



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

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

In attendance: Brian Miller (Chair), William Staderman (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Brianne Burger, Charlie Crawford, Marisa Laios, Phillippa Mezile, Mary Kay McMahon, Mary Jane Owen, Denise Rush, and Roger Stanley.

Call to Order

Chair Miller called the September 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 September 8, 2014 meeting agenda. The BRS approved the August 11, 2014 meeting minutes.

Ombudsman Report

Antonio Stephens, ADA Ombudsman, provided an update from the August 2014 BRS meeting. He stated that he followed up on Ms. Case's comments about the list of Silver Line stations that were absent from the Metrorail section on Metro's webpage. Mr. Stephens stated that all five new Silver Line stations are listed in the Metrorail section as well as other areas of Metro's website.

Mr. Stephens provided an update on Chair Miller's comments about the lack of accessible signage at the street level elevators at the L'Enfant Plaza rail station. He stated that the Office of ADA Policy and Planning (ADAP) has requested that the accessible signage be replaced. Mr. Stephens stated that he will continue to follow the issue until the matter is resolved.

Mr. Stephens stated that the issue regarding wheelchair securement on Metrobus from the May 2014 BRS meeting has been resolved. Metro's policy has been updated and incorporated into a Notice to Operators (NTO). The NTO is used to update a policy between revisions of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).

Public Comment

A comment was made about the lack of MetroAccess Road Supervisors at the BRS meetings. The lack of assistance with MetroAccess service makes attending BRS meetings less inviting for fear of being marked as a "No Show" and left while participating in a meeting about public transportation. Dr. B. Moore Gwynn, AAC Coordinator, stated that staff will ensure MetroAccess vehicles are available for all scheduled MetroAccess customers following Accessibility Advisory Committee and subcommittee meetings. Ms. Rush commented that due to the lack of MetroAccess Road Supervisors, she was unable to have access to a mobility device for the meeting. Ms. Rush stated that although she is ambulatory, walking for long distances is a challenge and the use of a mobility device is a reasonable accommodation.

Mr. Crawford concurred with the previous comments about MetroAccess service at the BRS meeting. He stated that because no Road Supervisors was available, Door-to-Door service was not provided to the building. Mr. Crawford expressed interests in the protocol for assistance in the building. Christiaan Blake, Director, ADAP, stated that Metro will provide assistance once in the building upon request.

Ms. Burger followed up on her comments from the July 2014 BRS meeting about extending Metro's priority seating policy to include pregnant women. She stated that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) recognize pregnancy as a disability. She encourages Metro to review its policy on priority seating; add pregnant women to the policy; and train staff on the policy as part of its SOP. Ms. Burger stated that other transportation organizations have included pregnancy in their priority seating policy. Ms. Owen stated she remembered how hard the disability community worked to get this issue recognized in the political arena. Mr. Blake stated that Metro encourages customers to be courtesy and that Metro has conducted several priority seating campaigns to reinforce the policy with customers. Chair Miller stated that the ADA does not recognize pregnancy, but the limitations of pregnancy are recognized under the ADA Amendments Act. Mr. Blake stated that Corinna Sigsbury, Accessibility Planning Manager, ADAP, (and a new mother), will provide follow up after the meeting.

Chair Miller expressed an interest in the policy for the use of Segway in the system. Mr. Blake stated that Metro's policy does not allow Segway on Metrobus, but customers can use the devices on the Metrorail. When using the Segway in the rail system, customers are asked to use the device at walkable speeds. Ms. Owen expressed an interest in whether the Segway policy was the same for adult tricycles. Mr. Blake stated that Metro also has a policy for non-conventional mobility devices (NCMD). He stated that ADAP administers a safety evaluation of all NCMDs proposed for use on the system, and that determinations are made on a case by case basis. Customers can contact ADAP for additional information.

A comment was made about the construction work at the Dunn Loring Metrorail station. The station is undergoing some major changes including the relocation of the kiss and ride as well as some of the bus stops. This work has caused the lighting surrounding the station to diminish making it difficult for some customers with low-vision to navigate the system. Mr. Blake stated that the project at Dunn Loring Metrorail station is a joint development project and ADAP has been involved providing accessibility consultation on the project. Mr. Blake stated that he will follow-up on the lighting surrounding the station and provide feedback.

A comment was made about the role of a Bus Operator in keeping the aisle of the bus clear. When customers block the aisle with strollers, rolling walkers, or folding shopping carts it makes it difficult for customers who use mobility devices to access the wheelchair securement area. Ms. Owen stated that this is always a challenge for buses serving the VA Hospital, National Rehabilitation Hospital, and the Washington Hospital Center because those routes always have a large number of customers who use mobility devices. James Hamre, Director, Bus Planning, stated that Metro's policy requires that stroller and shopping carts be cleared of the aisle. He stated that he would follow-up to see if the policy included rolling walkers.

Discussion on a Universal Securement Policy for Metrobus and Metrorail

The BRS discussed universal design; the final action item from the AAC's first quarterly meeting with Metro's Executive Board. Dr. Moore Gwynn stated that Metro does not have a mandatory securement policy for the fixed route system and Metro's Executive Board has requested the AAC's feedback on the issue.

Ms. Owen expressed strong opposition to a mandatory securement policy for Metrobus and Metrorail. She stated that Metro customers should have the right to choose. Dr. Staderman agreed, and stated that since automatic chairs are heavier and have less movement than manual chairs, they do not need to be tied down.

Mr. Ariza-Silva, however, offered a different perspective stating that in an accident, the mobility device user will be the person most likely and most severely injured, and being secured could possibly make the difference between major and minor injuries. Ms. Owen stated that injuries are common in accidents and that injuries will not be less because of securement.

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that another challenge with securement is the ability for Bus Operators to have knowledge of the many different types of devices. Many Bus Operators lack any training beyond their initial coursework on securement procedures. He stated that Metro should have a more accessible securement system, one that doesn't require the assistance of the Bus Operator. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro's new buses will have multiple ways for customers using mobility devices to be secured.

Chair Miller stated that the issue of securement is a personal choice and the requirement is not mandatory for all passengers, just customers with disabilities. Ms. Laios stated that customers with disabilities should not be required to tie down when using the bus or the rail. Ms. Owen stated that she will gladly take a seatbelt when every seat on the bus and rail has a seatbelt.

Mr. Hamre stated that there is a difference between tying down the individual and the mobility device. He stated immobilizing the device prevents it from flipping over or moving during severe movements of the bus. Metro has had several incidents where less stable devices have flipped over in the bus injuring the user of the device and other customers. These types of incidents require Metro to take the bus out of service, which delays Metro's ability to serve other customers on that route. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro is interested in balancing safety with customer choice. The BRS agreed that striking a good balance is important.

Ms. Burger stated that customers use other devices such as shopping carts and strollers that also need to be secured. If Metro is not requiring those devices to be secured there should be no discussion for customers who use mobility devices. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro requires that strollers are secured and cleared of the aisle on Metrobus, but there is not a similar requirement on Metrorail.

Mr. Blake stated that former AAC member Channel Houston was listening via Spreaker and commented that other cities such as Miami and Seattle have automatic securement, and customers on those systems are not given the option like with WMATA's system where the Bus Operator ask "do you want to be secured?".

The majority of the members agreed with the current securement policy and putting safety first; however, not at the expense of customer choice. Former AAC Member Ms. Houston agreed with the majority of the members stating that wheelchair securement should be an option.

Lighting at Metrorail Bus Shelter (Maintenance)

Michael Taylor, Superintendent, Office of System Maintenance (SMNT/POWR), provided an overview of lighting maintenance for bus shelters at Metrorail stations. SMNT/POWR provides lighting maintenance support to the entire system, and issues of safety are the first priority. He stated that Metro has done a lot of lighting improvements throughout the system and maintenance of existing lighting is just as important as the installation of new lighting. In response to a question about new lighting in the rail system, Mr. Taylor stated that new lighting is installed through Metro's Capital Improvement Plan. SMNT/POWR provides maintenance after installation. SMNT/POWR also changes light bulbs and run new circuits for damaged lighting in the system. Chair Miller stated that the BRS has an active Station Lighting Work Group which has identified the need for lighting improvements throughout the system, and added that Metro has responded favorably to the Committee's recommendations on lighting.

To answer questions about lighting maintenance at Metrorail bus shelters, Mr. Taylor introduced Leroy Archer, Assistant Superintendent, SMNT/POWR. He stated that POWR inspects all outside lighting on a monthly basis.

With a deployment of two teams (low-voltage technicians and revamping crews), Metro has cleared the backlog of maintenance issues related to lighting in the system. The BRS expressed an interest in whether all rail station bus shelters have their own light or depend on lighting of a nearby fixture. Mr. Archer stated that most bus shelters do not have their own lighting. Shelters closer to the station have lights while other shelters use lighting from another power source. Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that two bus shelters near the Congress Heights Metrorail Station (Alabama Avenue and Station Road) have dimmed and damaged lighting that need to be repaired. Mr. Archer stated that SMNT/POWR will follow-up and provide feedback.

The BRS expressed an interest in the percentage of bus stops with inadequate lighting. Ms. Owen stated that inadequate lighting makes it a challenge to read the bus maps or accessible signage at the bus stop. Mr. Archer stated that he will follow-up and provide feedback. Chair Miller expressed an interest in whether there difference in lighting at bus stops in each jurisdiction (e.g. District of Columbia has more bus stops with lighting than Fairfax County, Virginia or College Park, Maryland). Mr. Taylor stated that the lighting levels depend on the architectural design of the station and not all bus stops have electricity.

The BRS also expressed an interest in SMNT/POWR latitude to increase the illumination of lighting upon repairs. Mr. Archer stated that SMNT/POWR replaces bulbs with the same wattage and requires approval before higher watt bulbs can be replaced in a fixture. A comment from the public expressed an interest in the maintenance schedule for replacing burned out bulbs in the system. Mr. Taylor stated that SMNT/POWR is on a bi-weekly maintenance schedule inside the rail system and monthly outside the rail stations. The BRS expressed an interest how customers can report issues of lighting in the system. Mr. Archer reported that customers can report issues of lighting to Station Managers or by contacting Metro's Customer Service. SMNT/POWR provides maintenance coverage around the clock every day of the week.

The BRS thanked SMNT/POWR for its efforts to maintain adequate lighting inside and outside the rail system.

Old Business

Ms. Rush reminded members of Metro's upcoming public hearings. She stated that the hearings on bus service changes are just as important as the hearings on fares. Dr. Staderman agreed, stating that because the AAC is encouraging the uses of the fixed route system by the disability community, it is imperative that we make customers aware of bus service changes. A comment from the public stated that eliminating or consolidating bus routes can have an impact on MetroAccess service. Many customers find out that their service has been impacted after the bus stop has been eliminated.

Metro should make a stronger effort to notify customers about such issues. Mr. Blake stated that Metro has publicized the upcoming hearings and the AAC will receive the information to share with its constituents via email. Mr. Hamre provided a brief overview on the upcoming public hearings. He stated that Metro will hold six public hearing around the region on bus service changes. Many of the lines recommended for changes include routes with on-time performance and crowding issues. Metro is recommending an adjustment to certain bus service to meet growing demands. Ms. Rush requested that public hearing information be forwarded to all members and she encouraged everyone to attend. Mr. Blake stated that the first public hearing will be held on Monday, September 15, 2014, which is the same day as the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting. He stated that information about the public hearings will be forwarded to the Committee.

New Business

Mr. Ariza-Silva made a comment about the elevators at certain stations being shut down early before the last train leaves the station. He stated that shutting down the elevator before the station closes cuts off access to the station for customers who use mobility devices. Mr. Ariza-Silva expressed an interest in the time the elevator is shut down for the last train. Mr. Blake stated that the elevator should be available as long as the system is open. He encouraged customers to report the issue to Customer Service and ADAP for follow-up.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

Attachment: Work Plan