



Accessibility Advisory Committee

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METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: February 21, 2017

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Mr. Edward McEntee, Mr. Patrick Sheehan, Ms. Carolyn Bellamy, Ms. Darnise Bush, Mr. Charles Crawford, Ms. Phillipa Mezile and Ms. Doris Ray.

Call to Order

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

Review of January 2017 Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved.

Review of February 2017 Agenda

Ms. Rush asked to add an explanation of the new Metro Customer Service hours. Mr. Semelfort advised the discussion will be added to new business. The agenda was approved as amended.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Mr. Carlton Brown, Quality Assurance Administrative Services Manager, MTM, reported all public comments from the previous meetings were addressed.

Ms. Stephanie Thorne, Service Monitor, MetroAccess, reported staff attended an outreach event at Delta Towers in Washington, DC to answer questions regarding the transition to the new MetroAccess SmarTrip® ID for conditionally-eligible customers.

Mr. McEntee asked if the MetroAccess white ID cards would no longer be used after March 1, 2017.

Ms. Thorne responded that beginning March 1, 2017, only the MetroAccess SmarTrip® ID will be accepted for travel, replacing the MetroAccess white ID cards for conditionally-eligible customers.

Michael Wilson Award Presentation

Ms. Shannon Borst, Southeast Operations Director, First Transit, recognized First Transit operators Wayne Hartzell (from their Capitol Heights service garage) and Alex Sesay (from the Gaithersburg service garage) as the Michael Wilson Award recipients for

February 2017. Ms. Borst provided summaries of both operators' statistical performance, accomplishments, and key contributions to MetroAccess Service.

Meet Your Service Delivery Provider – First Transit

Mr. Paul O'Brien, Regional Vice President, and Ms. Shannon Borst, Southeast Operations Director, First Transit, provided an overview of their company. First Transit is a national provider of multiple modes of transit service, having been in business since 1952. Mr. O'Brien said he has personally served in the transit industry for 25 years, with 17 of those years in paratransit service. First Transit has many contracts in the Northeast, and quite a few services in Maryland, including Anne Arundel County, Baltimore MTA, and MetroAccess. First Transit began operating MetroAccess service in 2013, operating approximately 35% of the service and 2,500 to 2,700 trips per weekday. They maintain two operating facilities in Maryland—one in Capitol Heights, MD with 164 vehicles, and the other in Gaithersburg, MD with 85 vehicles.

Each new operator receives over 100 hours of training before entering revenue service, and all operators receive monthly training during safety meetings to proactively address common safety concerns with the service.

The maintenance facilities in both locations are ASE Blue Seal certified. First Transit has implemented a "paperless shop" by supplying all the maintenance technicians with tablets to complete their work orders. This method saves time and increases productivity in the maintenance shops.

Road Supervisors have also been supplied with tablets to produce incident reports more efficiently, and photograph locations for proper serviceability.

First Transit strives to improve service by addressing the operator shortage between the two bases. They have improved operator recruiting packages, implemented monthly and quarterly employee bonuses, and created morale-boosting activities for additional recognition. Mr. O'Brien said First Transit has also added 13 new staff positions to assist operators, including human resources agents, safety and training supervisors, managers, customer service staff, and maintenance technicians.

Comments/Questions from the MAS:

Mr. McEntee asked if operators could also be issued tablets to fill out paperwork and get updates to the manifest.

Mr. O'Brien stated that the software used is specific to maintenance operations. The operator utilizes the onboard vehicle computer for manifest updates.

Mr. Crawford stated his last two rides were with First Transit and they were favorable rides. He then asked for details about the average life of a vehicle and how the vehicle is disposed of after MetroAccess use.

Mr. Donald Scruggs, Assistant Director, MetroAccess, stated vehicles are eligible for replacement when they reach a minimum of 150,000 miles or four years. The actual timeframe depends on capital availability and contract agreements. Some of the current vehicles are beyond that cycle, but it is anticipated that MetroAccess will receive approximately 200 new vehicles in the next four to six months.

Ms. Bush asked if First Transit services any other urban areas that utilize door-to-door service and collect money outside the vehicle.

Mr. O'Brien stated they do have other contracts that require door-to-door service, but the policy varies depending on the transit agency.

Ms. Rush reiterated comments she made to other service providers regarding the importance of the operators, as there is no system without them. She stated the providers should be offering wages that will encourage operators to stay, as well as attract new operators.

Mr. O'Brien agreed, stating that First Transit has a similar goal to incentivize operators to stay.

SmarTrip® Cards

Mr. Christopher Colbert, Operations Manager, Office of Eligibility, provided an update on the conditionally-eligible MetroAccess ID card transition. All new cards were mailed out by the end of January 2017 to replace the current MetroAccess ID cards with the white background. This project allows for easier travel for customers who ride Metrobus and Metrorail for free. There were over 22,000 cards replaced during this transition. Customers received two cards: one MetroAccess ID SmarTrip® card that is red, white, blue, and silver (with the customer's photo), and one SmarTrip® PCA card.

The MetroAccess customer will tap the card at the bus fare machine or rail fare gate, like a regular SmarTrip® card. If the customer is traveling with a PCA, the customer would tap the MetroAccess ID card first, then the PCA has up to 90 seconds to tap the PCA SmarTrip® card at the same fare gate. If the PCA card is not used in tandem with the customer's ID card, the gate will charge the full fare for the trip.

This card is not honored in all local jurisdictions, such as Dash Bus or MTA commuter buses. Additionally, cards will not work in the Metro fixed-route system if the card has a negative balance.

If customers have not received the new card, they should visit the Transit Accessibility Center to have a replacement card issued. There were a few hundred cards returned to the Transit Accessibility Center, and those cards are filed in the office for pick up by the customer.

The last date of use for the old MetroAccess white ID card is February 28, 2017. As of March 1, 2017, the only card used in the bus or rail system will be the MetroAccess SmarTrip® ID card.

Comments/Questions from the MAS:

Mr. McEntee asked if there is money on the cards that were issued and could the card be reloaded at CVS.

Mr. Colbert stated there was not money on the cards issued, but if a customer would like to transfer money from another SmarTrip® card to the MetroAccess SmarTrip® card, they may do so if both cards are registered in the customer's name. Customers are still responsible for paying their own parking at Metro parking lots. Value can be added to the MetroAccess SmarTrip® cards at any SmarTrip® location.

Ms. Bellamy asked about the timeframe between the customer tapping the card and the PCA tapping the card after.

Mr. Colbert stated the PCA has 90 seconds to tap their card at the same fare gate after the customer has tapped their card first.

Ms. Bellamy asked what would happen if the PCA did not make it through in the 90 second timeframe.

Mr. Colbert replied that it would be at the discretion of the station manager to assist. During the testing of this model, a minute and a half was more than sufficient time to allow the PCA to enter the gate after the customer.

Ms. Mezile asked whether the process would still work if someone tapped their SmarTrip® card between the customer and PCA. Ms. Mezile warned customers against leaving the MetroAccess SmarTrip® ID and PCA SmarTrip® card together when traveling through the system. The gate read her PCA card instead of her MetroAccess ID card,

causing the PCA card to go into a negative balance because the full fare of the trip was charged.

Mr. Colbert responded yes, the PCA card would still be honored as a free trip if someone tapped their SmarTrip® card between the customer and PCA.

Mr. Colbert agreed the technology allowing customers to tap SmarTrip® cards without taking them out of their pockets or wallets will not differentiate between two cards next to each other, and may charge the incorrect card. He suggested keeping the PCA card in a separate place until it is needed.

Mr. Crawford stated he has a blue card, and he did not get a SmarTrip® card. He stated he can use rail with the assistance of a PCA and he requested to be considered for conditional eligibility.

Mr. Colbert advised that the criteria for conditional eligibility requires the customer to show they can independently traverse at least one trip on the bus or rail system. A Metro Travel Training Specialist will travel with an individual to assess their ability of traveling the system independently.

Ms. Ray stated this policy should be reviewed, as the criteria for the customer to travel independently without the assistance of a PCA violates the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Mr. Colbert clarified that this policy does not limit or prohibit customers from using a PCA to navigate the system. The policy only determines whether the customer meets the requirements to have a conditional designation placed on their account to indicate the customer can travel independently.

Ms. Ray moved that the policy on determining conditionally eligible customers be reviewed by WMATA staff. Mr. Crawford gave a second to the motion.

Mr. Christian Kent, Assistant General Manager, Access Services asked Ms. Ray to clarify whether she is referencing the criteria for paratransit service or the eligibility to use fixed-route service, which is available to everyone. He asked for Ms. Ray to clarify her understanding of the inconsistency with the current policy and the ADA.

Ms. Ray gave an example of a customer having the ability to travel alone on MetroAccess but requiring a PCA to travel on fixed-route service.

Mr. Crawford stated traveling with a guide dog is considered traveling independently. He stated his understanding of the ADA is that a PCA is used so that a customer can travel independently. He said the issue seems to be about charging the individual for riding fixed-route; he suggested charging the individual full fare, and allow the PCA to ride free, as the PCA would be the reason the customer can travel independently.

Mr. Kent stated the goal of the Eligibility office is to find any situation where a customer can ride the fixed-route service; the goal is not to deny the customer that ability or the access to the free ride benefit.

Ms. Rush asked if the change in hours for Metro Customer Service will affect any MetroAccess service, and if the closing of some of the fare centers would affect MetroAccess.

Mr. Kent stated those changes in Customer Service hours will not affect MetroAccess. He was not aware of any changes in fare centers; those changes would require board approval.

Mr. Semelfort stated the MetroAccess Operations Control Center operates 24-hours a day.

Ms. Ray asked if Reservations accepted calls 24-hours a day.

Mr. Semelfort clarified his statement to say, Where's My Ride is open 24-hours a day.

Ms. Ray stated the change in fixed route Customer Service hours is another hindrance to successful usage of the service.

Mr. Kent stated he would look into the issue, as the change in hours are related to an administrative office, and not directly to fixed-route operations. He would look into bringing the committee information on alternatives to after-hours assistance for bus and rail.

Public Comments

Comments received were with regard to: time on board a vehicle and paired with customers traveling in opposite directions; broken links on Metro website; late pick-ups; incorrect information provided; providing information in alternate formats; and fare issues.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the February 2017/AAC MAS February Meeting located at <https://www.wmata.com/about/accessibility-advisory-committee/subcommittee.cfm>.

New Business

Mr. Sheehan requested the on-time performance statistics for the month.

Mr. Hayford, Financial Manager, MetroAccess, advised that on-time performance increased by three percentage points to 86.94%. The mild weather is keeping ridership consistent. Statistically during this time of year, ridership would have decreased.

Ms. Ray requested that staff provide a plan for corrective action regarding customers who request alternative format for communication.

Mr. Kent stated he understands the issue and staff is working to accomplish this goal. He requested staff work with the committee on a plan, rather than create a full plan to present to the committee that does not move in the direction the committee wishes.

Ms. Bellamy asked if the white boards have been disseminated.

Mr. Christiaan Blake, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated the white boards are available in rail stations, but not yet in buses.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.