



# AAC

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

### **Meeting Minutes: February 19, 2019**

#### **Attendees**

Present: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush, Tappan Banerjee, Carolyn Bellamy, Darnise Bush, Charlie Crawford, Melanie Jackson, Phillippa Mezile, and Patrick Sheehan.  
Remote participation – Phil Posner.

#### **Call to Order**

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

Chair Semelfort started off the introductions of the Committee members.

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

The agenda was approved.

The January 22, 2019, Meeting Minutes were approved as amended. Chair Semelfort will send the amendment via email.

#### **Customer Service & Outreach Reports**

Carlton Brown, MTM, stated that the public comments were reviewed, and customers were contacted. Chair Semelfort asked for an update on a specific customer concerns.

David Shaffer, Ombudsman, ADA Policy and Planning, stated there were no outreach events for this month due to vacation and the weather.

The staff and customers were introduced at this time.

#### **Michael Wilson Award and Rush Award**

There was no Michael Wilson Award this month.

The Rush Award was presented to Andrea Mahoney, Dispatch Supervisor, MV Transportation. Chair Semelfort read a bio of Ms. Mahoney. She has served in a variety of roles since July 2010. Ms. Mahoney shows empathy, provides the utmost level of respect and service to customers. Ms. Mahoney has made the Operations Control Center (OCC) a warm place to work. Ms. Rush stated the Rush award is a thank you from the customers for making the system work. Ms. Bellamy stated Ms. Mahoney is a very nice lady, and she has always been a caring employee for her customers.

#### **MetroAccess New Vehicles:**

There was a discussion about the re-introduction of sedans in the MetroAccess fleet.

Mr. Blake stated Metro is highly interested in re-introducing sedans into the MetroAccess fleet. The plan is to buy 175 sedans this year. That would be 23% of the fleet. The goal is never to exceed more than 30% of the fleet. For a vehicle to be considered the vehicle must be on a current state or a local government contract, have fuel efficiency of at least

40 miles per gallon in city driving, and have at least 36 inches of rear leg room. Three vehicles are currently under consideration: Ford Fusion Hybrid, Chevy Malibu Hybrid, and Honda Insight Hybrid. These vehicles will not be customized or reconfigured, they will be new off the lot vehicles, then would be fitted with the necessary equipment to facilitate paratransit public transportation.

Ms. Rush provided her feedback on the Ford Fusion that was viewed before the meeting and stated that this purchase is important, however, the notice provided for viewing the vehicle was insufficient, and the model displayed was from 2010. Mr. Rush stated she was insulted by seeing this vehicle, it is not an appropriate vehicle for MetroAccess riders.

Mr. Blake stated the intent was not to insult. The Ford Fusion has not changed significantly, except that the 2018-2019 model has more leg room than the model she sat in. This sedan was shown because Metro has this vehicle. For the March AAC and MAS meetings, we are trying to get the two other vehicles on location as well. The purpose of going with sedans is to ensure our fleet age remains low while being able to reconfigure the existing vans and giving the time necessary for the AAC to provide feedback for the design of the new vans.

Ms. Bellamy stated that she was insulted and expressed her strong dissatisfaction about re-introducing sedans and the existing newer vans in the MetroAccess fleet. With the size of the viewed sedan, the drivers and customers must be a certain size. Money is being saved at the cost of MetroAccess customers by providing inadequate vehicles. The concept of adding sedans in the fleet is sending MetroAccess back almost 15 years.

Mr. Blake stated that sedans are used by other paratransit services successfully, as had Metro. An overwhelming percentage of the customers will still be on the vans, but most customers will prefer being transported in sedans. Having sedans will help maintain the age of the fleet, provide flexibility to reconfigure the existing vans as they will be in the fleet for a few years, and provide time to design a new van.

Chair Semelfort stated if only two customers will ride in the back seat of sedans and no customer in the front seat, how would a customer with a service animal and a PCA travel in a sedan? Mr. Blake stated generally the service animal is right by the foot of the person, therefore the customer and a PCA should easily fit in the back seat of the sedan. If there is an accommodation issue, the customer will be accommodated, as is being done now. Chair Semelfort stated because MetroAccess is a shared ride program, when you have a person sitting on one side of the vehicle, how would you get the second passenger on the other side – if the person on board refuses to move to the other side or is unable to do so. Mr. Blake stated you walk, with the escort of the driver, who uses the cone and other safety procedures. Customers are doing the same with the Abilities-Ride. The advantage for MetroAccess sedans is that customers will be escorted by the driver. Sedans are fuel efficient, easier to maneuver, easier to drive, and take less parking space. Vans get 14 mph, have more sitting space, and take more parking space, but they are not as easy to maneuver.

Ms. Bush asked if a customer needs assistance, would drivers help? For example, give their arm if a customer needs assistance? Mr. Blake stated yes, drivers are supposed to assist now. If they are not doing so, please let us know. Ms. Bush provided her feedback that Chevy Malibu has more space in comparison to the other two considered vehicles. Mr. Blake stated his commitment is to allow the committee members and the public to experience all the considered vehicles, and that he hopes the dealers will have the vehicles available.

Ms. Bellamy inquired whether Mr. Blake was ready to buy the vehicles and not telling the AAC members? Mr. Blake stated that he has decided to re-introduce sedans into the MetroAccess fleet, however, he has not decided on a vehicle. He is seeking the AAC's feedback and just heard a recommendation for Chevy Malibu.

Dr. Posner stated the vehicles under consideration are because of fuel economy, leg room and head room, and asked about the level of fuel economy. Dr. Posner stated the leg room is based upon the position of the front seat(s). The mentioned leg-room is the maximum space. Manufacturer's head-room varies depending upon the vehicle, and the seats are at different levels. For example, Honda seats are low to the ground. You may have to bend down to get into a Honda. Ford and Chevy seats are higher and easier to slide in and out of the vehicles. Dr. Posner also offered to visit different dealerships and try the vehicles, in case there is difficulty in bringing them to the meetings. Dr. Posner recommended that if the request for purchase (RFP) goes out, dealers can be asked to donate vehicles. For example, Koons may be delighted to give a bunch of Toyotas. We get donation and better cars, and Koons gets advertisement. Dr. Posner recommended to look at the fuel economy and the seat height along with the way doors open. Some doors open only 45 degrees. For many customers, wide opening of doors is important.

Mr. Blake stated the points are well raised and will be in the minutes. All the dealerships considered are local. The recommendation for receiving donations will have to be reviewed further. The purchase of the sedans will not be through an RFP, but through an already established state or local government contract.

Dr. Posner asked if all models are 2019? Mr. Blake clarified that except Ford Fusion, which may be 2018, the other two are 2019 models. Dr. Posner stated 2018 Ford Fusion has more head room than 2019.

Mr. Crawford shared his experience of the sedan viewed that he was happy, so was his dog. However, if his wife decided to travel with her service-dog then the space will be an issue. Mr. Crawford stated that he supports the matter of re-introducing sedans and that Chevy Malibu has more space in comparison to the other sedans under consideration.

Ms. Mezile stated we should not have to run around to dealers to try different cars. For a customer using wheelchair riding a sedan, there may be a possibility of wheel chairs being damaged. Mr. Blake stated it will be reviewed case by case. Ms. Mezile asked why were the sedans discontinued in the first place? Mr. Blake stated customers were calling and requesting to have sedans only. That is one reason the new vans are a bit

smaller. Mr. Blake reminded Chair Semelfort quoting his predecessor: it is the goal of MetroAccess to have an all accessible fleet. That it is a nice idea, but is not required to provide the paratransit service. There will be many customers who will be very happy to ride the sedans.

Chair Semelfort presented a scenario: a customer's ride arrives, but it is the wrong type of vehicle and it takes 2 hours to get another ride. Mr. Blake stated customers' requests will be fulfilled. He is working closely with the OCC to continue to improve. If someone cannot ride a sedan, his commitment is not to send a sedan for that customer.

Dr. Banerjee provided feedback as a wheelchair user. Manual wheelchairs can be loaded in sedans however, it must have big trunk space and a foldable wheelchair. He uses a transfer board and slides from wheelchair to car. Front seats can be adjusted. Clearance of the door is needed. Some of the new vehicles have doors that open upward like sports car doors. Having sedans in the MetroAccess fleet is a good idea, but it must be the right model. Mr. Blake asked Dr. Banerjee to send information of the model recommended.

Dr. Posner asked about the contract, is it a state or a local contract? Does that include contracts to all the local jurisdictions? Dr. Posner clarified they might be able to make purchases under the State of Maryland or Virginia, which might be better than a WMATA contract. Mr. Blake stated one vehicle is under Maryland, one is under Montgomery County, however, none of those are under a WMATA contract.

Ms. Jackson stated the Chevy Malibu is a larger vehicle thus it can accommodate taller persons. Ms. Jackson further said that service animals may not always want to sit on the floor. Mr. Blake stated today he has received three recommendations for Chevy Malibu.

Ms. Bellamy stated we are discriminating against the drivers. In smaller vehicles, they end up sitting too close to the steering-wheel because customers do not want drivers' seat too far back. The AAC was not aware how the newer vans were until they were already purchased. Since drivers can lift only 40 pounds and manual wheelchairs weigh more than that, how is a person with manual wheelchair who can transfer, going to be able to use a sedan? This is done to save money from MetroAccess by cutting corners to make the budget. MetroAccess customers got duped with the grand-father program. The new customers are going to be affected adversely with Metro service changes.

Mr. Blake disagreed because sedans were tried in Baltimore successfully and stated that Ms. Bellamy raised a good point, it is for efficiency. Drivers just like customers, will have the option. If they can drive sedans, they can opt for sedans. If they can drive vans, then they will have the option to drive vans. We are making MetroAccess efficient public transportation.

Ms. Rush asked when do you intend to buy the vehicles. Mr. Blake stated if everything works out, the absolute goal and hope will be to make the final decision by May.

Ms. Bush likes the idea of a sedan and stated that we should not discriminate against the people who like sedans and who do fit in them.

Mr. Blake stated these are off the lot vehicles that will be put in with equipment (the Rangers, GPS, interior and exterior cameras) to service. Customers will enjoy riding the sedans.

**Abilities-Ride Updates:**

Chair Semelfort stated that he sent all of his questions to the Procurement Office. Two days later he received an email from Mr. Blake with the document attached instead of answers to his questions. Why did he not receive responses and when will they be posted on the WMATA website? Mr. Blake stated that he provided his answers to the procurement staff and they will respond to him. The staff is on vacation this week and they will respond upon return and post the responses on the website as well.

Chair Semelfort motioned a recommendation to have service-providers' information added to the new MetroAccess Customer Guide. Mr. Blake stated he supports the idea of an insert with information about the service-providers as they may change periodically.

Dr. Posner recommended that with the change of the providers, MetroAccess vans could have seat-drops to give information on the new companies as it happens. If a company is added in Virginia, MetroAccess vehicles going to Virginia may have those seat drops.

Chair Semelfort tabled the discussion to be carried over to the AAC March meeting. The new Customer Guide will have an insert with the following information: area to be serviced, contact information, hours of operations, and mode of payment accepted.

**Other Items (MetroAccess Scheduling and Trip Time):**

Ms. Rush stated customers need to be educated about MetroAccess trip time and explained that it is comparable to the fixed route trip time. Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, asked if this is a recommendation during reservations for the trip time to be specified? Mr. Blake stated MetroAccess is a shared ride program and trip time needs to be better explained to customers.

Mr. Sheehan asked is there a proposal to put that average time as part of the trip summary or the reminder call? Chair Semelfort stated we would discuss it as part of the work plan.

Ms. Bellamy stated when customers end up going past their locations for another customer, that is not efficient scheduling. Some customers are late or even miss their appointments. If a person misses their dialysis time, they must wait until an open time. On top of it, the customer's return trip becomes an issue. Mr. Blake stated routing and scheduling will be reviewed. At the same time, we want to be passionate in explaining to customers that this is a public transportation and explain how trip length is calculated.

**Public Comment:**

A customer asked for an update on his reports about the incidents at the Union Station. The customer stated it was not right that Metro employees laughed at him. Mr. Shaffer stated that he is following up on both reports. Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD) is investigating, as well as the Rail Department, and that they will update him. Mr. Blake stated we agree, it is not appropriate, and Mr. Shaffer is reviewing the matter.

A customer had a question about MetroAccess ride schedules, which was partially answered by an earlier committee discussion. She lives in Virginia and works in Bethesda, however, her trip to work took her via Washington DC. As a result, she got late to work. Mr. Blake stated we will look at the specific trip and see what happened. We are reviewing the trips and are taking a much more hands on approach. We must have shared rides in a more sensible and efficient way with better scheduling.

**Inclement Weather:**

Ms. Bellamy asked about MetroAccess service for Wednesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>, as inclement weather was in the forecast. Mr. Blake stated MetroAccess will be on return trips only after 4 am. For anyone scheduled to leave home after 4 am, those trips have already been canceled. Ms. Bellamy stated why are we going out at 4 in the morning? It is dangerous. Mr. Blake stated as per the ADA, if buses are out servicing, then MetroAccess is going to provide service. Ms. Bellamy asked if there were many people with scheduled trips after 4 am? Mr. Blake stated it is about a couple of hundred, and they will be encouraged to come back sooner.

Chair Semelfort emphasized that customers should not use the Abilities-Ride program for snow days as taxis do not have snow equipped vehicles and they do not provide service.

Ms. Rush asked if the OCC will be open tomorrow? Ms. Bellamy asked what about the employees' safety? Ms Williams-Hall stated we must have dispatchers available for the return trips. The call center will remain open and the service providers will have arrangements for their employees.

Dr. Banerjee stated safety is a high ADA priority. You may want to advise customers if they go out they may not come back or come back very late.

**Ride-Along Program:**

Ms. Rush shared information about the Ride-Along Program and stated she will be doing the fixed-route with the Board Member Mr. Crawford. Mr. Blake stated Ms. Rush is going to be riding the fixed route to show the Board Member any challenges she may face.

Chair Semelfort asked when are we going to have a Board Member come to the AAC? Mr. Blake stated when Ms. Rush does the fixed route with the Board Member that may be a good time to invite him.

**General Information:**

Ms. Bush asked if WMATA or MetroAccess has anything to do with Transport DC as far as the oversight is concerned? Mr. Blake stated we have a partnership with Transport DC however, we do not do oversight.

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