



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: January 21, 2020

Attendees

Present: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Darnise Bush, Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Phillippa Mezile, Patrick Sheehan, and Phil Posner (Remote Participation).

Call to Order

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

Chair Semelfort started with the introductions of the Committee members and staff.

Review of Agenda & Minutes from Prior Meeting

The Meeting Agenda was approved as amended. The topic of Abilities-Ride Providers was moved in place of the Michael Wilson and the Rush Awards. The topic of Budget Discussion by the Committee was added to the agenda and placed prior to the topic of Policy and Procedure – Safety Issue.

The December 16, 2019, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

Customer Service & Outreach Reports

Carlton Brown, MTM, stated the public comments from prior meeting were reviewed and customers were contacted. All of the MetroAccess vehicles have writing tools (paper and pens) available for deaf customers and drivers to use as needed.

Mr. Brown is moving from his current position, and he introduced Kate Clark, as his replacement and shared that she will be working on customer issues going forward.

There had been no customer outreach events since December MAS meeting.

Michael Wilson Award and Rush Award

There were no Michael Wilson or the Rush Awards presentation today.

Abilities-Ride Providers Update:

Colleen Shaffer, Uber Transit Team, and Malcom Glen, Uber Head of Policy for Accessibility in Under-served Communities, provided information about the role of Uber in the Abilities-Ride program. Ms. Shaffer stated they are very excited to join the Abilities-Ride program. Uber is a Transportation Network Company (TNC) and has been in the area providing on-demand trips for many years. Uber will provide service using sedans, as well as wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs). Ms. Shaffer looks forward to receiving feedback and recommendations on how to improve the service for the community. Mr. Glen works with Ms. Shaffer's team on reviewing how they can get accessible parts of the platform into the hands of the maximum number of people. He communicates with the disability community to understand ways in which Uber can improve the different parts of their platform for the spectrum of people who have disabilities and want to use Uber.

He also works internally to ensure their design/engineering/operations teams understand the importance of making continued investments and implementing each of those. At this time, Mr. Glen invited questions from the Committee.

Chair Semelfort asked how Uber works for someone who already has an account and has discounts and/or a pass. Would the person have to create a business account or how would the two accounts differentiate, especially if the person uses the same credit card. Chair Semelfort also asked about mileage covered for the first \$5.00 that the customer pays, and about the wait-time charges. Ms. Shaffer stated they would be working with Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services (ACCS), to design the best way using a few different options they currently have and to understand how MetroAccess customers currently use the application (app) and how they use the service. The app would be designed to provide ease of use. Uber has partnered with other transit agencies and would be reviewing the best app for MetroAccess customers. Uber is working on determining whether the standard wait-time charges would apply or not. Mr. Blake stated Uber covers 6.5 miles for \$20.00 where a customer pays the \$5.00 and Metro pays \$15.00. Chair Semelfort stated what happens if a customer has better pricing? Mr. Blake stated that would be a decision of the customer.

Vice-Chair Rush asked whether drivers would assist customers with vision impairment and customers that use a wheelchair. Mr. Glen stated the drivers would assist getting in and out of the vehicle, they would fold the mobility devices, put them away and give them back to the customers at the end of the ride. For customers who cannot transfer out of the mobility devices, they do have WAVs for customers usage. The drivers go through a robust training on how to secure the mobility devices safely. Vice-Chair Rush asked about Uber charges for MetroAccess customer, as per the time of the day. Ms. Shaffer stated the pricing is demand responsive. In the Uber app, pricing will be shown to the customer before they board the trip. The WAVs cost the same as a sedan. Mr. Blake clarified that Uber, Via, and Curb have dynamic pricing. That means that the pricing may change as per the time of the day, based on demand.

Chair Semelfort asked if the trips would be on Uber X or Uber Pool trips? Mr. Blake stated when the service opens to customers, they will have the option to choose the service of their preference.

Ms. Coles asked about a phone number for customers to connect with Uber, if a personal care attendants (PCA) ride free, can customers enter comments to inform drivers for needed assistance, and would there be a no-show charge. Ms. Shaffer stated when the service opens for all, customers will have the ability to book trips using the app. It is easier to find the driver in the app as it provides information about the vehicle and the driver. There are several charges that do not come to Uber, they go to the driver for their time. Therefore, the no show fee will be applied. Mr. Blake stated the PCA can ride free of charge, and his goal was not to make any of the services like MetroAccess, but to provide more transportation options for MetroAccess customers that fulfill their civil rights to accessible transportation.

Mr. Ariza-Silva asked about the service area that will be served by Uber. Mr. Blake clarified that the entire MetroAccess area will be served by Uber and a MetroAccess customer can use Uber service regardless of their jurisdiction.

Ms. Bush asked for clarification on the app, text messages, and door-to-door service. Ms. Shaffer stated for the pilot, trips would be booked by Mr. Blake and the customers would receive text messages about their ride. You do not need to have an Uber app at this time, however, but when the service opens for all customers, the app would be needed. Mr. Glen stated Uber does not offer door-to-door service, it is curb-to-curb service. The driver is expected to help the customer in and out of the vehicle.

Mr. Dancy asked if cash is a payment option. Ms. Shaffer stated credit or debit cards are the accepted modes of payment. However, as an alternate, Uber gift cards can be used, and they are available for purchase at most grocery stores, as well as other stores. Mr. Dancy raised an issue that he experienced where the price increased from the time the ride began and ended. Ms. Shaffer stated the pricing should not change from the time a ride begins and ends unless something dramatic happened and the driver had to take an alternate route. This is to ensure drivers are compensated appropriately. Mr. Dancy asked about communication for deaf customers and whether vehicles have pen and paper. Mr. Glen stated right now we do not require drivers to keep pen and paper, however customers can communicate via the app as all communication between the drivers and the customers happens via the app.

Dr. Posner reiterated the concern of higher prices of a ride after it had been booked and from the time the trip started and ended. When he tried to appeal the pricing, it was impossible to be able to appeal. There was no route change for that trip, however, the price changed tremendously. Mr. Blake stated that is not related to MetroAccess or Abilities-Ride, it seems like an Uber issue. Mr. Blake asked about the percentage of that happening. Ms. Shaffer stated she could not say the percentage however, it is very rare. Mr. Blake stated we will educate our customers that taxi rides are simpler and TNCs have varied pricing.

Ms. Mezile asked about the wait time for Uber. Ms. Shaffer stated it depends on the vehicle, however, for a sedan it is 2 minutes. Ms. Mezile asked if there are going to be a set of drivers or a universal group of drivers who would serve Abilities-Ride. Mr. Glen stated WAVs drivers go through more of an extensive training. We are pooling all drivers for Abilities-Ride. Ms. Mezile also asked if Uber can be used for any area. Mr. Blake stated Uber for Abilities-Ride can be used anywhere in MetroAccess service area, however the longer the trip, the more it would cost the customer.

A customer asked for the wait time for vehicles other than sedans. He also stated that Mr. Blake has said that Abilities-Ride is like MetroAccess. He also commented about pricing and the options for MetroAccess customers, even though they have options for Metrorail and Metrobus. The price on fixed routes are fixed, as is on MetroAccess and Abilities-Ride. It is the customer's choice to use Uber. He commented that the solicitation should be shared with the AAC members. Mr. Blake made clear that he never said Uber or other

Abilities-Ride providers are like MetroAccess. In fact he has gone out of his way to state that these services are the generally available services on the street that any individuals can choose. Mr. Blake reminded the customer and Committee that the solicitation was shared with the Committee, and their recommendations were received, considered, and some incorporated. We are going to continue to educate the consumers about the services being provided by the providers of the Abilities-Ride. Mr. Blake thanked the Uber team for being here.

Accountability for MetroAccess Trips given to Taxis:

Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated we asked our taxi providers to proactively inform the Operating Control Center (OCC) if the ride is going to be late. At this time, the procedure is that the dedicated taxi that is assigned for a MetroAccess trip, needs to inform the OCC if the taxi is running late. We will follow up to ensure the procedure is being followed.

WMATA Budget: Committee Discussion

Vice-Chair Rush asked about the dates and locations for the public hearings. Mr. Blake informed the dates and locations have not yet been decided, and as the information is finalized, it will be shared with the AAC. Chair Semelfort stated the public hearings are a way for us to show our support for the topics that we advocate for and attested to the importance of having a high number of attendees for the public hearings.

Mr. Blake provided information on two matters for which the AAC has advocated: MetroAccess pass and flat fare. For the purpose of transparency, ACCS is not supporting the concept of a MetroAccess pass at this time, as the resources are limited. As the Committee is aware, we are moving to allow the use of subsidy dollars and provide more options to the customers. ACCS has presented arguments and logic as to how the flat fare would be beneficial for customers and Metro.

In an email, Dr. Posner shared the talking points and information on the bus service cuts. He emphasized the importance of attending the budget public hearings. He also thanked the staff for providing support when possible. Mr. Sheehan stated the staff is also supporting with no-service cuts for MetroAccess customers, even though bus service cuts would impact those areas. Dr. Posner stated this is a pilot for a year and we hope it would work financially to keep the existing service and to continue the grandfathered program for all MetroAccess customers who are currently using the service. Vice-Chair Rush stated if Metro fares increase, that would impact MetroAccess fares. She emphasized the importance of attending the public hearings and offered to assist customers with their ride fares, if needed.

Dr. Posner recommended that Abilities-Ride to be extended for the public hearings. Mr. Blake stated he has thought about it and cannot make any commitments at this time. Dr. Posner thanked Mr. Blake for his efforts and for his support of the Committee in everything that they have tried to do for the budget and the hearings.

Policy and Procedure - Safety Issue:

Vice-Chair Rush asked who is doing sensitivity training for the drivers. Conrad Marshall, TransDev, stated they currently do not have a replacement to provide the sensitivity training. The position has not been vacant for that long and they have not had that many classes of new drivers, therefore it may not necessarily be a training issue, but an employee issue. He encouraged the Committee to report when they get an operator that does not provide the level of expected service. Vice-Chair Rush stated the drivers have attitudes and offered to visit all the providers and provide information for the drivers. The topic was moved to next month's meeting due to time constraint.

Public Comment:

A customer stated her concerns about taxi drivers not performing door-to-door service. A driver arrived in a mini-van and she fell into the mini-van while attempting to get in, as the driver never assisted her. The cab was also dirty. Mr. Blake stated the trip information would be needed for further review and for the issue to be addressed. A short-term solution was recommended until the issues have been reviewed.

A customer stated her concerns about scheduling issues she has been experiencing for the past few weeks. When reporting the scheduling issue, the staff informed her she is in a pilot program. Why was she not informed prior to being placed in a pilot program? Mr. Blake ensured the MetroAccess service and the trips would be reviewed further. The customer is not placed on Abilities-Ride automatically, therefore she is not part of the pilot and the informational language will be aligned with all the staff members.

A customer recommended for Uber to hold user-app classes for MetroAccess customers, throughout the service area. He also stated his concerns about MetroAccess scheduling. Mr. Blake stated it is a great idea to provide information about service providers; and shared information about the forthcoming showcases being held that will provide information to customers about all the providers. He shared information about the adjustments that have been made in the recent past.

A customer stated her concerns about an old address that keeps coming up for her reservations and a concern about a ride from past Saturday. The customer also asked why is there no MetroAccess service in the areas where there is no bus service. Mr. Blake stated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states service to be provided within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of fixed route. To provide more options to customers, the Abilities-Ride program has been put into place.

Ms. Mezile asked about an update on the MetroAccess sedans, and the type of sedans. Mr. Blake stated we are moving forward with the procurement process and it should be made public in the next 7 to 10 days and the companies have no more than 21 days to respond. The AAC selected a vehicle which was the Honda Accord, however the approach to how the vehicle was chosen was not approved by the Procurement Department. Mr. Blake hopes the AAC's voice would be heard in the selection.

Meeting adjourned at 5:55pm.