



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
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BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: March 9, 2015

In attendance: Brian Miller (Chair) William Staderman (Vice-Chair), Heidi Case (2nd Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Charlie Crawford, Phillippa Mezile, Edward McEntee, Mary Kay McMahon, Denise Rush, and Anthony Stephens.

Call to Order

Chair Miller called the March 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 March 9, 2015 meeting agenda. The BRS approved the February 9, 2015 meeting minutes as amended.

Ombudsman Report

Antonio Stephens, ADA Ombudsman, provided an update on comments made at the February 2015 BRS meeting. During that meeting there was a comment regarding MetroAccess vehicles arriving early and customers being asked to report to the vehicle before the pick-up window. The Ombudsman followed up with MetroAccess and reported the following: customers are not required to board the vehicle until the pick-up window begins; however, a customer may board the vehicle early if they wish. According to policy, when a MetroAccess driver arrives before the pick-up window begins the driver is only required to wait five minutes into the pick-up window. Under no circumstances should MetroAccess drivers pressure customers to board prior to the beginning of their window. It is possible that if the vehicle arrives early and the customer chooses not to board, the vehicle may be dispatched to execute another trip and another vehicle sent during the scheduled pick up window to handle the trip on time. Customers can contact "Where's My Ride" at (301) 562-5360, press 2 for trip status and then press 2 to speak to a customer service representative for assistance.

The Ombudsman stated that he also followed up with MetroAccess to for a response to another comment from the February 2015 BRS meeting related to seatbelt extenders on MetroAccess vehicles and when the extenders will be available in all MetroAccess vehicles. According to procedures, all MetroAccess drivers are to conduct a pre-trip inspection of the vehicle. As a part of this process, the driver is to ensure they have a seatbelt extender. A Posey belt is not to be substituted in place of a seatbelt extender. Customers should report any incidents of this nature to WMATA Customer Service at (202) 637-0128. Customers should also request the tracking number, so they can follow their complaint.

Ed McEntee commented that it appears that with newer model year MetroAccess vehicles, none of the seatbelt extenders are compatible. He stated that MetroAccess drivers tend to reposition his mobility device so the seatbelt extender will reach his device.

Heidi Case stated it appears that the seatbelt extenders will not fasten securely together. Mr. Miller stated that this is a safety issue and suggest that the issue be forward to MetroAccess Subcommittee for discussion.

The Ombudsman requested clarification on a comment made related to steps in the rail stations lacking a contrast of color on the edge. The comment stated that the lack color on the edges make it difficult for some low vision customers to navigate the stairs while traveling in the system. Ms. Case stated that the low vision community was speaking of the stairs. The Ombudsman stated that Metro adheres to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on this issue. The ADA requires a contrasting of color on the edge of the riser on escalators. Metro complies with the ADA on this issue.

Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy and Planning (ADAP), provided feedback on comment regarding accessing information on the Metrorail web page, under stations, regarding bus service information. He stated that his office reviewed the website and found it to be accessible.

In a follow up to comments during the presentation on bus training made about the Metrobus annunciator system, the Ombudsman stated that Anne Carey, Director of Bus Training, is committed to resolving the issue. To assist with this, Ms. Carey is requesting that the AAC provide feedback on their annunciator experience when riding the bus. The feedback should include: date, time, bus number, bus route or line, route direction and whether the automated or manual announcements were acceptable or inadequate. This feedback will allow Metro to target the inefficiencies and correct the issue. All comments should be forwarded to Dr. B. Moore Gwynn, AAC Coordinator, via email and she will forward the emails to Ms. Carey. In response to a comment about when to start auditing the announcements, the Ombudsman stated the review is set to begin in early April. The AAC Coordinator will follow up with additional information.

Mr. Crawford stated that customers have an expectation that announcements will be made. The issue is not new, yet it appears Metro is challenged with how to correct the problem. Metro should make it public that announcements are an expectation when riding the bus and be accountable for its inadequacy. Mr. Blake stated that this angle of making all customers aware of announcements appears to be a marketing approach. He suggested that members share their idea of an awareness campaign with the Metro's Marketing Department, which will be presenting at the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting in April 2015. Dr. Miller stated that there are multiple ways to addressing this issue and encourages Metro to use a multi-tier approach to ensure the system is operational for all customers.

Public Comment

A customer expressed an interest in follow up to a comment made at the February 2015 AAC meeting regarding MetroAccess cards on the fixed route system and the poor service received. The customer stated that in the past it has taken approximately four months to receive feedback from the incidents. She expressed an interest in the outcome of her complaint regarding the poor service from the station manager. Mr. Blake stated that staff worked with the customer to resolve the issues around her MetroAccess card to enable her use of the fixed route system. With regards to the Station Manager, the issue has been addressed with the appropriate office.

A comment was made about Metro's culture. The customer stated that many employees demonstrate defensiveness when working with people with disabilities. The customer stated that she has experienced this on the Metrobus and Metrorail, and when contacting Metro to make a complaint. These practices discourage useful feedback. The customer suggested that Metro provide personnel with a crib sheet for the most popular customer questions and ID cards used in the system. Mr. Blake thanked the customer for the suggestion.

A comment was also made about the accessible pedestrian signals. At certain bus stops in the District of Columbia, the pedestrian signal activates automatically, which allows customer to safely cross without pushing the signal button. Other bus stops do not have this feature. Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that he encounters this issue often when traveling in the region. The customer expressed an interest in the appropriate office to contact to report the issue. The Ombudsman stated that he can put the customer in contact with the appropriate official to address the concerns.

Dr. Staderman commented about the varying styles of elevator "call" buttons. He stated that the issue is not new, yet the problem still exists. The different styles make it difficult for customers to find the appropriate button to push, and that the buttons in new elevators are hard to push. Additionally the "call" button lights outside of the elevators at the Judiciary Square and Ballston rail stations are both inoperable. Mr. Blake stated that he will look into the issues raised by Dr. Staderman.

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that the "call" button lights outside the elevators at the following rail stations are also broken: DuPont Circle, Gallery Place, Metro Center, and Friendship Heights.

In response to a comment about the inaccuracy of the availability of a bus accessibility feature as listed on Metro's website, Mr. Blake stated that he would review and update the site.

Old Business

At the February 2015 BRS meeting during the Bus Operator Training discussion, the BRS tabled a motion to have a sign posted on buses to alert all customers that stop announcements would be made and when they were not, the customer should contact Metro. The BRS discussed the issue and amend the motion to include: 1) the BRS supports an audit of the announcements on Metro buses and provide feedback to Metrobus Transportation; and 2) develop a marketing campaign related to announcements on Metrobus that is inclusive of the Metro's website. The motion passed.

ADA Sensitivity Awareness Training (CBT)

The BRS discussed Metro's computer based training titled *Serving Our Customers with Disabilities*. The training is design to enhance employee knowledge of proper communication with customers with disabilities, and show employees how to assist customers with disabilities in using Metro's services. The training materials include information on the ADA, accessibility features in the system, and test exercises to improve learning.

Mr. Blake stated that the training is an elective for many Metro employees except customer facing Metrorail employees. The Department of Access Services (ACCS) is encouraging agency-wide implementation because all employees can benefit from this training. In response to whether MetroAccess personnel are included in the Authority-wide implementation, Mr. Blake stated that it's the goal to have the training required by all departments.

In a follow up to a comment made at the February 2015 BRS meeting related to service animals, Ms. Case stated that many people associate service animals with people who are blind. She stated that the fact is that the use of service animals has increased over the years by a number of people with different types of disabilities. She stated that it is important to emphasize this information in the training.

Ms. McMahon stated that the CBT was a good general overview on the various types of disabilities. She expressed an interest in how often refresher training is provided. Mr. Blake responded that the training is new and a timeline for refreshers has not been set. ACCS is recommending employees take the training once every three years.

Ms. Case stated that is important to impart to staff that Metro has added bus stop accessibility to its list of priorities in the system. Metro's success will be impacted by the organization's ability to align, execute, and deliver on this goal. This message of sustainability should be imparted more directly to all employees. Mr. Blake stated that the CBT does highlight the benefits of accessible fixed route services by customers and the benefit to employee when Metro provides such service.

Mr. Stephens commended ACCS for enhancing the customer service through the CBT. The key points that can make a difference in the adoption of this training are the dignity and respect piece that sometimes gets overshadowed. It's the humanistic side of transportation that we should all want to achieve in our daily interaction with people. Mr. Blake stated that enhancing customer service is an important initiative that Metro is supporting with resources to improve its culture.

Bus Stop (Update)

Mr. Blake provided an update on bus stop accessibility. He stated that Metro's Board has adopted a goal of having 100 bus stops improved to accessibility standards annually. Some of those improvements will be completed by Metro using grant funding, while the others are being improved by the local jurisdictions.

In response to a question about how stops were selected for improvements, Mr. Blake stated that the criteria included stops identified by individuals whose MetroAccess eligibility was based, in part, on the inaccessibility of a nearby bus stop, and bus stops that have high concentrations of MetroAccess customers nearby. It is Metro's belief that improving bus stops based on these criteria will allow the jurisdictions to realize measurable cost savings.

Mr. Ariza-Silva suggested Metro test the accessibility with a mobility device user of each stop prior to completion. He stated this will ensure the designs are complete and lack unintentional barriers. To ensure the public is aware of the bus stop improvements, Metro will conduct outreach via mail to each MetroAccess user within 150 feet the improved bus stop.

Ms. Case suggested that Metro add the bus stop at National Rehabilitation Hospital to the list of stop that needs improvement. She stated that the bus stop currently sits at the curb, which prohibits customers who use mobility devices from accessing a bus lift or ramp. Mr. Blake stated that he will review.

Mr. Stephens expressed an interest in improving non-Metro stops. He stated that the bus stop and intersection at Contee Road and Baltimore Avenue in Laurel Maryland is totally inaccessible. Mr. Stephens expressed an interest in the appropriate office to contact to report the issue. Mr. Blake stated that he will review.

Recruitment

Dr. Moore Gwynn reminded members that the 2015 AAC recruitment period is open, and it will close on March 30, 2015. Applications are available online, by mail, and on the table outside the meeting room.

Adjournment

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

Attachment: Work Plan