



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

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METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: November 21, 2016

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Co-Chair), Mr. Edward McEntee, Dr. Phillip Posner, Ms. Darnise Bush, Dr. Tapan Banerjee, Mr. Patrick Sheehan, Ms. Phillipa Mezile, and Ms. Carolyn Bellamy.

Call to Order

Ms. Denise Rush called the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting to order at 4:09pm.

Review of November 2016 Agenda

The agenda was amended to adjust the order of topics to be discussed. The committee requested the Annual OCC Customer Service Update presentation precede the MetroAccess Route Trip Insertion Process presentation. The agenda was approved as amended.

Review of October 2016 Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Ms. Jennifer Weber, Quality Assurance, MTM, reported all public comments from the previous meetings were addressed.

Ms. Allison Anderson, MetroAccess Operations Manager, reported that Mr. David Shaffer, Ombudsman, ADA Policy and Planning, and herself attended the 7th Annual Resource Day event sponsored by the National Federation of the Blind, National Harbor Chapter. Information was shared regarding the accessibility features of the Metro system. Ms. Anderson also stated Mr. Mark Nash, MetroAccess Field Operations Manager, and Ms. Celisse Outlaw, MetroAccess Service Monitor, were answering questions and distributing materials at the 8th Precinct Civic Association Meeting in Hyattsville, MD that very evening.

Dr. Posner suggested adding the bus stop location for the MGM Grand, National Harbor, and Convention Center to the Wayfinding application.

OCC Customer Service: Annual Update

Mr. John Gray, Acting Project Manager, and Ms. Nicole Ridgeway-Reid, Acting Director, MV Transportation, gave an overview of the improvements made in OCC customer service as a result of the feedback received from the committee last year. Ms. Ridgeway-Reid said senior management made more of an effort to lead by example by

modeling great customer service behavior. Senior management maintains a presence on the Operations Control Center floor working with the managers, supervisors and agents and coaching staff to be better at their positions by interacting in a customer focused way. She said this customer focus interaction is not only directed at the customer, but also the operators.

Ms. Ridgeway-Reid explained they have also made innovative changes to their customer service training program. A customer service excellence training module has been developed, which is specific to the MetroAccess customer base and to the transportation industry. The training program uses many customer service examples, recorded customer calls and role-play to help staff understand and implement positive attitudes when talking with customers. Effective communication, tone of voice, listening without speaking, conflict resolution, and being respectful to both external and internal customers are also discussed. The training seeks to improve interactions and relationships with operators by allowing the operators to visit the Operations Control Center, speak with dispatch agents, and learn additional aspects of the service. Live monitoring of phone calls and radio communication on the floor is conducted by the quality assurance team, and supervisors. Incentive programs reward dispatch and reservations agents with prizes when executive management or internal quality assurance staff observe positive interactions with customers or operators. It is a fun and engaging way to recognize excellence publicly and encourage continued positive communication and customer service. Agents who receive customer commendations are awarded prizes as well. Ms. Ridgeway-Reid said that MV is working very diligently to improve the customer experience and will continue to incorporate innovative strategies to ensure that occurs.

Comments from the MAS:

Dr. Banerjee commented the coaching and counseling of staff is great and inquired on the turnover rate for the Operations Control Center.

Mr. Gray stated that termination occurs when staff have been coached and counseled but still lack the skills to provide good customer service. He said the turnover rate is approximately 35 percent.

Ms. Rush commented that she has witness the changes in interactions between the dispatchers and the operators.

Mr. McEntee agreed that communication and efficiency has improved.

Ms. Rush commented on wait time to speak to a supervisor to resolve a problem.

Ms. Ridgeway-Reid apologized for the inconvenience and stated that they realize this is an area that needs improvement.

Mr. Posner stated that Diamond Transportation has an application where a customer is able to receive text messages regarding the location of the vehicle, ETA of the vehicle, and other pertinent questions the customer may have. This may be a tool that would be useful for the Operations Control Center.

Ms. Anderson said there is a map overlay project underway to assist in getting to a point that MetroAccess can have that level of communication with our customers.

Ms. Bush commented that agents have been very courteous when she attempts to rebook her trips.

Ms. Bellamy commented that there is a partnership between the customer, operator, and dispatch staff. She said that customer's communication with operators and dispatchers needs improvement.

Dr. Posner gave statistics from the performance report on on-time performance.

Mr. Christian Kent, Assistant General Manager, Access Services, thanked Ms. Bellamy for her comments. He stated other statistics that have not been provided are the weekly increases in ridership, which is at a record high. He stated that MetroAccess, unlike Metrobus or Metrorail, has fluctuating numbers of ridership daily, which is not known until the day prior. Though WMATA has been fairly successful in predicting ridership for budgetary purposes, unseasonable weather conditions will impact and slightly skew these numbers. When these increases in ridership occur, MetroAccess is not able to secure additional vehicles or hire and train more operators in short order to accommodate the increase. He asked the committee to allow staff to explain the changes in performance statistics as they occur. Mr. Kent said that to alleviate the issues with late trips, an additional 200 vehicles have been ordered to replace older vehicles and increase the fleet. MetroAccess is working with the service providers to facilitate several approaches to recruit and retain operators.

Ms. Rush commented that operators are required "to provide limousine service for Volkswagen wages."

Mr. Kent said MetroAccess does require high quality service from the operators. He said though he is not at liberty to speak for the service providers, they are aware and open minded about different means to improve operator conditions.

Dr. Posner suggested that an investigation should be conducted to determine if the issue with service is systematic as well as ridership. He said the statistics on ridership have not increased much. Dr. Posner stated the business model was changed from one service provider to three service providers. There was thought to be some flaws in this model, which raises the question whether the issues are related to business model flaws, service provider issues or passenger issues. He said the data is available, and analysis should be conducted before the next renewal of contracts.

Mr. Kent said a shortage of operators can occur at any time. In the transportation industry, the normal practice is to budget for absenteeism. At times, absenteeism is higher than anticipated and adjustments have to be made. He stated most employers have a no fault policy for absenteeism, which means they don't require an explanation for the absence. Therefore, to speculate about the reasons operators are not showing up for work may result in false perceptions. Mr. Kent commented on the business model of MetroAccess stating the model was based on a few key items. The Operations Control Center was separated from service delivery, which almost immediately increased service productivity. This supported the WMATA Board of Directors' decision not to raise the MetroAccess fare. Contracting an impartial third party company to provide quality assurance assists in looking at how the service operates and collects data to help improve current processes. Mr. Kent stated that by having three different contractors with different approaches to providing service, it has brought about innovation and improvement to customer service. He said focusing on the annualized ridership from one year to another is not the same as observing the average weekday ridership at different times during the year. As attested to by riders, surveys and regulators, MetroAccess has had very strong statistics in service. In regard to recruiting and retaining operators, changes in the transportation industry with Transportation Network Companies (TNC) competing for business, agencies across the country are having difficulty recruiting and retaining staff. Mr. Kent complimented MV Transportation for the presentation of their customer service improvements.

Dr. Posner requested the daily data be added to the performance report going forward.

Mr. Leroy Hayford, Financial Manager, MetroAccess, commented that July ridership data was missing from the year-to-date report. He said he could attest that quarterly ridership has increased 5 percent over the previous year.

Customer Comments:

Ms. Case stated that the number of late trips have increased. She is hearing more negative comments regarding late trips. She said though it is not related to customer

service with the dispatch staff, it impacts customer service as more calls are made to the Operations Control Center with complaints of lateness.

MetroAccess Route Trip Insertion Process:

Mr. John Gray, gave an overview of the process for trip insertions. He said comments are made that if scheduling is done properly, trip insertions would not be needed. He stated that MetroAccess has a very dynamic, robust and complex system, and there are many factors that may require the need to move trips. The bus and rail systems, as compared to MetroAccess, maintain route consistency. Aside from construction and some traffic delays, these modes have the same route daily. The operator gets used to the route and understands where they need to be, and they learn the traffic patterns. MetroAccess is vastly different, as on any given day, service is different. This may result from subscription trips, ridership, or events in and around the city. Factors that require trip movement may be passenger situations, no-shows, accidents, traffic delays, passenger or operator illnesses, passenger altercations, driver attendance, and malfunction of equipment on board the vehicle. Mr. Gray explained the goal is to pick up customers and deliver them to their destination on time as much as possible. They ensure that if they need to move a trip, it makes sense and will result in the least amount of disruption to the route as possible. If it does not make sense, the trip is not moved. He explained there are instances where a customer trip may be on a route which may be running a few minutes late. To make a decision to move that trip to another route could negatively impact three or four other customers. When a vehicle needs to go out of service, trips on that route must be moved. The Trapeze system helps to make those decisions; however, staff will consider the validity of the move. Only managers and executive management are allowed to move trips. Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) monitoring and map usage are very important during this process.

Comments from the MAS:

Dr. Posner said he spoke with Mr. Omari June, Director, MetroAccess about Trapeze developing a method to overlap groups to work with the GPS system in order to receive the most efficient manner in inserting customer trips. He asked if this was underway.

Mr. Gray stated that he understood the process of the traffic overlay is close to completion.

Ms. Bush inquired on the reason a large number of subscription trips are moved on the day of service if the approximate number of trips are already determined beforehand. She also asked why customers get differing times for the estimated time of arrival when they call into Where's my Ride (WMR).

Mr. Gray stated that when customers call to check on where there vehicle is, staff will rely on AVL to see where the vehicle is located. If the vehicle is in

motion the driver will not be contacted except to say, please call dispatch when it is safe to do so. The initial estimate given is the estimate found in Trapeze which factors distance, traffic, and mileage. This information is updated throughout the day, dispatch staff attempts to provide the best information available at the time. He said in reference to subscription trips moves, there are times when a vehicle is not able to be put in service, service issues with a route, or need to find a solution for customers on another route which will cause a manifest to change.

Ms. Rush commented that it is impossible for WMR agents to accurately determine the precise time a vehicle will arrive. She said many things can occur between the time the agent provides an estimated time of arrival and the actual time the vehicle arrives. She stated customers expect too much.

Dr. Banerjee commented that customers can sometimes provide a better route for an operator to get to a location.

Mr. Gray said that a customer knowing different routes can be helpful. He said the overlay project, once complete, will provide this information to the operator.

Customer Comments:

A customer asked about the service area, stating that he does not understand how MetroAccess can go into Montgomery County but does not service Brandywine. He also asked if taxis are only used for medical appointments.

Ms. Anderson explained the service area may change on different days and times. She asked the customer to provide details and staff would investigate to see if MetroAccess services those locations.

Ms. Case commented to the customer that the address must be three quarters of a mile of fixed route per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

Ms. Case said she believes there are issues with Trapeze. She cited an incident where four women traveling from the same pick-up location, at the same time, going to the same drop-off locations were provided different trips. Ms. Case said this is a waste of resources and feels that a human touch or tweaking of the system is needed to avoid this type of occurrences.

Mr. Kent suggested that if a group of customers making a trip, using the example cited by Ms. Case, could book a trip with one of the customers as the primary passenger and the others booked as companions might resolve such issues.

Mr. Gray responded to Mr. Kent's suggestion stating that booking in that manner would resolve the issue.

Dr. Posner commented that during events where 20-30 customers may be traveling to the same location, it would be productive to alert the scheduling department of these trips to prepare to route them efficiently.

Ms. Anderson responded that a number of organizations provide MetroAccess with information regarding upcoming events and the scheduling department is able to route the trips for maximum efficiency.

New Business:

Ms. Rush asked if MetroAccess operators are still fingerprinted.

Mr. Kent responded that operators are not fingerprinted; however, they undergo a commercial background check. Fingerprint checks through the FBI require special access and authority to use. He said he shares the committee's concern that the very best background check process is needed. Mr. Kent assured the committee that for many years most transportation agencies have utilized commercial background checks and they have work well. He stated that when there have been incidents on MetroAccess, it was found that the individual had nothing on their background check. Mr. Kent said for this reason employers need to be mindful of who they hire, interacting with them to gather information.

Public Comments

Comments received were with regard to: Abilities-Ride RFP questions; wheelchair securement training for possible new providers; fingerprinting requirements with TNC's; disappointment with WMATA's silence on setting standards for the possible providers of Abilities-Ride; customers left at agencies or homes with no one to receive them; a location outside of the service area; Trapeze issues; taxis not providing door-to-door service; and a question of if taxis provide only medical trips.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the November 2016 Complaint Resolution Report located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Meeting adjourned at 5:53pm.