



Accessibility Advisory Committee

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September 8, 2020

Dear Chair Smedberg, and Members of the Board,

On behalf of the AAC, we welcome your return from the summer break, and back to the Fall session of WMATA Board activities.

It is my pleasure to present you with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) Report for the month of July 2020. The primary issues we reviewed were: 1) Sounds: New Faregates Update, 2) Scooter Hubs, 3) MetroAccess Vans Design Update, 4) Covid-19 Safety, 5) Bus Service, 6) Summer Platform Project, 7) Budget/Safety Updates (RAC/Board Committees).

Issues of the Month

Sounds: New Faregates Update:

Terri Anomnachi, Project Manager, Capital Funding, presented a new set of proposed sounds for the new faregates. The last set of sounds presented to the AAC were not acceptable for various reasons. In July, Ms. Anomnachi presented a new set of proposed sounds to determine preference, as per the sound purpose. Several sounds were demonstrated for failures, successes, and alarms indicating something that should not be happening, is happening. The new faregates will have multiple zone sensors to prevent premature closure on customers' mobility aid and/or luggage. It is mandatory for WMATA to have failure sounds to alert customers. Along with the sounds/alarms, customers will be notified of the issue via text messages displayed on the faregate screens.

The AAC recommended testing the sounds with station managers to determine which sound will get their attention. The AAC also recommended wireless or portable devices for station managers enabling them to hear the alarms as they have to move around within the station. Ms. Anomnachi has offered to share further information about sounds for the new faregates with the AAC. We appreciate WMATA's efforts of taking into consideration the feedback of the AAC.

Scooter Hubs:

David Goodman, Jacobs, and Veronica Davis, Nspriegreen, presented possibilities for the scooter hubs on Metro property, specifically at Metrorail stations. Mr. Goodman stated there is no specific location to park shared mobility devices, such as electric scooters. WMATA is searching for designated areas for scooters close to the stations that will not cause hindrance for other customers. Nspiregreen has been asked to develop concepts called Scooter Corrals to review the appearance, size, functionality, and locations. Some scooter corrals could be in the street which may replace a parallel parking space. A parking space may be changed to place many scooters versus one vehicle. Another option presented was to utilize landscaping areas on the sidewalks. Criteria is being reviewed for locations at Metro stations.

The AAC was pleased to hear the options and provided feedback concerning existing corrals in close proximity to a few Metrorail stations. We look forward to receiving updates as they become available.

MetroAccess Vans Design Update:

Glenn Millis, Senior Policy and Planning Officer, Access Service, thanked the Committee for inviting him back. Mr. Millis attended two prior meetings on September 16th, 2019, and April 20th, 2020, to share/receive feedback from the Committee. Mr. Millis received 14 recommendations from the AAC which are under consideration. In addition, WMATA is taking under advisement an active collision system to improve safety, space for 1 or 2 wheelchair stations along with space for four other seats, capability of all current MetroAccess vehicles to include CCTV, a lower roof height to reduce overhead accidents, improved reliability. Since Federal funding will be involved this vehicle would be as per Buy America standards. The AAC was glad to hear that as part of the next steps, the Committee and other disability stakeholders will have an opportunity to review the prototype. The AAC also recommends that other paratransit agencies get in the partnership and help promote this prototype as the vehicle for all of the paratransit agencies throughout the nation.

Covid-19 Safety:

At our September meeting Theresa Impastato WMATA's Chief Safety Officer returned to update the AAC on the latest safety measures being used and investigated to secure the safety of bus and rail passengers as well as WMATA personnel. She also updated us on our request to participate in emergency training exercises without having to sign a waiver of coverage. She explained that the waiver is essential to maintain WMATA's liability insurance coverage. We are still hopeful that WMATA will find some way to indemnify volunteers that participate in these exercises for potential injury (medical costs and equipment damage) so that members of the AAC can continue to participate in these important exercises without worries about potential loss. Perhaps a rider to the core policy could be added for individual exercises or an internal self-insurance fund could be developed.

Ms. Terrian Williams-Hall presented an update on the work in progress through the summer and currently to improve MetroAccess Scheduling Software.

Bus Service:

Mr. Jim Hamre presented the latest update on the recent and potential changes in Bus service. During the presentation we heard from bus riders about the negative impact of certain bus changes in Fairfax County and Dupont Circle. We suggested that the customers should present their issues directly to the Board for consideration and to participate in the Board's future virtual hearings.

Summer Platform Project:

Ms Tatiana Kotrikova presented an update of the MetroRail – Summer Shutdown / Service. The AAC was impressed with the accessibility improvements.

Budget/Safety Updates:

Following the AAC meeting, several of our members attended the September RAC meeting and listened to the Board: Finance/Safety committee meetings on YouTube (there were some gaps during the safety meeting).

We were happy to learn that the proposed savings in MetroAccess funding would not negatively affect service. During the summer MetroAccess has maintained its service level even when bus and rail service was reduced.

In a response to the reduced customer load for MetroAccess, the Abilities Ride program was put on hiatus. There was a glitch in informing the AAC and the public of the hiatus.

Customer comments at the AAC pointed out problems with the lack of elevator outage announcements on the train or on the Passenger Information Display System (PIDS) scroll. One customer who uses a wheelchair complained about poor treatment by station managers at Metro Center when she was caught with no functional elevator and was refused a shuttle. The incident is being investigated by the Ombudsman. It is troubling because at the July Bus/Rail meeting we were informed that improving elevator outage communication was being prioritized as was the new shuttle system, and still this negative event took place at MetroCenter.

We look forward to the virtual hearings and a safe/accessible/sustainable solution to the current issues.

Sincerely,

Philip Posner
Chair