



Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: July 15, 2019

Attendees

Present: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Carolyn Bellamy, Darnise Bush, Tino Calabia, Charlie Crawford, Melanie Jackson, Philippa Mezile, Phil Posner, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Chair Semelfort called the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting to order at 4:00pm. Chair Semelfort started with introductions of the Committee members, staff, guest speaker, and customers.

Review of Agenda & Minutes from Prior Meeting

The Meeting Agenda was approved as amended.

The topic of "Vote on the Honda Accord Hybrid Sedan" was added while the "Abilities-Ride New Providers" was taken out as there was no update at this time.

The June 17th Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

Customer Service & Outreach Reports

Carlton Brown, MTM, stated all the feedback received has been reviewed, investigated, customers have been contacted, and late trip credits were provided as applicable.

David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning (ADAP), stated most of the outreach has been on the platform shutdown project. The effort was to provide better training to operators with a focus on helping customers get better service.

Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services (ACCS), stated the Office of Eligibility Certification and Outreach (ELIG) conducted onsite outreach at the Pentagon and Crystal City stations as these are the destination stations for the Blue and Yellow Line shutdown. The staff were out there to offer customers presumptive eligibility for MetroAccess as recommended by the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC). Five people signed up, and within 5 days they became MetroAccess eligible customers until the Blue and Yellow Line shutdown is over. If the customers wish to extend their MetroAccess eligibility beyond the shutdown, then they will have to provide the information requested from all customers applying for MetroAccess eligibility. While today was the last day for the on-site presumptive outreach activity, the opportunity for the presumptive eligibility continues and it is on our website for people with needs to sign up without time restrictions. ELIG can be contacted and a member of staff will go out to either the Pentagon station or the Crystal City station to meet the customer and conduct the visual assessment. If the customer passes the visual assessment, he or she will be granted the presumptive eligibility until the end of the shutdown project.

Michael Wilson Award and Rush Award

The Michael Wilson Award was presented by Robbie Werth, Diamond Transportation, to Ronald Alston, Trainer, for his service since September 2017. Mr. Alston has been a model driver who performed 3,321 trips with 94% on-time performance without any accidents. He is a compassionate person and an inspiration for others.

Ms. Rush remembered Mr. Johnson, a driver who passed a few weeks ago.

The Rush Award was presented to Marlyn Bowman. Since April 2007, he has provided safe transportation to MetroAccess customers. His dedication and integrity have built everlasting relationships that echoes beyond First Transit's walls. Mr. Bowman stated he receives an immense amount of satisfaction and joy from helping the disabled community.

TransportDC:

Gerald Kasunic, Administrative Office, Government of the District of Columbia Department of For-Hire Vehicles, stated there have been some recent changes. There is an infusion of wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) incentive funds. Any WAV drivers will receive a supplemental \$5. To make this affordable and accessible, TransportDC's pool ride is a free ride sharing program that started on June 17th until the end of September. The WAVs are also part of the pool ride program. The pool rides will be measured in numbers, timeliness, accuracy, and customer service.

To ensure the expansion of transportation service and to compliment MetroAccess customers as needed, different programs are being initiated, such as the Micro Transit (free) Program in Wards 4 and 5. Customers can call 202-398-0500 to sign up and/or drop down their application (app) "microtransit", and if a customer is in the zone, they can connect with a free shuttle till the end of the fiscal year at the end of September. Another program, Taxi2Rail (T2R) has been introduced east of the river for Wards 7 and 8. The user does not necessarily have to be a resident of Ward 7 or 8. The idea is first mile last mile mentality. If someone needs a ride from their home to Metro or vice versa, or from grocery shopping to Metro or vice-versa, a trip under \$10 will be free. Any amount over \$10 is going to be a co-pay by the customer. At this time, Mr. Kasunic invited questions.

Dr. Posner asked about the pool service. Mr. Kasunic stated for now, customers can get picked up from different locations, however going to the same location within a 5 minutes radius, with a great deal of flexibility because 5 minutes in a rush hour traffic could be half a block. Dr. Posner also asked who manages the pool, riders or providers? Mr. Kasunic stated both. The pool ride is not restricted to the location whereas the standard ride is, therefore, he encourages as many people to use it as possible by self-matching for rides or provider matching rides if called in 24 in advance and with customer approval for it.

Ms. Mezile stated her concerns about the "call-in" system as it takes a while to get connected with a company. When a customer hangs up and calls back, the system connects with the same company instead of an alternate provider. Ms. Mezile recommends letting the market place dictate which company gets the business.. Mr. Kasunic stated they have Amazon Web Services (AWS) system, a call-in center for Amazon. He provided a history of the previous system that did not work as intended

since customer phone calls could not be traced. The economic development grant funds must be equally divided amongst the 3 companies that serve the community across the board. To streamline the process, a trace on the call was started, that is how they put-in the AWS system. If a customer called in to an operator, the system remembers the customer for 24 hours and connects them back to the same operator. In the past couple of weeks, Mr. Kasunic and his team have developed a customer survey for all TransportDC customers to tell why they would prefer a certain company over others. Another TransportDC survey coming up is for WAV customers to provide feedback about the service.

Ms. Bush asked if the current travel restrictions within the month may change soon? Mr. Kasunic stated from the budgetary standpoint, it will be impossible as it will be almost a \$9 million to \$10 million grant, versus the current funding of \$5.5 million. Ms. Bush stated another concern about WAV, especially in Southeast where the service is very slow already. The providers say they are looking for a WAV driver, however, in meetings they claim to have ample WAVs. Mr. Kasunic agreed with Ms. Bush that more WAVs are needed on the road. He had a site visit before this meeting and found 4 out of 11 WAVs were in the mechanic shop. He is exploring different ideas to bring more WAVs and more WAV drivers. For example, a veteran driver with several years of experience may mentor new WAV drivers. They are looking at ways to incentivize the new WAV drivers in the fiscal year (FY) 2020. Mr. Kasunic stated they have been working with the User Disability Group as well as the Access Disability Group to explore some innovation grants. One idea would be a repair grant, which could assist drivers with vehicle repairs when needed. Another idea is to have a fast lane over at the station.

Vice-Chair Rush asked about paper advertising concerning the mentioned programs. Mr. Kasunic stated people can attend meetings on first Wednesdays of the month, there is on-line advertising, they have gone out to all the Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) meetings in each Ward, and they would visit Churches as well. Mr. Kasunic has reached out to Age Friendly DC and the Washington DC Office on Aging. Mr. Kasunic stated he has brought 50 bags with brochures, which will also be posted online and are 508 compliant. Mr. Kasunic provided his contact information for other outreach activities.

Mr. Crawford asked about funding streams that could help improve the program. Mr. Kasunic commented about the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with WMATA and the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), that would ask for an additional \$10 WAV incentive for the TransportDC program. The minimum wage this month increases up to \$15 per hour, therefore, he would like for the WAV drivers to earn above the minimum wage. The other funding source being reviewed is the Council of Governments. He would explore the Mobility Grant, scheduled for August 1st. Another grant to be reviewed is from the Office on Aging service for seniors, as 69% population of Transport DC are seniors.

A customer stated the pool rides are a great idea. The Abilities-Ride program pays an extra \$10 for a WAV and the TransportDC should match that to incentivize drivers. The

current MOU states that. She would like to see the AAC make a recommendation to the Board.

It is the same number of drivers and vehicles, they are not going to magically multiply and get more vehicles. Mr. Blake stated about the MOU, Metro does not control the TransportDC program. If the DC Government wants to incentivize WAV drivers, they can, Metro does not control that. Metro is not going to increase any more money for the TransportDC program. Metro is giving back about \$5 million a year. There are other changes the DC Government can make. Giving another \$500,000 or a \$1 million to pay the \$10 WAV incentive is most likely not going to happen. The Abilities-Ride will be an option for customers.

Chair Semelfort thanked Mr. Kasunic for coming and sharing information.

Roll-Out of Arrival-Calls and Ranger Improvements:

Roll-Out of Arrival-Calls:

Chair Semelfort stated he has received both, some pre-arrival as well as arrival-calls. Some pre-arrival calls were timely. Whereas one call was made 25 minutes prior to the vehicle arriving. He recommends for the pre-arrival calls to be kept to a small pool of people until the issues have been resolved. Mr. Blake stated current pool has 28 people. For some people the calls have been inaccurate. Whereas for some, the calls have been accurate. Keeping it to a small number may not be the solution. The number may have to be expanded to determine the challenges whether they are geographic, related to time of the day, or other reasons causing the issues.

Ms. Rush stated the calls can confuse customers as sometimes the vehicles arrive sooner than 10 minutes, and sometimes much later. Mr. Blake stated if the call states a ride is 10 minutes away, then you have 10 minutes regardless if the ride arrives earlier than the stated 10 minutes. We have a record of when that call comes out. If it takes education and more practice for the program to work, then he is committed to that. There will be another call made to the customer before the ride leaves.

Ranger Improvements:

Chair Semelfort shared his experience of rides coming 2 blocks before or after his home address. Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated they are working with Trapeze.

Ms. Williams-Hall stated last week she took a MetroAccess trip along with Allison Anderson, Operations Manager. The trip was to home address of Ms. Rush and it was a 4-hour ordeal. It gave them some meaningful feedback not just that the ride was bad, but details as to what the system was doing. They are going to take another trip with Ms. Rush on Wednesday from work to home to find potential issues with possible resolutions. Mr. Blake stated Ms. Rush has informed that directions to her home do not require a U turn. Ms. Williams-Hall stated as per the directions on their cell phones via Google maps and Waze, it required a U turn. When the driver deviated, the ranger started to recalculate, however, to some arbitrary directions and they are trying to determine what

caused for it to “get lost” while in route to her home address. Dr. Posner recommended to bring MapQuest for the next trip to see whether there is a conflict of directions between Google Map, MapQuest, and/or Garmin.

Chair Semelfort stated on Saturday, a driver had his pick-up address, but not the drop off address. Ms. Williams-Hall was not aware of this and will review it further.

Ms. Rush has had issues with the service on Fridays, thus, asked what happens every Friday? Mr. Blake asked the service providers how they encourage their employees to come for a full day of work? It is public transit and shared ride, once a driver decides to take off for any reason, it affects everyone.

Edward, Diamond Transportation, stated they pay every week and allow drivers to keep the fares until it is time for reconciliation, which allows for them to have some spending money. They promote great attendance. When a driver does not get enough hours, enough pay, or they get enough hours, but not enough pay, then there are other avenues open to them these days. It is astuteness, it is having a plan, and executing the plan.

Chametra Baskerville, First Transit, stated on the management aspect they manage progressive discipline versus encouraging folks to come to work for paycheck. Employees are supposed to come to work as per a schedule, if they are out or late, they accrue points. About bonuses, they track performance and high performing employees get a bonus based on that. Their location is across from the FedEx Field and they get some complaints. They actively ensure the drivers are well rested and keeping safety in mind, their dispatchers will turn away the drivers if needed.

Albert Sams, TransDev, stated they encourage operators to come to work and provide good service. They also have a point system for when drivers are not in compliance and when inconsistent with rules and regulations.

Challenger was not present in the meeting to provide their feedback about this issue.

MetroAccess Refund Policy – Build the Plan:

The topic was not discussed due to time constraints and was moved to a future agenda.

MetroAccess Work-Plan:

Chair Semelfort provided a list of work-plan, via email to all the Committee members prior to the meeting. The list is as follows: Easter Seals App for Regional Services – update, Updates on New Abilities Ride Providers – Introduction, Abilities Ride Providers – service updates, Update on Transport DC, Revision of MetroAccess Customer Guide and Insert Pamphlet – Updates, Updates on data collected for the Expanded MetroAccess Reservations window pilot (45 minutes), Updates on the MetroAccess Sedan purchase, MetroAccess Van Seat Configuration – update, MetroAccess GPS System – Ranger Updates, Update MetroAccess Pre-arrival calls (10 minutes), MetroAccess service call – 5 minute rule, MetroAccess Refund Policy – Taxi/Alternative Rides, Overview of MetroAccess Eligibility Process, MetroAccess real-time information APP update,

Heddinger Award Discussion, Election of AAC Officers, and the Fare Policy - was added to the work plan. Going forward, the work plan will be modified as needed.

Vote on the Honda Accord Hybrid Sedan:

Chair Semelfort asked for the Committee's vote on the Honda Accord Hybrid to be chosen as the sedan for MetroAccess fleet, providing their feedback by saying yes, no, or abstain.

Ms. Bush found the vehicle comfortable, accommodating, the front seat usable, the back door opens wider, and the leg room is adequate. Ms. Mezile liked the car, found it comfortable, was able to get her feet in even with the front seat pushed back all the way. Ms. Rush stated previously she voted not to get the sedans, however, she was comfortable, could get in and out on her own, her legs were neither crunched-up in the back nor in the front of the car, and that she was impressed with this sedan.

Ms. Bellamy stated her strong disapproval of the sedan and stated MetroAccess means all people have access to a ride. She stated people in wheelchairs are being discriminated. Mr. Blake responded for the record, and stated the word discriminate has got to be used very carefully in public. If the AAC believes that the sedan is discriminatory, then he would encourage the AAC to consider the fact that taxis have been used for MetroAccess service long before he arrived. Last year, more than 100,000 MetroAccess trips (not Abilities-Ride or TransportDC) reported to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) were done in taxi cab sedan vehicles. When we send the information to the FTA, the Federal Government, the Department of Justice – the people whose job it is to see if we are discriminating or not, we do not say these trips were on a cab, or these trips were on a van, we say they were MetroAccess trips. We are using a variety of vehicles to ensure the civil rights of people who are in this region, who are eligible for para-transit service, and adding a Metro-owned sedan in our fleet is no different than a privately-owned sedan, providing hundreds of thousands of MetroAccess trips over the last 5 or 10 years.

Dr. Posner stated the shape of the roof is oval and would not hit his head if he sat up straight. Mr. Crawford provided positive feedback. Mr. Ariza-Silva stated the fabric is easier to slide or move. The seat height is good for a person of his height. In rides longer than 30 minutes, it may be problematic for him to be seated due to position of his feet. However, the seats are comfortable. Dr. Posner asked is it because the seat is too low or high? Mr. Ariza-Silva stated because the seat is low. Dr. Posner asked if a cushion will help? Mr. Ariza-Silva confirmed it will.

A customer strongly approved of the vehicle and thanked for choosing this sedan. A second customer gave her positive feedback and stated the sedan was comfortable.

A third customer opposed sedans and stated why not have better vans, why is money being wasted on cars. Mr. Blake stated we need newer vans, and once we get through the sedan process, part of our next work with the AAC and stakeholders is to help select the specs of a newer van design that will go back to the more traditional paratransit van. We need a sedan for several reasons: fuel efficiency, customer comfort, and safety. The

customer asked if a survey was done. Mr. Blake stated the sedans will be at most 30% of the fleet. The competitive process requires all the requirements to be announced and companies from outside provide what they can provide along with their price. Often, we can come back and talk about it. Or go through the regular procurement process and make the purchase that fits the best choice. That is how things normally work. This was a very different procurement than what we do at Metro. We did not put out those specs. We did not do a survey. We reviewed all the vehicles in the world based upon fuel efficiency, rear seat room, and head room. Those were the general standards established for this purchase. We brought the Committee and took feedback from the members and other stakeholders. Even after we had selected 3 vehicles we took feedback from the stakeholders, however, there were challenges. We could have brought forth this vehicle the first time. The Honda Accord Hybrid turned out to be the best vehicle that is available for purchase.

Dr. Posner proposed a motion that the sedans will not reduce the number of vans, we will not find a situation down the road that the number of vans will be reduced as a result of sedans being added to the fleet. Mr. Blake stated we have no intentions of doing that. The vote was taken on the vehicle. All the Committee members stated yes, while Chair Semelfort abstained. The motion passed. Mr. Blake stated this process is transparent. Any updates will be provided to the Committee and thanked the members for participating in this process.

Public Comment:

Dr. Posner read an email received from a customer about MetroAccess service delays.

A second customer stated Regency's service (Abilities-Ride) is deteriorating. He stated that the AAC is not fully representing the disabled community and a report should be submitted reflecting the Committee's responsibilities. He strongly supported the sedan.

A third customer recommended for WMATA to adopt a vehicle design for national standards and to advocate within APTA to create a design request. Dr. Posner stated we can put out a standard vehicle that is approved by APTA, as a national standard.

A fourth customer stated her concerns about MetroAccess service overall. Leland Peterson, MV Transportation, stated we have looked at additional training and other best practices to implement, including feedback from this meeting and from customers, we talk to employees to determine better options for future reference and use past experiences as lessons learned. Schedulers look at the bigger picture and try to balance everything out the prior day. On the day of service, the primary focus is to service the customer. Several things may affect the service. Our group looks at information in the computer and uses group knowledge.

Ms. Bush stated her concern about excessive MetroAccess trips causing delays to work. Ms. Rush asked Mr. Blake about routes being closed. Mr. Blake stated for today 41 out of 756 routes were closed because of lack of demand. It includes the cushion as we have some call-outs built in when routes are shut down. Unfortunately, the scheduled staff did

not come or came in late and that affected other routes adversely. The scheduling teams put out a schedule and if we have 900 routes, we cannot have 100 drivers being paid for sitting around doing nothing. Mr. Sheehan asked about penalties for the low on-time performance. Mr. Blake stated service providers get penalized not Metro.

Meeting adjourned at 6:05pm.