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Accessibility Advisory Committee

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: September 16, 2013

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Dr. Phil Posner, Mr. William Straderman, Ms. Carolyn Bellamy, Mr. Elver Ariza-Silva, Dr. Tapan Banerjee, Ms. Heidi Case, Ms. Doris Ray, Mr. Brian Miller, Mr. Patrick Sheehan, and Ms. Regina Lee.

Call to Order

Chair Paul Semelfort called the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting to order at 4:01pm.

Review of September 2013 Agenda

The September 2013 meeting agenda was amended to include a new topic, (establishing a Bus Stop work group) and to change the order of topics on the agenda.

Review of August 2013 Meeting Report

The August 2013 meeting report was approved.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Ms. Kim Clark, Regional Vice President of Operations, MTM, reported that all public comments have been investigated and resolved.

Ms. Allison Anderson, Operations Manager - Operations Control Center, MetroAccess, reported that there were no outreach events since the last MAS meeting. She stated there are events scheduled for the end of September and October, and these events will be shared at the next MAS meeting.

Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award

Ms. Anderson recognized Mr. Gbedepe Agbeyibor as the Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award winner. A detailed description of Mr. Agbeyibor's accomplishments can be found in the accompanying document titled "Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award" located under the September 2013 heading at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Overview-MetroAccess Eligibility Certification Process

Mr. Frank Roth, Director, Eligibility Certification and Outreach (ELIG), gave an overview of the application and assessment process for MetroAccess eligibility. There are two parts to the application requiring the applicant to complete their demographics and the second part is completed by a healthcare provider, which details the individual's disabilities. There are a series of questions that the healthcare provider answers to give perspective on how the disabilities affect the applicant's ability to use the bus and rail system. The assessment is not solely based on the disability but functionality.

The assessment appointment is scheduled by phone once the application process is complete. ELIG attempts to get applicants in for the assessment within ten (10) days. Verification of address is noted during the telephone conversation as transportation is provided to and from the assessment if the applicant resides within the service area. Type of disability is also discussed during this telephone conversation to determine the type of assessment tool needed for the appointment. The assessment takes approximately thirty minutes to an hour; reassessments are usually quicker. There are two types of assessments. The functional assessment requires the applicant to walk for a one half mile distance to check for balance and safety awareness. Applicants with cognitive disabilities are not required to perform the functional assessment but complete an interview. During the interview assessment, questions are tailored to the specific disability. Travel training is discussed with applicants who are hesitant to ride bus or rail. Bus stop accessibility issues are discussed and forwarded to the appropriate department for resolution. In seven to ten business days, applicants are notified of their eligibility determination.

Mr. Roth then explained the eligibility determinations stating that a customer who is fully eligible would not be able to independently utilize bus/rail due to their disability. Conditionally eligible customers can utilize bus/rail for some trips, but may need MetroAccess for other trips. Ineligible customers can take bus/rail at all times but because they have a qualifying disability are enrolled in the Reduced Fare Program. There is a small percentage of individuals who are found not eligible for MetroAccess or the reduced fare program. Individuals who receive conditional eligibility, the Reduced Fare Program, or are determined to not be eligible may file an appeal.

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

1. What is the age range for eligibility?

Mr. Roth stated age five is the minimum age of eligibility and there is no limit on the upper end of the age spectrum.

2. What is the "code" that is requested by the healthcare provider? During the reassessment process, are there diagnoses that do not need to repeat the functional assessment?

Mr. Roth explained that the code is an ICD code that gives specifics related to a diagnosis and allows eligibility to determine the type of assessment needed. Applicants with diagnoses that have progressive deterioration or no prognosis for improvement will not need to repeat the functional assessment at time of reassessment. However, the application will still need to be completed.

3. When an individual calls to request an application, is it a recorded call or are they able to speak with someone to receive direction on completing the application? During the assessment process, should applicants bring their mobility devices and are they informed of this in advance? Is fixed route and travel training

explained to the applicant? A point was made that verbiage in literature is different than what is told to the customer/applicant.

There are several ways to obtain an application, which has detailed instructions and a fact sheet explaining what needs to be done. Applicants are asked to be very detailed about all of their disabilities and providers. Applicants are asked to bring their mobility devices with them for the assessment. An explanation of how Metrobus/Metrorail are accessible is provided, and the difference between a Metrobus and a MetroAccess van is made clear by showing pictures to the customer. Mr. Roth stated that literature and brochures regarding the eligibility process are being revised.

4. Is there a temporary eligibility process for individuals who have paratransit eligibility in other jurisdiction but are visiting the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area?

Mr. Roth stated that yes, this information is detailed online. A paratransit user from another jurisdiction or someone who does not have paratransit eligibility anywhere else (because it may not be available) can be set up to use MetroAccess while visiting the area. If they do not have paratransit eligibility in another jurisdiction, they must provide a letter from their healthcare provider detailing their disability. Under the ADA, visitors have twenty-one days in a rolling 365-day period to utilize MetroAccess service while visiting. Visitors receive a letter of authorization assigning them a MetroAccess identification number with information outlining how to make reservations and a service area map. For periods longer than twenty-one days, individuals must apply for MetroAccess eligibility.

5. What is the medical background of the assessment staff?

They are certified therapeutic recreational therapists who are trained in integrating individuals with disabilities into the community. Mr. Roth pointed out that the eligibility assessments are not medical assessments.

6. Who needs to complete the medical verification portion of the application?

Mr. Roth stated that there is a list of persons who may complete this form on the instruction sheet in the application packet such as Physician, Certified Nurse Practitioner, Optometrist (visual disabilities only), Podiatrist (disabilities of the foot and ankle only) or, Licensed Clinical Psychologist (Psychiatric disabilities only).

7. A comment was made that time is being wasted discussing the same topics that should be known among the MAS. It was suggested that an orientation occur for new members of the AAC to inform them of MetroAccess policies, MAS projects, and other information pertaining to the AAC.

8. Can the MetroAccess identification card be used when visiting other states?

Mr. Roth stated that the card can be used in other jurisdictions. He asked that customers contact eligibility at least a week in advance of their travel with the information about where they are going. Eligibility provides a verification letter to the paratransit agency in the area of travel stating that the customer is a paratransit user in our area. The customer's disability and type of mobility device is also relayed.

9. What is the medical staff's knowledge in regard to how to assess someone with a large bag or disability where the customer cannot use stairs during the assessment?

Mr. Roth clarified that assessments are not done by medical staff as it is not a medical assessment. If a bag is brought to the assessment, staff can secure it during the assessment. If there is a problem with the applicant using the stairs because they are carrying a large bag, the assessor will skip that part of the assessment. However, this would prevent an accurate assessment of the applicant's ability to navigate bus/rail service. Mr. Roth stated that a suitcase on wheels is not considered a mobility aide.

Working Group to Determine MetroAccess Stop Locations

Mr. Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy & Planning, explained that for the sake of safety and efficiency, MetroAccess stops were installed at 44 Metrorail stations. He stated that WMATA would now like to establish a work group to discuss the possibility of installing MetroAccess stops at high density locations around the region on private property (i.e., malls, schools, hospitals). The group would identify a few locations and as a group contact those locations to see if they would agree to establish accessible MetroAccess stops on their property. All MAS members are encouraged to participate in the working group and may contact Dr. B. Moore-Gwynn within the following week if interested.

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

1. Several comments were made in opposition to the MetroAccess stops at high density locations and many questioned the intent of establishing the work group. Mr. Blake stated that the intent is to establish a working group to garner advice in response to concerns from customers at these high density locations. Staff will work with the group to facilitate the discussion, but the group will decide the parameters and ensure that the voice of the customer has been included.

Mr. Christian Kent, Assistant General Manager, Access Services, commented that the establishment of a working group and MetroAccess stops do not have to occur. It was a suggestion so that the rider's representatives can decide if it would be appropriate. He stated the idea for these stops did not come from staff, but from customers with concerns for confusion and safety at large or high density locations. Customers stated that a point of reference would be helpful.

He said that Mr. Blake has offered to form a working group for these stops, but if it is not the desire of the MAS for staff, we will do what the MAS requests.

MetroAccess Fare Policy Working Group Update

Dr. Phil Posner discussed information from the subsequent Metro Board Finance & Administration Committee reporting on the reduction in ridership in fiscal year 2013. He explained that MetroAccess transported 49,000 fewer passengers in FY2013 as compared to FY2012. He stated that this represented a 2.4 per cent reduction and is 172,000 fewer trips than forecasted. The ridership reduction is primarily the result of a greater usage of fixed-route service that is attributable to the success of our ongoing eligibility screening and travel training efforts. He said the reason for giving those numbers was to explain that there was not a decrease in registered riders, but there were fewer rides taken. He stated that when discussing surplus, part of the surplus is what was budgeted and what was used. He said that because there were fewer rides taken, there was a surplus, but that does not mean more money was made.

He continued to explain that the ridership experience in FY2013 will inform service and fare policy decisions in FY 2014 and beyond. Metro will continue to focus on bus service changes to use resources more effectively and better match service levels with demand to drive ridership growth. Metro will also consider fare product and pricing changes in FY 2015 that will focus on encouraging ridership in modes, locations, and time periods where capacity is available. So MetroAccess riders need to have a presence at the hearings.

He then reported on the FY 2015 budget development. In October, staff will present a preview of the FY 2015 budget and six-year financial plans. The FY 2015 budget development is guided by the following principles:

- Align investment decisions with Momentum goals and multi-year business plans (which does not directly affect MetroAccess)
- Recommend fare policy updates consistent with fare policy principles which are available
- Enhance linkage between operating and capital investment plans
- Identify and implement opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness

Dr. Posner then gave dates of upcoming subsequent Finance & Administration Committee meetings:

- October 10, 2013, there will be information items presented on a fare policy discussion. He stated that input from the full AAC should be submitted prior to this date.
- November 7, 2013, the general manager will present his FY2013 budget with dates for public hearings.

- December 5, 2013, there will be a presentation of the FY2014 Quarterly Financial Review.

Questions/Comments from the committee:

1. A member wanted clarity on the goals of the Fare Policy Working Group. She stated that her understanding of the overall goal was to ensure that MetroAccess customers do not continue to pay more; are not affected by bus/rail changes; and to prevent the increase of the current maximum fare. The member inquired about the possibility of twice the bus fare or one and one half times the bus fare.
2. There was another comment stating the working group was requesting other transit services in the area be included in the trip planner for fare calculation.
3. A member stated that some local bus services offer lower fares. Because of this, there was a discussion to give consideration to allow twice the fare of each jurisdiction's local bus service or when traveling across county borders to consider twice the regional bus fare.
4. Are the causes of the reduction in ridership being tracked? Do we know why people are choosing fixed route? Was it due to cost or increased accessibility? Dr. Posner said that because there were three changes that occurred to MetroAccess almost simultaneously, it is difficult to determine which may have been the cause of the reduction in ridership. He stated that the next fiscal report will give data on what has occurred since the implementation of the fare calculator. Since some customers have experienced a reduction in fare as a result of the fare calculator, the report may give some indication if the fare calculator has made an impact on ridership. He said that a year's worth of analyzed data would provide a better picture of the causes. Dr. Posner stated the report provided was information from WMATA.

Mr. Blake commented that the information Dr. Posner reported was not provided to the MAS could not be, since it was not available until the morning of the meeting. When there is insufficient time to make information accessible to everyone before the meeting, the practice is to present the information to everyone at meeting at the same time.

5. Could the public comments period at the current or next MAS meeting be used to request feedback from the public regarding if the cost of the service has resulted in a decreased in their use of MetroAccess? Dr. Posner stated that a petition with that information was gathered and the people that testified at the last hearing spoke about the cost of fares. He also stated that the Board is aware of the economic impact the fare is having on the customers.

Mr. Kent stated that the Board wants to know how much of an impact it is. The information has not been quantified.

6. The numbers provided in the subsequent Finance & Administration Committee report differed from what a member had personally recorded. It was suggested that a MetroAccess rider survey be conducted. A motion was brought forth and approved by the MAS to have the MACS staff assist in developing a MetroAccess ridership survey. The MAS would seek to have the support from the full AAC Committee. The survey would attempt to understand what things are occurring to affect numbers of trips customers are taking. Mr. Kent asked that staff be provided detailed information of what is the intent of the survey and to acquire a product that is not biased by the phrasing of questions.
7. A comment was made regarding not having sufficient time to complete the survey before the public hearings. The suggestion was again brought up to use the public comment period for input about the fare and ridership.

New Business

Mr. Patrick Sheehan, Chair, AAC, reported that during the Riders Advisory Committee meeting on August 4, 2013, advance notice about the bus hearings was provided. Mr. Sheehan suggested that Jim Hamre provide this information at the Bus/Rail Subcommittee meeting, which he did. Unfortunately, this information was not provided to the AAC.

Questions/Comments from the committee:

1. A concern was stated that the information was known to some but not provided to the committee.
Mr. Kent agreed that the information should have been provided. He urged the AAC to make it known to the Board that information that would impact MetroAccess should be provided to the AAC.

A motion was approved by the MAS to present to the Board the request that information about hearings pertaining to anything related to transportation be provided to the AAC. At least 60 days of advance notice needs to be provided so that the information may be offered in accessible formats and sent to customers.

Public Comment

Customers and subcommittee members made comments related to using medical specialists during the assessment process for eligibility, a complaint about a Metro Bus

Driver, the need for updates to drivers during area crises/incidents/accidents, the need for Road Supervisors at Georgetown Hospital, issues with the cost of fares, the possible need for drivers work hours to be reduced, mistreatment by customer service, a driver knocking over trash cans in the neighborhood, a request for response from contractors about sensitivity training, and a compliment to Quality Assurance and Ms. Kim Clark for follow-up on some issues.

Please refer to the September 2013 Complaint Resolution Report located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm for detailed descriptions and resolutions of the public comments.

Meeting adjourned at 6:03pm.