



Accessibility Advisory Committee

600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
202-962-6060

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: December 16, 2013

In attendance: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Dr. Tapan Banerjee, Carolyn Bellamy, Heidi Case, Dr. Phil Posner, Doris Ray, Patrick Sheehan, Dr. William Staderman, Elver Arisa-Silva, Regina Lee, and George Aguehounde.

Call to Order

Vice-Chair Rush called the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting to order at 4:05pm.

Review of December 2013 Agenda

The MAS made a motion to reduce the amount of time for the MetroAccess securement policy agenda item, add time to the work plan agenda item, and incorporate an item for old business. The agenda was approved as amended.

Review of November 2013 Meeting Meetings

The minutes were approved without amendments.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Kim Clark, Regional Vice President of Operations, MTM, reported that all public comments from the previous meetings were addressed.

Allison Anderson, Operations Manager, MetroAccess Operations Control Center, reported attendance at the following events: Fort Lincoln Senior Center residents meeting and DaVita Dialysis Center on Lee St. NE Washington, DC. A committee member commended MetroAccess for reaching out to the dialysis centers and providing information to the individuals there. Ms. Anderson encouraged the MAS to inform MetroAccess staff of groups or organizations interested in having MetroAccess attend or present at their events.

MetroAccess Securement Policy

Antonio Hamlin, Field Operations Manager, MetroAccess Service, Ms. Stephanie Newsome, Service Monitor, MetroAccess Service, and Gregory Quarles, Safety Manager, First Transit-Gaithersburg, explained the MetroAccess securement policy, detailing the operators' required tasks. (Mr. Hamlin stated the current securement policy is under review by WMATA Counsel and updates will be provided at future MAS meetings.)

- Operators must first offer the Posey belt to the customer. Use of this belt is not required. It is a safety option for the customer's use.
- The operator must maintain constant contact with the customer explaining what is occurring while performing the securement action.
- The operator then directs the wheelchair to the lift at the vehicle.

- The customer has the option of boarding the vehicle either forward or rear facing.
- The customer is then boarded on the vehicle with the operator giving direction during the boarding process.
- The customer must always be forward facing on the vehicle.
- The operator will then secure the wheelchair using two securements in the front of the chair at a forty-five degree angle on the outside of the wheel and two securements in the rear of the chair on the inside of the wheel at a forty-five degree angle. The securement will go above the axle or the frame of the rear of the chair. Depending on the make-up of the chair, the securements can go around the rim. Some chairs require four web loops, two loops for the front of the chair and two loops for the rear. The web loops are utilized at the discretion of the operator and the customer.
- The operator will then apply appropriate seatbelts. The lap belt is required at all times. The shoulder belt is required unless the customer can provide medical documentation supporting the non-use of the shoulder belt.

Question/Comments from the committee:

1. Are belt loops mandatory on the vehicles?

Mr. Hamlin stated that the belt loops are part of the necessary equipment that is required on all vehicles. If customers discover that this is not the case, they are encouraged to call and report the information.

2. Can the customer request to have only one web loop in the front and one loop in the rear of the chair?

Mr. Hamlin said that such a request would result in an improper securement and is against MetroAccess policy. He urged customers not to make that sort of request as it places the customer in danger.

3. The shoulder belt is optional? It seems very risky to allow customers to be transported without the shoulder belt.

Mr. Hamlin stated that both the lap and shoulder belt are required, but exemptions may be made for the shoulder belt with medical documentation.

4. Depending on the type of chair the web loops may cause damage to the power chairs. The loops and belts can get tangled around the wheels.

Mr. Hamlin commented that if the chair has hooks this would be the best option to utilize for securements. He said that sometimes the hooks may not be visible to the operator and the customer should inform the operator of them. He stated that it is prohibited for the operator to secure the chair using the wheels of the chair. Operators are not trained to secure chairs using the wheels.

5. When using the posey belt, it may require wrapping the excess belt around the customer to prevent the belt from dragging. Should there be two sets of four web loops on the vehicle? Where is the information documented regarding use of certain belts for the driver to understand what the customer needs?

Mr. Hamlin confirmed that there are to be two sets of the four web loops on all vehicles. He also stated that the information regarding belts will be documented in the customer's file, so that it will be reflected on the operators' manifest. Drivers must read the instructions on their manifest and when that is not the case, it should be reported.

Ms. Anderson commented that when making comments or giving instructions, make them as brief as possible as the comment field on the ranger can only maintain sixty-four characters. Therefore, the most important information should be made first.

6. If instructions are on the ranger it will follow you, but if it's on the manifests it may not?

Ms. Anderson stated that the full typed instructions will be on the paper manifest. If a customer's trip is inserted onto another route, the information would not be on the operator's manifest but would be sent electronically via the Mobile Data Terminals (MDT), which will only be the first sixty-four characters.

MV Transportation- Overview and Call Center Process

Paul Comfort, Assistant Project Manager, MV Transportation, explained the three components of the call center: Reservations, Scheduling, and Dispatch departments.

The Reservations department takes reservations seven days a week.

After reservations closes, the Scheduling department creates the schedules for the next day. New practices are being implemented in the scheduling department to improve scheduling of trips. Once the schedules are completed, they are sent to the service providers who then print out the manifests preparing them for the operators the next morning.

When eighty-five to ninety percent of the fleet of six hundred vehicles is dispersed for the day, the Dispatch department begins to manage the performance. Dispatchers maintain communication with the drivers through push-to-talk radios and MDT's. A dispatch observation form was recently created for the dispatch supervisors to communicate any issues that may be occurring on the road to the service providers ensuring quality service for the customer. Dispatch supervisors are involved with safety, sending reports regarding accidents or incidents.

There is also an information technology team available to support the Trapeze and Spider systems as well as the push-to-talk radios.

An internal Quality Assurance team receives feedback from customers, WMATA, and from internal reviews. They watch and listen to communication between dispatch agents and drivers to ensure that communication with drivers and customers are appropriate.

Question/Comments from the committee:

1. Is it the customer's responsibility to report a rude dispatcher? The committee member reported a dispatch supervisor who gave wrong information.
Mr. Comfort stated that it would be helpful to have the information to coach and counsel the employee. If the customer is able to provide the date, time, and vehicle number, the dispatchers name could be located. Ms. Anderson affirmed that the supervisor giving the incorrect information was coached and counseled on the information given.
2. The number one complaint heard is that dispatchers are rude. Are Dispatchers monitored? Do operators have an outlet to address issues with dispatchers? If eighty-five to ninety percent of the vehicles are in service daily, where is the remainder of the vehicles? Improvements of call center processes have been noticed.
Mr. Comfort stated that there are floor monitors and supervisors walking the floor listening to conversations. There are also supervisors sitting in the vicinity of the dispatchers. All dispatchers are in one location and are grouped by the garage they monitor. The percentage of vehicles in service is minus the spare ratio. Vehicles must go through preventive maintenance inspections every so many miles.
Ms. Anderson stated that through their bases, drivers may report incidents of unprofessional behavior by dispatch agents. She commented that WMATA Service Monitors also monitor the operations on the call center floor addressing issues as needed.
3. Is this a new call center?
Christian Kent, Assistant General Manager, Access Services, stated that MetroAccess Operations Control Center has been in Hyattsville, Maryland since August 2009. The Quality Assurance contractor, MTM, will be evaluating the service in new and different ways. The call center performs a measure of quality assurance on the service that operates on the street because it's how customers receive information on what is occurring. Prior to 2006, there was no equipment on the vehicles to assist in determining where the vehicle was. Frequent calls to the driver are necessary when customers are on the telephone with dispatch agents inquiring about their ride.

Though the vehicles are equipped with MDT's, which allow the dispatchers to monitor the vehicle locations, due to the density of the Washington Metropolitan area traffic, it is difficult to determine the length of time it will take the driver to travel a couple of blocks. Dispatch must contact the driver to gather this information in an effort to properly inform the customer. WMATA hopes in the future new technology will be added to MetroAccess that will predict accurate vehicle arrive time. Another reason the Call Center was separated from service delivery is to ensure the Call Center can focus on good customer service and build efficient schedules for the operators to perform their duties. Mr. Kent acknowledged MV Transportation and Leland Petersen for their extensive experience in managing call centers.

4. Can notice be made earlier when there is a disruption with the system?
Recently, there was a long period of time waiting on hold to make a reservation. There was no notice that there was a problem for several days. Mr. Omari June, Director, MetroAccess Service, apologized for the unusually long wait times and stated that there were intermittent technical difficulties. He said MetroAccess will do a better job identifying the issue the first day. He said the problem was not initially thought to be as complex as it turned out to be. Reservation agents remained beyond their work schedule to attempt to get all of the reservations completed. The following day had an unusually high volume of trips. He thanked the customers for their patience during the event of extensive hold times.
5. How long does it take for a driver to secure a wheelchair?
Mr. Hamlin stated that it should take a proficient driver approximately five minutes to secure a wheelchair. Mr. Kent commented that during the scheduling process the computer system builds extra time into each pick-up to allow for boarding and securement. If the driver takes longer than allotted to board and secure the customer, the trip may run late. He encouraged customers to wait until the start of their window to inquire about their ride and to consider that every time they call dispatch, the agent must interrupt the driver's trip.
6. There was a suggestion to extend the pick-up window, and utilize the toll/access roads.
Drivers are not directed to use toll roads. MetroAccess is pursuing waivers to utilize toll roads, but such waivers are not currently available to MetroAccess vehicles. Extending the pick-up window would require customers to wait and be available for a longer period of time. A change such as this would not occur without public opinion.

7. Where is the supervisor when the window dispatcher inserts trips that increase late trips? Customers with cell phones could call dispatch to inform them where the driver is or while the driver is busy and cannot answer the phone. The pick-up window should not be extended.

Ms. Anderson stated that the supervisor is involved during such trip insertions. Supervisors monitor late trips, utilizing a board which is kept visible at all times. This board records projected late trips allowing supervisors to scour all of the possible routes to place these trips on to prevent them from being late. If a customer would like to call dispatch to inform them that the driver is busy, that would be helpful. There are no plans to extend the pick-up window at this time.

Review MAS Work Plan

A committee member suggested adding a discussion about shuttles to the work plan. This is a part of MetroAccess as individuals with conditional eligibility will need this information and it's a part of ADA. The member also suggested that members take an active role in the responsibilities of tasks on the work plan.

A committee member asked what the Transit Accessibility Guide (action item 2014-08) and the MetroAccess Bus Stop High Density Areas (action item 2014-16) are about. Ms. Cheryl O'Konek, Operations Manager - Office of Eligibility Certification, explained that the Transit Accessibility Guide is a booklet which details services and outreach offered in the Transit Accessibility Center related to the identification card program, MetroAccess, travel training, and outreach. Ms. O'Konek will bring the information to the committee to review the work that has been done to the guide. Mr. Kent stated that with the projected growth that will occur in the Washington Metropolitan area, MetroAccess must begin to make plans. Consider the areas where there are MetroAccess customers who use the service and there is not a rail station or accessible bus stop nearby; if that stop was corrected and made accessible, how many customers might be willing to take the bus? The MAS committee could advise about what may make a difference to customers if an accessible bus stop was available.

A committee member stated that this item is crossing into the bus stop task force. Mr. Kent said that the plan is a listing of subjects. It is up to the committee to decide what their focus will be and WMATA staff will provide the data regarding the subjects.

A committee member commented that fare policy will be very important in the next couple of months for MetroAccess, in particular, so this needs to be an action item.

A committee member requested clarification of action item 2014-16, as she thought this item was referring to certain places where a MetroAccess vehicle may stop at high density areas to pick-up customers.

Mr. Kent stated that MetroAccess was attempting to put bus stops for MetroAccess at places that would serve as landmarks. He stated that it could be either or both subjects related to this topic of bus stops. The decision would be the committee's.

Public Comments

Comments were in regard to: trip movements making customer late, exceptions being made for days of inclement weather, calling drivers over the radio, differing fares for the same trip, agreement with extending pick-up window, Essential MetroAccess Policy Brochure will be available in January 2014, MetroAccess Customer Guide will be completed in April 2014, gratitude for assistance with thanksgiving baskets, and a compliment to Ms. Allison Anderson and Mr. Charles Robinson for assisting with a trip.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the December 2013 Complaint Resolution Report located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Meeting adjourned at 5:48pm.