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Accessibility Advisory Committee

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: July 18, 2016

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Co-Chair), Dr. Phil Posner, Ms. Marisa Laios, Mr. Charles Crawford, Mr. Patrick Sheehan, Ms. Phillippa Mezile, Ms. Mary Kay McMahon, Ms. Suzanne Kamel, Mr. Steven Kaffen, Mr. Will Schell, and Ms. Carolyn Bellamy.

Call to Order

Mr. Paul Semelfort called the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting to order at 4:51pm.

Review of July 2016 Agenda

The agenda was amended to include the Michael Wilson Award recognition for July 2016 and postpone the MACS Performance Report until the September 2016 meeting. Dr. Posner also requested the MACS Performance Report include data specific to the current SafeTrack surge timeframe. The agenda was approved with the amendments.

Review of June 2016 Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved without amendments.

MetroAccess Employee Recognition

Ms. Celisse Outlaw, Service Monitor, MetroAccess, recognized Diamond Transportation operator, Mr. Larry Tilghman as the Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award winner. A detailed description of Mr. Tilghman's accomplishments can be found in the document titled "Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award" located under the July 2016 heading at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Abilities-Ride Final Recommendations

A member of the public inquired whether there would be a presentation from WMATA staff to the AAC regarding WMATA's final service recommendations for Abilities-Ride.

Mr. Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy and Planning, stated a presentation of the final plan for Abilities-Ride service would not be given until the release of the Request for Proposal (RFP).

Mr. Semelfort read the finalized letter to be presented to the board regarding AAC recommendations on the proposed Abilities-Ride service. The letter was approved during the AAC full committee meeting with additions from Ms. Carolyn Bellamy and Ms. Doris Ray. The full text of the letter can be found in the accompanying document titled "Accessibility Advisory Committee Letter to the Board" located under the July 2016 heading at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Transport DC Discussion

Ms. Rush stated the committee needed to pay attention to funding for Abilities-Ride in case it has the same popularity that the Transport DC program experienced. Ms. Rush also asked if any DC residents on the committee received communication regarding the recent changes to Transport DC.

Ms. Mezile responded she had not received any such communication.

Ms. Rush inquired as to why DC residents of MetroAccess did not receive the communication of the changes to Transport DC service, effective July 22, 2016.

Mr. Christian Kent, Assistant General Manager, Access Services, stated the change in Transport DC was not a WMATA decision, as Transport DC is a service of the District of Columbia. Due to budget issues, the local jurisdiction had to reevaluate the program. The cost of Transport DC was to be covered by savings realized by the reduction of MetroAccess service, but the program's popularity required a reevaluation of the budgetary allowance. Mr. Kent stated that in the future, the evaluation process will require surveying the needs of the users to attain an understanding for what made Transport DC more appealing than MetroAccess.

Ms. Rush commented that Transport DC included both same day service and more localized shared ride service. Ms. Rush inquired as to who should have been responsible for sending the communication regarding the change, since Transport DC receives all the customer information from MetroAccess.

Mr. Blake stated Transport DC is an alternative to MetroAccess service and WMATA's recommendation was to keep the same customer experience as MetroAccess. The taxi companies provided additional services that were not part of the original service plan, which generated a higher volume of ridership than anticipated. Reducing some of the added features will create a more sustainable and cost effective service. WMATA is working with the District of Columbia to institute those changes for the next fiscal year.

Mr. Kent stated there will not be any one service that will meet every customer's needs. There are other alternative transportation services, such as Arlington Star, that utilize additional amenities MetroAccess does not feature, but they have restrictions on service area and eligibility. Similarly, the restrictions presented for Transport DC are necessary to understand the scope of the service's ability.

Ms. Mezile commented the Transport DC communication was not straightforward.

Mr. Blake reiterated that Transport DC is not a WMATA service; the final decision was made by the District of Columbia's Department of For Hire Vehicles.

Mr. Crawford inquired whether Transport DC and other pilot programs could receive additional funding through a lottery.

Mr. Kent stated there is always a need for recommendations for sustainable funding, but the funding for specific projects would depend on the community advocating for the funding.

Ms. Laios recommended the AAC compose a letter to Transport DC regarding their communication to customers.

Mr. Kent stated Transport DC has a customer advisory committee similar to the MAS that may have input regarding the service and communication. WMATA staff was not aware the Transport DC changes would take effect as rapidly as they did.

A member of the audience stated Transport DC users attended DC Mayor Muriel Bowser's speaking engagement earlier that day. The users expressed their disappointment in the lack of communication and drastic cuts to Transport DC, and literature was distributed with Ms. Heidi Case listed as a point of contact.

Ms. Rush stated the changes in Transport DC service include reduced hours and limiting rides to hospitals, pharmacies, and dialysis. She inquired whether the same changes would happen to Abilities-Ride if the service became too popular.

Mr. Kent responded that Maryland has entrusted the Abilities-Ride service to WMATA, and the resources will be drawn from the budgeted WMATA allocation, so there is no anticipation of the service changing drastically.

Dr. Posner inquired if Abilities-Ride will be run by WMATA. He also inquired whether the service will be required to meet standards with higher overhead, especially since WMATA is partially funded federally.

Mr. Kent stated Abilities-Ride will not be subject to the same standards. Abilities-Ride will be a non-ADA alternative to MetroAccess service. MetroAccess is a civil right under the ADA, which has more strict regulations. Abilities-Ride will have the basic features of MetroAccess without being a replica of MetroAccess.

Ms. Mezile inquired whether DC will be funding Transport DC at the same level in the new fiscal year.

Mr. Kent responded he did not have that information at this time, but the voice of the disability community will contribute to the level of importance DC places on Transport DC's funding in the next fiscal year.

Mr. Sheehan inquired if there are any lessons learned from the Baltimore Mobility paratransit service that will influence Abilities-Ride or Transport DC.

Mr. Blake responded that staff has been incorporating the knowledge gained from the Baltimore service into the Abilities-Ride plan, including the limit on the number of trips daily, the minimum fare, and the restricted service area. Additionally, riders will have more options in the Abilities-Ride service than the Baltimore Mobility service.

Dr. Posner recommended Abilities-Ride use next-day scheduling, with the exception of medical transportation and travel to/from buses, trains, or airports, which would require same-day scheduling.

Mr. Kent agreed with the recommendation, stating that would be a reasonable way to constrain costs. Abilities-Ride differs from Transport DC in that WMATA is attempting to leverage a network for more than just a few taxi companies. MetroAccess does not include same-day service because MetroAccess requires a lot of coordination since vehicles are coming from a central location. WMATA staff is requesting flexibility from the community as they find creative ways to serve customers.

Public Comments

Comments received were with regard to: operator and dispatch professionalism; an early drop off to a closed location; and ADA compliance for alternative services.

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

Dr. B Moore-Gwynn reminded the committee there would be no meetings of the AAC, subcommittees, or working groups during the month of August 2016.

Ms. Laios advised this information should be added to IVR messaging and given to MetroAccess Reservation agents to ensure prompt dissemination.

WMATA staff agreed with the recommendation and will disseminate the information.

Meeting adjourned at 5:53pm.