



Accessibility Advisory Committee

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

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE *VIRTUAL* MEETING MINUTES: April 20, 2020

In attendance: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Darnise Bush, Tino Calabia, Vanessa Coles, Charlies Crawford, Rico Dancy, Melanie Jackson, Phillipa Mezile, Anthony Oberg, Phil Posner, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Due to COVID – 19, the MAS meeting was held virtually. Anu Sharma, Accessibility Advisory Committee Coordinator, started the meeting by admitting all the participants in to the “meeting room”, followed by a roll call. Ms. Sharma read the Agenda to all the participants. Thereafter, Chair Semelfort moved the meeting forward.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The MAS approved April 20, 2020, meeting agenda was approved.

The MAS approved the February 18, 2020, meeting minutes as written.

The MAS Meeting scheduled for March 16th, 2020, was canceled due to COVID-19.

Customer Service and Outreach Reports

Kianda Washington, MTM, provided an update about customer service follow up. Both the customer complaints were addressed and follow up was performed.

Allison Anderson, Operations Manager, MetroAccess, stated during this time of pandemic, a number of dialysis centers reached out. Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, has had numerous conversations with the leadership from dialysis centers. Ms. Anderson also has outreached with those to ensure service is provided to dialysis patients.

Michael Wilson and Rush Awards

Michael Wilson Award: Pierre Montebello, Challenger, stated Keith Blanc receives the Michael Wilson Award. Mr. Blanc is the best driver, he is a trainer, has been with Challenger for many years, he is a Union member, there have not been any customer complaints and customers like him. He has good attendance and has no safety issues.

Rush Award: The Rush award recipient was the gentleman who got Ms. Rush to the airport just in time and she would like to present the award to him in person [when the AAC is able to meet in person] .

Policy and Procedure – Safety Issue – COVID-19:

Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, provided an update. MetroAccess continues to run full service from Monday through Friday. The number of vehicles has been scaled back on demand. The vehicles are disinfected daily. There is an established detailed

process of reporting when COVID-19 passenger is transported via a MetroAccess vehicle. The scheduling allows social distancing by booking individual customer trips, and the street supervisors updates are received routinely. At this time, Ms. Williams-Hall invited questions from the Committee.

Chair Semelfort recommended to suspend the practice of signing the manifest due the pens and clip-board not being disinfecting before and after each use. Ms. Williams-Hall stated it will be reviewed and take effect soon to move towards paperless manifest.

Mr. Sheehan asked about reservation process for a customer going for COVID-19 testing. Ms. Williams-Hall stated the same reservation process is in place. We have a list of all registered locations and an alert is sent to all the drivers. If feasible, that trip is assigned to a third-party vehicle. If a person calls and requests a trip to Fed-Ex Field, however, does not specify s/he is going for testing, we will still treat that trip and follow the protocols for COVID-19. Mr. Blake stated MetroAccess will not recommend any testing locations for customers as that is a personal decision, however, we will transport the customers to and from those locations, when requested.

Chair Semelfort recommended for the service providers to require their drivers to wear the personal protective equipment (PPP). Robbie Worth, Diamond Cab, stated it is mandatory for their drivers to wear masks.

Mr. Dancy asked about requirements on Metro buses. Chair Semelfort stated people are recommended to wear masks, it is not mandatory, and transportation will not be denied.

Dr. Posner stated his recommendation was to have a locked box in vehicles, for customers to drop cash fare so that no one touches the money except the paying customer. Mr. Blake stated it would have to be discussed with SAFETY Department as that would require an extra instrument on the vehicle that would need to be secured. Ms. Williams-Hall stated there are many things to be considered before something can be implemented however, there has been a discussion about this matter.

Chair Semelfort asked whether information can be made public concerning the number of employees with positive test results of COVID-19. Mr. Blake stated the operators are employees of the contractors thus that information may not be available at this time. He would discuss with the contractors and share information if permitted by the companies. Chair Semelfort also asked about ride sharing on MetroAccess vehicles. Ms. Williams-Hall stated the trips are not being shared as much as possible. If trips get shared, dispatchers are supposed to move those trips. If that gets missed, the operators are supposed to

contact the Operating Control Center (OCC) about their upcoming trip that might overlap, or describe the situation to get the trip moved. There may have been instances where it may not have worked out that way, but we are trying to do that as best as possible.

Ms. Ray asked about the policy on MetroAccess drivers who are contracted, if they have contracted COVID-19, are they supposed to self-quarantine for some time, what is the policy? Ms. Williams-Hall stated those are not our employees thus we are not the first ones to be informed. As we get informed, those operators are not to return to work for 14 days. Every customer who may have been transported in the 14 days duration, will be notified. The operators may not be driving our vehicles until provided medical clearance after the 14 days requirement. Ms. Ray asked what if someone is symptomatic but not yet tested, as test and then the results, both take time. Is there any checking before people go out on the manifest? Ms. Ray's other question was about customers who go to the testing sites, is there additional PPE mandatory for drivers to transport those customers? What happens to the consumer when they get to the testing site as most drivers would leave after dropping off the customers? Ms. Williams-Hall stated about checking the drivers before they get on the manifest, we do not have any requirement to check the operators. All the service providers including the OCC have been mandated that if a person is not feeling well in any way, they would not come to work. Concerning a customer trip who is going to a testing location, at the time the trip is scheduled even if the customer does not state they are going for testing, that trip is flagged and the driver is informed of potential COVID-19, so that they can wear the appropriate PPE. If possible, that trip would be moved to a third party provider. Regarding the question as to what happens to the consumer when they arrive at the testing site, we do not treat that any differently than we do to any other location. There is no special protocol for managing a customer arriving at a COVID-19 testing site. Ms. Ray asked whether a return trip may have to be scheduled and what may be the wait duration. Ms. Williams-Hall stated we have a no-strand policy and a return trip would have to be scheduled.

MetroAccess GPS System Update:

Ms. Williams-Hall stated since February 28th, we do not have real time traffic information, drivers are simply moving turn-by-turn-instructions. The solicitation for new application is currently working its way up for procurement and we hope to have it this summer.

Mr. Sheehan asked if the current application would have anything to do with the rangers. Ms. Williams-Hall stated the issue was not with the rangers but the application, thus we are moving to have another application.

MetroAccess Vans: Next Generation:

Glenn Millis, Senior Policy and Planning Officer, Access Services, provided an update about MetroAccess Vans, Next Generation. Mr. Millis had received recommendations from the AAC and he provided an update on the features that could be adopted, as follows:

- Low floor ramp paratransit suitable vehicles available.
- Step in entrance for ambulatory customers available.
- Kneeling features may be available.
- Increased open space for two wheelchairs available.
- Increased aisle space/seating space available.
- Legroom - open space under seat ahead available.
- Arm rests, hand holds, foot rest in seat ahead—possible depending upon seat type.
- High back seats at 17" to 19" meet requirements for people of different heights.
- Seat belts – adjustable height at shoulder could be available.
- Integrated longer belts available.
- USB charger port available.
- Larger windows available. Tint available for protection against sunlight.
- LED lighting available at entry way and interior.

At this time, Mr. Millis invited further comments and/or suggestions from the Committee.

Ms. Rush asked about the height inside the vans. Mr. Millis stated the vans would have full height.

Mr. Crawford asked about floor space for guide-dogs. Mr. Millis stated there would be sufficient space. The low-floor vans would be lower and wider.

Chair Semelfort asked if drivers would have more space to secure equipment. Mr. Millis stated yes, there will be more space for securing equipment.

A customer asked for better shock absorbers than in the current vans. Mr. Blake stated the Fort Transits were introduced because of the softer ride. Mr. Millis stated the procurement is to ensure all the components are there for a comfortable ride. The customer stated there used to be a little ventilation hood in case the air-conditioning was not working, and asked if it was possible to have that ventilation hood for the next MetroAccess vans? Mr. Millis stated we can look in to that. Dr. Posner stated the shocks in current vans are very good except when riding on a very rough road in higher speed. He asked about placing an over-head bar to hold for support. Mr. Millis stated that will be reviewed.

Ms. Ray commented about lumbar support and about the tinted windows being problematic for people with vision impairment, especially at night time.

A second customer asked about the grant award. Mr. Blake stated we are not just waiting for the grant, the work is also underway to enhance the grant. The customer further stated would the specifications be forwarded to APTA to make it a role model vehicle for paratransit nationwide. Mr. Blake stated the customer is looking to have this vehicle more global. Mr. Millis stated we are building a van that has not been built before and he plans on going forth the Committee and see if that is what they are looking for. He can take the recommendation into consideration.

Ms. Bush asked about the number of wheelchairs, above hand-hold bars as well as for wheelchairs, and about ergonomic seats on the next generation vans. Mr. Millis stated two wheelchairs could board at one time. About the hold bars, the above hand-hold as well as for wheelchairs, both bars would be considered. Mr. Millis stated we are looking for ergonomic seats, the purpose is to have good shocks and comfortable seats.

Abilities – Ride Update:

Mr. Blake stated there was no update on Abilities-Ride due to COVID-19 stay in place orders. As we get a handle on when this region plans to move, we will plan on the next Abilities-Ride showcase.

Ms. Ray asked whether the whole expansion is on hold. Mr. Blake stated the entire expansion in the whole region with service providers has been completed. At this time, customers are not able to call and schedule trips on their own. Until we are satisfied with the Abilities-Ride showcases and have had successful feedback, we will not open for customers to schedule their trips region wide.

Public Comments:

Dr. Posner asked how much money MetroAccess has saved due to less road hours as a result of COVID – 19. Mr. Blake stated unlike bus and rail, MetroAccess is a federally required service. Metro could stop bus or rail for any amount of time. If bus and/or rail is running, MetroAccess must provide service. Our goal was not to save money. Our goal was safety. Federally mandated service is 100% ready when the stay-at-home orders are removed. The main focus was to ensure that contractors, drivers, mechanics, all of the support staff is available.

A customer stated his public comments about web accessibility issue and WMATA Budget. Mr. Blake explained that every mode is being charged with a cost, 95% of the Access

Services is MetroAccess budget. Despite everything he asked for in order to run an efficient service and in order to provide alternate service, the Board and the General Manager gave us everything we asked for. The customer stated he cannot understand how is \$5 million ballooning is benefitting the customers, it may benefit employees. Mr. Blake stated about 15,000 direct trips have been free of charge for customers. Another part of the incentive was better service, direct trips, and improved on-time-performance. If anyone states there has not been any benefit, he would have to review their individual trips. Mr. Blake appreciated the feedback received and stated we are going to re-establish the AAC Budget Work Group so that these conversations can continue. The Budget the General Manager allowed us to present, and for the Board to approve, is much better for all of us.

Mr. Ariza-Silva's question about free MetroAccess rides for health-care workers was asked by Dr. Posner. Mr. Blake responded that would involve a policy change.

Ms. Ray inquired about eligibility process for people who need to be certified and/or re-certified at this time of pandemic. Antoine Johnson, Eligibility Verification Operations Manager, stated at this time, they are still accepting application and presumptive eligibility is being granted, and people are still getting extensions. The Office of Eligibility can be contacted via email: eligibility@wmata.com, or via phone: 202-962-2700.

Ms. Coles asked about MetroAccess service. Mr. Blake clarified that MetroAccess encourages that customers use public transit for essential trips only. However, MetroAccess does not engage in trip denial based on trip destination or purpose.

Ms. Mezille asked about number of customers aboard a vehicle at one time. Ms. Williams-Hall stated right now our goal is to transport one customer per trip. In the event something happens and there is an overlap, the drivers should contact the OCC.

Ms. Sharma provided information as to how public comments can be received, via email: MetroAACChair@wmata.com, or via phone call message by calling 202-962-1100.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.