to report inoperable PIDS to Station Managers and Metro's Customer Service.

Ms. Case expressed an interest in the difference between the email alerts regarding elevator outages and the information provided on the PIDS. She stated that street and mezzanine elevators are listed on the email, but not on PIDS. Ms. Hall stated that when Metro has other operable elevators at the station, the elevator outage is not listed. However, the elevator outage information a customer may receive on the phone is generally not listed on the PIDS. Ms. Case also stated that when Metro provides shuttle service it should also provide each shuttle station destination on the PIDS. Ms. Hall stated that she would take the members concerns to the next level and provide feedback.

Ms. Owens expressed an interest in the time frame for shuttle service when there is an elevator outage. Mr. Anderson stated Metro has one or two buses staged near the outage and those buses run upon request. He stated that customers can obtain shuttle services by calling directly (202) 962-1825 or by a Station Manager.

Ms. Burger stated at the July 2014 meeting, the AAC passed a motion that that in addition to auditory announcements, Metro should provide the same announcements in a written format to scroll across the KIDS and PIDS for customers to read as part of its SOP. She stated that this lack of information makes it difficult for customers who are deaf to know pertinent information that would improve their riding experience in the system. Chair Miller stated that many things that are on the PIDS, the Blind community never hear about. Many other transit system only overhead announcements to ensure all customers have full connectivity to the system. Ms. Hall stated that she would take the members concerns to the next level and provide feedback.

A comment from the public expressed an interest in the reason Metro uses mixed colors on the PIDS. Many in the low-vision community find that amber is easier to read than red. Ms. Hall stated that Metro uses the different colors so the information will stand out to customers.

Mr. Anderson also provided an overview of the KIDS. The KIDS are 47-inch flat screen displays that hang from the front of the Station Manager Kiosk at every rail station in the system. The purpose of the KIDS is to provide customers with major transit information, service disruptions, and alerts prior to entering the station. Mr. Anderson stated that Metro defines service disruptions as planned service changes and alerts are real-time service disruption. The KIDS also display a service status box, which exhibits all six rail lines. Mr. Anderson stated that when there is a delay or an alert on any of the rail lines the messaging band will turn red and contain that message. He stated that the elevator outage information listed on the PIDS is also displayed on the KIDS.

Mr. Anderson stated that the Metro-Alert system is the driving force behind the KIDS. He stated that the Metro-Alert system is a web-based system that allows the customer to receive information on up to six rail lines, three parts of the day for each line, up to four bus routes, and four stations the customer may frequent. When Metro has an alert or an advisory, the customer will receive an email. Metro only provides text information when there is a breaking alert. In response to a question about displaying alert information on monitors at the mini-mezzanine level, Mr. Anderson stated that Metro plans to add alert information to monitors at accessible entrance to provide customers with information prior to entering the system.

Old Business

Mr. Blake announced that the AAC By-Laws Work Group will be held on August 18, 2014 immediately following the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting. All members are welcome.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:17 p.m.

Attachment: Work Plan