



# AAC

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

### **Meeting Minutes: September 17, 2018**

#### **Attendees**

Present: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush, Carolyn Bellamy, Steven Kaffen, Charlie Crawford, Phil Posner, Patrick Sheehan.

#### **Call to Order**

Chair Semelfort called the MetroAccess Subcommittee meeting to order at 4:02pm.

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

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

Chair Semelfort motioned to approve the Agenda. Mr. Blake proposed to add a presentation to the agenda.

The modified agenda was approved.

Chair Semelfort motioned to approve the minutes from prior meeting. Ms. Rush asked if the meeting minutes are written exactly as the discussion occurred? Ms. Bellamy asked if minutes have everything that happened. Christiaan Blake, Acting AGM, Department of Access Services (ACCS), stated in developing the meeting minutes, they are not a word for word transcript of each meeting. What we have changed in the past is that we are going above and beyond the salient points and quoting the individual(s) making said points. He added that we are willing to add any edits that a committee member feels need to be made in the minutes. Chair Semelfort encouraged members to send any additional edits to Mr. Blake.

Ms. Bellamy asked was the tape on last time? Mr. Blake said no.

Chair Semelfort stated, if it is ok with the makers of this motion, minutes to be amended as per Ms. Bellamy. If you can read it and let us know in the next 2 days if there is any change, by email. Dr. Posner stated 20 years ago the AAC had a long discussion about the minutes and it was decided it is not going to be a verbatim transcript. They are an outline of what went on, but if there are key things that are left out, they should be added in there because if it is not in the minutes, it did not happen. Chair Semelfort stated we are going to amend the minutes, and an email needs to be sent within 48 hours to Mr. Blake.

Ms. Rush asked why the meetings weren't being taped. Mr. Blake stated I have my staff sitting at the table, writing the minutes as the meeting as occurring. We may have to stop here or there to accommodate a member of other meeting attendee, but we are using live capture to develop meeting minutes. There is no requirement in the By-laws that Metro staff records the meetings. Ms. Rush stated, I am not questioning Metro staff. I am talking about can we go to the website and play the meeting? Mr. Blake stated not at this time.

Ms. Rush stated if we can't play the meeting back and the minutes are doing a summary of highlighted points, we have nothing to refer back to. Mr. Blake stated there was a time when we had extra staff whose job was to sit in the office and just do the audio of the meeting minutes. I lost the luxury of such a staff member. From her we had a recording of each meeting saved on Speaker. Everybody loved it including myself, but it wasn't approved by Metro's IT security team. Therefore we are trying to perfect BlueJeans and I have in writing a desire to have the BlueJeans recorded and online. If Bluejeans is found not to be the long-term solution we will keep searching. We haven't gotten there yet, but right now there is no mandate or requirement to have these meetings recorded.

The July 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting Minutes were approved with a recommendation to provide an email to Mr. Blake within 48 hours, if any changes needed to be made.

Ms. Bellamy asked Dr. Posner is there something you can do at the Board level to make sure we have the minutes taped? Dr. Posner stated that at the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting, he is going to ask for a motion that we have a recorded record of the meetings just like the Board has of their meetings and all of their subcommittee meetings, and that they be available for all people to see what has happened. He added that it's really important because a lot of people cannot come down on days with bad weather, and a lot of our customers can't afford a \$13 round trip to come down here and hear what's going on. I will request informally next Thursday to the Board. After that when we meet as a full group, I will ask in the AAC meeting. Afterwards we will put it in a letter to the Board and ask formally.

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

Carlton Brown, MTM, stated that the public comments were reviewed and customers were contacted. Chair Semelfort asked for the Outreach Reports. Allison Anderson, MetroAccess, stated there have been no customer outreach events since July MAS meeting.

Dr. Posner stated we do not have any breakdown of ridership in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties. We need a breakdown per jurisdiction. The average fare of a MetroAccess ride is \$4.90, less than DC Cab and Abilities-Ride. 36% of the rides are at the maximum fare of \$6.50. Mr. Blake stated that MetroAccess ridership has gone down for the first time in five years. Dr. Posner stated that the registration number has increased, but it does not cost anything. Mr. Blake stated registration does not cost directly, but we have to account for the customers and their potential to use MetroAccess for some trips, so there is a budget cost. Chair Semelfort stated that Mr. Blake will follow up on the breakdown of fares as per the following jurisdictions: Montgomery and Prince George's Counties.

Dr. Posner stated that with the decline in ridership, the system is not being overwhelmed by the people. He attributed the decline to Abilities-Ride, Star, and other alternatives. He added that we have received the data for how many people are riding Abilities-Ride and it's really good, but he wants to know what effect does that have on the Prince George's County and the Montgomery County ridership. We are supposed to get that by October,

and I want to make sure we will get that by October. He added that 54% of the MetroAccess passengers pay the \$4 minimum fare, and 36% are paying the maximum fare. The numbers are important for us to track. There is some incentive to use MetroAccess.

Mr. Blake stated he will share the data on the impact Abilities-Ride is having on MetroAccess ridership in particular jurisdictions. He added the primary focus and the goal of Abilities-Ride, and the reason why he considers Abilities-Ride a success is to reduce overall MetroAccess demand, which did happen the recently completed year.

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

There were no nominees for the Wilson or the Rush Award this month.

### **Guest Speaker:**

Mr. Blake introduced Larry Bram, Sr. Vice-President – Innovation, Easter Seals. Mr. Blake stated that Easterseals was awarded a grant related to technology for use by MetroAccess customers; Metro supported this application, and that Mr. Bram is here to invite the participation of MetroAccess customers and other interested stakeholders.

Ms. Bram stated about four or five months ago someone said to him that it's really problematic that they can know when their pizza is going to show up, but not know when their MetroAccess ride is going to show up; there should be an app for that. From there Easterseals applied for a grant from the National Aging and Disability Transit Center called "Getting Ready to Innovate" and won the grant.

Over the next five months Easterseals are going to be planning and gathering ideas that can go into such an app. We are bringing together a group of MetroAccess users, people with disabilities, and seniors to go through a process with a transportation expert to prioritize what you would like to see in a MetroAccess application. Mr. Crawford is on our planning committee from Montgomery County. We will have four half-day meetings throughout the Fall starting the second week of October where we will bring together about 30 new people, with the facilitator. By the end of the year, we will have the report that we will hand Mr. Blake, with users defining what they like to see in the app, both from what features they want and what accessibility aspects they need. Easterseals believes there is an opportunity to save \$15 million a year in customers knowing when their ride is going to come.

Dr. Posner stated the question is when the application is being developed, will it be open enough to handle not just MetroAccess, but also bus, rail, and the MetroAccess alternatives, such as Abilities-Ride, Star, and Transport DC. Dr. Posner stated It should be an open software that people can use for other transits.

Mr. Blake stated ideas like that is what this project is all about. He added that Easterseals is going to gather a group of stakeholders who will participate in five meetings between now and December to flush out these type of ideas. Beginning October 10<sup>th</sup>, there are going to be meetings in Silver Spring at the Easterseals headquarters; at 1420 Spring Street.

Dr. Posner recommended an email be sent out to all the members sharing the opportunity.

**Abilities-Ride Modified SOW – Christiaan Blake**

Chair Semelfort stated if someone gets hurt on Abilities-Ride, there is supposed to be some type of insurance, but what does the customer do? Mr. Blake stated the customer can let Metro know about it, but in case of an accident the liability is on the cab company. We will follow up to monitor as to due diligence and justice. You are going to call the cab company and your representative, and you are going to ask for their insurance information. What you have different from a regular customer on a cab is that you have added support of Metro in case the cab company is not being responsive. Chair Semelfort stated to be clear, if an accident does occur, the customer is encouraged to call the taxi company and if they do not get an adequate response, they call ADAP to help facilitate this process. Mr. Blake stated I want to say not just for an accident, but definitely for an accident.

Chair Semelfort asked about the next steps regarding the Scope of Work (SOW) and process. Mr. Blake stated Metro is interested in hearing ideas of changes tonight to the SOW. From there he will review any suggestions, make a decision on them, and then proceed with Procurement to issue the solicitation. The goal is to have it on street before November 1<sup>st</sup>, to have a pre-proposal conference, and then hopefully receive many proposals.

Chair Semelfort stated providing some kind of customer service seems to be a concern, adding that he hopes to hone into this time with SOW, and that he is not getting any level of cooperation. Mr. Blake stated 95% of the Abilities-Ride are by phone calls and not through the apps, and that one of the reasons he emphasized the app originally is because he wanted customers to know where their rides were. Chair Semelfort stated Regency has done that from the start, but for Silver there is still no app. Mr. Blake stated both Regency and Silver Cab have their applications. The Silver app is called Koach. The Regency app is Armon. He added that both companies have invested a lot of money in their respective apps and they are getting better slowly, but surely.

Chair Semelfort stated the original SOW requires drivers to help the customer into the vehicle, but very few drivers do that. Mr. Blake stated the language in the SOW is strongly encouraged. We cannot mandate it because it is not our service. We handle it through customer relations. We tell them this is your opportunity, this is your livelihood, if you don't want to help these customers, then they are simply going to ride with MetroAccess. Mr. Blake added that he is also creating new training. It's going to be a Power-Point training. It's also going to be converted to an electronic format that is not only going to go to current Abilities-Ride providers, but to potential Abilities-Ride providers. The companies will have to show that their drivers have actually sat down and took the training course. The training is heavily leaning on Metro's training on serving customers with disabilities. We are taking an existing industry that needs a lot of help in understanding their opportunity and the customer. Any driver who receives repetitive or egregious behavior complaints, I have asked the companies to take that particular driver out of the

Abilities-Ride network. Companies have to hear from you, the drivers have to hear from you, and they will continue to hear from Metro as well.

Ms. Bellamy asked about the Mystery Rider program. Mr. Blake stated we have added a partner company, called MB Staffing. The way program will work is that we need to know where a customer is going to go on a regular basis, the customer will take that trip, pay for that trip just like a normal trip, fill out a report, and be reimbursed for the trip and paid for filling out the surveys. Make sure it's a trip that's worth your while for a trip for which we will reimburse you. As per interest shown by members, Ms. Bellamy, Ms. Rush, and Chair Semelfort will hear from Darlene Carpenter, ACCS, to get information and to be invited.

Ms. Bellamy asked if there has been public interest about expanding the Abilities-Ride program. Mr. Blake said yes, especially Yellow cab in DC. The final interest is going to be about companies agreeing to our standards; safety, accessibility, and information about the trips. Ms. Bellamy asked is there still a discount? Mr. Blake stated discount is still going on until December and probably will be extended as well.

Chair Semelfort commented on making reservations with the discount program. He said it's been decent however, especially with Silver Cab, their front line agents cannot do the promotional trips. It has to be either handled by dispatcher or a manager because it is a separate account number and it has to be processed a separate way. Mr. Blake stated Metro is helping them.

**Public Comment on SOW:**

Heidi Case stated DC has tons of taxi apps. Yellow cab has a wonderful app. Just for ease, I use transport DC cab. Once you book a request, there is a confirmation, then when they assign cabs, you get that information. It is for Yellow Cab and for TransportDC. Mr. Blake stated they are looking for their own promotion outside Metro. I told District officials Metro supports whatever they do, but added the opinion that simply pooling is not enough.

When asked about the impact on TransportDC of Abilities-Ride, Mr. Blake stated there is room for both. TransportDC is \$5 anywhere in the District. Abilities-Ride may be \$5 from SE to SW, but more convenient or cheaper for short trips. Silver Cab's pricing model is a heavily discounted fare based on where you are going. Instead of paying \$5 to go 2 miles to dialysis on TransportDC, you might end up paying \$3 on the Abilities-Ride provider. You would call TransportDC when you want to go from SE to NW. As long as TransportDC is contributing, to a decline in demand for MetroAccess, it is in our interest to keep supporting it.

**MetroAccess – New Modification Update & Vehicle Demonstration – Donald Scruggs**

Mr. Blake stated today we had a vehicle on display 30 minutes prior to the meeting, and will have it 30 minutes after the meeting. Chair Semelfort stated the seats are at level,

his feet are not hanging, and while everyone's opinion may be different, the current transportation is better.

Ms. Rush stated the public did not know anything about the 3:30pm or 6pm to 6:30pm times. Mr. Blake stated the demonstration is intended for AAC to provide one final round of feedback directly in response to concerns raised by Committee members. Ms. Rush stated she gets off at 3:30pm and had to leave early from work. Ms. Rush added that the seats are great. She can sit in the "kiddie" seat in the back without any discomfort. The one on the right in front of the kiddie seat, she can sit without sitting sideways. Her legs were fine. The seats were it folds up, but not a problem, when she got on the bus. The very last step is a real step where your foot can rest. Seat belts are still choking her. She still had to bend her knees to get on, but that is the way it is. She would like to physically see two wheel chairs on a Ford Transit at the same time. Mr. Blake stated, as far as the two wheel chairs, it is MetroAccess policy not to transport two wheelchairs at the same time on a Ford Transit unless there is an urgent matter.

Ms. Bellamy stated you cannot see the driver. For safety reasons, she recommends cutting the panel behind drivers in half. She likes to be able to see the drivers. Donald Scruggs, MetroAccess, stated discussions with the manufacturing representatives will include a determination as to whether that is feasible. Ms. Bellamy added that she likes the seats, but knows you can't put double wide wheelchairs on the vehicles. She is aware of two particular customers who travel together and won't be able to fit in the vehicles. Ms. Bellamy stated the seat belts need to be moved up.

Dr. Posner stated he was on one of the vans before it was modified and there was a wheelchair on it before he boarded, he had to board sideways. When there is a wheelchair, if they are on first, how does the passenger get to the seat or get off the van? Mr. Scruggs stated the comments by Ms. Bellamy and Dr. Posner are about different seat belts. Ms. Bellamy is talking about adjuster mobility shoulder belt, which will be verified. Dr. Posner is talking about the seat belts, not mounted to the wall anywhere. It is by the height of the seat. We are going to talk with the manufacturer about those.

#### **Five Minute Rule Update - Christiaan Blake**

Mr. Blake stated that during a previous MAS meeting, some members raised questions and concerns about some practices that were in the Five Minute Rule (FMR). Mr. Blake went back and confirmed that customers were indeed being called 3 minutes within the FMR window. We have stopped that practice. That was just an update that we made that change. Ms. Rush stated she has continued to receive the three minute calls. She stated the call took place last week, but this morning instead of calling, they sent a text. Mr. Blake stated we will follow up on that.

Ms. Rush then added that the real issue is the 3 minute call sent to drivers, causing them to rush the customers You come to my door and before we get on the van, driver has in his hand (radio), and (dispatcher asks the driver) have you made contact (with the customer)? . The problem is you have pressed the button, they (driver) are getting a call about making contact with the person. Mr. Blake stated the call center is allowed to

contact the driver. Ms. Rush asked so you are saying the driver has pressed arrived, and he comes 10 minutes later. Mr. Blake stated that's a problem. The example we are using is the driver arrives at the door, in the window, once the window opens, they push arrive, you get the call, and 5 minutes later you present yourself at the door.

Ms. Bellamy stated the customer has 5 minutes to be seen not 5 minutes to come out the door. And don't rush the driver because when you rush the driver, you can cause an accident. You are rushing a driver, and you are rushing people come out the door. Ms. Bellamy stated you are making people think they have got 5 minutes to come out the door to the van, they are rushing. Mr. Blake stated customers have to be ready and have 5 minutes to present themselves. Ms. Bellamy stated the forefathers just want you to have initial contact. Mr. Blake asked Ms. Anderson, when will the focus group meet about the FMR? Ms. Anderson stated the initial meeting is slated for October/ November time frame. Ms. Bellamy stated what she is trying to do is change the rule that is made up by the forefathers.

Dr. Posner stated the question I have is on first contact. If the customer is at the front entrance waving their crutches, is that acceptable or do they have to be outside? Mr. Blake stated being at the most exterior door within five minutes is the requirement. Dr. Posner asked do you want their presence known from the curb, or do you want their presence known from where they are. Mr. Blake stated they have to be at the door.

Ms. Anderson asked is it the driver feeling like they have to get passenger on the van within 5 minutes. Ms. Bellamy stated drivers are being rushed and they feel they need to rush the customer. Ms. Rush stated, they pick up a customer and OCC is calling, have you made contact, they are wheeling down the wheelchair, they don't have time to strap the customer properly, they are feeling rushed. Mr. Blake stated you are right, if I am a driver, if I am rushed, I may be prone to make a mistake. Ms. Bellamy stated she is against the second door policy. Adding that people misunderstand what the exterior most door is.

**Public Comment:**

A customer stated she has been contacting Metro since August 2017, due to problems with the new MetroAccess vehicles. The design of the new vans does not accommodate her. She sent her complaint to Mr. Roth and to Mr. Shaffer as well, but never heard back. When she called Mr. Shaffer she was told her complaint would be forward to Mr. Blake, but she did not hear anything. Mr. Shaffer informed her that this falls under FTA. She asked for \$26 reimbursement for a trip she had to take on another service when MetroAccess failed to accommodate her. Mr. Shaffer said he would call her back. Until now, no one has followed up with her. She added to ignore her is not good. To have to share her public health issues is in violating her rights. She wants to know what is WMATA going to do about this?

Mr. Blake stated today was the first day he heard about this matter and spoke with the customer. Now that he has heard, he will use what power he has to accommodate the situation. It probably will have to be two parts: short term solution and a long term

solution, and ensure there are no mistakes along the way. No guarantee that there will never be any mistakes, but we will make sure to limit any such instances. Mr. Blake apologized for this matter taking so long.

The customer commended three dispatchers for doing, a great job. They always put her on older vans.

Ms. Case stated that there is an ongoing problem about the Abilities-Ride program and one thing is a chronic problem: drivers don't help customers with visual impairments. They don't know how to help customers, they are ignorant, insensitive, and better training needs to be provided. Improvements we see in TransportDC come from the fact we have an opportunity we meet with those people. Even once a quarter, someone from the cab company management should meet with customers, WMATA, and AAC.

Chair Semelfort stated last year after the Abilities-Ride started we had Silver and Regency attend the meeting. He intends to do that again soon.

Ms. Case asked about elevator outages. Ms. Rush asked are we are going to talk about ELES to the Board. Dr. Posner stated he did not attend the Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting due to the Jewish Holiday, so he will rely on his co-chair. Mr. Blake stated the subject was discussed during the BRS meeting.

Mr. Kaffen asked about Abilities-Ride's financial consideration of different carriers based upon just the ride. What about giving information, so that they can make an informed decision? How about promotional material to inform customers?

Mr. Blake stated right now in all of our promotional materials: on the websites, even in some of the phone calls, we do inform customers of the \$5 minimum fare, Metro pays the next \$15, and then anything above and beyond that, customer pays. The program is on demand. We advise that customer should call ahead of time for a couple of reasons: 1) try to better ensure you have a vehicle available to you when you need it, and 2) most importantly you want to know what your price is before you get in the vehicle. So that way you call the day before or hours ahead of time. They tell you your trip is going to be \$7.50. On MetroAccess the trip is \$6.50, but you make that decision. You may say I am going to pay the extra dollar for the convenience.

Ms. Rush stated WMATA sends out RFP for the cabs for the sustainability of MetroAccess as an alternative for same day service and cheaper for the cost. But when the cab does something, Metro says "we have nothing to do with that." Ms. Rush says she can't understand that. Why can't WMATA have more control on how the cabs are run? She know they are not Metro's business, but they are soliciting their business.

Mr. Blake stated we are taking advantage of existing services that are on the street providing transportation service that are not paratransit service. Per trip, they cost a lot less than a paratransit service. Metro is not in the business of managing and controlling a private taxi enterprise. We are incentivizing customers and promoting independence



to choose other modes of transportation for trips they otherwise would have had to use MetroAccess.

Ms. Rush stated if we are not going to request service, then we are not going to get it. Chair Semelfort stated it is strongly suggested, it is just not a requirement. Ms. Rush stated it should be a requirement. Mr. Blake stated we are not running those companies. If we make these companies MetroAccess like, there is cost involved. The \$5 fare may turn out to be higher. Ms. Rush stated so that's my choice. If I need MetroAccess service, then I need to call MetroAccess. Mr. Blake stated if you need paratransit service, you should call MetroAccess.

Ms. Rush asked for a report on how the Abilities-Ride program is affecting MetroAccess. Mr. Blake stated we will give you stats for the impact. We measure success or failure based on the overall impact on MetroAccess. For the first time in five years, thanks to TransportDC, Abilities-Ride, STAR, and Fastran, we had a reduction in MetroAccess ridership.

A customer stated when a person gets in the cab in Virginia, Maryland, or the District of Columbia, someone somewhere will not get the same (level of) service. If Metro and any other transit agencies operated taxi service for general population anywhere, there will be a taxis available all day long. Had Metro invested more money on MetroAccess than spent money on creating a taxi service, we could have more service.

Mr. Crawford commented on contractual relationship between the Abilities-Ride and Metro. To the extent that there is a contract, there is expectation associated with the contract, which is called the meeting of the minds. There was a document which is called the verification contract and the enforceable conditions of the contract. Even with the contractual part of it, there are obligations under the ADA with regards to the people with disability. They are in fact agents of Metro when they agree to do something on behalf of Metro when they provide rides to passengers on Abilities-Ride. There is also an issue with taxi cab in Montgomery County. At the disabilities commission meeting in Montgomery County, there is \$2 million being generated. Every ride on Uber and Lyft, 25 cents go to improvement funds which goes to help persons with disabilities. There was a recognition that people with disabilities do need help. We still have an adequate level of taxis that can transport folks in wheelchairs. There are 30 cabs out there, not all of them are out on the street at the same time, but a person in a wheel chair will be able to call a taxi and get a taxi in a reasonable time of period as somebody else does. When we meet that goal, all of these discussions are moot.

Chair Semelfort stated Mr. Blake, this seems like open discussion for scope of work. So you might open it to more and entertain it like Uber and Lyft even though the committee has strong disagreement about it? Mr. Blake stated the solicitation is going to be open to all transportation companies that are providing or can provide general accessible public transportation. A question asked was whether Uber and Lyft are transportation companies or are they ride hailing company? Mr. Blake stated they are listed as a transportation network company.

Dr. Posner asked how the rides are distributed if they are from a central location where the request for rides comes from Abilities-Ride, and the ride is sent over the network and anyone can grab it: a Lyft driver, an Uber driver, a Yellow Cab driver, or Red Top driver, etc. That means there are more cars on the road. But if you have to make the call to a specific company as we do now to Regency or Sliver, then that is a problem with Uber. He recommends a central transit system that can show it open and more cars are available. Mr. Blake stated that might be possible in the future. If Metro brings in a network, it goes close to the things that we were talking about earlier. If you look at MTA's website on TaxiAccess, it started with two taxi companies. Now there are 18 companies that individuals can call. Customers make their own decision. The companies are able to choose the area they wish to service, which is added to the new Abilities-Ride SOW. One number won't be for all. A company in the District of Columbia may not want to go to Arlington. We will have to educate customers on who to call.

Ms. Case stated if you call Uber, they have to have a wheelchair service.

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