



# AAC

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

### **Meeting Minutes: October 21, 2019**

#### **Attendees**

Present: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Darnise Bush, Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Melanie Jackson, and Phil Posner.

#### **Call to Order**

AAC Chair Posner called the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting to order at 4:00pm.

AAC Chair Posner started off with the introductions of the Committee members and staff.

#### **Review of Agenda & Minutes from Prior Meeting**

The meeting agenda was approved.

The September 16, 2019, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

#### **Customer Service & Outreach Reports**

Carlton Brown, MTM, stated a follow up was done with all the customers. AAC Chair Posner asked if customers from last session might be expected today. Mr. Brown stated that it's possible, but there is an issue at the DC General hospital. The staff is actively working to resolve the issues.

AAC Chair Posner asked whether a malfunction of the Global Positioning System (GPS) at the Washington Hospital Center was contributing to the lower on-time performance (OTP) since August. Allison Anderson, Operations Manager, MetroAccess, stated it is a combination of things that is driving the low OTP and a variety of things are being tested; as a result, some improvements have been noticed in the OTP. The progress will be reviewed to continue monitoring further improvement.

Ms. Anderson provided the Outreach Report. On October 12, she attended the 9<sup>th</sup> year event of the National Federation of Blind, Prince George's County Chapter. She represented WMATA, and shared information about MetroAccess, Abilities-Ride and travel training. Ms. Coles also attended the event and stated it was well organized. She also informed Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services that the "shared ride" worked very well.

#### **Michael Wilson Award and Rush Award**

The Michael Wilson Award was presented to Edmund Carter, Operator, TransDev. Mr. Carter is punctual, polite, a role model, is admired and respected by the entire team. He leaves customers with a smile on their faces and has received numerous commendations for his excellent customer service skills. He is a family man with diverse personal interests. Mr. Carter thanked the committee for the award and received it with honor, joy, and pride.

The Rush Award was presented to Dennis Ashton, Operator, First Transit. Chair Semelfort read a brief bio: Mr. Ashton has established himself as an altruistic advocate for MetroAccess customers. He provides safe transportation, maintains a safe performance record, and demonstrates his commitment to MetroAccess values. Ms. Rush thanked him for his service. Mr. Ashton graciously thanked everyone for the award.

### **Abilities Ride Updates**

Mr. Blake shared information about the Abilities-Ride service providers. Regency Taxi and Silver Cab have been with the program from the beginning. Mr. Blake provided an update about the new partners of the program and areas of their service. The following are our new partners and the services they offer: Yellow Cab Company of DC can take customers from Washington DC to other jurisdictions; Transco of DC can take customers from Washington DC outward; Action Taxi can take customers from Montgomery County outward; Curb can take customers from Washington DC outward. The program continues to grow and eventually there will be service in every jurisdiction. Mr. Blake invited the representatives from Curb to share information about their service. He also invited the Committee members and customers to try Curb for their trips going home and asked them to provide feedback to him about their experience.

The representative from Curb Mobility provided information about their company and stated Curb is the number one taxi application (app) that connects customers to fast, convenient and safe rides. Customers can download Curb app to easily request and pay for rides. Through their extensive solutions for paratransit programs, Curb brings reliable rides to people who need them, whenever they need them. Curb has demonstrated a reasonable success level in New York. At heart, they are a technology company and act as a consumer-friendly business. The focus is on quality of service, on-time performance, and ride completion rates (judging of operators and technology). Curb is going to deliver a new level of service to the paratransit community. They reiterated that they are not a taxi company; they are a platform that rolls up taxi supply. The goal of Curb is to harmonize the supply to customers.

The Committee and customers were invited for questions. Chair Semelfort shared his positive experience of using Curb in New York City. AAC Chair Posner asked about an alternate way of booking rides besides an app, how the Abilities-Ride trips will be identified, and about their rates. The representative stated Curb has a call center that can book trips and a concierge, as well. The organization users get registered on the platform, they select the payment method, and all the rules will come up to provide additional data that will identify the user as an Abilities-Ride customer. Chair Semelfort shared that Regency Taxi also has an app. Mr. Blake stated Curb has proposed \$20 for 6.5 miles. We are facilitating the initial trips, we will give them easy trips. Mr. Blake wants feedback on performance. If he gets negative feedback he will ask the companies to remove the specific driver(s). We want it to be customer choice. Chair Semelfort stated right now Mr. Blake is controlling the trips because he wants to see the performance.

Ms. Coles asked whether a customer must have a smartphone to utilize Curb service. Mr. Blake stated a customer would need to have either a cell phone or a smartphone to utilize the service.

A customer commented about Curb's presence in Washington DC and using an app, other companies participating in the program, and the proposals received. Mr. Blake clarified that Curb is not the first company to use an app, as Regency and Silver also uses an app. In previous meetings, Mr. Blake has mentioned that other companies that have been added to the program and more companies are being added to the Abilities-Ride program, as well. The customer is not going to have proposals; however, these are publicly available companies. Most of the companies are in the local jurisdictions. Curb has their service in New York and they do have presence in this area. These companies are not providing MetroAccess service. Metro is providing a subsidy and as a customer, anyone can visit their website to learn more about them and see if that is the company of choice.

A second customer asked what Curb is bringing to the table and about their charges. The customer asked how much it would cost him from home to work, which is about 7 to 8 miles away. Mr. Blake provided information on the price and informed the customer he will not have the service now, however, it may cost him about \$6 to \$8, and Metro will pay \$15. Regarding what Curb brings to the table, the representative stated Curb is not a transportation company, we are a technology and service company. We fit the best ride for a rider. We have a broader supply therefore, we have more choices and options to provide you a ride. The technology provides a better and supervised ride. We bring technology to an existing infrastructure for better service.

Ms. Bush asked about the difference in a call center and a concierge kiosk. The representative stated a call center is a dial in where an agent answers the phone and books the trips. The concierge is a product, for an example at a doctor's office, a customer can simply punch in some information in to a kiosk which connects with the system, and that gets them a ride. Mr. Blake further clarified and provided an example of a similar concept where some dialysis center(s) can book trips for customers.

Mr. Blake confirmed the names of all the customers who showed interest in trying the complimentary trips facilitated by WMATA using Curb this evening. The MetroAccess return rides will be canceled for this evening so that customers can try the Curb service and provide their feedback to Mr. Blake.

#### **Shared-Ride: Incorporate guidelines for excessive time**

The topic was not discussed today, instead, it was moved to next month's meeting.

#### **Closed Routes - Impact on MetroAccess On-Time Performance**

Vice-Chair Rush stated closed routes on buses impact everything and grand-fathering relates to the closed routes. The low OTP is because of lack of drivers. The question how we can find out the real problem, was asked. Chair Semelfort stated the drivers calling out is creating a significant problem. Vice-Chair Rush asked the providers present, why

are they having so many drivers quitting, calling in, and/or not coming in. The issue used to be insufficient pay however, now with higher pay, what is the main complaint for why drivers are just calling in. If drivers do not work, they do not get paid. There must be other reasons.

Conrad Marshall, General Manager, TransDev, stated, the drivers wanted more money a month after they got the raise. There are many single parents who need to take time off for personal reasons, there is an issue of lack of commitment to the job, and there are several opportunities for the staff to explore. They do try to enforce their policies however, they must be careful of how many people can they terminate at a given time. Even though they are short of drivers, if everyone came to work, the work load would be manageable. They are seeing less people resigning and being terminated. They are doing everything they think they can to get the drivers come to work.

Vice-Chair Rush stated we have more trips for Abilities-Ride and Transport DC and lower number of trips for MetroAccess. If the lower number of trips cannot be managed, that is a major concern. She asked the providers about the level of treatment that the drivers receive. People stay at their jobs for benefits, sick leave, good pay, etc. Some of the rules and regulations that the different companies apply, are unacceptable. AAC Chair Posner stated we know there are a fewer drivers and that there is a plan to increase the efficiency and asked has the data been analyzed to determine if we can work with the lowest number of drivers. If the number of drivers and Abilities-Ride increases, would that help? Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess stated she would defer this question until Mr. Blake returns however, we can have direct comments from the providers present.

Will Ford, General Manager, First Transit, apologized for serious staffing issues with operators and stated they have started hiring more operators. Many of the operators are single parents and things do occur in their personal lives causing for them to take time off work however, First Transit is pushing for a day to day basis operations for all routes.

Robbie Werth, Founder and Project Manager, Diamond Transportation, discussed the general view point of any transit agency in the country and stated there is a severe driver shortage. The younger generation has not joined the force in the past 25 years and something must be done to attract them. In the recent past, Diamond Transportation drivers had a 50-hours work week. When the work load was managed, drivers' hours and pay decreased. As a result, they started looking for other modes of work. Mr. Werth stated more routes and a better job of recruitment is needed to be done. As a recommendation, Mr. Werth stated the qualifications for MetroAccess drivers should be same as for Metrobus operators. For example, Metrobus requires for an individual to have had a driver's license for three years, whereas, MetroAccess requires an individual to hold the driver's license for five years.

Pierre Montebello, General Manager, Challenger, stated fortunately they do not have an issue of operators. All their routes have been covered for a long time. Daily, they have extra 15 to 20 drivers. Since September 1<sup>st</sup>, the date their contract renewed, the call-out has decreased by 40%.

AAC Chair Posner asked Mr. Blake if he has calculated how much efficiency you can achieve, and, will that be sufficient to cover the decrease of drivers in other companies. Previously, WMATA changed the contract to help solve the salary issue. Mr. Blake stated there has been a third piece and that is scheduling. There is a culture of scheduling that needs to change. A direct trip is the culture of the Operating Control Center (OCC). For many years, first thing they would strategically do is put 18/19/20 miles trips on taxis, whereas those trips need to be on the van. That gave high OTP numbers, however, the was not cost effective. A Metrobus route cannot go that distance without picking up other customers. If MetroAccess picks up a customer in Alexandria and takes them to DC without picking up another customer, that is not public transportation. When rides are scheduled the night before, schedulers must pool more trips. That is where the low OTP comes in. He has given the OCC a lot of autonomy to move trips quicker than in the past. If the trips need to be moved to a provider that has drivers coming in, they would get more money. At the same time, we have a business to run.

AAC Chair Posner stated if there is no shared ride in-line, you are not going to send the drivers out of the area and the number of pick-ups should be limited. Mr. Blake stated it is not about pick-ups, it is about fixed routes. If it takes a fixed-route two-hours, then it can take MetroAccess trip two-hours. AAC Chair Posner stated the more stops you have on the trip, the longer it takes you to get to a destination. Mr. Blake stated instead of limiting the number of stops, we are estimating dwell time for customers as per their needs. Customers who are abusive, at some point, they will have to understand that this is public transportation. If a customer's dwell time increases than normal, there will have to be some modifications made. Scheduling and day of service personnel not showing up for work, will have to be worked on before we contact customers for modifications.

### **MetroAccess Customer Guide Update & Insert Pamphlet**

Ms. Anderson stated there are numerous on-going pilots such as the scheduling window, pre-arrival calls, the fixed route equivalent, and the 5-minute rule. If implemented, these would be included in the Customer Guide and the Insert Pamphlet. The pilots are being documented and reviewed. We seek input from the Committee before making language proposals for the Customer Guide which is expected in the next two to three months.

### **Public Comment:**

A customer asked if a specific time is provided for a pick-up window and is the customer expected to be outside for the entire window time. Mr. Blake stated the pick-up window is 30 minutes. The 10-minute pre-arrival call is supposed to prevent customers being outside or even at the exterior-most door for 30 minutes.

A customer that is a resident of Prince George's county had concerns about routing issues and not having received a follow up call. Mr. Blake stated he called every customer from the last month's meeting. The routing of her trip will be reviewed.

A customer had concerns about MetroAccess drivers who do not have clearance to go to the military base. Mr. Blake explained that having clearance is not a requirement for a

MetroAccess driver position. As a public transit, MetroAccess has limitations as to where drivers may be allowed on the premises where they pick up or drop off customers.

A customer voiced his concerns of drivers not having clearance for military base. He also stated that a driver refused to show his identification, and about the fact that there is no weekend service, yet he sees several vans pass by through their neighborhood. AAC Chair Posner informed the customer about the Committee's proposal to WMATA Board, of grand-fathering customers who had service but lost it due to bus service cuts. Mr. Blake clarified that would not help this customer's daughter. Mr. Blake recommended that the customer to advocate to the AAC, and the elected officials. AAC Chair Posner recommended that the customer voice his concern at the Board Meeting.

A customer reported a cab driver who refused to come to her pick-up location, instead asked her to walk to the location where he had parked. The customer was informed to contact the cab company to report the issue.

A customer stated she sent her email to Mr. Blake and will send another one with additional concerns. Mr. Blake stated her concerns will be reviewed.

A customer asked when the sedans will start rolling. Mr. Blake stated the process he was trying to adopt was customer friendly however, not the Metro way, and that he continues to work on it. The customer's other issue was about the inaccessible website. He provided his concerns to David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of Americans with Disabilities Act Policy and Planning (ADAP).

A customer had complaints about cab companies. The vehicles have been filthy, the personnel have been rude, and the service has been unacceptable. Mr. Blake re-iterated (informed in the last month's meeting) for the customer to contact the taxi commission of Prince George's County.

An attendee was a PCA for a customer that already voiced her concerns. The PCA stated an incident while traveling in a MetroAccess van and stated the driver did not take his complaint. The customer was informed that drivers do not take complaints and was provided with the process of filing a complaint. A follow up will be done on his concerns.

A customer decided to give up his time due to insufficient duration of the meeting.

A customer stated she hears about bus and the train service. It is irrelevant to MetroAccess customers. The customer also complaints about the change of fares. The customer's trips would be reviewed for fare issues.

Ms. Coles stated couple of observations regarding the ridership and asked about temporary eligibility, and about some people who drive, however, also ride MetroAccess. Mr. Blake clarified that someone can be temporarily eligible. AAC Chair Posner stated a person who drives, can be also a MetroAccess customer, based on their disability. Being able to drive, does not disqualify a person from becoming a MetroAccess customer.

Ms. Henry Bush will share her comments in the next month's meeting.

**Meeting adjourned at 6:05pm.**