



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: April 15, 2019

Attendees

Present: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Carolyn Bellamy, Darnise Bush, Tino Calabia, Erin Coneys, Charlie Crawford, Melanie Jackson, Phillippa Mezile, and Phil Posner.

Call to Order

Chair Semelfort called the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting to order at 4:05 pm.

Chair Semelfort started the meeting with introductions of the committee members, staff, and customers.

Review of Agenda & Minutes from Prior Meeting

The Meeting Agenda was approved.

The Meeting Minutes from April 15, 2019 were approved as amended.

Customer Service & Outreach Reports

Carlton Brown, MTM, provided an update on customer service. All customers have been corresponded with the findings.

There was no Outreach to be reported for this month.

Michael Wilson Award and Rush Award

Michael Wilson Award: Conrad Marshall, Project Manager, Transdev, provided the Michael Wilson Award to Omonike Famakinwa. Ms. Famakinwa has been an operator for 6 years. She is reliable, friendly, and a dedicated professional who received several customer commendations. Her on-time performance for the last quarter was above 97%.

Rush Award: Charles Watkins Sr., Diamond Transportation, received the Rush Award. Chair Semelfort read a bio for him. Mr. Watkins has been an operator since March 2016 and has completed on-time trips with an average of 94%. He has a track record of maintaining safety, has received 11 commendations, he is dedicated and compassionate.

Parting Gift

Dr. Posner thanked Jennifer Weber, MTM. Ms. Bellamy presented Ms. Weber with a parting gift along with a card on behalf of all the committee members. Allison Anderson, Operations Manager, MetroAccess, thanked Ms. Weber for her tenure since 2013. Ms. Weber stated it has been a great learning experience and thanked everyone.

MetroAccess Customer Guide Update

Ms. Anderson provided an update on the MetroAccess Customer Guide and thanked the committee members for their feedback. There were 106 recommendations received for the MetroAccess Customer Guide and 94 of those were implemented. A working group

from the committee was formed and they discussed some of the topics. Ms. Anderson stated more information may be placed regarding transportation as it relates to service on the military bases, and about the lost and found process. An update will be provided.

Chair Semelfort inquired when would the informational insert get added about the additional Abilities-Ride providers. Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated that it may happen either at the end of this year or early next year. Chair Semelfort asked if the audio of the customer guide will be posted online, and Ms. Anderson confirmed it will.

Dr. Posner inquired if the taxi (refund) policy that the committee will discuss, may be added in the customer guide? Chair Semelfort stated that is a major policy issue and needs approval. The Director can give her view on it; however, it may take some time to get approved by Christiaan Blake, Acting Assistant General Manager, Access Services.

MetroAccess Refunds: Taxi/Alternate Rides

There was a discussion about new policies to develop and implement for MetroAccess to provide refunds for taxi/alternate rides when MetroAccess rides get extremely delayed.

Chair Semelfort stated the taxi/alternate-rides is different from the Abilities-Ride Program. He provided information about the process for the reimbursement program that has been established and in use in New York, thus the basis of recommendation to see if there may be a possibility for WMATA to reinstate the taxi/alternate rides reimbursement policy.

Based on the information received from Chair Semelfort, Mr. Crawford asked how would a person access information, such as the medallion number for the taxis and other information which may not appear easily? Chair Semelfort stated the information is a must for accounting, auditing, and records purposes. If ultimately WMATA approves of this policy, they would have to have the required information, without exceptions.

Dr. Posner proposed a motion that this committee recommends that WMATA develop a taxi cab / car service reimbursement policy parallel to the one currently in service in the New York City to be used by MetroAccess. The motion carried.

Ms. Williams-Hall stated MetroAccess has a no-strand policy, thus customers get picked up. She asked as to which taxi (Abilities-Ride or taxi for MetroAccess ride) would be under this policy? Chair Semelfort stated in instances where MetroAccess may not have a vehicle available in a timely manner and cannot get an alternate ride (Abilities-Ride) either, then a customer gets an approval number to call a taxi and be reimbursed for the difference. The duration of the "timely manner" is to be defined by WMATA. Ms. Anderson stated this policy seems like a hierarchy of options before the final option of a customer procuring a taxi or car service. Chair Semelfort confirmed and stated WMATA needs to go through financial consideration before it gets to all those steps.

Robbie Werth, Diamond National Express, shared information as per his experience that taxi companies in Arlington, Fairfax, Washington DC, and Montgomery County provide

printed receipts upon requests. Chair Semelfort stated that is why he stated it is up to the Authority to set the taxi companies because customers must have a receipt.

Ms. Bush stated the receipt is a preprinted small slip with blank lines (usually) and drivers do not sign it, nor do they fill it up. Customers are not going to have all the mentioned required information (medallion number etc.). About the time frame, the company (MetroAccess) does not want to admit they are late by 30 minutes. The estimated times of arrival are provided as either 10 or 12 minutes. In that case, who sets the time? Chair Semelfort stated there will be established guidelines. Person answering the phone (in MetroAccess) will have to contact provider and give you an update.

Ms. Rush stated if the ride is from Tysons to Suitland, she will not pay the difference of the fare on the Abilities-Ride. Chair Semelfort stated if customer calls a taxi, the customer pays the cost upfront and later gets reimbursed for the difference of the fare.

Ms. Bellamy stated currently, MetroAccess customers get late trip credits. WMATA has budget issues and this would not work. Ms. Bellamy stated this is complicating things for customers. She likes the thought of getting money back, but Metro is not going to pay back. Dr. Posner stated MetroAccess customers may not receive cash but may get credit on the EZ Pay accounts. In that case, customers will have money for MetroAccess trips.

A motion was proposed to build the plan. A vote was called on the motion. All members stated "yes" except Ms. Rush as she stated "nay". Chair Semelfort remained neutral.

Performance-Reports and Trip-Times:

Dr. Posner commented about the on-time performance reports and the trip-times. This month's performance report was 94%, in February it was in the 80s%. Dr. Posner stated we are back down to 88% on the performance. Several customers have complained about excessively long trips. We need to have the pick-up and the drop-off times right.

Chair Semelfort asked for Ms. Williams-Hall to provide the numbers for next month's meeting. Ms. Williams-Hall stated a MetroAccess trip should not exceed the fixed route trip time. We have been working on some things on the scheduling. As a result, we were aware that the on-time trips (percentage) may drop temporarily. We anticipated this to occur, and the updates can be followed up next month.

Dr. Posner shared his experience about an excessively long trip that took 2 hours instead of 90 minutes because the Ranger took the driver to different directions. There must be some way for people with various disabilities to be dropped off quickly. For example, a dialysis patient, a diabetes customer, a child, someone needing to use a restroom frequently, a person with cognitive disabilities; these people cannot ride for hours. Something must be done about rangers taking customers to various locations.

Ms. Bellamy stated customers have been on vehicles for 2 hours. Something is being cut and routing is an issue. All customers (in a vehicle) should be going in the same direction but that is not happening.

Ms. Rush asked how many times did you (Chair Semelfort) circle around here this afternoon? She had to go around 6 times. She reached the location at 3:30pm but did not get in until 4:00 pm. Ms. Williams-Hall stated she cannot address what happened as she was not aware of it, she can only assume that the driver may have had to drive around until a parking space was found for her to exit the vehicle safely.

Ms. Williams-Hall stated that things probably do feel different to MetroAccess customers. For business needs, we do have a responsibility to improve service productivity and different things are being tried. As a result, there is going to be a shift in expectations and in customer experiences. We are aware of customers' needs, not one of those things that get escalated to our offices is ignored as we try to address each one of them. We are also actively calling our customers when the system delivers to us that there is a breach in the way we like to deliver our service and we have tried to minimize that impact. Some customers have had service up till now with the ability of traveling alone, but that has come as a tremendous expense to the Authority and we are looking at efficient ways to address that. It is an on-going process.

MetroAccess GPS System: Customers driving direction input to drivers

Chair Semelfort stated the Global Positioning System (GPS) system sends drivers in circles, it blanks out, and takes a moment to recharge itself.

Ms. Anderson stated it has been a year and a half since we transferred to real-time-traffic utilizing the Inrix data. It provides more information to our operators to avoid areas of traffic, so that customers are not caught up in frequent traffic delays and enhances the on-time performance. Issues are being worked on as discovered. The Inrix data is used by a variety of stakeholders in the region, therefore, the information should be more accurate as far as the traffic in the region. Our position on operators using the GPS information by customers: we think that overall there is a safety concern in doing that. In taking that information from customer, we really do not have any way of weighing the accuracy of the information from overall perspective. We cannot do for one and not do for the other. We are trying to go with the technology base we have or go with something else. Right now, our position is to utilize the GPS as we are working towards resolving any issues that surface, improve the data, improve the technology, and working with that data will breed the desired outcome.

Chair Semelfort inquired what do you do when the system you are using, gets stuck in the middle of the highway? The driver cannot look at the map in the middle of heavy traffic on a highway, cannot go anywhere, but needs to try and find a location. It may be impeding on MetroAccess on-time performance.

Ms. Williams-Hall stated Inrix is the same software application that is used by Waze. Even if a driver turns to a customer utilizing Waze they are going to have same information. We do trust decision-making of our drivers. If the turn-by-turn directions with real-time traffic are not available, drivers will have the option of using directions without the real-time traffic information. We just started doing that within the last 3 to 4 months. If something occurred and the entire Ranger did go out and the driver had no driving

directions, for those instances the driver does have a few options at his or her disposal: they can utilize a map if it is safe to do so; if they do know the area and they do know how to get to locations because of their own experience, they are free to do that; and under their own discretion they can get guidance from the customer.

Ms. Coneys commented about drivers' manifests and the add-on trips. Ms. Coneys shared her trip experience where the driver was sent to opposite direction for an add-on customer, and asked why a driver from the vicinity was not sent for that customer? Ms. Anderson stated the dispatchers have information about the entire service area. The "add-ons" are called "trip insertions" and are done for various reasons, which may not make sense to the driver or the customer, however, may be the best option as the dispatchers can view the entire region and are able to make decisions accordingly.

Dr. Posner stated he has used a lot of different GPS systems. Sometimes the GPS gives directions to save time, but driver ends up spending more time on the road. Sometimes people who change lanes to get ahead are even further behind another person who stays in one lane. Dr. Posner recommended to follow one simple direction. The Russians are interfering with the GPS system. He provided an example of one of his rides where the driver received wrong information and was directed to a wrong way. Dr. Posner recommended to get the simplest GPS as the advanced ones are more complex.

Ms. Rush stated we are getting new drivers who are not familiar with the area. When GPS goes out the drivers are lost. A lot of customers may not have directions, thus cannot help the drivers.

Ms. Jackson asked why MetroAccess is using Waze, it is one of the worst ones. Ms. Williams-Hall stated we do not use Waze, we utilize the software application Inrix that is also utilized by Waze. We are aware of the issues and that is why we have the ability of removing the real time traffic information when needed.

A customer provided her experience about a trip she recently took, where she was taken to streets that were closed during the Cherry Blossom Parade and it took the driver an extra half hour to get her home.

Ms. Bush shared her experience about the GPS malfunction. She was on a MetroAccess vehicle this morning, the GPS did not work for about 5 to 7 minutes. The driver was new, she was unfamiliar with the area, thus she waited until the GPS came back.

Dr. Posner recommended to reconvene on this topic in the full committee meeting. Dr. Posner also stated that in the District of Columbia (DC), traffic patterns change without notification. This may happen during events, and the Cherry Blossom Parade may be one of those incidents.

A motion was proposed to bring this matter to the full committee meeting. All members voted yes, there were no nays, the motion carried.

Public Comment:

A customer asked how can a MetroAccess rider get a sedan for rides, and how many customers will be in a vehicle at a time? Sometimes, his sister is in the vehicle for hours. Ms. Williams-Hall stated the system will work just like it does now, customers will call in and schedule a trip, customers will not have a choice to request sedans. If a customer uses a walker (ambulatory), it is likely the customer may get a sedan sometimes and a van sometimes. Customers will not get an option to request for sedans. We will not have the same number of sedans as we do on vans. For a customer who requires vans, they will always get a van for pick up. For customers who may not require a van, they may sometimes get a sedan. It depends on the vehicle available for the pick-up. Customers are not prohibited to ask for a sedan, but we are going to distribute the service based upon vehicle availability. Unless it is a reasonable accommodation, it may not be fulfilled. Ms. Rush stated there may be 8,000 or 9,000 trips, and only 175 sedans, how can you expect a sedan for all the trips?

The second customer's complaint was that on a Sunday, he did not get a train from the Union Station until 8:45am, heading towards Brookland. Carol Lopez, Access Design Review Manager, ADAP, provided the following information to the customer: Rail Schedule, Rail Hours, Station Times, and Train Times.

The third customer is a subscription rider, however, has had an on-going trouble with her return trips. The customer stated she has had to wait for long times for rides. Ms. Anderson met with the customer after the meeting to take specific information for further review.

The fourth customer commented about the web booking system. The time table only goes up to 1 am and recommended that it should be pushed up to 2 am. She would also like to have the ability to add addresses/locations to the frequent addresses on the web booking system. When a trip is booked through web-booking, it does not call the customer on specified phone number but calls at the location's phone number.

Chair Semelfort stated because there are very few drivers between the hours of 1 am and 6 am, MetroAccess wants a live person to book those trips. Also, the service for a day ends at 2:59 am and next day service starts at 3:00am, MetroAccess wants to ensure the trips are book correctly. Ms. Anderson will follow up with the customer to walk her through the process that will enable her to add addresses in frequent addresses, and appropriate phone numbers for the calls upon arrival.

The fifth customer talked about the Abilities-Ride. The Request for Proposal (RFP) has changed. The customer stated that in Boston, because of the pilot, they required Lyft to have a call center. Uber refused to open a call center, thus, they are required to give smartphones to the users. The customer further provided some information and recommended for Dr. Posner to further review it: the last Obama Administration Director wrote a Dear Colleague letter stating that the Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) will have to be an alternate to para-transits, with certain restrictions. He lays out a list of equities. The customer wants the AAC to be aware that there are about 10 different

providers out there. It is ok for other services to be out there if they are providing the services: price and the wait time, all are equitable. Chair Semelfort stated the Abilities-Ride providers may be back to the MAS meeting in June, and the customer could ask her questions directly from them.

The customer further shared information that she received at a disability expo in Maryland. It was attended by many people who use wheelchairs and all of them stated that Uber Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (WAV) is giving better service than the Abilities-Ride. Uber WAV (drivers and staff) are trained by the MV Transportation employees. Chair Semelfort shared his experience about training the Abilities-Ride employees. He received a call from the Silver cab and was asked as a customer, if he knows someone who can help train their drivers? Ms. Williams-Hall stated we will provide your recommendations to Mr. Blake.

Ms. Bush commented about long trips and inadequate scheduling for her trips to and from College Park, for past couple of weeks. This morning she was in the vehicle from 6:30 am until 8:10 am. One day last week she was in the vehicle from 6:30 am until 9:10 am. Ms. Williams-Hall stated she does not have specifics of the trips (at the time) and that her trips will be further reviewed. Ms. Rush asked Ms. Bush, how long was her trip on the day when it was shared by Chair Semelfort, Ms. Bush and Ms. Rush.

An email received from a customer was read by Dr. Posner for the record. The comments were about the sedan that is chosen to be added to the MetroAccess fleet. The customer's comments reflected his disagreement about the Chevy Malibu as the choice of sedan, as it seemed to be a decision made rather quickly. The customer's email also reflected his disagreement about the proposal of the front seat removal.

Five Minutes Interpretation:

Mr. Crawford stated there has been some discussion about the door-to-door and curb-to-curb service. When a person does not need door-to-door service, then it is served as curb-to-curb service, and this motion directly impacts that. When a person needs door-to-door service, the 5 minutes start when the driver gets to the door. When a person gets curb-to-curb service, the 5 minutes start at the time of notification to the customer.

Ms. Anderson stated the MetroAccess service is door-to-door. It is curb-to-curb only when the location is not door-to-door serviceable. Ms. Rush stated if that is the case then why does the reservations office ask the customer (at the time of reservation) if they want door-to-door? Ms. Anderson clarified that reservations office would ask because some customers do not want the door-to-door-service.

Ms. Rush proposed a motion for the 5 minutes interpretation and take it to the AAC. All members stated "yes." As the Chair, Mr. Semelfort stayed neutral. The motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 5:55pm.