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METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: November 16, 2015

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Ms. Darnise Bush, Mr. Edward McEntee, Mr. Charles Crawford, Ms. Marisa Laios, Dr. Tappan Banerjee, Mr. Elver Ariza-Silva, Ms. Carolyn Bellamy, and Dr. Philip Posner.

Call to Order

Vice-Chair Rush called the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting to order at 4:07pm.

Review of November 2015 Agenda

A review of the MAS work plan was added to the agenda in lieu of the MetroAccess Door to Door Program. The agenda was approved with the amendments.

Review of September and October 2015 Meeting Minutes

The September minutes were approved without amendments. A request was made to amend the phrasing of the motions in the October minutes and to add Dr. Banerjee as an attendee at the October meeting. The October minutes were approved with the amendments.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Ms. Jennifer Weber, Compliance Auditor, MTM, reported that all public comments from the previous meetings have been addressed.

Ms. Celisse Outlaw, Service Monitor, MetroAccess, reported her attendance at the National Federation of the Blind, National Harbor Chapter. Mr. David Shaffer, Access Policy Officer, ADAP, reported his attendance at the Disability Awareness Acquisition sponsored by the District of Columbia, the Disability Career Expo, and the District of Columbia Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind where he shared information about MetroAccess.

Dr. Posner briefly commented on the MetroAccess Subcommittee Performance Report, stating that the year-to-date performance measures are impressive. Between fiscal years 2015 and 2016 (year-to-date) there was an increase of 0.92% in ridership; the average weekday ridership increased slightly at 1.33%; and reservations had a slight increase at .45%, which suggests that the other modes of transportation are being utilized. He commented that collisions are down, but growth in on-time performance is slow and increased only by 1.89% from 92.42% to 94.31%. He commented that though on time performance increased only slightly, it is better than in past years.

Customer Service/Sensitivity

Mr. John Gray, General Manager, MV Transportation, and Mrs. Nicole Ridgeway-Reid, Training Manager, MV Transportation, began their presentation with an overview of MV Transportation and their departments. They then explained the management's need to understand how MetroAccess customers viewed the call center's customer service. They apologized for and acknowledged their shortcomings and the areas where improvement was needed. Statistics were provided outlining the gaps between the employees' perception of their customer service performance and those of the MetroAccess customers. Mr. Gray also provided the number of commendations received compared to the number of calls received weekly, which was not what they considered to be satisfactory. Lastly, they explained the average number of calls that require management coaching or discipline of staff to improve performance. Mr. Gray and Mrs. Ridgeway-Reid acknowledged that in the past MV's focus was business driven. They outlined ideas to take a more customer-centered approach. Their model is to:

- Pursue new customer service training tools;
- Engage employees with "on the spot" positive recognition for exemplary customer service;
- Implement a commendations recognition program;
- Foster positive working relationships between dispatchers and drivers by establishing a customer service committee where all involved can discuss improvements;
- Increase live monitoring of phone calls and radio communication;
- Listen to customer complaints brought forward at AAC meetings;
- Have service providers forward driver complaints to MV management for resolution ; and
- Have management and supervisor staff promote customer service excellence by example.

To measure their success rate in the future with the proposed changes, they will look for a decrease in complaints, an increase in commendations, and feedback from WMATA and the AAC.

Comments from the MAS

Mr. Semelfort suggested looking at other transit agencies' models. He stated that in New York City the dispatch staff utilize and follow a standard script.

Mr. Gray stated that MV dispatch staff have a script that they should follow. Based on customer feedback, the script is not being followed as expected.

Ms. Bush suggested dispatch travel with a driver to experience what occurs on a daily basis in the vehicle. She also suggested that the response time of a driver attempting to contact a dispatch agent be observed.

Mr. Gray commented on the "Walk a Mile" program that was established by MV in the past, which allowed the dispatcher to understand what the driver experiences in a day and vice-versa. Mr. Gray acknowledged that a refresher may be needed from time to time.

Dr. Banerjee stated that there should be a recorded system to monitor the behavior of the dispatch staff. When he has requested to speak with a supervisor he is told that one is not available.

Mr. Gray said that all calls are recorded and that if a particular call is brought to management's attention, they can listen to the call. A manager and supervisor are scheduled twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week. If customers are being told a supervisor is not available, then discussions and training with managers and supervisors need to occur to remind them of their roles and responsibilities.

Ms. Laios stated that she has personally noticed the rudeness of the dispatch agents.

Mr. Gray acknowledged her frustration.

Mr. McEntee commented that dispatch will to send a call to the supervisor. He also stated that he feels that dispatch agents should ride along with a driver. He expressed his concerns with the scheduling of trips and being driven many miles away from customer destinations. Mr. Crawford suggested motivating staff with occasional reinforcement instead of constant reinforcement, and not monetarily.

Mr. Gray thanked him for the suggestions.

Mr. Semelfort read three comments from the public. The customer stated that they stopped making complaints, as it does no good. They also said that drivers are threatened by dispatch agents when the driver is unable to answer the radio. The second comment was that disability sensitivity training should only be taught by persons with disabilities. The final comment from the public was asking how MV planned to address the dispatch rudeness toward drivers.

Mr. Gray acknowledged having heard about drivers being threatened by dispatch agents. He stated that an agent is currently on administrative leave for such behavior. Mrs. Ridgeway-Reid commented stating that she understood the suggestion that sensitivity training should be taught by someone with a disability. She said that she has a slight hearing loss and is able to share her experience in the training with staff. Mr. Gray said that the radio script for both dispatch agents and drivers is not being utilized. He stated that it requires dispatchers establishing a relationship with the drivers.

Dr. Posner said that he visited the call center and understands the stress that the call center staff is under. He suggested shortening shifts; providing a quiet room where staff can go to de-stress; having a button that an average dispatcher can push when they are in distress and a specialist more equipped to handle stressful calls can take over; and rotating the specialists occasionally. He suggested utilizing the model Arlington Star uses which informs customers via text message or phone call about how many miles away their vehicle is. This would take the human element out of the equation. Lastly, he commented on scheduling, stating that he has observed several

vehicles taking customers from the same pick-up location going in the same direction and within a couple minutes from each other's destination. He also suggested that *Waze*, the traffic and navigation app, be utilized for real time traffic information.

Mr. Gray agreed that scheduling could perform better. MV has a quiet room that agents may utilize. When staff are found to be stressed or frustrated, management will urge them to take a break for time to calm down. Mr. June commented on the GPS systems stating that they are on all vehicles and the information is in the call center for use by dispatch managers, supervisors and agents. The District of Columbia metropolitan area is one of the nation's worst traffic areas. He expressed concern with providing (for estimated time of arrival) the distance a vehicle is away from a customer due to the uncertainty of local traffic. Providing that information to a customer will give a false perception of how long it will be before the vehicle arrives. Work is in progress to integrate a program into the current GPS systems that would provide a real time traffic overlay. Once that integration is complete, the customer will be able to utilize and obtain information directly. MetroAccess will be pioneering a real-time information program, as no other paratransit agency in the nation yet offers it.

Mr. Ariza-Silva said that there is an increase in riders that do not speak English. He suggested having more staff that can speak other languages.

Mr. Gray agreed.

Ms. Bellamy suggested incorporating an aptitude test for new employees, allowing low performers in the call center to attend the MAS meetings. She also suggested that hiring young adults and giving them power via supervisor and management positions is not correct, as much of the time they are not mature enough.

Mr. Gray said that they are looking to hire people with good attitudes.

Ms. Rush thanked MV for their honesty and acknowledging their shortcomings. She said that she is upset to hear dispatchers disrespecting the drivers. She urged everyone, customers, dispatch agents, and drivers to get along and work together.

Mr. Semelfort asked if MV provided a mental health wellness program.

Mrs. Ridgeway-Reid stated that MV has an Employee Assistance Program and staff is encouraged to call when they have issues.

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that when customers call because of an issue they have with their transportation, it is a complaint. He stated that customers do not have access to Metro or MetroAccess staff as the MAS does during the MAS meetings.

Work plan review

Mr. Semelfort read the topics currently on the work plan. Ms. Bellamy is interested in hearing more on safety concerns regarding seatbelts and seatbelt waivers. She said

that the topic of safety has been moved back on the work plan and she feels that it needs to be addressed sooner. The other topic that needs to be addressed now is the grandfathering process and its impact on the service and the system.

Mr. June asked for additional details regarding the topics on the work plan.

Dr. Posner stated that Ms. Bellamy is referring to the federal regulations for seatbelts and the impact of speed without seatbelts. He requested information from an insurance agency that provides those measurements.

Mr. June commented that the seatbelt waiver was introduced to comply with State law. It was not an endorsement of waivers by MetroAccess per se, but we are required to comply.

Dr. Posner stated that offering a demonstration of what the risk is by not wearing a shoulder harness gives full consent.

Mr. June stated that there is specific language on the form that the doctor is required to sign speaking to the seriousness of not wearing the shoulder harness.

Ms. Bellamy commented about who is signing off on the waivers. Ms. Bush stated that the language in the seatbelt waiver needs to be reviewed. She said that Metro takes no responsibility if injury occurs and she thinks it is too broad. Dr. Posner provided a scenario about persons living in the same home who may have been grandfathered, but another individual in the home who was not in need or of age to ride MetroAccess and is now in need but cannot be grandfathered. He also commented that there is an issue when there is a route change/discontinued and customers are affected and not offered grandfathering. Ms. Bellamy suggested a working group for grandfathering.

The MAS suggested that safety protocols during an incident; the seatbelt waiver; and proper lift procedures be presented at the next meeting. Additional work plan topics will also be discussed at the next meeting.

Public Comments

Comments were received with regard to seat belt waivers; instability on the vehicle lift; collecting fares outside of vehicle; issues with Trapeze routing; changing of rules; a customer being put off the vehicle in the rain; non-compassionate dispatchers; and drivers being told not to speak to customers regarding issues.

Comments from the MAS

Ms. Bush commented about collecting fare prior to boarding the vehicle. She said she feels unsafe exchanging money with the operator outside the vehicle. She also stated not enough customers were aware they could share commendations with Customer Service in addition to complaints.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the November 2015 Complaint Resolution Report located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Meeting adjourned at 6:02pm.