



600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
202-962-6060

Accessibility Advisory Committee

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: February 16, 2016

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Co-Chair), Mr. Patrick Sheehan, Mr. Edward McEntee, Ms. Marisa Laios, Mr. Charles Crawford, Ms. Doris Ray, Mr. Steven Kaffe, Ms. Darnise Bush, Dr. Tapan Banerjee, Ms. Carolyn Bellamy and Mr. Elver Ariza-Silva.

Call to Order

Chair Paul Semelfort called the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting to order at 4:00pm.

Review of February 2016 Agenda

The agenda was approved without amendments.

Review of January 2016 Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved without amendments.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Ms. Jennifer Weber, Quality Assurance, MTM, reported that all public comments from the previous meetings were addressed.

Ms. Janice Carpenter, Service Monitor, MetroAccess, stated that there were no outreach events to report since the previous meeting. There is a scheduled outreach event at Target Community and Educational Services Inc. on February 23, 2016.

Abilities Ride – An Alternative to MetroAccess Open Discussion

Mr. Christiaan Blake, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, provided a handout and overview of the Abilities Ride program proposal stating it will be available to all MetroAccess customers. This program will be a subsidized, on-demand transportation service that will originate and terminate within the Maryland boundaries of the MetroAccess service area. The service will be provided by selected vendors and will be limited to a fixed number of maximum trips per customer per day. There will be an online and mobile platform to connect the customer with the transportation service. Mr. Blake explained the requirements and deliverables expected from vendors to qualify as a provider for this program.

For the detailed handout, please refer to the February 2016 Abilities-Ride information located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Comments from the Committee and the Public on Abilities Ride:

Ms. Rush asked how customers without smart phones or access to a computer would be able to utilize this service. She commented that this is discriminatory.

Mr. McEntee stated the alternatives in DC and Maryland are great; however all of Northern Virginia is underserved by alternate transportation.

Mr. Crawford stated that the name should be changed as well as the ability to make reservations by means other than a smart phone or computer.

Dr. Banerjee asked about ADA requirements for this service.

Mr. Blake stated this service is non-ADA. Although it is not paratransit service, there will be required standards.

Mr. Semelfort stated trips should mirror paratransit service. While he is aware this is not ADA service, the number of trips are limited and not unrestricted like MetroAccess. There needs to be an option to book transportation that does not require a computer or smart phone.

Ms. Bellamy commented it would cost her more to be transported by the service being proposed than by MetroAccess when traveling from her home to church. Based on this, the proposed option is not sensible to her. She asked how the service will be monitored to ensure compliance. Ms. Bellamy also stated the service should be ADA compliant.

Customer #1 asked if there was a change from considering Uber as the provider.

Mr. Blake said there was not a specific plan to utilize Uber. This proposed program is an option for Maryland, which will be similar to Transport DC. This proposed service gives customers freedom of choice.

Customer #2 commented that the service is an option to MetroAccess and allows a customer to make a choice depending on their transportation need for the day.

Customer #3 commented about the pricing for the proposed service and suggested requesting a report regarding pricing in Maryland from the companies desiring to apply as contractors for the service. Transportation Network Companies (TNC) apply surge pricing, which can be different depending on the day or hour of the day. There are ADA requirements for all transportation services, whether paratransit or non-paratransit, and these should be required of this proposed service. Not only should the companies applying as vendors be responsible to ADA requirements, but any disability or human rights laws in the State of Maryland.

Customer #4 shared information regarding an application (app) that is being utilized by Transport DC, which gives the rider the ability to choose the type of vehicle needed. Many times a wheelchair accessible vehicle may be dispatched, as it can be utilized for any trip request. The customer applauded the vision of the proposed program.

Ms. Ray commented that the proposed service is a violation of the ADA and Title VI, and should not be a service that WMATA subsidizes.

Mr. Sheehan applauded the RideLeads service (provider of the DC Taxi App). Having wheelchair accessible vehicles to transport all customers improves a provider's chances

of getting business. It also incentivizes other companies to acquire wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Mr. Sheehan understood that Transport DC initially had unlimited trips, but due to funding had to reduce the number of trips. He asked if the proposed service is viable financially.

Mr. Blake stated the demand for Transport DC is increasing, having provided over 39,000 trips in the last three months. Transport DC provides unlimited trips in the District of Columbia. There have been no reductions with Transport DC. The numbers have been run to determine the subsidies needed to adequately run the service. While analyzing subsidies, consideration was given to the added surcharge WMATA will pay for wheelchair accessible vehicles. He said the four-trip limit will not change; however, the subsidy could change based on feedback from the committee.

Ms. Ray stated the four trip per day cap was very limiting. As an alternative to ADA paratransit, it is not comparable. She asked if there was adequate provision in the proposal for allowing open bidding for all vendors to ensure the best service.

Mr. Blake said WMATA is seeking great service providers. WMATA is not only considering TNC's, but transportation brokerages. There is Maryland legislation specifically targeting TNC's and bringing them in line with the taxi industry to ensure fair competition in the procurement process.

Ms. Bellamy again stated that the elderly and poor customer does not have access to a smart phone. The limit of four trips is unfair.

Customer #5 was concerned about the alternatives; asked if the Maryland Department of Transportation is in agreement with the proposal so far; and, asked if Maryland will compensate WMATA for these rides.

Mr. Blake stated WMATA receives a subsidy for paratransit service. WMATA must ensure customers with disabilities have access to service comparable to fixed route service. The subsidies are provided from the jurisdictions in the Compact and WMATA management decides how the funds are dispersed. Management determines, on a particular day, if due to overwhelming demand, more taxi service is needed. This alternative transportation is a part of management's responsibility to enhance our customer's travel experience; giving them more freedom and flexibility, while assisting the jurisdictions in reducing their overall paratransit costs. Permission is not needed from the jurisdictions to enact this program, but WMATA ensures the service is adequate for their citizens and that all eligible customers are satisfied with the service.

Ms. Bellamy asked how the vendors in this proposed program will be managed.

Customer #6 commented that if the limit remains at four trips with this proposal, WMATA should require that the contract be awarded to companies that can provide access to everyone across their business lines.

Customer #7 stated that TNC's require a credit card, while Transport DC has a pay in car option, which affords equality of access for all.

Customer #8 stated that the four trips with this proposed service will not have the time constraints that MetroAccess has.

Ms. Bellamy stated that because Prince George's and Montgomery Counties are larger than DC, it will require more staff and money to manage this proposed service.

Ms. Ray stated wheelchair accessible vehicles should have an associated response time.

Mr. Blake stated that for every wheelchair accessible vehicle trip request executed, the company/driver will receive an additional \$12 fare subsidy. WMATA wants to financially incentivize the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles, as well as demand the company to incentivize drivers to execute these trips.

Mr. Sheehan asked about the effect the Transport DC program has had on MetroAccess with the 39,000+ trips they have provided. He asked if there is a forecast measuring the impact on efficiency with this added program.

Mr. Blake stated in terms of overall demand for MetroAccess there has been a decrease, which is in part attributed to the availability of Transport DC.

Mr. Omari June, Director, MetroAccess stated that trends suggest demand for MetroAccess will increase, and WMATA needs to ensure the ability to utilize the resources and vehicles that are presently available for the individuals that require MetroAccess service. These models are critical to maintain and increase the efficiency of MetroAccess in the future, while still allowing individuals the ability to ride other services.

Mr. Sheehan asked if customer satisfaction has increased.

Mr. June stated customer satisfaction on MetroAccess is at an all-time high due to initiatives put in place by MetroAccess staff and the contractors.

Mr. Leroy Hayford, Manager of Financial Operations, MetroAccess added the conversation would include the goal to promote independence for the customer as part of the measurement.

Customer #9 stated the minimum requirement of 50 wheelchair accessible vehicles is very low considering the service area. She also applauded the additional \$12 fare subsidy for wheelchair accessible trips executed.

Mr. Sheehan asked if there was a timeline for completion of this project.

Mr. Blake stated March 18, 2016 is the last day to submit requests for information. Service was initially proposed to begin in July, 2016; however, this will most likely change.

Mr. Sheehan stated the discussion of this proposal should continue at the AAC full committee meeting.

Customer #10 desires same day service.

Customer #11 stated there were no required driver standards in the proposal. She asked that the proposal ensure drivers are paid adequate wages, and that it offer MetroAccess drivers that may lose their job because of this new service a career path into the new system. She also suggested a robust training program for the drivers in this new program.

Customer #12 asked what will occur next with this proposal and if there will be further discussion.

Mr. Blake stated that responses to the Request for Information (RFI) will continue to be accepted until March 18, 2016. This information is on the Metro website and federal website.

Ms. Rush stated that utilization of applications (apps) and smart phones is not accessible and discriminatory.

Ms. Ray asked who will bear the cost of the specific proposal for Maryland. If WMATA pays, will it take funds from the state of Maryland; MetroAccess subsidies provided by Prince George's or Montgomery counties; or, the customer? This would require meeting the ADA compliance and Title II entities. She raised the issue of the grandfather policy and the need to address this in the proposal. Comparability is not offered in the proposal as it relates to requiring drivers to assist visually impaired customers. The proposal does not spell out whether the assistance is door-to-door or curb-to-curb.

Mr. Crawford stated he feels performance is the measure. Equity and accessibility must exist.

Public Comments

Comments received were with regard to trip insertions; refunds for trips booked by appointment time; and a compliment to Ms. Allison Anderson for resolving an issue brought to her attention.

Comments from the MAS

Ms. Bellamy addressed the committee stating that member participation is needed at all events and meetings.

Ms. Rush advised the committee of the upcoming public hearings on February 22, 2016. She asked why the committee received notification at the last minute. She also concurred with Ms. Bellamy regarding committee participation.

Mr. Sheehan recommended that the fare policy working group develop talking points to be discussed at the public hearings. He also stated there are several ways for individuals to have their comments heard during the hearings if they are unable to attend.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the February 2016 Complaint Resolution Report located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.