



# AAC

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

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### **BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: February 9, 2015**

In attendance: William Staderman (Vice-Chair), Heidi Case (2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Brianne Burger, Charlie Crawford, Phillipa Mezile, Mary Jane Owen, Philip Posner, Doris Ray, Denise Rush and Roger Stanley.

#### **Call to Order**

Vice-Chair Staderman called the February 9, 2015 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

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

The BRS approved the February 9, 2015 meeting agenda as amended. The BRS approved the January 12, 2015 meeting minutes as amended.

#### **Ombudsman Report**

Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy in Planning provided an update on one item from the January 2015 BRS meeting in the Ombudsman's absence. He stated the option to text shuttle service request when there is an elevator outage is being explored; however, with most customers having access to Smartphones, the most feasible solution is email. Heidi Case stated that the reason texting was suggested was because Metro already offers the services through the police. Mr. Blake stated that the Transit Police has the staff and are set-up for that type of communication while other Departments are not. In response to a question about the turnaround time for emails, Mr. Blake stated that Metro is exploring the option and considering all the factors before this type of communication is implemented. He stated that he will continue to keep the committee abreast on this issue.

Ms. Case expressed an interest in whether Station Managers can conduct a count of MetroAccess customers accessing the accessible fare gates when staff does not physically swipe the customer into the system. She indicated that at the Mount Vernon Metrorail station, the Station Manager rarely departs the kiosk to swipe MetroAccess customers into the system. Mr. Blake stated that Metro has the technology at some stations to provide remote access, therefore MetroAccess customers are being counted in the system. In a follow up questions, Elver Ariza-Silva expressed an interest in whether the technology was available at other stations in the rail system. He indicated that he travels on the Red and Orange Lines often and Station Managers almost always allow MetroAccess customers to use the emergency gate. Mr. Silva stated that Metro's inconsistency in its approach sends MetroAccess customers using the fixed route the wrong message. Mr. Blake stated the procedure is part of the Station Managers training, and ADAP will suggest that Rail Training emphasis the point training.

A comment from the public expressed an interest in whether Metro will be changing the MetroAccess cards to the SmarTrip technology. This will allow those customers to independently use the accessible fare gates when a Station Manager is unavailable.

Chris Colbert, Operations Manager, Office of Eligibility Certification and Outreach stated that the Reduced Fare Program cards have the SmarTrip capability.

Denise Rush stated that the local news outlet will be featuring a story about a mobility device user and their experience in riding the fixed route system. She encouraged members to watch the news.

### **Public Comment**

A comment was made about MetroAccess vehicles arriving before the pick-up window. On several occasion, MetroAccess vehicle have arrived approximately an hour or two before schedule. When vehicles arrive before the pick-up window, customers are contacted with an expectation that they are ready and will immediately board the vehicle. When that does not occur, the customer is 'no showed' in the system. Some members of the AAC indicated that they too have experienced early arrival vehicles. Mr. Blake stated that his office will follow-up with the customer on the issue and provide feedback.

In a follow-up to a comment made at the January 2015 MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting regarding seatbelt extenders on MetroAccess vehicles. The customer commented that he requested an extension belt but instead was provided a posey belt to add extra length to seat belts and make it easier for the customer to buckle up. The customer requested information when the extension will be available in all MetroAccess vehicles. Mr. Blake stated that his office will follow-up with the customer on the issue and provide feedback.

Chato Carter, President, Vienna Oakton Visually Impaired Resource Group made a comment about the steps in the rail stations. She indicated that many of the stairs lack a contrast of color on the edge of each step. This makes it difficult for some low vision customers to navigate the stairs while traveling in the system. Although there have been some improvements in lighting in the rail system, Ms. Carter stated that she encouraging Metro to do more. Mr. Blake stated that his office will follow-up with the customer on the issue and provide feedback.

A comment was made about accessing information on Metro's website. On the Metrorail page, under stations, the bus service information is not accessible. The customer stated that he uses the website to plan his trips from the Wiehle-Reston East station Mr. Blake stated that his office will follow-up with the customer on the issue and provide feedback.

### **Metrobus and Metrorail Training Materials**

The Subcommittee discussed training with the Office of Bus Transportation and the Office of Rail Transportation. Anne Carey, Director, Metrobus Administration and Training, discussed sensitivity training for Metrobus Operators. She stated that Bus Operators receive four types of instruction: New Operator Candidate; Refresher; 'We Care' and Remedial training classes.

The New Operator Candidate sensitivity awareness module covers the following topics: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy and procedures; service animals, lowering the bus for customers to alight; priority seating announcements; hands-on instruction with wheelchair securement; and safety. The Refresher and 'We Care' training take place every two years. Ms. Carey stated that the Refresher training centers on the ADA and compliance while 'We Care' training focuses on customer service. The final piece of instruction is the remedial training which takes place as a result of a Bus Operator accident. This training highlights an incident and focuses on correcting Bus Operator performance. A comment from the public expressed an interest in whether Bus Operators receive training on hidden disabilities. Ms. Carey stated that the training includes all disabilities.

Ms. Carey stated that Metro also provides the 'We Care' training to managers and other staff serving in a leadership role. This ensures managers have the appropriate tools to support Operators, when an issue arises. Both Managers and Bus Operators receive some instruction at safety meetings. Ms. Carey stated that during those meetings, Notice To Operators are discussed. The NTO is used to update a policy between revisions of the Metro's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). Over the last few months there have been five NTO's distributed to Bus Operators related to disability which are: Observation and the Standee line; Passengers and Inclement Weather; Priority Seating; ADA Announcements; and Emergency Procedures. Additionally, Operators receive instruction on the Bus Stop Complaint Form. This form is used to identify inaccessible bus stops and can be completed by an Operator or a customer.

In response to a question about inoperable annunciators, Ms. Carey stated that customer should report an inoperable annunciator to the Bus Operators and Metro's Customer Service at (202)637-7000. Bus numbers in raised lettering and Braille are located on the front of the fare box. Many members of the BRS indicated that they have rode buses where the annunciator did not work. Ms. Carey stated that when the annunciator is inoperable, Operators are required to make announcements at major

destinations and transfer points. Members reiterated that Bus Operators are not making the announcements.

Patrick Sheehan expressed an interest in whether the annunciators were tied into the destination signs and therefore could be disabled by the Bus Operator. Ms. Carey stated 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, when the automated announcements are made, nor can a Bus Operator disable the annunciator.

The BRS discussed approaches to enforcement of the annunciator policy. Charlie Crawford made a motion to add a sign to the bus that would alert customers to the fact that stop announcements would be made and if they were not made the customer should contact Metro. Some agreed with his motion while other members indicated that the bus already has too many signs and another sign would have little effect on changing the behavior. A comment from the public stated that in some neighborhoods, Bus Operators do not engage the public and therefore a sign might be helpful. Another comment from the public stated that some Bus Operators are insensitive and make a big deal of issue when a customer with a disability makes a request. All members agreed that Metro should benchmark other transit properties and implement best practices where appropriate in the system. With agreement from Mr. Crawford, the BRS tabled the motion until more information can be garnered. Ms. Carey stated that she would investigate and provide follow-up.

Ms. Carey stated that from time to time, mystery riders are used to test whether Bus Operator are in compliance with the ADA and other policies and procedures. To assist in the effectiveness of the training, Doris Ray suggested that Metro use people with disabilities in training. Ms. Carey indicated that the Metrobus training videos include customers with disabilities. Additionally, Bus Operators are trained on the various types as well as securement devices using various bus models with actual mobility devices. This training is also continued at the division level and veteran operators are reviewed every two years.

Mary Jane Owen commented on the challenges of securing priority seating. She indicated that on the H2 Line that services three major hospitals in the District of Columbia, the priority seating area is always full. Ms. Owen expressed an interest in the protocol for priority seating. Ms. Carey stated that Operators are required to announce the request for priority seating encouraging customers yield their seat for

another customer. As you know there are many hidden disabilities and therefore, Bus Operators cannot make a paying customers move from that seat.

Dr. Lauren Semper Scott, Director, Rail Operations Quality Training discussed sensitivity training for Station Managers and Train Operators in the rail system. She stated that Station Managers receive 9 to 11 weeks of training that include policy and procedures, ADA, customer service, communication and safety. All Station Managers receive recertification training every two years and remedial training when there is a major complaint or incident in the system.

Brianne Burger stated that Station Managers often do not have ways to communicate with deaf and hard of hearing customers. She suggested that Metro provide front line staff with paper and pen. Dr. Semper Scott stated that she would share the comments with the training team.

Ms. Case expressed an interest in the training protocol for elevator outages. She that Station Managers at the affected station should offer customers an alternate route in the system or on the bus as well as shuttle services especially for customer using the intercom system. Ms. Owen suggested that Metro provide Station Managers with a crib sheet for quick reference of the most popular lines for each station. This may reduce frustration and allow them to readily assist customers. Dr. Semper Scott stated that she would share the comments with the training team.

In a follow-up point, Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that Metro should have buses waiting when there is an elevator outage. Mr. Blake stated that for planned elevator outages Metro provides shuttle service to transport customers automatically between stations. For random elevator outages, Metro does not have the resources to keep buses in standby status.

Train Operators also receive training on ADA policy and procedures, train announcements and customer service training that specifically focuses on customers with disabilities. Dr. Semper Scott stated that the various modules along with SOP and safety instruction are conducted over a 12 to 18 week period. In response to a question about protocol of announcements, Dr. Semper Scott stated that announcement are an integral part of Train Operators training and all are instructed to announce the line and station.

The BRS expressed an interest in monitoring and enforcement of announcements on the train and in the rail system. Dr. Semper Scott stated that Metro has over 100 supervisors in the system that monitored and address problems on a daily basis,

including operator compliance. Metro also has a quality assurance team that monitors announcements throughout the system. Dr. Semper Scott stated that in June 2014, the announcement module was enhanced to cover announcements for delays and incidents in the system.

Dr. Semper Scott stated that rail supervisor receive similar training as the other two groups with the exception of coaching class. The coaching tool is a more grounded communication method which spurs thoughtful communication. All Station Managers, Train Operators and Supervisor are required to attend safety meetings.

The BRS thanked Dr. Semper Scott and Ms. Carey with a round of applause for their commitment to improving the traveling experience of customers with disabilities using the fixed route system. It is in the little details where the difference is made and seen by customers.

#### **ADA Sensitivity Awareness Training (CBT)**

The BRS briefly discussed Metro's Computer Based Training for Sensitivity Awareness. Mr. Blake stated that this training was developed by the Department of Access Services and is provided to all staff during new employee orientation. Ms. Burger expressed an interest in whether the CBT included information on service animals. Mr. Blake stated that the training covers service animals and has two test questions related to the subject.

Due to the late hour, the BRS agreed to table the presentation and further discussion of the CBT until next month. The presentation will be added to the March 2015 agenda.

#### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:04 p.m.

Attachment: Work Plan