



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: October 15, 2018

Attendees

Present: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Erin Coneys, Charlie Crawford, Melanie Jackson, Phillipa Mezile, Phil Posner, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

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

Chair Semelfort started off the introductions of the Committee members, WMATA staff, and customers.

Review of Agenda & Minutes from Prior Meeting

Chair Semelfort motioned to approve the modified Agenda. The modified agenda was approved.

The September Meeting Minutes were approved.

Customer Service & Outreach Reports

Carlton Brown, MTM, stated customers who submitted complaints during the last MAS meeting, were contacted and followed-up successfully.

Allison Anderson, MetroAccess, Gernae Weaver, Eligibility Certification and Outreach, and WMATA's outreach group attended the Maryland Resource Fair on Saturday, October 13, 2018, held at the Montgomery College, and shared information with customers concerning Metro's travel training, and other accessibility services, such as Abilities-Ride, as well as answering questions regarding MetroAccess.

Michael Wilson Award and Rush Award

Michael Wilson Award: Conrad Marshall, Project Manager, TransDev, presented the award to Patrice Hall, an employee since 2011. Ms. Hall provides exceptional customer service and training to the work-force. She is a professional, and a union representative. At the recent MetroAccess Rodeo, Ms. Hall won the third prize award out of more than 700 drivers. Ms. Hall thanked everyone for being selected for the Michael Wilson Award.

Denise Rush Award: Ms. Rush presented the award to Phyllis Johnson, MV reservations agent since August 15th, 2011. She has received commendation and an internal award recognition for being a very kind professional and a customer-first-centered person. Ms. Rush started the Rush Award to thank the entire team that makes MetroAccess work. Ms. Johnson believes in good customer service and thanked everyone for the award.

Abilities-Ride Ridership Breakdown

Christiaan Blake, Acting Assistant General Manager, Department of Access Services, stated he will email the numbers to Committee members that reflect how MetroAccess

ridership has been impacted in Prince George's and Montgomery counties since the Abilities-Ride program started.

GUEST SPEAKERS:

Sam Bland, Regency Cab, and Hossein Khorsha, Silver Cab, provided updates on their respective services under the Abilities-Ride program.

Chair Semelfort stated the Abilities-Ride program has been in place for over a year. There were some initial challenges, but improvements have been made. He added that the MAS wants to have a conversation about the technology, and thoughts on the future plans of the program.

Mr. Bland stated in the beginning Regency had a few bumps on the road, but now they have a lot of new procedures, protocols, and policies in place. They also have an intense training program in place. Regency is being very selective about the drivers. They are going to have very intense training for drivers of wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Mr. Khorsha stated Silver had a few miscommunications in the beginning and passengers were not familiar with what to expect. Training has improved along with follow up and enforcement of the training.

Chair Semelfort outlined a few issues: (1) drivers do not come to the correct pick up locations, (2) they do not provide assistance to customers, and (3) have had disputes about the fares, even no-showing customers because of fare issues. Ms. Rush stated an incident about fare dispute that her teacher experienced. Ms. Rush commented about his difficulty in getting a ride from DC back to the Montgomery County. Mr. Bland stated he will check in to it.

Mr. Khorsha stated drivers should contact a supervisor whenever there is any issue. If a driver does not pick up a customer due to fare issues, Silver will eventually remove that driver from the program. They are working on improving the service through a filtration process.

Mr. Blake asked why is there an impression that drivers are paid less for Abilities-Ride trips since they get the full fare payment, subsidized by Metro. Dr. Posner asked whether there is a tip issue. Mr. Bland said that tips may be a possibility. Mr. Khorsha stated Mr. Blake is correct. If a driver refuses a short trip, they will be out of the queue (dispatch) for two to four hours. He is unable to understand why drivers refuse short trips. Mr. Bland stated we give incentives for short trips by giving the same or more money to drivers.

Mr. Blake asked why a trip is not dispatched until 20 minutes before the trip time even though when booked well in advance. Mr. Bland stated they have two systems. The automatic system dispatches a trip 20 minutes before the trip time. They also pre-assign some of the rides that need higher maintenance.

Mr. Khorsha stated previously when driver did a no-show, they would let the driver leave. Now they first confirm with the customer. Drivers are not their employees, therefore, they may not have their specific work schedules. They identify the trips in areas where they have cabs available. They pre-assign trips and try to build up a rapport between drivers and customers by having the same drivers pick up customers regularly, as much as possible. They may have to put Chair Semelfort on MetroAccess rides (for reservation purposes), and perhaps schedule the trips ahead of time. He also asked if it is possible for the Committee to reach out to the community and tell them to inform Silver's management of any concerns. They don't want the problems to be repeated.

Chair Semelfort stated Regency cab has a smartphone application (app) that he can use to book his trips, and asked when is Silver cab's updated app coming out? Mr. Khorsha stated it is actually available right now. They are moving to a newer app, therefore, not all the drivers are on it. As part of that program, they need to register the rider as a MetroAccess customer.

Mr. Crawford stated his last Abilities-Ride trip was the best he has ever taken. The driver got out of the car and assisted. When he called to book the trip, the employee was very professional. He had moved away from the Abilities-Ride because of negative experiences as rides arrived late. If it is going to be reliable, then he gives his support to Abilities-Ride. Mr. Bland stated they are trying to improve the service and hope that customer will have positive experiences going forward.

Dr. Posner asked do your drivers have a white board for people with hearing impairment. Mr. Bland stated that is a good point, he had not even thought about it. Mr. Blake stated he has encouraged for cab drivers to use their cell phones to use text messages (type message and communicate). Dr. Posner stated in the winter, for elderly people to have to text, may not be practical.

Dr. Posner asked do drivers expect tip or is it built in the fare? Mr. Bland stated drivers do not expect the tip.

Chair Semelfort asked is there any way to get a call upon arrival? Also, reservation staff needs to give correct fare information consistently. Mr. Khorsha stated the drivers have to do something for the customers to receive the calls upon arrival. Fares given to customers should be correct.

Mr. Blake asked when would the Committee want to get next update from the current providers. Chair Semelfort stated 3 months would be a good time to get updates.

MetroAccess Fleet Update

Mr. Blake stated this is a follow up of some previous ideas. We are going through a process of buying new vehicles. We can purchase more than one kind of vehicle, e.g. vans and sedans are being reviewed. We want to re-introduce sedans in to our fleet for safety reasons, for customer comfort, and for fuel economy. The target number is 175 sedans, which would be just under 25% of the fleet.

Mr. Scruggs provided update on the FY18B vehicles with four single seats. About 65 or 70 vehicles went in to service today. By this weekend, 90 vehicles will be in service. In another two weeks, 116 vehicles will be in service.

Ms. Rush stated the Global Positioning System (GPS) systems were not working this morning. Mr. Scruggs stated he had no information about the GPS system not working this morning, but such a malfunction would not be related to the type of vehicle used. The GPS has real time directions and will send drivers around incidents and backups to save time. We have about 85 or 90 of the newest rangers that are operating on the 4G platform.

Ms. Rush stated she is officially requesting that a road supervisor ride with her to her home, because on Silver Hill Road the GPS gets lost. Chair Semelfort stated since the summer, the GPS system has been blanking out especially on the Ford vehicles. Mr. Scruggs stated there have been a few cases of GPS blanking and those were due to communication backlog on the 3G rangers. It is yet to be seen if this happens with any of the 4Gs. We have 42 more that have arrived, and 250 will be retrofitted to 4G cellular communication. The system will give drivers a corrected set of directions based on traffic even if it gives an advantage of only one minute. On longer trips it may change directions every 5 minutes, based on the current traffic situation. For the next generation, we have asked that the difference or the advantage has to have a larger magnitude. Dr. Posner stated on his trips from Virginia to DC, drivers are always sent through Wisconsin Avenue no matter where he is going, regardless of the day or the time.

Mr. Scruggs stated for vans the chassis size remains the same. Low floor vans with ramps are being reviewed as it is a quicker load getting on or off the vehicle. The capacity of the vehicles will be similar to E350s. Possibilities for sedans are: Hybrid, E350, Electric, and Plug in hybrid.

Chair Semelfort recommended to have enough seating space in a sedan, given that some of the customers are wider. Having handles to get-in and out of the sedans will be helpful. The sedan should have sufficient leg room, and asked how can that be addressed? Mr. Blake thanked Mr. Semelfort for the recommendations, and stated that each of these recommendations will be taken into consideration.

Ms. Rush asked are there extensions for seat belts? Dr. Posner asked how will be the seating configuration in sedans.

Mr. Scruggs stated seating is important. Sedan is low to get in and out. Another option may be a smaller SUV. Vehicle options are still under review and consideration.

Chair Semelfort stated the MV1s would have been ideal, something similar with sufficient room for ambulatory customers will be a good option. Mr. Scruggs stated that the MV1 was a good combination. Instead of getting one kind of vehicle, different types of vehicles are being considered. This will be helpful for future reference as well.

Dr. Posner made following recommendations: seat material should be so that riders do not slide. Knee covers for taller people. Drivers should be seen by customers, therefore driver-seat needs to be modified. Window height should be adjusted so that customers can look outside, and be able to see street signs (if applicable). Higher head-rest will be helpful for whiplash, in case of an incident. A little bit of a tilt in seats provides comfort. Seat-belt-extension was also suggested. Mr. Scruggs stated a lot of these things are on our list.

Chair Semelfort stated newer vehicles with wonderful shock absorbers make a good ride. Mr. Scruggs stated newer vehicles should have better shock absorbers.

Ms. Coneys suggested to have a large enough trunk space for a walker to be placed in and taken out with ease. Mr. Scruggs made a note of the suggestion.

Chair Semelfort asked if it is possible to have the wheelchair ramp to be on the side, but towards the back of the vehicle. This provides convenience for customers already on board. Mr. Scruggs stated the wheel chair door will be on the side not on the back. Purpose is to minimize the inconvenience for ambulatory customers.

Mr. Crawford advocated for service animals. Sedans needs to have sufficient space on floor or back seat, don't get small sedans.

Mr. Blake asked Mr. Scruggs about the next steps in regards to general time line for the Committee as to when they will see the solicitation package? Mr. Scruggs stated we may have the solicitation package possibly by December. We should have the statement of work and ideas of specification of vehicles by late November.

Dr. Posner asked are you going to do Request for Information (RFI), before you do your solicitation. Mr. Blake stated an RFI was a strong consideration early on, but not now because it can be a bit longer to brain storm. We are highly likely going to have sedans first, and then later a newer van. Dr. Posner recommended having the sunroof option. It may provide an escape route in case of a vehicle roll-over. Mr. Blake stated we will look into it with our Safety Department.

Mr. Sheehan asked do you have safety collision prevention option. Mr. Scruggs stated it is already an option installed on all of the vans.

Chair Semelfort asked will there be an availability of screens on vans, like a Metro train? Mr. Blake stated we are trying to have a system to have service and marketing related announcements. Chair Semelfort stated if it is possible to have cell phone chargers? Mr. Scruggs stated the new sedans may have that option.

Public Comments

A customer stated she had a fire in her building in May and lost her MetroAccess ID card. At the time of replacement, she had to pay the replacement fee instead of getting it for

free. She also suggested to have one of the AAC meetings in a library meeting room in Fairfax, Virginia.

A customer stated That on Monday, her ride came 45 minutes outside of the window time. She was delayed for her business meeting. She received no explanation or courtesy call from MetroAccess informing her that the ride was late, or why the ride was late. Customers should be informed when rides are late, so that they make decisions whether to continue to wait or make alternate arrangements.

An advocate for transportation accessibility and accountability suggested to the AAC work with other agencies and come up with a vehicle that will be a model for all agencies throughout the country, and to send some information to APTA regarding this vehicle.

Ms. Mezile asked can we have a TransportDC representative provide update on changes.

Chair Semelfort asked about a message received from Mr. Blake, about a heat advisory. Mr. Blake stated we are trying a new system to contact customers. A message regarding Abilities-Ride was sent to customers. Those who answered live heard the Abilities-Ride message. However, as discovered later, the live message does not automatically became the voicemail message. Therefore, the message left on customers' answering machines was related to an old weather advisory. ACCS will address this matter in future automated calls. ACCS looks forward to additional feedback related to future calls.

Chair Semelfort provided topics to be added on next month's agenda: Customer Guide, and Modified Scope of Work (SOW) – Abilities-Ride.

Chair Semelfort asked when is the Request for Proposal (RFP) expected to come out. Mr. Blake stated it should be out by November meeting and that he will send a notification to the Committee members before it goes out. Mr. Blake stated not much has changed, however, except we are going to ask the companies how far (distance in miles) will they take customers for \$20, and allow the potential vendors to select the area(s) they wish to provide service. Customers will have their input as well. Chair Semelfort asked if he could have it scheduled later on in the afternoon. Mr. Blake will try to have it at 4 pm.

Hedding Award:

Mr. Blake commented about the upcoming Hedding Award, on Thursday, October 25, 2018 from 6pm to 8pm. This year's honoree is Ms. Rush. We have an exceptional award internally for colleagues and this year's recipient had a major role in redesigning the shield on buses. The General Manager has informed me that he will be present.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.