



## Accessibility Advisory Committee

600 Fifth Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001

### **METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE *VIRTUAL* MEETING MINUTES: May 18, 2020**

In attendance: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Darnise Bush, Tino Calabria, Vanessa Coles, Charlies Crawford, Rico Dancy, Phillippa Mezile, Anthony Oberg, Phil Posner, Doris Ray, and Patrick Sheehan.

#### **Call to Order**

Anu Sharma, Accessibility Advisory Committee Coordinator, started the meeting by taking a roll call and reading the Agenda for all the participants. Thereafter, Chair Semelfort moved the meeting forward.

#### **Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

The MAS approved May 18, 2020, meeting agenda was approved.

The MAS approved the April 20, 2020, meeting minutes as written.

#### **Customer Service and Outreach Reports**

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

Allison Anderson, Operations Manager, MetroAccess, stated due to COVID-19, the outreach with customers has been over the phone.

#### **Michael Wilson and Rush Awards**

*Michael Wilson Award:* Robbie Werth, Diamond Transportation, awarded Larry Tillman Sr., for operating since January 2014 and completing 98% of the 4368 trips, on-time. Mr. Tillman Sr. reports early, has an excellent record without any incidents, and 32 commendations. He is dedicated, attends all the safety meetings, and goes through the recertification as needed. This is the second time he is being award in the past two years.

*Rush Award:* Vice-Chair Rush prefers to provide the Rush Award in an in-person meeting.

#### **MetroAccess Scheduling Window Update:**

Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, stated at this time we are not projecting any changes to the scheduling window. The true impact of 90-minutes window has not been impactful. As we move forward and retrain the Operating Control Center (OCC), we will get a better understanding whether it is a true impactful measure. With COVID-19 upon us, the ridership has been impacted.

Ms. Coles asked about the practice of social distancing for MetroAccess rides. Chair Semelfort informed at this time, customers are picked up and taken directly to their destinations.

Ms. Ray asked about MetroAccess service; and how would the service run if Virginia opens before Maryland or the District of Columbia? Mr. Blake stated MetroAccess never reduced the service and the scheduling window will be enforced. Due to the circumstances, a customer will experience direct trips for the time being within the service area. If Virginia opens more than the District of Columbia or Maryland, then there will be more trips in and out of Virginia comparatively to other areas in the region. We might schedule more trips on taxis to spread them apart and continue maintaining social distancing. The service is Monday through Friday, a practice since COVID-19 due to fixed route service restrictions. Ms. Ray asked what happens if someone has an emergency during COVID-19. Mr. Blake informed that MetroAccess has not engaged in prioritization of trips or destinations. If a customer wants to go for testing, they can schedule a round trip to and from the location. MetroAccess is not participating in drive-by test trips.

**Summer 2020 Shutdown – Eligibility Process:**

Antoine Johnson, Eligibility Verification Operations Manager, stated that customers with disabilities who cannot use the fixed-route service, may apply for MetroAccess. For this purpose, a short application is available on WMATA website. Mr. Johnson shared alternate travel options for MetroAccess customers that are available in specific areas within Northern Virginia. The Office of Eligibility Certification can be reached via email: [eligibility@wmata.com](mailto:eligibility@wmata.com), or via phone at 202-962-2700. If customers do not have online application available, they can call the office for assistance.

Dr. Posner stated since a photograph is required for MetroAccess identification card, people applying via website can email their photo. However, people who may call in to the office may not have that capability. Mr. Johnson stated we will work with customers and see how they can be helped. Dr. Posner asked about fares for MetroAccess rides. Mr. Johnson clarified the fares will be between \$4.00 and \$6.50.

Ms. Ray asked whether the eligibility for MetroAccess be limited to shuttle trips only. Mr. Johnson stated a person applying for MetroAccess would use the service for any purpose trip and anywhere in the region.

Ms. Coles asked if a person had limited MetroAccess before, can they use the service as well as the Abilities-Ride. Mr. Johnson stated a person can re-apply for MetroAccess but they would need to wait 30 days after being eligible, to use Abilities-Ride.

**New MetroAccess Web Booking Site:**

David Shaffer, Ombudsman, ADA Policy and Planning stated the new web booking site combines the old text booking site and the web booking site. Until a year and a half ago,

it was permissible to have separate booking sites. With new regulations in effect, we started making the booking site 508 compliant. Mr. Shaffer stated training on using the screen reader will be provided to help the users.

Chair Semelfort commented about two concerns he experienced while booking trips using the new booking site, previously shared with Mr. Shaffer. Nicole Murray, Access Projects Control Officer, stated one of the concerns could not be duplicated when it was tested. However, they were able to re-create the second issue and it will be resolved soon.

Vice-Chair Rush asked whether this was the same issue that was brought forth by Chair Semelfort in January. Ms. Murray clarified the issue in January was about an overnight trip, which was resolved.

Chair Semelfort stated full addresses are not visible in the drop down. Ms. Murray asked for him to provide a screenshot and the exact address so that the issue can be tested.

Ms. Ray asked if people using JAWS or external screen magnifying tools would be able to see the entire address. Mr. Shaffer stated he tested it using the JAWS with zoom text in positive and negative mode and it passed all those manual tests. He tested it using the new accessibility testing software which is automated, and it passed that as well.

Mr. Sheehan commended Mr. Shaffer for a detail testing. Mr. Shaffer thanked him for the positive comments.

Chair Semelfort also commented positively about location names showing on the new booking site. Mr. Shaffer informed that 15 minutes before and after window for negotiating trip times is also available to customers using the new web booking site.

Ms. Coles asked on behalf of a customer, whether the Budget document was accessible on the website. Ms. Anderson informed that Mr. Blake had addressed those issues at the time of the meeting. Mr. Blake clarified that is the WMATA website not the MetroAccess booking website, and that the budget document was made public in an accessible format.

Ms. Ray asked if the booking website is accessible for speech recognition software and other software for people with learning disability. Mr. Shaffer stated we did not test it with Dragon, but you can dictate it with a smart phone. Ms. Ray stated for deaf people, sometimes there is an issue following up on phone. Mr. Shaffer informed that is a separate issue with the OCC.

Chair Semelfort stated currently the booking site shows trips for the month beginning with the earliest date versus the current date, therefore, customers would have to scroll down to the current date. Mr. Shaffer stated that is how it is for now. Perhaps that could be a change in the next modifications of the site.

Ms. Ray raised a concern of having to scroll down for people with speech disability. Mr. Shaffer informed the tabs would work instead of having to scroll down, as would the arrows. Dragon and JAWS do not work together, therefore, we cannot work on it. Ms. Coles stated there is a software called Dragon Jsay, which works together. Mr. Sheehan stated with I-phone, the speech-over uses Dragon, as do other applications.

**MetroAccess Safety and Service (Corona Virus) Update:**

Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, provided an update. MetroAccess continues to run full Monday through Friday service. The primary concerns remain the safety of employees and customers. Today, WMATA announced a requirement of face coverings. However, we would not deny service to anyone who may not have face coverings. Any updates will be provided via the Media Relations Office or via MetroAccess.

Ms. Rush asked how many drivers have been reported contaminated with the virus. Ms. Williams-Hall stated these are not Metro employee therefore we are not required to track all the cases. However, as soon as we are reported of an employee who has been infected with the virus, we follow all the protocols and they do not operate our vehicles for 14 days and till after a physician note is provided for clearance. We contact all the people who may have been in contact with them in the past 14 days. Mr. Blake stated there have been approximately 50 operators, who have self-quarantined for possible or for positive tests, and we follow the established protocol. There have been about 18 or 20 customers reported and those have been on third-party providers.

Chair Semelfort stated most of the drivers are using face coverings. He hopes the drivers are being encouraged to use the face coverings since it is the expectations that customers do that. Ms. Williams-Hall stated that has been our policy all along, there is no change.

Mr. Dancy asked if this has been the policy, he saw no one on his bus with face coverings. Mr. Blake stated it is a requirement, however, we would not deny transportation to anyone. On MetroAccess, it may delay the trip as the driver has a right to contact the OCC, which may take some time.

Chair Semelfort stated some drivers may be under an impression that a customer not wearing a face covering can be denied a trip. Ms. Williams-Hall stated all the service providers have been informed of the policy and it is not the duty of a driver to enforce

the policy. If a driver feels uncomfortable to transport a customer without face covering, then they may contact the OCC.

Ms. Rush stated a requirement is a requirement. A customer asked if it is a requirement, then how it is being enforced. Mr. Blake stated Metro bus operators are instructed not to contact MTPD for this issue. It is a requirement, however, we do not deny transportation. Dr. Posner stated in the Board Meeting it was discussed that it is a requirement, however, people may not be denied service.

Ms. Ray stated people may not access to getting face masks. Ms. Coles stated if the CDC and the Governors specify requirement then it must be followed. She asked why we are special and do not follow the rules? The face coverings can be made out of other things. Mr. Dancy stated some bus operators are not allowing customers to ride buses without face coverings. He asked about the policy. Mr. Blake clarified that the bus operators may not do that and if he experienced it, then he should report it.

A customer stated some people may not be able to use the face coverings due to their disabilities, and she appreciated Metro's efforts on this issue. Mr. Calabia raised a concern for the safety of the bus operators. Ms. Williams-Hall stated the policy is that customers would board from the rear-doors to protect the bus operators.

Chair Semelfort thanked Ms. Williams-Hall for ensuring drivers do not ask signing the manifest and maintaining social distancing unless assisting customers and/or securing the wheelchair.

Dr. Posner asked about a previously discussed matter or having first aid kits on MetroAccess vehicles. Chair Semelfort stated it was decided that drivers are not trained on performing first aid assistance. Dr. Posner stated it was discussed that drivers could have the kits on the vehicles to offer it to customers if needed. Ms. Williams-Hall stated there was no mandate given to service providers, however, the issue could be re-visited.

Ms. Ray stated if a deaf deaf-blind person accompanied by sign language interpreter, travels with masks, there may be reasons why interpreters want to pull down the masks. Mr. Blake stated if an interpreter has to pull down the face covering to communicate with the person that is not a problem. We are still providing door-to-door service. We are enforcing not to engage any communication when not 6 feet apart even with a mask on. Mr. Dancy stated if you are deaf-blind, you cannot see and cannot hear, how are you supposed to communicate with the driver, there is no lip reading, everyone is wearing a mask, how do they communicate? Mr. Blake stated if someone is with the customer that

would not change. If the person is traveling alone, still nothing has changed because their challenges in communicating remain the same with or without a mask.

**Public Comments:**

Ms. Bush asked how service animals are being situated on buses as they do not wear masks. Ms. Williams-Hall stated Metro has not made any requirements for service animals to wear a mask.

Vice-Chair Rush asked for an update about the sedans. Mr. Blake stated the solicitation has been closed. We received a proposal that meets the requirements of the solicitation however, it was not for a Honda Accord, but for a Toyota Camry Hybrid. If the proposal meets all the procurement requirements, that proposal may be accepted as the vehicle may have all the requirements fulfilled. Vice-Chair Rush asked for the target date. Mr. Blake stated he would like to have some vehicles by June 30<sup>th</sup>. A total of 175 sedans will be added, and that would be less than 30% of MetroAccess fleet. Dr. Posner asked is there an issue before July due to the budget year? Mr. Blake confirmed that is why he is pressing to get the sedans before the end of this fiscal year. Ms. Mezile asked if Camry has the head room and leg room available in the back seat as was in the other vehicle. Mr. Blake confirmed and stated a customer who is tall, has been in Toyota Camry.

Ms. Ray asked about availability of Abilities-Ride for MetroAccess customers in Virginia. She shared an incident where a customer needed the same day ride in Virginia due to a medical emergency, and had to make arrangements for alternate ride. Mr. Blake stated for instances like these customer can call the call center, express the concern, and the management can make arrangements. Customers can contact dispatch office even after 4:30 pm, and arrangements can be made.

**Adjournment**

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