



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

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Washington, DC 20001
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BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: December 8, 2014

In attendance: Brian Miller (Chair), William Staderman (Vice-Chair), Heidi Case (2nd Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza Silva, Charlie Crawford, Marisa Laios, Mary Kay McMahon, Mary Jane Owen, Philip Posner, Doris Ray, Denise Rush, Anthony Stephens and Roger Stanley.

Call to Order

Chair Miller called the December 8, 2014 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved the December 8, 2014 meeting agenda as amended. The BRS approved the November 10, 2014 meeting minutes as amended.

Ombudsman Report

Antonio Stephens, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning (ADAP), stated that members have occasionally expressed an interest in how Metro communicates with customers who speak languages other than English. To remind Bus Operators of the diversity of Metrobus riders, Metro issued a Notice to Operators (NTO) regarding Customers with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The NTO states that when a Bus Operator suspects that a customer is having difficulty and they don't speak English, the Operator should provide them with a LEP instruction sheet. Written in seven of the most prevalent languages is the following sentence: For help riding Metrobus and Metrorail in your language, call the number below, 202-637-7000. That is the number to Metro's Customer Service line. Once the customer calls the number they will be transferred to a company that interprets in 248 different languages.

In a follow-up to a comment made at the December 2014 the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting regarding lighting at the Gallery Place Metrorail station, Mr. Crawford stated that the lighting had been replaced and the station is illuminated again, making navigating the station a safer experience for customers.

Public Comment

Ms. Case made a comment about the cleanliness of platforms inside Metrorail stations. She stated that on several occasion she has seen waste and other debris on the platforms at the Mt. Vernon and Shaw stations. She added that the lack of cleanliness draws rodents, which have been seen at the Gallery Place station. As a wheelchair user the option to bypass or go around some of the waste and debris is limited. The Ombudsman stated that he follow up with Metrorail Custodial Services and provide feedback on this issue.

Ms. Case also made a comment about accessible signage in the rail system. She stated that the accessibility directional symbols were not added to the new signage for the Silver Line. She stated that the following stations also needed symbols: L'Enfant Plaza, Smithsonian, Federal Triangle, Metro Center, McPherson Square, Farragut West, Foggy Bottom, Rosslyn, Court House and Clarendon. The Ombudsman stated that ADAP would follow-up with the appropriate office to resolve this issue.

Ms. Case made a comment about the request for accommodation link on Metro's Career page. She stated that after the AAC presentation on employment she tried the link, but it was not functional. Ms. Owen stated that she also had difficulty with link. The Ombudsman stated that he will follow up with Metro Human Resources regarding the link and provide feedback on this issue.

Ms. Owen made a comment about priority seating on Metrobus, in particular the H2 line, which serves the three major hospitals in the District of Columbia. She stated that the bus was full, and although the Bus Operator was unable to board the customer he showed lots of compassion and concern. Ms. Owen expressed an interest in the protocol for priority seating. The Ombudsman stated that two NTOs were recently distributed to Bus Operators regarding the subject. Ms. Case stated that because the route services three major hospitals the issues are not always so clear cut, i.e. sometimes the bus has to pass customers up with mobility devices because there are already customers with mobility devices occupying the priority seating area. The Ombudsman stated that in those instances the Bus Operator is still required to stop and notify the customer of the circumstances. He stated that he would follow up for the appropriate procedure and provide feedback on this issue.

Dr. Posner stated that there is a similar problem with priority space on the train. When two mobility devices enter a rail car, there is no more space for a third device to enter the same railcar. Although customers can go to the next railcar, it is unlikely that will occur before the train leaves. Dr. Posner stated that is the reason the AAC recommended that Metro not place all the priority seating and priority space at the center doors.

In a follow-up to Dr. Posner's comments about the rail system, Ms. Case suggested that Metro use eight-car trains to give customers who use elevators greater access. Eight-car trains would make the distance to access a train from the elevator shorter. Additionally, increasing the number of cars would also decrease overcrowding allowing greater access for all customers including those that use mobility devices.

Christiaan Blake, Director, ADAP, stated that it is Metro's goal is to operate all eight-car trains, and he will keep the AAC updated on the progress. Upon motion, the BRS agreed to recommend to the full AAC that the Chairman's report include the recommendation about the accessibility benefits of eight-car trains.

Reflections - Wayfinding System

The BRS briefly discussed a Click-N-Go Maps wayfinding system. Chair Miller stated that he participated in the focus group. Focus group members navigated practice routes to various bus stops and to platforms in the Gallery Place Metrorail station. Chair Miller stated that he found the wayfinding system to be useful, easy to use and a significant advancement for traveling independently. At the end of the practice sessions, the focus group discussed the outcomes and areas of improvement.

Dr. Posner expressed an interest in how the wayfinding system accounted for issues such as construction. Chair Miller stated that one of the practice routes took him to an area where construction existed. While the wayfinding system provided real-time information, nothing should be considered a substitute for using orientation and mobility skills.

Ms. Rush stated that the wayfinding system is excellent. However, it is important to keep in mind that some people have not had orientation mobility training, so the wayfinding tool is not an option for them. Additionally, the wayfinding system requires smartphone capability and technology. Chair Miller stated that the designers understood some of the challenges and made the tool available through a toll free number from any phone, a smartphone is not required. He added that Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind and Click-N-Go Maps offer programs that support older groups in every stage of their disability.

Mr. Blake stated that Metro is committed to supporting this project. The Department of Access Services (ACCS) is working on a method to provide CLB with station maps to facilitate the production of audio maps for all 91 rail stations in the system.

Coordination Study – The Marketing of Fixed Route Services

Christian Kent, AGM, ACCS, provided an overview of the study. Metro's Board is interested in understanding the factors contributing to the rising cost of paratransit service. The purposes of the study are to identify other providers of specialized transportation service, and increase the number of people with disabilities who use these services and fixed route.

He stated that the Board is seeking advice from the AAC on ways to eliminate barriers that prevent paratransit customers from using the fixed route system, and increase ridership among people with disabilities.

Mr. Kent stated that this is a regional issue. Metro cannot do the job of providing specialized transportation alone. There are other companies that can provide transportation outside of the fixed route system, and the more people who are able to use the fixed route system do so, the more sustainable MetroAccess will be. Metro's goal is to ensure that the barriers that exist today for people with disabilities are not carried into the future. With this study, Metro is taking the first step of many to prepare for the future.

Mr. Kent stated that there were four questions that will guide the conversation. The questions were read as follows:

- What is your overall perception of Metro's bus and rail services as they relate to being able to be used by people with disabilities;
- Do you know that as much as 60% of MetroAccess eligible customers are certified as Conditionally Eligible;
- What do you consider to be barriers to using bus and/or rail service; and
- What do you think of Metro's efforts to promote bus and rail services to people with disabilities?

Chair Miller stated that it was important to hear from each member present. To achieve this, the Chairman stated the committee will use the round robin method to garner response from each member in attendance. Member comments and recommendations were as follows:

Ms. Case focused her initial comments on how Metro is obtaining the information. She stated that the questions should match the information Metro is seeking to understand about the customer base. Metro should make their questions more fundamental, so that a large majority of customers can understand them. Mr. Kent stated that the questions were worded for the AAC, not to the general public.

Ms. Case stated that she was MetroAccess dependent until it became too expensive. In the beginning, using the fixed route service was scary and difficult, but she learned

through trial and error. She suggested that Metro advertise travel training on MetroAccess vehicles.

Dr. Staderman focused his comments on how some people with disabilities feel about using the fixed route system. He said being able to understand those concerns will garner information.

Ms. Ray stated that many people throughout the region have strong feelings about using fixed route service and have a preference of using one service versus the other. She suggested that questions like *'What keeps you from using fixed route' or 'When you use fixed route, what do you like about it?'* be used to get to the root of customer feelings. Ms. Ray also stated that it was important to understand that many people with disabilities have to use a local transportation provider long before they get a Metrobus or Metrorail, and those services need to be reviewed as well. Ms. Ray stated that she has used fixed route service her entire life and never thought of using anything else. She suggested that Metro use campaigns or slogans to attract customers to the fixed route system. The best campaign Metro has ever had about the fixed route system was done when Carmen Turner was Metro's General Manager. The slogan was 'Get around, get around, I get around'. It focused on bus services and met people's needs where they were. Ms. Ray also suggested that the same question be posed to the MetroAccess Subcommittee.

Mr. Stephens stated that he is a user of fixed route system and is not considering using any other service. When moving to the area he only considered living in areas that were accessible to Metro. That perspective also guided him in employment opportunities, selection of secondary educational environments for his child, and other choices. Mr. Stephens stated that he uses fixed route because he is capable.

Ms. Mezile stated that she is very pleased with the fixed route service. Metro's shortcomings stem around inconsistent customer service from staff. Additionally, Metro's efforts to promote the fixed route system to the disability community have been nonexistent, leaving potential customers to learn about services for the disability community through word of mouth.

Ms. Laios stated that for her, fixed route service is not always a good fit. She has participated in Metro's travel training program, but found it difficult to access the bus and rail by herself with the horizontal and vertical challenges. Therefore, when she uses fixed route service, she ensures she has someone traveling with her. One of things that makes fixed route attractive to so many is the ability to travel spur-of-the-moment. Traveling unplanned is a motivating factor for many, not just the disability community.

Ms. Laios suggested that Metro enhance training because increasing the number of customers with disabilities means staff will need to be more engaging, especially for those customers that require additional help.

Mr. Crawford stated that he would like to address the questions from a different perspective. The question is not how Metro's fixed route services are viewed by the community of people with disabilities. There are many different people with diverse challenges who ride the system, and all of them interact with the system differently. As much as Metro tries to be universally accessible, there are situations where some customers cannot take the fixed route system. Mr. Crawford stated that he was a long time user of the fixed route system until he had an episode that changed his limitations in a dramatic way. The issue for many in the disability community is conforming to the environment in such a way that one can manage not only transportation, but navigating all the issues and challenges that come with it. For many in the disability community traveling can be dangerous if it is not properly planned. The disability community is not seeking a way to maneuver out of using the fixed route system, however they are seeking the transportation that most allows them to be who they are when using the service. Mr. Crawford stated that, in his opinion, MetroAccess offers the best value for his needs.

Mr. Stanley stated that he is concerned with reliability when using the fixed route system. He wants the bus and rail service to stick to the schedule. Mr. Stanley stated that the frequency or lack of it can deter a person from using the service, especially when they depend on it. For the most part, MetroAccess sticks to the schedule, but when they don't he knows where exactly to call to get help.

Ms. Rush stated that MetroAccess is her lifeline and the one reason she is still employed. Metro's fixed route system cannot handle the existing ridership. Crowding is a problem for all riders not just the community of people with disabilities and older adults. Despite its challenges and cost, many people depend on MetroAccess service and consider it to be a lifeline. Ms. Rush stated that there are many barriers in the environment such as sidewalks or uneven sidewalks, lack of travel training, lighting and safety are just some of the issue that keeps people from using the fixed route system. She encouraged Metro and the Subcommittee alike to be creative in their approach to this study.

Ms. McMahon stated that she uses the fixed route service because she is capable and was unaware that paratransit service existed when she moved the area. The fixed route system is overtaxed and that's a barrier within itself for all customers especially those with disabilities. Ms. Mahon stated that she has never seen Metro market any services.

Dr. Posner suggested that Metro advertise the fixed route services on MetroAccess. Metro should also discuss with its travel trainers why people with disabilities drop out of the program and are no longer interested in using fixed route services. Dr. Posner also suggested that Metro take a page from Germany's transit system with using rail cars that include additional accessible features. The features could include additional priority seats and accessible space for mobility devices, and be added to the railcar closest to the elevator.

Ms. Owen stated that when she began using the fixed route system she could navigate the system despite her primary limitations. As time progressed her limitations increased and her ability to use the fixed route system diminished. Her experience on the bus has been good. However, for many older adults and people disabilities the experience is not the same. Many require additional assistance when using the system, and having that assistance available would make using the fixed route more attractive, especially at transfer stations. Ms. Owen suggests Metro hire savvy people from the disability community to fill these types of jobs. This would further demonstrate Metro's commitment to accessibility and diversity.

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that without the fixed route system and paratransit service he would not have been able to accomplish so much in his professional and personal life. He stated that people with disabilities are diverse, and that is also true for their accommodations. Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that, just in the last year, he has had to change his routine because of over-crowding in the fixed route system. However, sometimes that is not possible and in those times he uses MetroAccess. Metro needs to understand that people have to associate accessibility with accommodations to a customer's comfort level. Mr. Ariza-Silva suggested that Metro market the fixed route service to hospitals and independent living centers. Many people who visit or use these centers can use fixed route services.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:19 p.m.

Attachment: Work Plan