



Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: January 22, 2019

Attendees

Present: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Tappan Banerjee, Darnise Bush, Tino Calabia, Charlie Crawford, Steve Kaffen, Mary Kay McMahon, Phillipa Mezile, Anthony Oberg. Remote Participation - and Phil Posner

Call to Order

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

Chair Semelfort started introductions of the Committee members, WMATA staff, Contractor staff, and the customers.

Review of Agenda & Minutes from Prior Meeting

Chair Semelfort removed the discussion of the MetroAccess Customer Guide as requested and replaced it with discussions of the WMATA Budget Public Hearing and MetroAccess Service: Inclement Weather. The meeting agenda was approved as amended.

The December 17, 2018 meeting minutes were approved.

Customer Service & Outreach Reports

Carlton Brown, MTM, provided updates on the three public comments received during the December MAS meeting:

- The first customer's issue about a late trip credit was investigated and resolved.
- The second customer's issue was about a MetroAccess ride. The driver and the customer were at two separate locations. Upon further review, it was determined that the customer was at a non-serviced location.
- The third customer's comments were about MetroAccess ride fares and seatbelt policies. The customer was informed how the fare is calculated. There were some inconsistencies regarding the seatbelt issues and those were also reviewed.

Allison Anderson, MetroAccess, stated there were no Outreach Reports at the time.

Michael Wilson Award and Rush Award

Michael Wilson Award:

Pierre Matabaro, Project Manager, Challenger, introduced the recipient, Joyce Hartman. She is excellent across the board, particularly her attendance and safety record. Mr. Matabaro introduced Gina Parnell, Safety and Training Manager, to present the Michael Wilson Award to Ms. Hartman. Ms. Parnell stated that Ms. Hartman is dedicated to her family, church and work. She has not had any accidents and is a dedicated employee.

Denise Rush Award: There was no Denise Rush Award presented this month.

TransportDC Program

At the request of Ms. Mezile, a guest speaker was invited from the TransportDC. Gerald (Gerry) Kasunick, Administrative Officer, Department of For Hire Vehicles, District of Columbia (DFHV) represented the agency.

Mr. Kasunick stated the TransportDC program is a coordinated alternative to paratransit service for MetroAccess customers. DC residents receive efficient curb-to-curb taxicab or wheelchair accessible taxicab service. TransportDC provides unrestricted rides for the first 15 days of the month and rides only for employment and medical services during the remainder of the month. Christiaan Blake, Acting Assistant General Manager, Access Services, asked is there any consideration to go for unrestricted rides from the 16th to the end of the month? Mr. Kasunick stated that is the goal. Ms. Mezile inquired instead of restrictions of dates, why not restrict the number of trips per day by a customer? Mr. Kasunick stated that was not feasible due to budget constraints. At the request of Mr. Ariza-Silva, Mr. Kasunick will be invited for to the MAS meeting in March. Mr. Kasunick provided information about a user group meeting held by TransportDC and extended an invitation to the AAC to participate.

WMATA Budget Public Hearing

Dr. Posner inquired about the timetable for procurement of MetroAccess vehicles, and if the committee will have input on the procurement? Mr. Blake stated that sedans will be re-introduced into the MetroAccess fleet. We hope to have an example of the stock vehicle at the March MAS meeting. If so, it will be outside for review, however it will be without any extra equipment. This likely will be a partnership procurement with colleagues in the industry. We will purchase the vehicle and add equipment to it. Once we have passed that procurement, then the MAS, along with other disability stakeholders, will have more of a direct input on the new van design and the Request for Proposal (RFP), that will go out later in the year for the purchase of new vans, but after the sedans. Dr. Posner asked do we know the volume of the interior and what will be the space for wheelchairs? Mr. Blake clarified that we cannot share that at this time due to the procurement process. If we go with a sedan, those vehicles will not be wheelchair accessible. If we go with small SUV, those vehicles will likely be wheelchair accessible.

Dr. Posner provided talking points on the two budgets: Capital and Operational. Under the Capital budget, items that will affect the disability community are the 8000-series railcars, the MetroAccess vehicles, and lighting. Under the Operational budget, the disability community will be affected by the proposed flat weekend fare of \$2 on fixed routes, extended rush hour service and fares charged under the extended rush hours, pass for MetroAccess customers, bicycle locations on trains, platform improvements to be made during the summer and what kind of shuttle service will be provided during the station shutdowns.

Mr. Calabria proposed that WMATA considers installing jumbotron-style Passenger Information Display System (PIDS) in new Metrorail stations and those stations undergoing renovations. An outdoor jumbotron now operates on 7th Street above the Gallery Place station showing arriving train times and other information. The AAC has

often focused on the need for existing PIDS to show additional information, such as elevator and escalator outages. More recently, the AAC also discussed how newly formulated notices could remind riders to ensure that the seats prioritized for people with disabilities and seniors are available to them. Jumbotron-style PIDS would offer more signage space for such messages.

Mr. Oberg listed Metro's proposed changes for the upcoming budget:

- Expansion of peak service from 5am to 10am and 3pm to 8pm.
- Extend the Yellow line to Greenbelt.
- Eight car trains during peak hours.
- Implement flat weekend fare of \$2.
- Reduced weekly-pass fare amount.

Mr. Oberg recommended the following talking points that the AAC supports:

- Fares staying at off-peak-hours during the extended rush hours service.
- Eight car trains but limit bike to the last two cars.
- MetroAccess \$4 fare (without transfer) because of the flat weekend fare of \$2 on fixed routes.
- Implement a pass for MetroAccess riders.
- As Doris Ray stated, regarding Metro restoring bus lines that feed into rail stations; if riders cannot get to stations, they cannot get benefit of the proposed changes.

There was a recommendation that WMATA explore the feasibility of developing variable height seating adjacent to the priority seats marked for people with disabilities and seniors. Due to differences in disabilities, some riders would be better accommodated on higher seats than those now offered -- e.g., a tall rider with disabilities who would find it difficult to rise after resting in a low or standard seat -- while another rider of short stature would benefit from a lower seat. A scooter or wheelchair user may also transfer more easily from his/her device onto a variable height seat. Ms. McMahon asked about feasibility study for seat heights on the 8000-series cars. Mr. Blake provided update that a Board memo was sent after a Board member asked for a status update this week. The idea is still being reviewed and studied. A guest speaker will come and discuss different seat heights on both 7000-series as well as the 8000-series, when a decision is made. At the moment our seat heights comply with ADA seat heights. We have not found a system that has variable seat heights versus the other seats. Ms. Mezile stated there is no guarantee that an adjustable seat may be available when needed.

Mr. Kaffen stated it is not for the AAC to discuss the \$2 flat weekend fare on fixed routes, however, it is our place to discuss the \$4 flat weekend fare for MetroAccess rides. Dr. Posner clarified that Metro's weekend ridership has decreased over 30%. To increase ridership on weekends, the General Manager/Chief Executive Officer (GM/CEO) proposed the \$2 flat weekend fare on fixed routes. Based on the GM/CEO's proposal, the AAC proposed that MetroAccess rides should be \$4 flat weekend fare.

Mr. Calabria recommends for the 8000-series to be articulated trains that have open gangways. He said we have not seen trains with variable seating, however, 75% trains

worldwide, use open gangways. Metro is losing \$400,000 a day because of the partial government shutdown. WMATA Board Chair Jack Evans at one point had recommended free bus fares. In an AAC meeting, it was mentioned that Seattle has free buses in downtown Seattle and that Metro could consider the same. Free bus system will solve the bus fare evasion.

Ms. Bush stated flooring is still very slippery and she plans to bring that up for the hearings. Chair Semelfort recommended for Ms. Mezile to submit her concern to Dr. Posner for talking points.

Dr. Banerjee asked if the safety attachments for wheelchairs in the designated space on trains will be part of the 8000-series? Mr. Blake clarified that the safety attachments are on Metrobuses, but not on Metrorail cars. There is designated space for wheelchairs however, there are no straps for wheelchairs. Mr. Ariza-Silva clarified if Dr. Banerjee is referring to an automatic lock for wheelchairs on Metrorail cars? When confirmed by Dr. Banerjee, Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that may be a good idea, however, because not all wheelchairs are of same size, it may be difficult to have a universal automatic lock.

MetroAccess Service: Inclement Weather

Chair Semelfort stated MetroAccess informs customers of service disruption by placing automated messages on the phone system as soon as possible. If the service disruption is due to inclement weather, the message also includes “as per the National Weather Services.” Chair Semelfort asked if it is feasible to place such messages on the website for customers to see it as they log in to their MetroAccess accounts.

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated that the Interactive Voice Response system (IVR) states about subscription trips being canceled. A customer may get that information when the MetroAccess phone line is called. However, how does MetroAccess inform families of the customer in case the service is suspended, specially, for non-English speaking family members. Mr. Blake clarified that MetroAccess would cancel all trips if there is a call for cancelation for weather. The automated message about subscription trips being canceled is for Federal holidays. That is a standard policy. During inclement weather, MetroAccess reviews what is happening with fixed route service. If buses are operating, then MetroAccess should be able to provide service as well. We try to adhere to the ADA. We are very sensitive about the timing. During the past weekend’s inclement weather, Metro was dedicated in running the service as long as we could, and we did. As long as the weather permitted, and the local jurisdictions kept the roads clean, we ran the fixed route service. MetroAccess ran the service all the way through Sunday 7:00pm, and then we had to restrict to return-service only. The local jurisdictions could not keep the roads clean. Fixed route went to end-line service and MetroAccess went to return-trips-home only. Every customer who had a scheduled trip, was contacted via an automated phone message. They were advised to call the office if needed. There were some lessons learned. For future reference, we are going to be even more proactive, and update our partners as to what service we will be running.

Chair Semelfort stated for certain emergencies, as done in past, where MetroAccess may have to shut down service almost immediately, who will contact the customers? Mr. Blake stated MetroAccess has the “no strand” policy. If MetroAccess took a customer, they will be brought back. We are going to utilize all resources available whether it is utilizing the contractors, TransportDC, or Abilities-Ride. If there is major inclement weather approaching, we will contact customers and encourage them to take an earlier trip. If there is an emergency, we may not be able to guarantee a ride back, given weather circumstances. Chair Semelfort shared his personal experience about cab service during inclement weather. Taxi drivers may not have snow equipped vehicles; thus, may not be available for rides.

Mr. Ariza-Silva asked how MetroAccess helps customers for a situation where there have been 2-hour delays? Mr. Blake stated that is a very good point. On January 14th, there was a 2-hour delay for Washington DC Public Schools, we did not include that in our message. We will try to include that type of information in the messaging going forward. If the customer’s community support service is not open for another 2 hours, we may not know that. We can advise customers to check with their destination location and get information. Mr. Ariza-Silva stated if school system has 2-hour delays, that is in the news. Even if the news comes out the night before, that is too late for customers to call and reschedule their trips as the Reservations Office has been closed by then. In such a scenario, where a customer’s trip was scheduled at 6:30am, however, the school system (drop off location) has a 2 hours delay, how can MetroAccess help that customer and provide a ride later, not at the time of its original schedule? Mr. Blake said that is a good question. For January 14th, the message that was sent out, and included instructions for customers to contact the OCC.

Chair Semelfort raised a question if customers cancel their trips outside the required 2 hours window, will they be penalized with late cancelations? Mr. Blake clarified that we have the information, we know when we sent out the automated calls, when trips were canceled, therefore, late cancelations will be reviewed accordingly. Is it a challenge or impossible for customers to call the OCC to reschedule the trips or to be rerouted to other vehicles? Michael Rademacher, MV Transit, stated that during the past weekend, customers had trouble getting through because the phone system was inundated. The staff was trying to schedule trips for the next day. As a result, they could not schedule trips until everything was cleared up, which was after 10 pm. They had upwards of 40 people on hold for 15+ minutes. Due to the inclement weather, they had a shortage of staff. Mr. Blake said we will follow up on this, and based on information received from Mr. Rademacher, we cannot commit to whether customers can call for rescheduling.

Easterseals Project Update

Allison Anderson, MetroAccess, provided an update from the January 16th meeting. That was the final work group session to finalize lingering items to discuss the proposed MetroAccess application (app). By the end of this month, WMATA leadership will receive the final document for approval. Larry Braham from Easterseals Project will be available to come back and report to the AAC, on what was done and how things concluded.

Pre-Proposal Conference Update:

Chair Semelfort provided an update on the Pre-Proposal Conference that he attended along with Dr. Banerjee, and Doris Ray. He stated this was the second pre-proposal conference that he had attended. Vendors came with their questions, so did the committee members. The RFP is out. He will start an email communication with Dr. Banerjee and Ms. Ray, submit their questions to the AAC, to include all questions for submission by February 6th.

Public Comments

A customer stated her ride on December 10th arrived one hour early. She called "Where's My Ride" (WMR) and was told the driver would have to initiate the call for any type of trip movement. The customer asked why the Reservations Office does not handle such cases? The customer also provided feedback on Abilities-Ride's reservationists and said they are extremely rude to MetroAccess customers. They are ill prepared for return trips and drivers do not show up.

Mr. Blake apologized for both incidents. Mr. Blake informed that we are encouraging the Abilities-Ride partners to provide better service. They are aware of the competition in the region, and possibility of them losing trips. Ms. Anderson asked if the customer called the Customer Service team to report the December 10th incident. She did report the incident.

Rico Dancy, National Black Deaf Advocates, re-iterated his experience with the Metro Transit police officer at the Union Station, that he had shared during the AAC meeting on January 4th, 2019. He wants to follow up about the police training and find out what is being done about that? He wants to make sure that they are trained and treat customers with hearing impairments, respectfully. There have been many complaints, however, there is no headway. He has contacted the Chief and there has been zero response. He has been hung up on.

Mr. Blake stated Metro is investigating the incident. David Shaffer, ADA Ombudsman, is following up on this matter, so that we can inform the Chief of our findings. In terms of the training and the training process, that is a more longer-term step. We want to first get information, understand the situation, identify the offending officers, and teach the police officers. That has been our focus since we heard of the complaint. The idea of Mr. Dancy's organization being part of the training of the police officers, is one we are not opposed to. That is not a decision that the Department of Access Services will make however, we are encouraging members of the disability stakeholder community to provide training to a lot of our internal as well as external partners, as we have been working with our MAS Chair Semelfort for Abilities-Ride and for future partners. We support voluntary efforts.

Mr. Dancy added that we can also use resources at Gallaudet University. They have a department of police services and they have a lot of experience dealing with deaf individuals in the right manner. Mr. Blake will mention this to the Chief, but we want to first investigate the incident.

A customer was at the meeting for an issue that he brought forth during the January AAC meeting. The customer says he did not take a ride, however, he cannot prove it. As a result, he has lost a late trip credit that he had received for a different trip. His question is how he can prove he did not take a ride and asked for MetroAccess to provide him with the signed sheet.

Mr. Blake stated the incident happened a year ago. He added that customers can show a medical release or other documentation demonstrating that they did not take the trip. The matter was reviewed from the day in question, we have the voice of a person who sounds like the customer. We have other evidence that the vehicle went to his house. Just because he did not sign the sheet, does not mean that he did not take the trip. We already established that not all customers sign. This is no longer a matter for the AAC. This can be discussed off-line and informed the customer that he will get a call back tomorrow.

Barbara Milleville, National Capital Citizens with Low Vision, shared a recent MetroAccess ride experience and suggested that customers should be educated about the trip time. A trip taken on shared MetroAccess ride may take longer than a trip taken using a personal vehicle. The trip that Ms. Milleville took last weekend, was with another customer who wanted to get to her destination very quickly, whereas Ms. Milleville was scheduled to be dropped off before the other customer. There was an argument between that customer and the driver and the situation was very uncomfortable.

Mr. Blake stated Ms. Milleville's point is very well taken. MetroAccess is a public transportation service. If fixed route takes an hour for a MetroAccess customer's trip, then MetroAccess has up-to an hour to get a customer to their destination.

A customer stated that when a rider makes a point, presenting it publicly, he hopes the resolution is made public, whether the customer was satisfied or not. On the topic of inclement weather, he had to take a cab back to his home. Metro decided (service) based on some jurisdictions, whereas some jurisdictions had passable roads. Regarding the Capital and the Operating budgets, any customer should be able to make their comments. The Authority should not prescribe the topics on which customers should and should not comment. We should tell the Board members of what we think. If the GM/CEO has placed priorities that we do not agree with, we should be able to voice those. We all know WMATA has been losing money because of the partial Federal Government shutdown. Along with the AAC and the Riders' Advisory Council (RAC), the WMATA Board should support and ask for compensation for this furloughed period.

Dr. Banerjee had a trip scheduled with MetroAccess for last week for Wednesday, at 10 am, however, a driver showed up on Tuesday at 10 am. The trip was confirmed to be scheduled correctly for Wednesday, at 10 am with Reservations Office. Dr. Banerjee also recommended (motioned) to have an AAC meeting, and one combined meeting for BRS and MAS, instead of two separate meetings. This way the AAC will meet two times a month instead of three. This will also help in having the needed quorum for the

subcommittee meetings. Attending three meetings a month is too much. Motion was moved and passed, and the subject will be discussed in the AAC.

Mr. Calabria recommended that WMATA negotiate a frequent-user incentive pilot project with taxicab and ride-sharing companies like Uber and Lyft, if they enter the WMATA Abilities-Ride program. This would adapt the Frequent Flyer Program model of many airlines. After a specific number of trips (e.g., 10 trips) with the same taxi or ride-sharing company, the user would be offered a free or discounted ride by that company. (Uber may already be engaged in such a program elsewhere.) There was a brief discussion about this recommendation. The motion was proposed.

Ms. Bush encouraged customers to provide feedback on their MA ride experiences. Ms. Bush also said that MetroAccess “no strand” policy does not help her as she uses MetroAccess only for going home from work, which is not categorized as a “return trip” for MetroAccess service.

Ms. Mezile stated the station entry at the at 13th & U Streets, is extremely wet.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.