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Accessibility Advisory Committee

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: May 19, 2014

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Dr. Tapan Banerjee, Ms. Carolyn Bellamy, Ms. Heidi Case, Ms. Regina Lee, Ms. Mary Jane Owens, Dr. Phil Posner, and Dr. William Staderman.

Call to Order

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

Review of May 2014 Agenda

The MAS made a motion to change the order of agenda items, allowing the update on the Customer Guide to precede the other items. The agenda was approved with the amendment.

Review of April 2014 Meeting Minutes

Vice-Chair Rush requested that her affirmation of the customer comment regarding drivers not receiving information on the MDT when there is a trip insertion be added to the minutes. The minutes were approved with the amendment.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Kimberly Clark, Regional Vice President of Operations, MTM, reported that all public comments from the previous meetings have been addressed.

Janice Carpenter, Service Monitor, MetroAccess, reported the attendance at Mrs. Phillipine's senior housing residence in Oxon Hill.

MetroAccess Customer Guide (Update)

Allison Anderson, Operations Control Center Manager, MetroAccess, reported the ongoing work on the MetroAccess Customer Guide. She stated that suggestions from the AAC have been incorporated in the draft that was submitted to the AAC for review, and staff welcomes suggestions and comments on the draft.

Comments from the committee were:

Dr. Posner suggested that the Riders' Bill of Rights and the riders' responsibilities be in the first two pages of the Guide and address the No-Strand policy. He stated that the No-Strand policy was missing from the Riders' Bill of Rights, and that it should be stated and enforced. He agreed with others that riders need to be aware of their responsibilities and recommended that eligibility encourage new riders to pay close attention to the sections on Bill of Rights and Rider's Responsibilities.

Ms. Case commended staff on the information on page 10 regarding the pick-up window. She said that it was very comprehensive and the visual of the pick-up window is great. Ms. Case brought forth an issue with a pick-up window for a trip that she had. This issue was clarified explaining the difference between the pick-up window and the time that the customer is required to be available for pick-up.

Mr. Semelfort commented about the fare and service areas section, asking that the grandfathering process be placed in this section of the Guide. **He also asked if it were feasible to have a service area map.** Ms. Anderson stated that the grandfathering process is in the section labeled "frequently asked questions." Regarding the service area map, she said that because of periodic changes based on fixed-route service, this would not be feasible.

Ms. Lee asked about making exceptions to grandfathered customers who have been traveling to a location that becomes unavailable for travel for MetroAccess customers due to the elimination of a bus route.

Ms. Anderson stated that there would not be any further grandfathering. Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy and Planning, stated the purpose of the public hearings is to bring forth proposed closings of routes for customers to address at that time. He asked that if the Committee saw shortcomings in WMATA's outreach efforts, please bring it to our attention for possible corrections. Mr. Hayford, responding to Dr. Posner, stated that information related to public hearings is put on the IVR; they are published in the Washington Post newspaper; and are placed on the vehicles.

Dr. Posner stated that not all MetroAccess riders are aware of the public hearings. He stated that many of the MetroAccess riders do not have access to the internet, nor does the IVR announce public hearings for bus route changes. He said that WMATA knows whether there are hospitals, dialysis centers, and churches along a bus route and should consider this before closing a route. Dr. Posner also commented that businesses around National Harbor were considered when bus routes were changed. He asked that the same consideration be offered to the customers needing service for their health and well-being.

Dr. Banerjee commented that customer's expectation of WMATA, to ensure that information is communicated to the customer, is excessive. He stated that customers should be held responsible for obtaining information from the sources which are being utilized.

Ms. Case mentioned that a group called Project Action, who is comprised of individuals with cognitive and other disabilities, met with Title VI WMATA representatives who discussed options for individuals to obtain and update information for the disability community.

Ms. Rush questioned the decision to not grandfather any other customers as she said the customers on the bus routes along the Silver Line will be grandfathered.

Ms. Bellamy questioned that if the bus routes can be extended to Tyson's Corner, why bus routes in Southeast Washington, DC or Greenbelt are being eliminated. Customers cannot travel to the better dialysis centers due to the elimination of bus routes. She stated that many of the individuals on committee will not be able to ride MetroAccess in the next five years.

Mr. Semelfort requested that in the free rides for certified MetroAccess customers section there be a list of buses that do not accept the MetroAccess identification along with the list of buses that do accept the identification. Dr. Posner suggested that this be provided in bold lettering.

Ms. Rush commented on the seat belt requirement and waiver, customers need to be aware of the new seat belt waiver policy before the new Customer Guide is distributed.

Ms. Anderson stated that the current agenda item on the seatbelt policy will address Ms. Rush's comments.

Ms. Lee stated that the wording in the draft regarding whether the customer will receive a signed letter or a seatbelt waiver requires a second look. She asked if drivers were told to activate the camera (Drive Cam) when a customer refused to use the seatbelt. She said the draft speaks of customers being examined in Eligibility. She asked if Eligibility will have medical personnel for such examinations. She also said the Guide states that the requirement is that customers 7 years and under are to be in a car seat when traveling on MetroAccess. This is not the same in all of the jurisdictions and should be re-written to weight specifications.

Ms. Anderson asked that comments/questions pertaining to the seatbelt waiver be held until that segment of the agenda is presented.

Mr. Hamlin, Field Operations Manager, Office of MetroAccess Service, said that the policy is not consistent in the three jurisdictions; however, that particular section is consistent with all jurisdictions.

Mr. Semelfort asked that the section on fare payment policy be made bold to emphasize that customers must have exact change before boarding the vehicle if EZ-Pay was not utilized, and that not having fare will be a violation of the Abusive Behavior Policy.

A comment from the audience was read stating that some customers cannot read, what is done to reach out to those customers.

Mr. Hayford, Financial Operations Manager, Office of MetroAccess Service, stated that public meetings, IVR messages, and outreach events are all in an attempt to ensure customers remain aware of the information being disseminated by MetroAccess.

Ms. Anderson commented that the Customer Guide is in audio format on the Metro website and a CD of the Customer Guide can be requested. She stated that other accessible formats can be requested through the ADAP.

Ms. Case suggested that a cover letter should accompany the guide highlighting the changes that have been made. Ms. Anderson said that this would be taken under advisement.

Ms. Lee addressed page 10 regarding door-to-door service, and page 14, regarding driver assistance for customers stating that drivers will identify themselves to customers. She said taxis do not identify themselves or ask for the customer. **She asked that the information be provided in the Guide making customers aware that service is occasionally provided by a taxi provider.**

Mr. Omar Browne, Field Operations Manager, Office of MetroAccess Service, stated that taxi cab drivers are required to identify themselves and carry proper identification. They are required to perform the same duties that the MetroAccess van drivers provide. MetroAccess monitors this periodically to ensure they are following policy. If customers observe drivers not following the policy, they should report it to staff for retraining or corrective action.

Ms. Bellamy commented that customers need to know that they must pay their fare before boarding the vehicle, and they need to read through the Customer Guide in its entirety to familiarize themselves with MetroAccess policies. She said that she would read the Guide to a customer if requested.

Ms. Ray agreed with Ms. Bellamy regarding customers reading the Customer Guide, and with the comments by Ms. Lee regarding the taxi providers. She stated that the taxi protocol seems to be that they do not need to exit their vehicles. **She asked that Guide be sent out in alternate formats when requested.** Mr. Hayford asked if everyone who wanted to weigh in on the discussion regarding the Customer Guide draft had the opportunity to do so.

Ms. Anderson asked that any other comments be forwarded to her no later than May 23, 2014.

Dr. Posner made a motion to have a comprehensive explanation of the no-strand policy added to the Bill of Rights portion of the Customer Guide and be in the first two pages of the guide. The motion was approved by the MAS.

Ms. Bellamy and Ms. Ray requested that the no-strand policy include information regarding what would occur if a customer requests to leave the vehicle before they arrive at their destination, specifically if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

MetroAccess 20th Anniversary (Update)

Mr. Blake stated that the 20th anniversary of MetroAccess will be celebrated during the next month's MAS meeting. He said the first hour will be an abbreviated MAS meeting, followed by a celebration in the meeting room. Remarks by Mr. Kent and Mr. June will be made, and a possible open forum for members of the AAC. Dr. Banerjee requested that previous AAC members be invited to the celebration.

Ms. Ray requested an invite be extended to Ms. Francis H. Lowder who now resides in NC and is the only living member of the original AAC committee. She also requested an

invite for Mr. Dennis Cannon, and an honorable mention of Mr. Larry Pelkey, posthumously, who was very instrumental in developing MetroAccess.

MetroAccess Safety Policy (Seatbelt)

Mr. Hamlin addressed Ms. Lee stating that she was correct in stating that the driver is encouraged to utilize their Drive Cam camera under circumstances where there are incidents or customers refuses to use the posey belt.

Mr. Hamlin explained the MetroAccess securement policy stating that it is not a new policy but has been a long standing Metro/MetroAccess policy requiring that all passengers wear a seatbelt during transport. He commented that in the last year, there were a number of incidents on MetroAccess vehicles that led to passenger injuries in which the passenger was not wearing or was improperly wearing the seatbelt. Passengers are often placing the shoulder harness behind them.

In an effort to prevent these types of incidents, MetroAccess has decided to reissue the policy to all drivers emphasizing the requirement for each passenger to wear a seatbelt though out the duration of their trip.

In January 2014, MetroAccess made some necessary revisions to the policy strengthening some of the language. In an effort to comply with state seatbelt laws, language was added to the policy that allows passengers to be exempt from wearing either the shoulder harness or the lap belt. Exemptions can only be granted if documentation is obtained from a physician explaining the reason wearing a lap belt or shoulder harness would cause physical harm to the passenger. This process is handled by the Office of Eligibility and they must approve all exemptions. Once the exemption is granted, it is documented in the customer's file and the necessary information is placed in Trapeze thus being displayed on the driver's manifest/ranger.

The policy was issued to each driver who was then required to sign acknowledging receipt and understanding of the policy.

This information will be included in the new Customer Guide.

Comments/Questions from the Committee:

Ms. Ray asked how were customer's made aware of the stronger implementation and detail of the seatbelt policy. Mr. Hamlin stated that MetroAccess chose not to advertise or promote the policy as we want customers to be safe and utilize the seatbelts. The intent of the policy is to be an exception.

Dr. Banerjee asked who is responsible legally if he has a letter stating that he does not want to wear a seatbelt and there is an accident that injures him.

Ms. Case said that it was stated earlier that the policy was reissued when there were incidents as a result of customers not wearing the seatbelts properly. When it was reissued to drivers, the message should have been presented to the customer for an understanding as to why drivers were taking a stronger approach to the policy.

Ms. Bellamy asked what if the PCA is held to this seatbelt policy. **She asked if the Abusive Behavior Policy pertains to the PCA also.** Mr. Hamlin stated that all passengers are required to adhere to the policy. He addressed the Abusive Behavior Policy by stating that the policy does pertain to the PCA as well, and it is in the Customer Guide.

Ms. Lee quoted the policy from the previous version of the Customer Guide stating that it is not consistent with what is now being said. She stated the MetroAccess is now making changes and attempting to invoke a policy without written notification to the customers, or allowing time for customers to receive a waiver. **She also asked if there will be medical personnel in Eligibility to evaluate customers as is what is stated in the draft. She asked if the doctor is required to provide a signed letter or waiver.** Mr. Hamlin said that Mr. Frank Roth, Director of Eligibility Certification and Outreach, advised that if there is question about the documentation from the customer's physician, they will consult with that physician and if there is more clarification needed, Eligibility will consult with WMATA's medical staff. Mr. Hamlin stated that the wording will be corrected to state that a signed letter is required from the customer's physician.

Mr. Hayford said that everything said regarding the seatbelt policy will be taken into advisement, but that at this time MetroAccess cannot guarantee that the seatbelt policy will be changed until the Customer Guide has been approved internally.

Mr. Christopher Colbert, Operations Manager Administration, Office of Eligibility, commented that WMATA medical professionals are in an office near Metro headquarters and will provide medical consultations as needed.

Ms. Owens stated her concern with regard to individual's right of privacy between a customer and their physician. She said that she agrees that if she was granted the choice of traveling without a seatbelt and a policy change has occurred without sufficient notification, it is a questionable action in her mind.

Dr. Posner stated that the language is confusing. He asked if it is the lap belt or shoulder harness or both which can be waived. Dr. Posner stated that Metro needs to have the forms available for customers if this is a requirement.

Mr. Hamlin commented that a waiver can be obtained for both the lap belt and shoulder harness or one of either. Mr. Blake stated that Metro is erring on the side of safety by requiring customers to wear lap belts and shoulder harness unless a waiver is obtained.

A comment from the audience asked if the seatbelt waiver can be provided and/or displayed on the vehicle. Mr. Hamlin stated that MetroAccess is exploring means to display this information on the vehicle.

Ms. Ray asked when the new customer guide will be distributed. She made a motion that a seat belt policy memo of an opt-out choice be distributed to MetroAccess customers. Ms. Anderson said that MetroAccess would like to have it distributed by July 2014.

Ms. Owens stated that she would like assurance that a physician will not second guess her physician on the complexity of her physiology.

Mr. Hamlin stated that Mr. Roth will be consulted on the consultation with the WMATA medical staff in certain circumstances.

Ms. Bellamy commented on receiving waivers on wearing seatbelts saying that she is concerned that this waiver policy is extreme and will result in injuries.

Ms. Lee asked when the information regarding the seatbelt waiver will be provided to customers via IVR or other means. Mr. Blake said that customers will be notified immediately. Mr. Hamlin stated that staff will be discussed how to best make these notifications.

Public Comments

Comments were received with regard to: requests to leave the vehicle, trip scheduling, excessive time on the vehicle, the door to door should be optional, incentives for reservationists, seatbelt policy, no input on issues being raised in past meeting, courtesy call letting customer know vehicle will be late, trip movement, lack of communication from MetroAccess.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the May 2014 Complaint Resolution Report located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Meeting adjourned at 6:04pm.