



Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: September 16, 2019

Attendees

Present: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Carolyn Bellamy, Darnise Bush, Charlie Crawford, Phillippa Mezile, Phil Posner, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Vice-Chair Rush called the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting to order at 4:00pm.

Vice-Chair Rush started with the 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 "Next Generation Paratransit Vehicle" was added.

The meeting minutes were approved as written.

Dr. Posner asked about the disparity of data in the MetroAccess Performance Reports as the daily ridership, weekly ridership, and monthly ridership statistics do not match. Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated the disparity can be attributed to what happens from the time the reservations are made, to the time when trips are taken.

Customer Service & Outreach Reports

Carlton Brown, MTM, stated that the public comments were reviewed, and customers were contacted.

David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of Americans Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy and Planning, stated there was nothing to be reported for the Outreach Report.

Michael Wilson Award and Rush Award

Michael Wilson Award:

There was no recipient for the Michael Wilson Award.

Rush Award:

Chair Semelfort read a brief bio for Operator Hatcher-Williams, recipient of the Rush Award. She is dedicated, has been providing genuine care to MetroAccess customers for over a decade, and raises funds for her alma mater. Ms. Rush stated it is a pleasure riding with Ms. Hatcher-Williams. The recipient graciously accepted the award.

Abilities – Ride New Providers Update / Information:

Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, provided an update on the second wave of the expansion of the Abilities-Ride program, including the addition of new providers. Mr. Blake stated not all the providers have been signed yet. Currently, there are four new approved vendors providing service: Yellow Cab Company of DC, Transco

(District of Columbia), BBC Express (District of Columbia, a van company), and Falcon Transportation (Maryland, a van company). The Transco and Yellow Cab are providing trips for residents of the District of Columbia, to and from their Eligibility appointments. Regency and Silver cabs are still providing trips to Eligibility appointments for residents of Maryland. As a result of these efforts, about 150 trips per week have been taken off MetroAccess.

Falcon Transportation and BBC are beginning their experience by providing trips for 74 customers a week to and from the Ardmore program. The customers were asked to try Falcon Transportation and BBC, and they have tested very well.

Curb, a new company that uses licensed taxi cabs, has also signed a contract, but they have not started service at this time. With the addition of Curb, customers will have more choices in various parts of the region including Maryland. Currently, there are seven companies participating in Abilities-Ride, including the existing two (Regency and Silver). A total of 12 companies are expected to participate in the program. Chair Semelfort asked about the accessible fleet. Mr. Blake stated the companies have accessible vans for service use.

Dr. Posner asked about service in Virginia. Mr. Blake stated we will have providers in Virginia as well. There has been a service challenge in Prince George's County and he is trying to address that. There is an effort to have all the contracts completed and signed soon. A customer asked whether the Abilities-Ride contract allows a contractor to use sub-contractors, as that is the model Curb uses. Silver Cab provides services in Prince George's county, however, WMATA is having trouble keeping service in that county. A customer question what is being done about it? Mr. Blake stated we want the capacity therefore we encourage the contractors to partner. Chair Semelfort stated there are more customers than drivers in Prince George's county. He shared his experience of using Curb in New York: it is an application (app) based company and customers are informed of the type of vehicle that will be serving as well as the location of the vehicle while in route. Mr. Blake stated under the Abilities-Ride, Silver cab provides service in Prince George's county and it has been a challenge for customers to get good service. Silver cab could not fulfill the high demand, therefore additional providers should help improve customer experience.

A customer asked about the base fare of various providers joining the expansion of the Abilities-Ride. Mr. Blake stated it is based on shorter trips and the exact information can be verified. A customer asked when are the remaining contracts expected to be completed? Mr. Blake stated the process of completing the contracts is underway and is expected soon. A customer, who is a Prince George's county resident, asked if the cab drivers are required to perform the standard service? Mr. Blake stated cab drivers for MetroAccess trips should be providing service as per MetroAccess requirements. In the past, the cab companies provided MetroAccess trips in Montgomery County and in Virginia, and the drivers in Prince George's County are relatively new. They are supposed to provide door-to-door service for MetroAccess customers, as well. The customer was asked to provide specifics of the trips for further review. The customer also asked why

she is unable to use the cab service in DC. Mr. Blake informed the customer that Transport DC is a DC Government program for DC residents, only. Currently, the Abilities-Ride program is for a MetroAccess customers who reside in Maryland. With the expansion of the Abilities-Ride program, the customers will have more options throughout the MetroAccess service region.

A customer stated she can take Regency cab to District of Columbia and back to Maryland. However, cab companies do not provide her service on Sundays. Mr. Blake stated that may be the time when she is out of the MetroAccess service zone, however, Abilities-Ride does not have that restriction and service providers should be able to pick her up. Chair Semelfort stated Silver cab does not have a sufficient number of drivers in the evenings. Mr. Blake stated with the expansion of the program, there will be additional options for the customers.

A customer, who is a Prince George's county resident, stated Silver Cab does not provide adequate service, and asked why Metro cannot have Uber as part of the Abilities-Ride providers? Mr. Blake stated he cannot provide any additional information about that specific provider at this time. A customer had a concern about cab companies not booking the return trips during the time that the first trips are booked. Mr. Blake stated even though the Abilities-Ride is a same day service, he has always encouraged customers to pre-schedule. He has been talking to cab companies about pre-assigning trips however, they do not assign trips more than 30 minutes prior to the trip times.

Chair Semelfort asked whether Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) communicates with any of the taxi regulators? Mr. Blake stated he is constantly in communication with the regulators in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. He does not provide customer details, however, he may provide taxi information to the regulators, as needed.

Next Generation Paratransit Vehicle:

Mr. Blake started the topic discussion and informed that WMATA plans to receive some grants for the Next Generation Paratransit Vehicle. Glen Millis, Senior Policy and Planning Officer, Access Services, provided information about the Next Generation Paratransit Vehicle. Mr. Millis presented a communication about the vehicle that is going to be built in the future. The vehicle needs to be safe, accessible, comfortable, efficient, environmentally friendly, and ADA compliant. The safety features being considered include avoidance of forward, side, and back-up collisions, and it will also have a closed-circuit television system. The accessibility choices under consideration include full size transit door/lift and low floor/ramp. For customer comfort, tinted windows, wider/higher seats, footrest seat attachment, bariatric seat, and phone battery chargers are proposed. The operational efficiencies to consider are: larger interior that can accommodate 2 wheelchairs and possibly 4 seated passengers, capability to load/unload wheelchair individually, have more aisle space, enhanced entry way lighting, improved stanchion hand holds, and navigation system (Ranger backup). The vehicle must be environmentally friendly, therefore improved fuel efficiency and LED lighting are

important. Mr. Millis stated the next steps are to begin the design of the Next Generation vehicle and have follow up meetings.

Dr. Posner stated since the new vans could have post modifications, he recommended having a good head-rest and seat belts for tall people. Regarding the side collision prevention, he assumes an announcement would be made about someone being in the blind spot. In past, some of the members had asked for tinted windows, however, the Committee did not like that idea for visibility, etc. He also recommended having larger windows on the vans for better visibility for people of various heights.

Mr. Crawford stated in past, when the discussion of vans about different designs came up, the response was that the manufacturer did not design all the requirements, has that changed now? Mr. Millis stated we have checked and there are many different items out there. Mr. Blake stated the new vans are being explored. We do not know for sure, however, we may still end up with a very different type of Ford Transit. As a member had previously mentioned, we could have a national standard of paratransit vehicles design, WMATA would like to get that and that is why we are moving for a grant. Mr. Crawford asked about number of phone chargers. Mr. Millis stated it may be one with each seat, however, that is under review.

Ms. Bush asked that with all the things mentioned, including a wider aisle, would that make the vehicle bigger, leading to operators acquiring a commercial driver's license (CDL)? Mr. Millis stated we may have a relatively bigger vehicle but not big enough for drivers to require a CDL. Mr. Blake clarified that if a vehicle is under 10,000 pounds, the driver is not required to have a CDL. The vehicle being considered and reviewed, may be bigger by a couple of hundred pounds from the existing vehicle, however, will not exceed 10,000 pounds.

A customer stated his concerns about the windows of the current vehicles and asked if there is a vehicle already designed for paratransit instead of re-inventing? He also asked what informed your various decisions on the designs? Mr. Blake stated the ideas that were mentioned, came from the Committee. We do not know if there is an existing vehicle for paratransit. Mr. Millis stated there are vehicles, however, we are looking for a next generation vehicle that is going to be better and we are listening to your comments. A customer commented about various air-vents. Chair Semelfort clarified the comment and recommended to review the air-vents for condensation. Mr. Blake stated the current vehicles are smaller and is supposed to give smoother ride, and asked if there was anything that the Committee likes about the Ford Transits? Ms. Bush stated she likes the fact that the chairs are adjustable. Mr. Blake stated the objective is to have a better vehicle with the recommendations of the AAC and other stakeholders.

Update of MetroAccess GPS/Ranger System:

Ms. Williams-Hall stated the team is reviewing a new device that works like the smart phone applications, thus it is going to be easier to use. If all works, those devices will start operating with the new sedans. Dr. Posner recommended to test the new device around

the Capitol Hill area to see if the signal drops or not, allowing for a good test of the device. Ms. Williams-Hall stated the efforts to improve the current devices continue.

MetroAccess Customer Guide Update / Insert Pamphlet:

The topic was deferred to a later meeting.

Heddinger Award:

Chair Semelfort asked about the Heddinger Award. Mr. Blake stated he will send an email regarding the award to all the members after the meeting.

Public Comment:

A customer stated her concerns about late and excessive trips, rude dispatchers, inadequate scheduling, and the malfunctioning navigation system. The customer commended all the van operators. Mr. Blake asked the customer to provide specifics for further review and clarified that MetroAccess is not a direct service. Ms. Williams-Hall stated there has been a shift in the focus on better customer service and hopes customers experience it soon.

Another customer's concerns were about the on-line reservation and inadequate scheduling. Mr. Blake asked the customer to provide specifics for further review. He clarified that MetroAccess is a shared ride, however, we have not had a real shared ride culture. We are currently working on it so that customers are not driven in different directions.

A customer shared his positive experience regarding improved customer service he received this past weekend. He recommended that MetroAccess follow the reimbursement program like the one in New York. Chair Semelfort stated he has it on the workplan. The reimbursement takes 2 weeks and MetroAccess customers may not want to put the funds out. Mr. Blake stated MetroAccess has a no strand policy. Through the Abilities-Ride programs, rides are provided to customers without the customer having to bear the cost. Every trip coming to Metro Headquarters is not a \$20 trip as Metro is paying much more. If a trip is delayed customer may even get a direct trip. At this time, we may not be able to follow the New York reimbursement model.

A customer stated her concerns about MetroAccess delayed and excessive trips. The customer's trip information will be reviewed further.

A customer stated a concern about a driver not following the navigation system, but instead followed directions given by a customer and drove unsafely. Customer also reported that a dispatcher hung up on him. Specific information was received from customer for further review.

A customer stated concerns about MetroAccess trips from a church location, as drivers are unable to find the building. At times, drivers circle around before letting her off the vehicle. Mr. Blake stated for the safety of the customers, drivers may have to circle around

if they are unable to find parking to safely drop off the customer, since they may not double park. As for the location finding of her church, that will be reviewed further.

A customer recommended that MetroAccess provide credits for excessive trips as done for the late trips. Mr. Blake stated we are looking into a fare policy as per the recommendations by the Committee.

A customer complimented the timely follow up done by MetroAccess pertaining to an incident she reported. The customer provided an example of an incident which was followed up by Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD) within minutes of the incident. The customer did not consider the matter so seriously, however, appreciated that Metro took the matter with such seriousness and diligence. The customer also stated her concerns about delayed and excessive MetroAccess trips, and the rude behavior of an operator on September 3rd. The customer stated she is penalized for missed medical appointments because of MetroAccess delays. The trips to and from the DC General hospital are problematic. Mr. Blake also stated the staff will review the issues from DC General. The mentioned trips will be reviewed, and the behavior of the mentioned driver will be addressed. For clarification purposes, it was stated that trip time in a personal vehicle may differ than from public transportation. Therefore, trip duration will have to be reviewed.

A customer stated her concerns about MetroAccess service: drivers get lost on Massachusetts Avenue, poor service level of the operators, scheduling issues, delayed and excessive trips. Mr. Blake stated the customer should not have to wait for hours due to scheduling issues and that MetroAccess is working with the hospital for pick up and drop off locations as that is mandated by the hospital.

A customer stated her concerns about return trips for the first week of September. Even though she books trips as early as a week in advance, she still has trouble finding a good pick-up window. The customer stated the dispatchers were rude, however she was provided with great customer service by two dispatch supervisors. The DC General hospital is going through a major renovation and customers have trouble boarding and disembarking the vehicles. The customer had a concern about being picked up with someone going to or coming from a club while she is heading to work. The customer also commented about being grand-fathered. Mr. Blake stated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates that MetroAccess cannot prioritize trips. Therefore, if a customer taking MetroAccess, using her or his civil rights, wants to go to clubs, then MetroAccess must take them and cannot prioritize trips even though another customer may be going to work. The customer was recommended to use subscription trips and have a set regular pick up schedule. The specific trips will be reviewed.

Ms. Coles shared a concern of a friend who is a Department of Defense (DOD) employee. The DOD building is secured, and as a result, MetroAccess customers have tremendous difficulty getting dropped off and picked up. Ms. Coles asked is there a way for communication between the security guards and MetroAccess drivers? Mr. Blake stated

some buildings have restrictions and MetroAccess drivers must abide by them. In such cases, customers need to help MetroAccess via communicating with their employers.

A customer was thankful for MetroAccess service however, the height of the vans and excessive trips of 2 hours do not fall under the ADA. The customer stated several concerns about Silver Cab: vehicle conditions, unsafe driving, etc. Mr. Blake stated if the customer does not like the new vans, she will like the sedans. Her concerns will be addressed and shared with Silver cab.

Ms. Rush asked how many drivers did not come to work and how many routes were cut as a result? Mr. Blake stated as per her recommendation, MetroAccess has not closed any route since the end of May.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.