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## Accessibility Advisory Committee

### **METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: December 16, 2019**

In attendance: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Co-Chair), Darnise Bush, Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Philippa Mezile, Doris Ray, Patrick Sheehan, and Phil Posner (Remote Participation).

#### **Call to Order**

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

#### **Review of Agenda and Meeting Minutes from Prior Meeting**

The Meeting Agenda was approved as amended.

An update on a previously discussed customer matter was requested to be presented.

The November 18, 2019 Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

#### **Customer Service and Outreach Report**

Carlton Brown, Quality Assurance Administrative Services Manager, MTM, reported all customer concerns were investigated and follow up was performed.

Allison Anderson, Operations Manager, MetroAccess, reported Brigid Doherty, Travel Trainer, Office of Eligibility, visited the blind center in Northeast, District of Columbia. Some patrons had further questions about MetroAccess. Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, will arrange for a MetroAccess representative to visit the center.

#### **Michael Wilson and Rush Awards**

##### *Michael Wilson Award:*

The Michael Wilson Award was presented to Harold Gilchrist, Operator, Challenger Transportation, for having perfect attendance, no customer complaints, and no accidents. Mr. Gilchrist thanked the committee for the award and stated it is a blessing to be able to help others.

##### *Rush Award:*

The Rush Award was presented to Michael Lane, Operator, TransDev. Chair Semelfort read a brief bio: Mr. Lane joined TransDev in 2015, he is friendly, and safety is his priority. Ms. Rush stated Mr. Lane has picked her up many times and the Rush Award is to thank him for the service. Mr. Lane thanked her for the award and said he enjoys helping riders.

#### **Amended Item: Previously Discussed Matter - Update**

Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated we have ensured that all MetroAccess vehicles have paper and pen on board so that deaf customers can communicate with the drivers. The complaint of a deaf customer mentioned in the last meeting was investigated and the Quality Assurance Office has performed a follow up with customer's guardian. Mr. Brown stated that a couple of items were investigated: the level of communication

provided by the operator, and the overall communication to that customer. The customer and her family were contacted with a fruitful conversation about our process, what our steps are, and then the potential next steps. The leadership team of MetroAccess has ensured that all the vehicles carry with them paper and pen to communicate with deaf riders. We were able to do what was needed and take away the positive in the right direction. Although perfection cannot be promised, but it is moving in the right direction.

### **MetroAccess On-Time Performance Update**

Mr. Blake provided an update on MetroAccess on-time performance (OTP). In May, the OTP was 86%. Afterwards we made some progress however, in September, the OTP dropped back to 86%. In October, the OTP was higher, at 88%. In November, the OTP was 90.16%. For this month, as of yesterday, the OTP was 91.49%, but not sure it will finish that high. For the day, as of the time of this report, the OTP is 94%, which may change by the end of the day. We are making adjustments in an effort to yield higher and sustainable results. Mr. Blake said he constantly monitors the OTP. This is an effort is to maintain the OTP while we continue to transition into a shared-ride for almost every trip.

### **Abilities-Ride Providers Update (Ride with Via)**

Mr. Blake introduced new service provider for the Abilities-Ride program, Ride with Via. Pooja Patel, Operations Principal, Via Transportation, shared information about their service. It is a curb-to-curb, on-demand, and ride-sharing service. The customer can be informed of the scheduled route and they can track the vehicle. Currently, Via operates in the District of Columbia, Arlington County, and the City of Alexandria. To book trips, customers do not need to have a smart phone or download an application (app). Ms. Mezile took a trip with Via to the meeting today and was asked to share her experience. Ms. Mezile stated the driver was very personable and accommodating. When she received the message of her ride arrival, due to the shape of the building the driver could not be seen, he was around the corner. With the guidance from Ms. Mezile, the driver came to her location for her pick up and dropped her off at the side of the building, as per her preference. She appreciated receiving text alerts and ride updates.

A customer asked about the cost of this service. Mr. Blake stated for the base fare of \$5, a customer can travel 5.5 miles on Via. Another customer stated not all customers have smartphones and his preference is to speak with a representative on the phone.

Ms. Patel stated customers do not need a smartphone for their service as long as the customer is able to make phone calls and get information. Ms. Mezile asked about screening of the drivers. Ms. Patel stated all the drivers must go through background checks before they get on their platform. Afterwards, they do have a robust plan to handle any issues. If they ever get a complaint, they do follow up and if needed, will remove that driver from their platform. Ms. Coles asked about modes of payment, the vehicles used, and about the maintenance. Ms. Patel stated it is credit card only. The fleet of vehicles are driver partners with certain requirements, for example it must be four doors and no older than 2010. The vehicles must pass their minimum maintenance

requirements. If a complaint is filed for a dirty or an odor in the car, they would ask the driver to comply with the cleanliness level or they can no longer drive on Via platform.

Vice-Chair Rush asked if Via has wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV). Ms. Patel stated they currently have two WAVs during the day-time and one during the evening/night hours. Vice-Chair Rush stated MetroAccess customers make the decisions for the same day trip. Chair Semelfort asked if drivers get ratings in terms of feedback from customers. Ms. Patel stated they do have the ability to rate drivers out of the five stars, as well as provide written feedback. The feedback ranges from drivers, customer experience, and about the vehicle. For any concerns received, Via would ask the drivers to come in for a meeting to understand the problem and find a resolution. Ms. Ray asked about the vehicle used for the WAV. Ms. Patel stated a Toyota Sienna is the vehicle used for the WAV.

Ryan Sullivan, General Manager, Via DC Operations, stated they are in active conversations to expand the WAVs. Via has many leasing partners in various cities and they are planning on leasing in the DC area, as well. Mr. Blake confirmed that through leasing and other partners, Via is looking to expand the WAVs and asked what type of assurances are being taken to ensure the WAVs remain available. Mr. Sullivan stated they are paying the drivers on an hourly basis. Mr. Blake clarified that the drivers are being paid to be out on the road and they do not pick and chose when they opt or not to pick up passengers. Ms. Ray asked about the website being accessible for customer feedback. Mr. Sullivan stated for feedback, customers can submit through an application, via email, or as Ms. Patel mentioned that they are setting up a live support line that can take customer feedback. Chair Semelfort thanked the Via team for sharing information.

### **Silver Cab and Regency Taxi:**

Hossein Khorsha, Silver Cab, and Crissy, Regency Taxi, joined the MAS meeting today.

Chair Semelfort stated Silver Cab started technological improvements as of October 1<sup>st</sup>, and customers can get updates on their rides. Mr. Khorsha stated during his last visit to the MAS meeting, he received complaints about dirty vehicles. He provided an update that they inspect the vehicles bi-weekly. Now they have a team that inspects the vehicles randomly by going out rather than drivers coming in for scheduled inspections. The other complaint he received was about efficiency. They have increased the quality of service by contacting customers by phone and text. The customers may receive estimated time of arrival based on Google. When customers receive the text, there is a link in the text message that takes the user to a page and provides details of the trip that updates every 20 seconds.

Mr. Semelfort provided a concern of staff who could not do anything about securing customers using wheelchairs. Mr. Khorsha stated drivers go through training and part of it is how to secure customers. Chair Semelfort shared an incident where his reservation was not made. He called Silver cab and was transferred to dispatcher. He should not have to go through this for a trip reservation. Mr. Khorsha stated they are working on

increasing staff and many are going through training. The trainees are not supposed to answer phones until they are paired with a trainer and it is mandatory for operators to state their operator number when answering the phones.

Mr. Sheehan asked if there can be a change made in the process of Regency Taxi. At the time of Abilities-Ride reservation, he informs that he is visually impaired. When the ride arrives, he gets an automated call whereas he would prefer to talk to the driver directly and tell them exactly where he is, especially when drivers are not at the correct location. Chrissy stated the drivers have a device where they press a button that generates the call upon arrival. If the driver is unable to find a customer, they will call the office, the office will call the customer, and conference everyone on the same call, if needed. Currently, there is no method of driver contacting the customer directly due to IT issues. Mr. Sheehan stated that is too complicated. It would be more efficient for the customer to know the vehicle are a few minutes away, and when the driver arrives, communicate directly with the driver. Chair Semelfort stated when he took a trip on Regency in summer, he used an app and it gave him an option to contact the driver directly and asked if it is not available on the phone platform. Chrissy stated they are working towards providing phone numbers of the customers to the drivers.

A customer stated he and his wife both use Regency extensively. He has filed several complaints and Regency has made substantial improvements, leading him to recommend to Ms. Rush to award them with the Rush Award. The supervisors have helped him tremendously. As per his experience, Regency and Barwood have different communication levels. Both companies should provide the same level of communication and provide the ability of speaking with the drivers directly. The international reservationists are not always truthful and are not able to do what is needed. They will say they are doing something even though they are not actually fulfilling the promised action. The drivers need orientation to assist people with disabilities. Chrissy stated we are working diligently to improve service for customers. One of those efforts include more training for drivers. The concerns are not overlooked and are addressed immediately.

Mr. Dancy asked if drivers have pens and paper for deaf individuals to communicate and added that it is very important for the drivers to make eye contact with the customers. Chrissy stated most drivers should have paper and pen in the vehicle for communication purposes with deaf customers. If a driver is not equipped with one, then customers should inform the management. Regarding the eye contact, she will bring that up to the team. Mr. Korsha stated for the past six months all the Silver Cab drivers have had paper and pens in vehicles, as it was mentioned in a previous MAS meeting.

Ms. Coles stated a concern of another MetroAccess customer with Silver Cab. The ride picked up the customer very late. Chair Semelfort asked Silver Cab is doing for MetroAccess trips given to them that are late. Mr. Korsha stated they are now paying drivers at a loss to stay in specific areas that are not in high demand. Mr. Blake stated since the trip mentioned was a MetroAccess trip, it will be investigated. He asked the OCC

manager how are trips that are given to taxi contracts monitored when running late. The OCC Manager stated the MetroAccess trips that are given to taxi contracts cannot be monitored by the OCC. When a customer calls and reports their ride has not arrived within the window, then they will contact the taxi contractor and get an update. If it turns out that the taxi is running extremely late, the trip at that time may get moved to an alternate vehicle. Mr. Blake stated there needs to be a protocol established for the OCC to monitor taxi contracted trips. He then asked Regency what they do in case the MetroAccess trips assigned to them are late. Chrissy stated they contact the customer and inform them of the delay. Mr. Blake asked at what point do they inform MetroAccess about the ride running late. Chrissy stated they can inform MetroAccess going forward.

Chair Semelfort asked Mr. Blake if the taxi trips are part of the statistics as being excessively late or missed trips. Mr. Blake stated any MetroAccess trips provided to taxi contracts are part of the statistics of being excessively late or missed trips. Chair Semelfort stated there seems to be lack of accountability for MetroAccess trips given to taxi companies. Ms. Coles stated customers are not able to get a taxi from the Walmart located in Waldorf. Mr. Korsha stated they are placing people on payroll to ensure there are drivers in areas where there is a lack of request. The process is underway.

Ms. Bush stated the calls that she has received under a pilot are helpful. The customer gets an automated call one half hour before the ride and asks if they still want to take the ride, followed by an option for the customer to speak with an operator. Mr. Blake stated MetroAccess cancellations range between 10% to 15% daily. The taxi companies are ensuring the drivers do not have an unutilized trip. It is more challenging for the taxi companies to have cancellations built-in as part of doing business. They are trying the pre-arrival calls in this pilot. Chair Semelfort shared an experience when he was at the location where his ride did not arrive, and he was labeled as a no show. Mr. Korsha stated the standard procedure is to contact the customer before no-showing them. Chair Semelfort stated he has experienced several similar incidents and he is informing them, so that Silver Cab can improve upon the service provided.

### **Public Comments**

A customer provided her concerns of a MetroAccess rider behavior where another customer was grabbing on to her and her belongings. The customer also stated the taxi driver refused to go on a military base to drop her off.

A second customer shared her concerns about a female driver's attitude, using her cell phone, not listening to her, not making eye-contact, and not having paper and pen. The customer was on the vehicle for 3 hours and she called the police. Mr. Blake stated there has been an investigation into this incident. This was an overall bad experience, but the driver has been followed up, and there has also been a follow up with the customer.

Mr. Dancy stated what kind of training are we providing for people who are deaf and deaf-blind. Mr. Blake stated we provided tools on every vehicle for communication and

we provide continuous training. He could not go into the details of the investigation of the incident mentioned by the second customer, however, we will have on-going training.

A deaf customer continued to interrupt the meeting and continued to use inappropriate language. Mr. Blake stated he understands the interpreters are doing their job and would appreciate if the curse words expressed by the customer, are not repeated by the interpreters. Vice-Chair Rush stated she understands the customer's pain however, she was given 3 minutes to speak and she will not interrupt the meeting while others speak.

A customer commended MetroAccess, the Committee members, and everyone who helps the customers as best as they can.

A customer echoed some of the sentiments of the third customer and stated there is room for improvement, for instance, WMATA's website needs improvement. He commended Mr. Blake for all he does and how quickly he responds to any inquiry made.

A customer stated her concern about cab service as they would not bring her to this meeting since it is not a medical appointment. Mr. Blake clarified the customer is referring to Transport DC and Metro Office is not a medical appointment.

Vice-Chair Rush talked about the upcoming public hearings in January 2020 and urged everyone to attend. Mr. Blake stated as an effort to assist customers, MetroAccess will continue to service the current areas even if bus service changes, for two years.

**Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.**