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METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: June 16, 2014

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

Call to Order

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

Review of June 2014 Agenda

The MAS made a motion to add a discussion about the seatbelt policy, which had been recently distributed. The agenda was approved with the amendment.

Review of May 2014 Meeting Minutes

There were requests made to reword a statement made by Dr. Banerjee at the bottom of page two, and to add "met with WMATA Title VI representatives" to the statement made by Ms. Case at the bottom of page two. The minutes were approved with the amendments.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Kimberly Clark, Regional Vice President of Operations, MTM, reported that all public comments from the previous meetings have been addressed.

Jacqueline Quander, Service Monitor, MetroAccess, reported her attendance at the U.S. Postal Service's Older Americans Month Fair where she and Mr. Reginald Ward provided information regarding MetroAccess service.

MetroAccess Employee Recognition

Ms. Quander recognized Tilwona Gollman as the Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award winner. A detailed description of Ms. Gollman's accomplishments can be found in the accompanying document titled "Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award" located under the June 2014 heading at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Ms. Rush commended Paul Seyfrit, Road Supervisor, First Transit, for his service at the National Federation for the Blind seminar.

MetroAccess Visitor Program

Cheryl O'Konek, Operations Manager, Office of Eligibility Certification (ELIG), explained the visitor program stating that, per the ADA, each public paratransit provider is required to make the service available to visitors. The public agency provides coordinated complementary paratransit service within a particular region. Each public agency will provide complementary paratransit service to all visitors who present documentation that they are ADA paratransit eligible. With respect to visitors with disabilities who do not present such documentation, the public agency may require the documentation of the individual's place of residence and, if the individual's disability is not apparent, of his or her disability. Visitor status is available for any combination of twenty-one days during any three hundred sixty-five day period.

ELIG handles such requests for visitors to the Washington Metro region and for MetroAccess customers who wish to travel to other jurisdictions across the nation.

For MetroAccess customers wishing to travel to another jurisdiction, ELIG requests notification at least seven days before the customer plans to travel to send the information; however, some jurisdictions may require more advanced notice. Given the volume of agencies across the country that offer paratransit, we request that the customer contact the transit agency which they are seeking visitor status from to attain the most current contact information. The customer would then forward that information to WMATA Transit Accessibility Center (TAC), and TAC will provide verification to that jurisdiction of the customer's eligibility. This will also help expedite the handling and processing of their request. The request can be made over the phone, through email, by fax or written letter, or in person at the TAC.

For visitors to the Washington Metro region, we request that the current paratransit provider mail, fax, or email verification to our office. In order to process the request we will need to obtain the following information:

1. Applicant's full name;
2. Applicant's full address and phone number;
3. Applicant's paratransit ID number and expiration date;
4. Type of mobility aid used, if applicable;
5. If they travel with a Personal Care Assistant (PCA); and,
6. If applicant uses a service animal.

If the visitor does not have paratransit in their home area, they will need to provide proof of disability - typically a brief letter from a healthcare provider will suffice.

Once the information is received the visitor will be entered into our system and a letter including ID number and instructions on how to use the service will be mailed to the visitor. If requested, we can email a copy of the letter to the visitor, or in other accessible format if requested. We request at least a seven-day notice if travelling to the area.

Visitors who use up their twenty-one days of eligibility before the three hundred sixty-five day period has expired, but still need paratransit services, will need to complete an application for eligibility to continue using the service – the eligibility office will assist them with navigating that process.

Comments/Questions from the Committee:

Mr. Semelfort suggested that individuals begin the process of requesting visitor status for a jurisdiction outside of the Washington Metropolitan area at least three weeks in advance. He stated that the receiving jurisdictions process may take longer than WMATA's process.

Dr. Posner asked if an individual is approved will the information be sent to the other service such as Star. Is the twenty-one days renewed each year or do visitors need to reapply each year? If visitors qualify for conditional eligibility in their home local, will they be afforded free transportation on fixed route if they do not utilize MetroAccess?

Ms. O'Konek stated that she would request information from the other services in the area to inquire if they provide services to visitors. The twenty-one days begins the day they begin using MetroAccess through the three hundred and sixty fifth day from that date. Visitors will recertify each year and receive the same ID number will. They would only be required to have their local paratransit agency forward the verification. Visitors are not offered free transportation, but they may receive a 30 day reduced fare disability Smart trip card if they have a transit or Medicare card.

Dr. Banerjee shared information stating that Fairfax County offers taxi coupons for county residents to travel to areas outside of MetroAccess core service area. These coupons are subsidized by the county and cost one dollar for every three dollar coupon.

Ms. O'Konek added that ELIG has a listing of accessible resources for each county. She said that the information is shared with visitors if their itinerary includes areas outside of the MetroAccess core service area.

Dr. Staderman asked if the information regarding the visitor program was online and if so where?

Ms. O'Konek stated that the information is online in the accessibility tab under TAC about halfway down the page.

Ms. Rush stated that Prince George's County has half price coupons for transportation on accessible cabs. These coupons are for Prince George's County residents.

Seatbelt Policy Letter

Mr. Semelfort led the discussion regarding the seatbelt notification posted on MetroAccess vehicles. He explained the letter and stated that the letter was very good. He made a motion requesting that the letter be placed in the front of the vehicle; the font be made larger; and the information placed on the IVR.

Mr. June stated that the letter will be sent to all customers, however placing the information on the IVR will need to be considered as the information contained in the letter is important and needs to be read in its entirety, but the length of the letter could pose a problem.

Ms. Rush commented that customers will continue having issues with the seatbelt policy since it will not be fully implemented until August 1. Mr. June stated that customer issues can be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Ms. Lee stated that though the letter has been on the vehicles for a couple of days, the drivers are still not aware of the policy, and asked if drivers will have the waivers on board the vehicle? Are you ensuring the customer that until August 1, they will not be denied transportation if they are unable to utilize the shoulder harness? Mr. June stated that he will ensure that the service delivery providers explain this policy to every driver so that they understand the expectation. Drivers will not have the waivers as this is handled by ELIG. This information will be included in the customer's permanent file and must only be handled by that office. The seatbelt policy is not a contractor-led initiative. The intent of the letter is to communicate the addition of the waiver process into the existing policy. Drivers will continue to communicate the safety reasons behind wearing the seatbelt and discourage not wearing the seatbelt.

Dr. Posner made a motion to move the seatbelt policy letter to the front of the vehicles and to increase the font of the letter. The motion was approved.

Dr. Posner stated that he had a great ride with the seatbelt extension and requested that the drivers are aware of the use of the extension. Mr. June stated that he will ensure that the seatbelt extenders are a part of the normal equipment on the vehicle, and the drivers have refresher training on the use of the extenders.

MetroAccess New Vehicles

Mr. Donald Scruggs, Fleet Maintenance Officer, MetroAccess, provided information on the installation of new vehicles to the fleet. He stated that the fleet size at the current time, prior to retirements is 652 vehicles. The fleet size will temporarily increase while preparing older vehicles for retirement. Fifty-five new vehicles have been placed on the road as of May of this year, and another 48 that have been delivered and being prepared for service. At this time three of the older vehicles have been taken out of service. There will be 120 more new vehicles added to the fleet in the new fiscal year. 17 vehicles will be delivered by the end of June and all of the new vehicles should be in service by the end of July depending on the rate of the commissioning of those vehicles.

The new vehicles will have most of the same features: same chassis, same mobility lift and design. The changes will be clearance lights around the upper perimeter of the vehicle to add visibility, a mud flap to the right front wheel, and a roof strobe light for visibility to be utilized in the future.

30 vehicles have an orange and black chevron on the back. This is a pilot program to determine if it will reduce the number of incidents where an adverse vehicle strikes a MetroAccess vehicle from behind. The pilot program will continue for six months at which time the data will be analyzed to compare with the overall result. If it is found that the chevrons have made a difference, they may be expanded across the fleet.

In 2015 a total of 150 new vehicles will be added to the fleet as slated in the capital program. 120 will be the same as the current vehicles and will be the last of the current chassis that will be available from manufacturers. The other 30 vehicles will be designated as pilot vehicles to attempt to locate and determine the MetroAccess of the future.

Comments/Questions from the Committee:

Dr. Posner commented about the windows in the vehicle and asked that in considering new vehicles that windows are sized so that passengers can have good visibility to the outside. He said that it is very comforting to him to be able to see where he is going. He stated that this was not the case in some of the older vehicles.

Dr. Banerjee asked if considering having the wheelchair lift in the rear of the vehicle as an alternative to using the side of the vehicle.

Mr. Scruggs stated that he would have evaluate the number of times a vehicle has been struck from behind by an adverse vehicle while boarding a passenger before considering rear loading wheelchair lift.

Ms. Bellamy requested that the condition of the chairs and air conditioning assessed. Many times the seats are broken and have springs coming out, and the air conditioner leaks on customers.

Mr. Scruggs stated that the air conditioning issue occurs on very hot days. The design on the new vehicles have addressed this issue, however on the existing vehicles the hoses are inspected regularly and cleaned out but still pose a problem on the hottest of days.

Ms. Ray stated that the width of the vehicle chassis be considered as maneuverability with wheelchairs and the securement devices is difficult.

Ms. Case stated that it was difficult to get her wheelchair in and out of the MV1 vehicles. She stated she enjoys the view in these vehicles but the practicality of the MV1 is questionable.

Mr. Scruggs concurred with Ms. Case stating that this was a major issue with the MV1 vehicles. Mr. June commented that the MV1 vehicles were a pilot program to evaluate the practicality of that type of vehicle. He stated that the feedback is very helpful and will be useful in the future with the pilot program on the thirty new vehicles next year. Mr. Scruggs read comments from the public related to the vehicles.

Drivers need to be retrained on use of the wheelchair lifts.

Vehicles need an attachment on the vehicle to level out the lift on roads with a slope.

Mr. Scruggs stated that drivers are retrained on the proper use of the lifts at least twice a year. Mr. Scruggs explained that if the front or back of the vehicle is higher or lower, that's an issue due to a rigidity issue with regard to the lift itself. If the issue is that the vehicle leans left or right due to the slope of the road, it can be adjusted. There is a bridging switch to prevent it from over rotating on that type of slope when the vehicle is against the curb. If that is not occurring, the vehicle will need maintenance to repair it.

No-Strand Policy Presentation and Discussion

Ms. Allison Anderson, Operations Control Center Manager, MetroAccess, presented a draft of the No-Stand policy for the committee to obtain with feedback regarding the draft. The draft will be forwarded to the committee in the near future. Ms. Anderson read the draft to the committee.

MetroAccess will make every effort to ensure customers are provided a safe trip back to their requested destination. If MetroAccess provides transportation for a customer to a destination, we will make every attempt to provide transportation to the customer for their scheduled return trip, even if the customer is a no-show. Return service will be provided as soon as possible, with the customer being provided the first available pick-up window time slot.

If a customer is a no-show for a trip originating from their home, no vehicle will be sent back to the home to perform the trip. If a customer is a no-show for a scheduled return trip originating somewhere other than home, MetroAccess will schedule a return ride upon request, offering the first available pick-up window time slot. The exceptions to this policy may include but are not limited to the following:

- The customer booked a one way trip to a location and did not schedule a return trip.
- The customer requests to depart the vehicle before reaching his/her destination.
- The customer refuses to follow applicable operational and/or safety policies required for transport.
- The customer demonstrates inappropriate, aggressive, threatening, or abusive behavior toward others.
- MetroAccess service suspension due to severe weather or service area emergency.

Comments/Questions from the Committee:

Mr. Semelfort gave an example of the type of emergency weather conditions that would suspend service.

Mr. June commented that sometime ago the AAC's recommendation was to not have a No-Strand policy. MetroAccess felt that this policy statement was something that was needed for our customer base and has been in place for some time. This current draft is addressing the language.

Ms. Ray requested clarity on the statement "returning passengers to their requested destination." Is what is meant by this statement return passengers home or their next destination? She also asked that it is clearly stated that during emergencies or inclement weather condition such as earth quakes, customers are returned to their end of day destination.

Mr. Semelfort commented that in the past when time permitted MetroAccess has placed an announcement to customers informing them of a pending emergency or inclement weather condition and MetroAccess' intention to arrive early for pick-up and the customer's needs to return to their home or final destination.

Mr. June commented that it can maybe be better stated, return to their originally scheduled destination. He said that it's important to know that individuals don't always schedule their last trip to return to their home address.

Ms. Case stated that she liked the letter, but asked if customers will be provided transportation home when they feel they need to leave the vehicle for safety reasons.

Mr. Omar Browne, Field Operations Manager, MetroAccess, stated that MetroAccess will take such circumstances on a case by case basis. If a customer removes themselves from a vehicle due to feeling unsafe, MetroAccess will provide transportation for that customer to their destination.

Mr. Banerjee referenced an article regarding accessible taxis that will be introduced in July 2014 in the District of Columbia. He asked if MetroAccess could work with the taxi companies to utilize their resources.

Mr. June stated that the article Mr. Banerjee referenced is a joint partnership with the DC Taxicab Commission and WMATA. The accessible vans that were mentioned are MetroAccess vehicles given to the DC Taxicab Commission. This pilot program will begin with certain number and type of trips.

Ms. Lee asked if the No-Strand policy will be added to the customer guide when the guide is completed. She also stated she is confused about customer's who are No-Showed for their scheduled return, and finally what happens when a customer's vehicle arrives late but the customer is cited as a No-Show and the customer finds alternate transportation to their destination. Will they be provided a ride home?

Ms. Anderson stated a decision will need to be made regarding whether the No-Strand policy being placed in the customer guide. She said that if a customer has received a valid No-Show and the customer is away from home and still needs transportation to their final destination, MetroAccess will transport them home. However, they will be provided the first available timeslot pick-up window to their return destination.

Mr. June commented that if the customer is No-showed or not transported for their original trip their subsequent trips are not cancelled.

Dr. Staderman commented about the wording of "back to your destination", it is confusing.

Ms. Anderson stated that changes will be made to the wording to ensure there is clarity of what is being stated. Mr. June thanked the committee for the feedback. He said that MetroAccess would incorporate into the draft to revise the language and return it to the committee for review and provide additional comments.

Mr. Sheehan commented on the article of the DC Taxicab Commission stating what is being seen is a return to the jurisdictions of pilot projects where by alternate transportation companies will be helping individuals with medical needs that need direct transportation. This will in turn take pressure off the system.

Mr. Browne read a comment suggesting that a clause be added to the No-Strand policy regarding a customer will be provided a trip if the customer refuses the posey belt or shoulder harness and drivers refuse to transport them. Mr. June stated that a refusal of the posey belt will not be included in the No-Strand policy as the posey belt is optional, and service will not be denied to a customer who refuses to use the posey belt.

Work Plan

Ms. B. Moore-Gwynn, Accessibility Advisory Committee Coordinator, requested ideas from the committee for the FY 2015 work plan.

There was a suggestion for real time information.

Ms. Moore-Gwynn stated that the topic is already on the work plan but can be moved to an earlier date if the committee requests it.

She requested more discussions regarding accessible taxi to include the work from the United Spinal Association who are seeking legislation in DC requiring fifty percent of taxi' to be accessible. She feels that committee should write a letter of support on this legislation.

Mr. Christiaan Blake, Director, ADA Policy and Planning, commented that he is not sure that item should be on the work plan. He said that the DC Taxi Commission (DCTC) has a disability advisory committee that has been working on advocating for the taxi power project that Ms. Case referenced. He said from a policy standpoint the goal of the committee is to have one hundred percent of taxis in the District of Columbia become accessible. He stated that a key to reaching that goal is a DCTC regulation that will require taxi companies participating in the dialysis project to purchase a new wheelchair accessible taxi vehicle for every 3,000 trips delivered in the project. Mr. Blake agrees with Ms. Case regarding writing a letter of support, but does not believe it needs to be an MAS work plan item.

Ms. Ray commented that follow-up on this taxi project as it relates to transporting individuals in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs should be on the work plan.

Mr. Blake stated that work plan items should be left to deliverables that the committee itself will be delivering.

Mr. Ariza-Silva requested a work plan item to address possible same day reservations.

Mr. Sheehan requested adding the topics of accessible bus stops and the quality of life study being conducted and how it will impact the committee to the work plan.

Mr. Banerjee commented that he is against the taxi project as a work plan item.

Public Comments

Comments were received with regard to: wrongful No-Shows, trip insertion, driver dwell times, and a request to allow a customer location to be grandfathered.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the June 2014 Complaint Resolution Report located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Meeting adjourned at 5:51pm.