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Accessibility Advisory Committee

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: January 17, 2017

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Co-Chair), Mr. Edward McEntee, Dr. Tapan Banerjee, Mr. Patrick Sheehan, Ms. Carolyn Bellamy, Mr. Charles Crawford, Ms. Phillipa Mezile and Ms. Doris Ray.

Call to Order

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

Review of January 2017 Agenda

Mr. Semelfort asked staff to provide information regarding Inauguration activities and the upcoming public hearings during new business. The agenda was approved as amended.

Review of December 2016 Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Ms. Jennifer Weber, Quality Assurance Compliance Auditor, MTM, reported all public comments from the previous meetings were addressed.

Michael Wilson Award Presentation

Mr. Robbie Werth, Founder, Diamond Transportation, recognized operator Belky Maldonado as the Michael Wilson Award recipient. Mr. Werth provided a summary of Mrs. Maldonado's statistical performance, accomplishments, and key contributions to MetroAccess Service.

MetroAccess Severe Weather Protocol

Mr. William Proctor, Field Operations Manager, MetroAccess, discussed the MetroAccess Severe Weather Protocol in detail. Mr. Proctor stated the purpose of the procedure is to ensure safe transportation for all customers during a severe weather event. There are established WMATA policies governing the operation of Metrobus and Metrorail service under severe weather conditions. Although, MetroAccess service warrants additional consideration for the unique challenges involved with transporting customers with disabilities (obstacles such as path of travel, un-cleared or otherwise impassable

sidewalks, driveways, or curb cuts) during severe weather events are taken into account.

Mr. Proctor stated the delivery of service is carefully balanced against considerations for safety and road conditions. MetroAccess closely manages the service on a case-by-case basis as conditions deteriorate. During severe weather conditions, it is the goal of MetroAccess to transport customers to their requested destinations as long as it is safe to do so. Generally, when weather conditions do not allow safe transport, outbound trips are discontinued and only return trips are provided. Customers are notified if their trips are cancelled. It is the policy of MetroAccess to attempt to operate all return or inbound trips before MetroAccess operations are discontinued.

Mr. Proctor described the six operational phases of the severe weather protocol, explaining the role and duties of WMATA staff and service contractors during each phase. WMATA staff are divided into two teams providing 24-hour coverage throughout the weather event. Each phase outlines specific actions to be taken as weather conditions deteriorate. During each phase, an IVR and/or E-Alert message is issued.

Comments/Questions from the MAS

Mr. Semelfort commented that when service is suspended for a day, resuming service usually takes place between 10am and 12pm, after the temperature has risen above freezing. He also asked staff to explain that during inclement weather, some locations may be deemed only curb-to-curb serviceable due to the conditions of the sidewalks or walkways.

Mr. Proctor commented that several factors are considered when determining resumption of service. Reports of cleared streets, vehicle de-icing, and removal of snow emergency equipment from the roadways are a few of the factors taken into consideration.

Ms. Allison Anderson, Operations Manager, MetroAccess, commented that ensuring employees are able to get into work is a factor as well. Ms. Anderson stated that for a location to be considered door-to-door serviceable, there must be a clear path of travel to the door of the location. If the operator arrives to a location and discovers it is not door-to-door serviceable, they are to contact the Operations Control Center (OCC). The OCC will contact the customer to inform them that the location is not door-to-door serviceable at that time, however, the operator will wait at the curb of the location to provide transportation.

Mr. Crawford asked about the criteria used to determine whether to provide service during inclement weather events.

Mr. Proctor explained that real time information related to road conditions at the time of the event, and forecasted conditions are used to assess. He stated the No-Strand policy would be implemented, and no customer would be left at a location if they could be safely reached. It is the goal of MetroAccess to transport customers safely to their final destination.

Ms. Anderson stated consideration is also given to whether MetroAccess would be able to safely return customers to the destination if conditions deteriorated.

Meet Your Service Delivery Provider – Diamond

Ms. Vernice Anderson, Project Manager, Mr. Robbie Werth, Founder, Diamond Transportation, and Mr. Terry Thompson, Regional Manager, National Express Transit, provided an overview of their service. Mr. Werth explained Diamond Transportation has been in business for 37 years, and has been awarded many times as an exemplary transportation provider in the region. Diamond began service with MetroAccess as a subcontractor in 2006. They began operating service with 15 vehicles and expanded to 90 vehicles by the end of the subcontract. Mr. Werth explained his on-going contracts with MetroAccess, Arlington County Star service, and the Arlington Senior Loop service. He advised that Diamond operates 100 vehicles for MetroAccess, with two dispatch centers in Springfield and Lorton, VA. Diamond conducts a 110-hour training program for operators and a safety program with one of the highest standards in the region. He proudly announced that Diamond Transportation had no customer injuries on any of their vehicles over a two years period. Mr. Werth lauds their success with consistency of management over the course of the MetroAccess contract. Their goals are operator engagement and proactive management. Mr. Werth announced that Diamond Transportation has selected National Express Transit as the new owner of Diamond Transportation. National Express is committed to the same path of excellence as has been provided by Diamond Transportation.

Mr. Thompson gave an overview of National Express stating that the company is a global transportation company with over 30,000 employees, operating in 36 states. He explained that as part of the transition, they identified areas of opportunity needing to be addressed. In December 2016, they began to address the issue of operator shortages and have currently reached an optimal number of operators to resolve the shortage issue. New hires are currently in training and will begin to provide service as soon as they have successfully completed training. In the future, management will rely on historical data and seasonal trends to forecast operating staff levels and mitigate the recurrence of staff shortages. The second area of opportunity is on-time performance. He stated that they understand their inability to meet the on-time performance in the past has caused undue hardship on the customers served. He said that though they are

not where they would like to be, they have seen steady improvements. Mr. Thompson said Diamond Transportation/National Express is confident of continued improvement with the resolution of operator shortage. The third area of opportunity is operator wages. An adjustment in their operators starting wage has been enacted. The last area of opportunity is retaining operators. A town hall meeting was conducted with the staff to determine the issues. Staff has voiced concern with the length of time it took to negotiate the collective bargaining agreement. The uncertainty of future increases and benefits frustrated the staff. In an effort to increase morale, this was a top priority of the management staff, and the staff and management were able to reach an agreement with the collective bargaining unit on January 15.

Comments/Questions from the MAS:

Ms. Rush stated that she was excited about the wage increase for the operators. She asked if the name would change from Diamond Transportation to National Express.

Mr. Thompson stated the name will continue to be Diamond Transportation.

Mr. Semelfort asked the portion of the MetroAccess service Diamond Transportation operates.

Mr. Werth said Diamond Transportation operates fifteen percent of the service.

New Business

Inauguration Planning:

Ms. Anderson discussed the planning for the Inauguration as it pertains to MetroAccess. She said communication will be key throughout the Inaugural events. There are IVR messages on the main phone numbers to the OCC to alert customers to the pending traffic and road closures. MetroAccess is open during normal service hours and within the normal service areas. Due to the road closures and vehicle restrictions around the National Mall, there is detour information available to all operators to navigate throughout. She said Robo-calls and MetroAlerts have been sent out to subscription customers, and will be sent again. Service advisories have been posted with information on Inaugural activities, and customers may call into the MetroAccess main line, press option 7, then #5 for the same information. She advised if customer's text "POTUS" to 90360 they will receive Metro Inauguration service information and alerts.

Mr. Semelfort stated some road closures will begin on Thursday, and access to Union Station will be limited. This information will need to be provided to customers. He said as changes occur, customers need to be informed that they may not be able to be picked-up directly at their location.

Ms. Anderson stated that all of the information Mr. Semelfort shared are included in the service advisories. She said it is important for customers to have their contact information updated in the event that MetroAccess needs to contact them about a particular location that may be compromised as a result of the Inaugural activities.

Ms. Ray stated she was concerned about the trips to Metro headquarters due to the barriers outside the building. She said the blocking of curb ramps at Judiciary Square are dangerous. She also commented about the inadequacy of the sound system in the room.

Mr. Christiaan Blake, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, said the barriers outside Metro headquarters were placed by Secret Service personnel. He said he has communicated with the police department stating the placement of the fence is a violation of the ADA, asking them to move the fence back 2 feet to provide access to the building.

Mr. Proctor commented that the official ADA drop off to the Mall is 7th & E St. SW, but may be subject to change.

Mr. Crawford stated that customers will desire to participate in the Inaugural activities, and these barriers pose a danger. He asked if there was any information of how these issues with the barriers will be resolve.

Mr. Blake said he could not speak to what Homeland Security or Secret Service would do.

Ms. Ray said it is illegal to block a curb ramp, and Homeland Security or Secret Service are not paying attention to the laws governing ADA.

Public Hearing:

Dr. B. Moore-Gwynn, AAC Coordinator, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated that there will be a public hearing on Monday, January 30, 2017, from 5pm to 9pm at Metro Headquarters. The hearing will discuss fiscal year (FY) 2018 operating budget, FY 2018 capital improvement program, and federal FY 2017 grant applications. An open house will occur from 4:30pm to 6:30pm, with the hearing beginning at 5pm. She said speaker registration is on-site only and closes at 9pm. There will be two ways to submit testimony; the first is through the survey, which will be open from 9am on January 14 through 9am on February 6, 2017. The testimony may also be mailed to the Office of the Secretary at 600 5th St. NW. Washington, DC. She said an information packet is available on the table outside the conference room.

Mr. Semelfort suggested that discussions begin among the committee members regarding positions to take on public hearing subjects. He said that the committee can submit comments collectively or individually, but it needed to be completed soon. He suggested that the committee also show strong support by attending the hearing.

Ms. Rush is concerned with the increase of rail and bus fare as it will double for MetroAccess customers. She said the maximum fare will not increase, but the fare below six dollars could increase. Rail service over the year has not been good. She asked that all customers attend the meeting or write their comments and concerns and send them in.

Ms. Bellamy stated she is concerned for the elderly customers if fares increase, as they are on fixed incomes. She also urged customers to attend the public hearing.

Ms. Ray agreed with Ms. Rush and Ms. Bellamy. She said a solution could be suggesting no increase in fare for fixed route or MetroAccess as long as there is not the service to go with it.

Ms. Rush offered to pay for transportation for individuals that desire to attend the hearing.

Mr. Crawford stated he had an appreciation for the dilemma but no real answer. He said he understood everyone's concerns with the increase in fare but also realizes the expense incurred by the providers to run the service.

Dr. Banerjee asked if the AAC can represent themselves as a speaker.

Mr. Semelfort said they don't have a quorum at the present meeting to discuss and present a position for the hearing. He explained that all members may speak as individuals, acknowledging themselves as committee members. Mr. Semelfort stated that he would send an email to all AAC members informing them of the meeting and asking them to consider the talking points.

Dr. Moore-Gwynn stated that an email was sent to the AAC about the public hearing and how to submit points to the Board. It is usually an individual comment through the Chairman, Patrick Sheehan, and through the Board report.

Ms. Ray asked if the AAC may submit a letter of testimony as a body after the hearing to be voted on at the hearing or at the next committee meeting. She suggested that the MAS urge the Chairman of the AAC to develop a written position.

Ms. Rush said that a letter may be written afterwards, but talking points should have been discussed at the committee meetings earlier so they would be prepared for the meeting in February.

Mr. Blake urged them as a group or individually to submit their position before the hearing deadline.

Mr. Crawford made a motion that the MAS encourage the AAC members to consider and vote on a position that would accomplish a goal of allowing the MetroAccess program to continue and improve without cost to the individuals. This would be on the condition that the AAC recommend to WMATA they seek a direct funding stream for the purpose of MetroAccess. The AAC knows it will take a real advocacy effort to Congress or whomever generates the revenues, so the need can be met without placing more stress on the system that is already having difficulty meeting the expectation.

Mr. Semelfort suggested that someone craft a letter in a timely manner, allowing feedback and approval from the committee prior to the hearing on February 6.

Dr. Moore-Gwynn reminded the committee that they have an opportunity to speak to the Board on January 26. She said that would be the first opportunity to have their position heard through the AAC Chairman, allowing him to formulate a response.

Ms. Ray asked that the written statement come from the Chairman of the AAC. She suggested that the statement include MetroAccess customers who utilize fixed route in lieu of MetroAccess. These individuals are affected by the change and/or alleviation of bus routes. The current motion and letter to be drafted does not address the issues of the individuals utilizing fixed route, specifically Metrobus.

Mr. Semelfort will discuss the points to include in the letter and allow feedback from the committee.

Mr. Sheehan stated that the position of the AAC has been on record as saying that they oppose any fare increase on MetroAccess. The suggested remedies to this were to calculate the fare by twice the bus fare or change the multiplier in the way the fare is calculated. More argument has been made for twice the bus fare, especially since the rail system has been undergoing Safetrack, and the calculations supplied by the fare calculator are inaccurate. He said those positions have been represented in previous Board reports and may be used as talking points at the public hearing. Mr. Sheehan was not sure if the AAC came to a consensus on the time Metrorail stations should remain open. He agreed to include Mr. Crawford's comments regarding dedicated funding. Mr. Sheehan and Mr. Semelfort committed to having a draft for review by the committee within one week.

Ms. Ray stated it is her recollection that a vote was not taken related to the budget. Mr. Sheehan asked Ms. Ray to send him an email regarding the concerns with fixed route, specifically as it pertains to Metrobus.

Mr. Semelfort summarized the discussion stating that Mr. Sheehan will craft a letter by the February 6 deadline with the committee position. Mr. Semelfort said he will send an email to the committee urging them to attend the public hearing to present their individual opinion.

The motion was withdrawn in lieu of the letter from the Chairman.

Public Comments

Comments received were with regard to: time on board a vehicle and paired with customers traveling in opposite directions; late pick-ups; incorrect information provided; request to increase the weight of packages placed on vehicles; providing information in alternate formats; urging customers to attend the public hearing; issue with not receiving the number of respondents to the RFP; drivers unfamiliar with the area; and a braille note taker broken while on vehicle.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the January 2017/AAC MAS January Meeting located at <https://www.wmata.com/about/accessibility-advisory-committee/subcommittee.cfm>.

Meeting adjourned at 6:10pm.