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Accessibility Advisory Committee

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: December 21, 2015

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Co-Chair), Ms. Darnise Bush, Mr. Edward McEntee, Mr. Charles Crawford, Ms. Marisa Laios, Mr. Patrick Sheehan, Mr. Elver Ariza-Silva, Dr. Philip Posner, and Dr. William Staderman.

Call to Order

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

Review of December 2015 Agenda

It was noted that the date of the next MAS meeting was incorrect on the agenda. The date of the next meeting is Tuesday, January 19, 2016. The agenda item, *Safety: Demonstration of a Vehicle Lift*, was changed to *Demonstration of Securements*. The agenda was approved with the amendments.

Review of November 2015 Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved without amendments.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Ms. Jennifer Weber, Compliance Auditor, MTM, reported that all public comments from the previous meetings have been addressed.

MetroAccess Employee Recognition

Ms. Celisse Outlaw, Service Monitor, MetroAccess, recognized Mr. Kenneth Sims as the Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award winner. A detailed description of Mr. Sims accomplishments can be found in the accompanying document titled "Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award" located under the December 2015 heading at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm

Dr. Posner commented on the MAS performance report stating that the statistics are wonderful. The average weekly ridership has only increased 1.31%, reservations increased only .11%, and scheduled trips are down .37%. These numbers represent the average for the year, and speaks well for maintaining sustainability.

Safety: Seat Belt Waiver

Mr. Donald Scruggs, Assistant Director, MetroAccess, provided some statistics from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety on safety belts. Mr. Scruggs reported that safety belts saved an estimated 12,584 lives in 2013. He also shared that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reported that adult seat belt use is the most effective way to save lives and reduce injuries in crashes. NHTSA data shows that

seat belts reduce the risk of serious crash-related injuries and death by about half. He stated that according to the Federal Transportation Administration's (FTA) Office of Civil Rights, a transit operator may establish a policy that requires all riders to have their wheelchairs secured while aboard a transit bus or van. Therefore, the operator may decline to provide service to a rider who refuses to allow his or her wheelchair to be secured. Furthermore, Department Of Transportation ADA regulations requires all ADA-compliant buses and vans to have a two-part securement system, one to secure the wheelchair, and a seat belt and harness for the wheelchair user. However, due to local and State laws that allow exceptions for persons who cannot use a seat belt for medical reasons, WMATA has established a seat belt waiver procedure.

Mr. Christopher Colbert, Operations Manager, Office of Eligibility Certification & Outreach, reported WMATA's policy on the Seat Belt Waiver. He stated that the waiver process is conducted by the Office of Eligibility and only overseen by Mr. Frank Roth, Director of the Office of Eligibility Certification & Outreach, Ms. Cheryl O'Konek, Operations Manager, Office of Eligibility Certification & Outreach, and himself. When a customer requests a seat belt waiver, they are sent a letter addressed to the customer's health care provider explaining the importance of seat belt safety and WMATA's stance on seat belt safety and a one-page application requiring the health care provider to explain why the customer needs an exemption from wearing a seat belt and whether it is for the harness or both the harness and lap belt. The customer will then submit the original documentation to the attention of Mr. Frank Roth. If the documentation is provided with all pertinent and sufficient information, the application will be approved. If the medical conditions do not present a safety issue utilizing the seat belt, a letter of denial will be sent. Mr. Roth thoroughly reviews all applications to ensure the documentation has not been altered.

Questions/Comments:

Ms. Laios said while she appreciates the waiver, she urges individual to utilize seat belts unless it is medically detrimental.

Ms. Rush commented that she expected the presentation/demonstration to include what happens when there is no seatbelt during an accident.

Mr. Scruggs commented that he has begun to compile data related to accidents when there is no seat belt used due to the seat belt waiver. There are plans to present that data and show videos from the University of Michigan's Transit Research Institute, where they are testing wheelchair restraint systems.

Mr. Crawford asked for an example of a medical condition that would qualify for a seat belt waiver. He also asked if there were alternate restraints that could be used that would guarantee a level of safety that a seat belt otherwise affords.

Mr. Scruggs said that the only restraints that have crash test worthiness are those that have been through the official crash test certification processes. He said that alternatives do not provide any level of tested crash worthy protection.

Mr. Colbert stated that customers with ports/catheters used for dialysis, report that the area where the port is located is very sensitive and can cause severe issues when pressure from a seat belt is present. The majority of the waiver requests they receive are for the shoulder harness, entrusting the lap belt as the means of protection.

Ms. Bush commented that her doctor advised her to continue to wear her seat belts. She was not aware there was an option to waive the harness or the lap belt. She has experienced the belt tightening uncomfortably when the vehicle maneuvers over a bump or sharp turns. She said the extension helps, but something else is needed.

Mr. McEntee described an incident where he was strangled by the harness and his chair was damaged.

Mr. Scruggs shared some information about the engineering of the seat belts. He stated that most seat belts are designed to hold a child safety seat. He explained that the seat belt can be pulled out to its fullest extension and will lock. If the seat belt is not pulled to the fullest extension, it will move with the individual without tightening. Mr. Scruggs shared that there is an FTA working group comprised of transit properties and manufacturers to address issues with wheelchairs and seat belts.

Mr. Ariza-Silva said the operators need the information to know how to prevent the seat belt from injuring riders.

Mr. Scruggs said the drivers are aware of the information, he acknowledged that the information may need to be communicated more clearly.

A customer in the audience asked why drivers refuse to secure carts for customers on the bus.

Mr. Blake explained that her comments were related to bus service and someone would discuss that information with her at the conclusion of the meeting.

Safety: Demonstration of Securements - Transdev

Mr. Frankie Lee, Training Instructor, Transdev, demonstrated proper wheelchair securement utilizing a portable platform and restraints.

Questions/Comments:

Ms. Bush stated that some scooters and electric wheelchairs will require different securement procedures. She asked if the customer is able to direct the driver on how to secure their wheelchair or scooter.

Mr. Lee explained that webbing loops are used for scooters and electric wheelchairs. He also said that the securement may be used on other areas of the wheelchair as long as the parts are welded and are not moveable.

Mr. Scruggs added that the securement must be placed high enough on the chair to create a 45-degree angle to prevent the wheelchair from tipping over.

Dr. Staderman commented that he was confused by the demonstration as the presenter's movements from left to right or vice-versa depends on the person's perspective.

Mr. Scruggs and Mr. Lee explained that the drivers are trained to secure facing the wheelchair from the front and the rear, and the explanation of securement is from the driver's perspective.

Dr. Posner commented that if the presentation was explained from the perspective of the passenger's front and rear or right and left it would alleviate the confusion. He asked if extending the seat belt to its fullest capacity would cause strangulation for a wheelchair passenger. He also commented about the need for safety releases on lap belts.

Mr. Scruggs stated that it is possible that the shoulder harness could cause injuries to a wheelchair passenger when it has been fully extended.

Ms. Rush commented that the presentation illustrated the time it takes to secure a wheelchair. She said when dispatch is calling the driver to inquire if a customer is on board the vehicle, instead of continually calling the driver, they should review the customer profile to determine if the customer is in a wheelchair and therefore possibly securing the wheelchair.

Mr. Crawford commented that proper securement on a wheelchair is necessary. He said if the chair is damaged it is very costly to repair.

Ms. Laios agreed with Mr. Crawford's comments adding that it sometimes takes several months to replace parts or repair a wheelchair when it is damaged.

Public Comments

Comments received were with regard to events and updates on the Transport DC program; grandfathering; a complaint regarding bus driver's unwillingness to secure a passenger's cart; and praise for the work the operators do.

Comments from the MAS

Ms. Rush commented on the emergency exercise committee members participated in on December 13, 2015. She stated more practice is needed for persons with disabilities. She also stated she did not understand the need for a waiver for this exercise.

Mr. Christiaan Blake, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated that the January 11, 2016 Bus and Rail Subcommittee meeting will focus on the emergency exercise and strategies for improvement.

Ms. Rush asked about a demonstration and statistics regarding traveling on MetroAccess without seat belts.

Mr. Scruggs stated the information is being collected for a presentation at a MAS meeting in the near future.

She asked whether the reduction in the Transport DC program would affect the Maryland or Virginia taxi programs.

Mr. Blake responded stating he has no information to confirm reduction in service for Transport DC. He said that work is underway for similar programs in Maryland and Virginia.

Finally, Ms. Rush asked if a customer is grandfathered, does the designation follows the person if they relocate.

Ms. Allison Anderson, Operations Control Center Manager, MetroAccess, stated the designation relates to the person and their travel history at the time the service area changed.

Ms. Bush also commented on the exercise stating it was uncomfortable and there was no physical support.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the December 2015 Complaint Resolution Report located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Meeting adjourned at 5:17pm.