



## **Accessibility Advisory Committee**

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

### **METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: December 18, 2017**

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Co-Chair), Mr. Edward McEntee, Mr. Elver Ariza-Silva, Mr. Charlie Crawford, Ms. Carolyn Bellamy, Mr. Steven Kaffen, and Mr. Patrick Sheehan.

#### **Call to Order**

Chair Paul Semelfort called the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting to order at 4:06pm.

#### **Review of December 2017 Agenda**

Mr. Semelfort removed the discussion of the MetroAccess Customer Guide, and replaced it with a discussion of the report from the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). Ms. Bellamy added the committee should discuss the rules of the road for MetroAccess. The agenda was approved with the necessary changes.

#### **Review of November 2017 Meeting Minutes**

The Minutes were approved without amendments.

#### **Customer Service and Outreach Report**

Mr. Carlton Brown, Quality Assurance Administrative Services Manager, MTM, reported ten customer comments were received from the previous meetings. All customers were contacted and resolution efforts were provided to address each service issue.

Mr. David Shaffer, Access Policy Officer, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, reported he met with Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind, and the customers were appreciative. Mr. Shaffer also attended the Capitol Veterans Engagement Board. Information was shared and questions were answered regarding MetroAccess service, Abilities-Ride, Bus and Rail accessibility, and the Travel Training Program.

Ms. Allison Anderson, MetroAccess Operations Manager, Operations Control Center, stated the MetroAccess staff have facilitated group travel coordination and road supervisor coverage for high volume events.

#### **Employee Recognition Award**

Ms. Chametra Baskerville, Project Manager, First Transit, recognized First Transit operator Mr. DeJose St. Jore as the Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award winner. Ms. Baskerville detailed Mr. St. Jore's service, safety, and customer service statistics.

Ms. Denise Rush presented her award to Ms. Allison Anderson for her dedication to MetroAccess service and commitment to the customers of the service.

### **Update and Review of MetroAccess Severe Weather Protocol**

Mr. Donald Scruggs, Assistant Director, MetroAccess, stated the MetroAccess Severe Weather Plan covers many different types of events, some of which include flooding, summer weather, and location closures. MetroAccess takes its leadership from WMATA's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to correspond with the Authority's overall emergency plan, but MetroAccess has unique differences to accommodate the service. MetroAccess has been conducting a Severe Weather Tabletop Exercise for the past three years to talk through different scenarios involving emergency service protocols. MetroAccess monitors weather primarily through the National Weather Service, and the information is relayed to customers through the IVR and eAlert systems.

When reviewing the weather reports, MetroAccess staff may call for the service to enter Alert Mode. This designation calls upon service providers to assess their resources and prepare for the applicable upcoming weather event, such as rain, wind, or snow. Depending on the level of the storm, the operational level is increased, from one to four. Mode Four is full shut down of the service. Mode Three consists of providing return trips only, with no outbound trips. The safety of the customers, operators, and motorists on the road is very important. MetroAccess staff makes every attempt to think ahead and place the customer's needs first.

This year's tabletop exercise is scheduled for Thursday, December 21, 2017, and the hypothetical scenario will take place on a Wednesday in January where there has been heavy snow over the previous weekend, but the temperature has increased and there has been heavy rain. The snow is melting, but the temperature is dropping again, causing icy conditions. The members of the tabletop discussion will talk through the necessary steps to conduct MetroAccess service through this weather incident.

Mr. Semelfort asked if the service becomes curb-to-curb when there is snow or ice.

**Mr. Scruggs stated this is not correct as a blanket statement. Curb-to-curb service is determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on whether it is safe for the operator to traverse from the vehicle to the customer's door. This case by case determination is made all year long in accordance with the MetroAccess Door-to-Door policy.**

Mr. Semelfort asked generally what time service is restored after being shut down due to a weather event. He gave an example of restoring service around midday, or after the temperature has risen above freezing.

**Mr. Scruggs stated MetroAccess has a requirement to have Reservationists in place prior to opening service, and the conditions should be favorable enough to allow those Reservations agents to travel. Service restoration is made on a case-by-case basis with guidance from fixed-route service and**

**OEM. Midday service restorations are not caused by vehicle readiness, but usually caused by following the guidance of Metrobus. The OEM, Director of MetroAccess Service, and the MetroAccess Field Operations Team discuss with Mr. Christian Kent, Assistant General Manager, Access Services the best time to reopen.**

Ms. Bellamy asked what will happen to customers who found a way to get to a scheduled dialysis appointment because MetroAccess service was closed, but the customer has a scheduled return trip home.

**Mr. Scruggs stated MetroAccess will honor the trip and transport the customer's trip home from dialysis.**

Ms. Rush stated it has happened in the past that MetroAccess has stated to the customers that because MetroAccess had to cancel the outbound trip, they canceled the return trip as well.

**Mr. Scruggs stated he will look into the issue, as this may be a place for process improvement. Ms. Anderson stated the OCC contractor is listening and they are taking notes on everything being provided.**

A member of the public asked how the situation is handled if there is an early shut down by schools or the government due to severe weather and customers are attempting to get home earlier than their scheduled ride.

**Mr. Scruggs stated MetroAccess makes it a priority to get anyone transported in the morning home in the afternoon. When MetroAccess is anticipating an early shut down, the customers are contacted and given an opportunity to schedule an earlier trip. Ms. Anderson stated if weather is currently coming that could impede operation, customers are encouraged to take an earlier trip.**

Mr. Semelfort stated in the past customers have been advised to keep their current trip and not schedule earlier.

**Ms. Anderson stated MetroAccess will accommodate the earlier trip if they can. MetroAccess attempts to send out messaging through IVR and eAlerts to customers based on the current severe weather advisory.**

A member of the public stated she never received a call on early closures.

**Ms. Anderson stated there are only about 30 dispatchers reaching out to all MetroAccess customers with trips. Customers are encouraged to make sure**

**their contact information is updated in the system to ensure the correct number is called.**

**OIG Report:**

Mr. Christiaan Blake, Director of ADA Policy and Planning, stated that Mr. Kent was not available to present on the report, and he requested the committee delay the discussion to a later meeting.

**Overview of MetroAccess Customer Guide Revision:**

Ms. Anderson stated since the last discussion about revisions to the customer guide, there were many useful recommendations from both the committee and the public. The customer guide cannot include everything, but it should include the most beneficial information for MetroAccess service. The following items were recommended to be added to the new customer guide: information regarding the refund policy, MetroAccess bus stops at rail stations, new hours for WMATA Customer Service, and changes to loading money into EZ-Pay. Also there will be new information regarding the MetroAccess SmarTrip card added to the guide.

There is currently a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section of the customer guide, and Ms. Anderson asked the committee if they had suggestions for additional items for that section. Currently the FAQ includes topics such as how the service runs, grandfathering policy, seatbelt waiver, posey belt, and how fares are calculated.

Mr. Semelfort asked if the guide will list the bus stop bay and the rail station pickup point.

**Ms. Anderson responded yes, the guide will include the correct stops for those locations.**

Ms. Rush asked if the guide can include when the five minutes begins while picking up a customer.

Ms. Bellamy stated she has concerns with this as well. She stated the five minutes is what it takes for the operator to walk to the door. Ms. Bellamy stated she has a problem with operators rushing customers out of their door in less than one minute.

**Ms. Anderson stated the customer guide currently addresses that customers have five minutes to present themselves to the operator for boarding, but maybe staff and the committee can review the current wording to make the policy more clear about the customer's responsibility to present themselves for boarding.**

Ms. Rush stated the operator will press the arrive button and the five minutes begins, but the operator has not arrived to the customer's door yet. She noted as soon as the

arrival call is made and she presents herself to the operator, she can hear Dispatch through the operator's radio asking if the operator has already made contact. There needs to be a clearer understanding for the customers and operators of the exact moment the five minutes begins.

Ms. Bellamy stated this rule is being misinterpreted because the five minutes should begin when the operator knocks on the door. The operator should not be getting continued calls from Dispatch within the five minutes, asking if the operator has made contact with the customer.

Ms. Rush stated customers are complaining about being on a vehicle and waiting 20 minutes for operators to make contact with ARC customers, but the operator will only wait five minutes for other customers.

Ms. Bellamy stated the operators are being rushed as well, and she is concerned the operators may not secure the customers correctly when rushing. Also, every time a customer calls Where's My Ride, Dispatch causes the operator to have to pull over in order to respond to the radio for an estimated time of arrival. The Door-to-door process was not meant to rush customers who are using the service correctly.

Mr. Ariza-Silva recommended the guide include a clear explanation of subscription trips and how it benefits the customer. Also, he recommended the guide include an explanation for situations in which MetroAccess may use a taxi instead of a dedicated vehicle.

Mr. McEntee agreed with Ms. Bellamy that the five minute policy should be more clearly explained. He also recommended the guide define the difference between a no show and a cancel at the door.

Ms. Bellamy stated the rules and expectations should be set from the beginning of a customer riding the service. When customers are transported to Eligibility for certification, the operators or road supervisors escort the customers into the building, and customers think this is part of the service they will receive when riding MetroAccess. The same service should be offered in this initial trip as any other trip. Also, some of the service delivery providers are telling operators not to offer their arm for assistance because the company does not want to be sued. MetroAccess needs to do a better job at educating customers about the service, because customers are not watching the door to door video that plays in the Eligibility office.

Ms. Rush asked why the customer guide is being revised without going through the committee.

Mr. Semelfort stated the MetroAccess Customer Guide revisions came up for discussion earlier this year, and this is a follow up discussion.

Ms. Rush stated one meeting is not enough time to review the MetroAccess Customer Guide because the committee goes through the guide together to present recommendations.

Ms. Bellamy stated the committee is not being provided an opportunity to give their feedback and suggestions on the customer guide; instead, the completed guide will be handed to them without any input from the committee. She stated this is the same situation that occurred with the new vehicles.

Mr. Crawford agreed that clarity should be given to the five minute period when updating the guide. The committee should recommend a suggested explanation to be included.

Ms. Bellamy stated the original idea was that the five minutes begins when the operator gets to the door. Dispatch is calling the operator before the five minutes has expired, which is not the way it was designed. If an operator presses the arrive button before they actually arrive at the location, or if the operator arrives at the incorrect location, the five minutes has started, and Dispatch is calling for a no show. This is unfair to customers, and it rushes the operator. This could cause a safety concern, as the operator may not fully secure the customer's wheelchair while being rushed by Dispatch. Additionally, the customer guide needs to be dissected by the entire committee, but everyone needs to be involved. Ms. Bellamy asked if everyone knew customers could carry up to 40 pounds on the vehicle, but some operators will not accept 40 pounds.

Ms. Rush replied to Mr. Crawford that the committee cannot give a suggestion on the five minute period, because the policy is not clear.

**Ms. Anderson stated she has been involved with the last two revisions of the customer guide and she has brought the revisions to the committee for feedback. The committee made time for this topic at this meeting in order to solicit suggestions and feedback on what should be included. This discussion can take however long it needs in order to provide useful and relevant information for MetroAccess customers. Ms. Anderson stated she will provide a current copy of the guide to the committee for further input, and she will report back to the committee after everyone has had a chance to review it.**

Mr. Sheehan asked for a timeframe to submit feedback.

**Ms. Anderson stated the committee should respond by the end of January 2018. The last revision of the customer guide was November 2015, so there have been a lot of changes that have occurred since then.**

Mr. Sheehan asked if MetroAccess staff will be incorporating the suggestions and bringing the final guide back to approve changes through the subcommittee and full committee.

Mr. Semelfort stated yes, a work group would be created to bring this back to the subcommittee.

Ms. Rush requested a current copy of the customer guide for all the committee members because there are a few members who do not travel on MetroAccess, and they would need a copy for their information.

**Ms. Anderson stated she will ensure each member of the committee receives a copy of the current guide.**

Mr. Semelfort stated both a PDF version and an audio version of the guide are available on WMATA's website.

Mr. Ariza-Silva suggested the guide include information and resources on how to use Transport DC.

Mr. Semelfort asked to add Abilities-Ride to that recommendation as well.

**Ms. Anderson stated there is a section in the guide dedicated to alternate transportation resources.**

Mr. Ariza-Silva asked if the guide will be available in a language other than English.

**Ms. Anderson stated the guide is currently available in Spanish, and the guide could be translated into another language upon request.**

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated he would like to review the Spanish version of the customer guide prior to printing.

A member of the public asked if there is time for the public to comment on the guide. Mr. Semelfort stated there is still another agenda item to be discussed, so please include customer guide feedback as part of public comment.

**Mr. Terry Prevost, Operations Manager, MetroAccess Field Operations, responded to an earlier statement from Ms. Bellamy regarding door-to-door service. Operators have been trained on commentary door-to-door, and the operators should be offering customers an arm for assistance. Mr. Prevost stated he would be interested to know who is not offering their arm for assistance when providing door-to-door service.**

Ms. Bellamy stated she received the information from another customer. The company is telling the operators to be careful when offering an arm because the company does not want a lawsuit. Ms. Bellamy stated when there was only one company, this problem did not occur, but now with four different companies, there are four different interpretations of what door-to-door service consists of. A customer called Ms. Bellamy because the operator would not load or unload the customer from the lift until the customer turned off her wheelchair, and Dispatch did not know the correct answer to give the operator or customer. Every day, there seems to be a new rule created, and there are inconsistencies between one company and another.

**Mr. Prevost stated this seems to be a training issue. The MetroAccess Office will be going into the field to assess the training programs for professionalism, accuracy, and thoroughness. There should not be any deviations from the wheelchair securement process.**

Ms. Bellamy responded that the separation of the companies makes it difficult to train in a standard method.

**Ms. Terrian Williams-Hall, Acting Director, MetroAccess stated the she has recorded everything being shared at this meeting, and the MetroAccess staff will be enhancing their involvement in the execution of the training programs, including monitoring in the field, in the classrooms, and on the vans during cadetting. Ms. Williams-Hall stated she is committing to change the trajectory of the service currently being provided.**

Mr. Semelfort gave an example of an operator refusing to provide door-to-door service because the operator did not want to park in front of a stop sign.

Ms. Anderson stated the door-to-door policy has been in effect since 2008, and there have been some changes in the area since then. The door-to-door policy should be reviewed and revisited in partnership with the AAC committee to make sure the policy is holistic from many vantage points. Ms. Anderson recommended a working group be formed to review the door-to-door policy with MetroAccess staff.

### **Public Comments**

Comments received were with regard to: fare pricing, Transport DC, incidents of incorrect trip booking, resolving issues real-time, insensitivity of operator and dispatch personnel, trips being arrived prior to actual arrival, late appointment times, circuitous routing issues, and comments of appreciation for the service provided.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the December 2017 Complaint Resolution Report located at [http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy\\_policy/subcommittee.cfm](http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm).



**Comments from the Committee**

Mr. Semelfort moved to include the OIG Report with statistics in the January 2018 meeting agenda, and the motion was carried.

Ms. Bellamy asked when the ride along occurred, who rode from MetroAccess.

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated the travel initiative is called "Ride with Me" in which the WMATA Board Members were invited to ride along with AAC Members. Three Board Members accepted the invitation, two of the Board Members traveled with AAC Members using Metrorail, and WMATA's General Manager scheduled a ride with Mr. Ariza-Silva for Metrorail and MetroAccess, but the trip was canceled because the General Manager was unavailable on the day scheduled. The initiative is still going to continue, and another ride will be scheduled in the future. The ultimate goal of the "Ride with Me" program is for the entire board to ride with the members of the AAC Committee.

Ms. Bellamy asked if the "Ride with Me" program can be brought up again at the next board meeting.

Ms. Rush stated she brings the topic to the attention of the Board at every Board meeting. When she uses MetroAccess to attend the Board meetings, MetroAccess does not drop her off in enough time to get on the schedule for public comment.

Mr. Sheehan stated he brings the program to the Board's attention as well, and at the last Board meeting, the two Board Members who participated in the "Ride with Me" program mentioned their experiences at the last meeting. The AAC committee has the opportunity to bring this issue up at the meeting on Thursday, December 21, 2017.

Ms. Rush presented Mr. Patrick Sheehan the September 2017 Denise Rush Award for his dedication to MetroAccess and more than 20 years of serving as the chair of the AAC Committee.

Mr. Sheehan thanked Ms. Rush for the recognition.

**Meeting adjourned at 6:05pm.**