



Accessibility Advisory Committee

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METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: February 20, 2018

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Co-Chair), Mr. Edward McEntee, Mr. Charlie Crawford, Ms. Carolyn Bellamy, Dr. Tapan Banerjee, Ms. Doris Ray, Ms. Hazell Brooks, and Mr. Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Co-Chair Denise Rush called the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting to order at 4:00pm.

Review of February 2018 Agenda

The Agenda was approved without amendments.

Review of January 2018 Meeting Minutes

The Minutes were approved without amendments.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Mr. Carlton Brown, Quality Assurance Administrative Services Manager, MTM, reported several customers provided public comment at the previous meeting, 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 will be attending the DC on the Bus Disability Group meeting to discuss both paratransit, Transport DC, and fixed route service. Mr. Shaffer also attended the DC Department of Transportation open house in Anacostia and the Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind board meeting. Information was shared and questions were answered regarding MetroAccess service, Abilities-Ride, Bus and Rail accessibility, and the Travel Training Program.

Employee Recognition Award

Mr. Andre Taylor, Director of Operations, Transdev, recognized Transdev Operations Manager, Mr. James Madison as the Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award winner. Mr. Taylor detailed Mr. Madison's extensive career and service to Transdev and the MetroAccess operation.

Ms. Denise Rush presented the Rush Recognition Award to Ms. Lynelle McRae, Reservations Agent, MV Transportation, for her consistent professionalism, timeliness, and customer service as both an operator and reservations agent.

MetroAccess Customer Satisfaction Survey

Mr. Raymond Yau, Director, Office of Customer Research, presented the MetroAccess Customer Satisfaction Survey results, comparing 3rd Quarter and 4th Quarter CY2017. The survey was conducted with 400 diverse MetroAccess customers. The comparison showed there was an increase in very satisfied customers, from 57% to 64%. Customers who indicated they were satisfied overall (choosing 4 or 5 on a 5 point scale) increased from 77% to 80%, which shows a trend in a positive direction. The survey indicated the biggest area of dissatisfaction came from late pickups.

The survey also indicated improvements in dispatch and operator coordination. The survey indicated there was a concern with the satisfaction of customers' complaint resolution. A decrease in awareness of the Metro Free Ride program was also noted. The presentation revealed a significant increase in the use of Transport DC from 18% to 29%.

The presentation indicated 9 out of 10 MetroAccess trip reservations are conducted by phone as opposed to the online booking system. Customers consider the phone easier and more convenient when booking.

Ms. Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, Office of MetroAccess Service, clarified the dissatisfaction with complaint resolution outlined in the survey did not indicate the problem was not resolved, but that the customer was displeased with the resolution.

Mr. Yau responded he did not have enough detail to respond, but he understood that the problem could be solved and the customer still feels dissatisfied with the solution. He added this was not a measure of performance, but customers' perceptions of the service.

Dr. Banerjee inquired on the customer sample size for the survey.

Mr. Yau stated 400 MetroAccess customers participated.

Ms. Rush stated that most people do not have computers, so it makes sense that nine out of 10 reservations would be conducted over the phone.

Mr. Yau responded he understood customers will not be completely converting to the web booking system, but training with the online reservation system could be conducted to help those customers who are comfortable with web activity. There may be some barrier that is prohibiting customers from trusting the online reservations system.

Mr. Semelfort stated there are some instances that require an agent to complete the booking, such as overnight trips.

Mr. Crawford stated he has received comments from customers that they would prefer to travel with the same operator on a consistent basis, but he was not sure that would be possible due to the complicated nature of scheduling. He also asked for clarification that the survey indicated 88% of those surveyed were satisfied. Of the 12% that were not satisfied, a portion of them received a resolution to their issues, but they were not satisfied with the results. Mr. Crawford asked if there can be an update to the survey that specifies what causes the dissatisfaction.

Mr. Yau stated he wanted to collect more information and bring it back to the committee.

Mr. Semelfort noted the survey should be clear in labeling taxi service, so as not to confuse MetroAccess taxi service with Abilities-Ride or Transport DC.

Mr. Yau thanked Mr. Semelfort for the suggestion and stated he will get feedback from MetroAccess staff when updating the survey.

An audience member asked the committee if they saw the questions prior to the survey being conducted. He also asked why Abilities-Ride was not included in the survey questions, if the dates of the survey encompass 4th quarter 2017.

Mr. Yau stated Abilities-Ride was not included because he was not aware of the issue; now that he is aware, he will work with the survey vendors to make the proper adjustments.

Ms. Rush said she did not hear that 88% of customers were satisfied.

Mr. Yau clarified that 80% of customers were satisfied in quarter 4 of 2017. The survey question asks how satisfied a customer is with the service, on a scale of 1 to 5, and 80% of survey participants marked 4 or 5 (satisfied or very satisfied).

A member of the audience asked if the committee could receive a copy of the survey questions.

Mr. Christiaan Blake, Acting Assistant General Manager, Department of Access Services, stated he will find out if the questions can be shared without impacting the usefulness of future surveys. The request seems easy enough to accommodate, but he will check with staff to confirm.

Abusive Behavior Presentation

Ms. Lauren Thompson, Field Operations Manager, Office of MetroAccess Service, presented the MetroAccess procedure for identifying and investigating customer abusive behavior while traveling on MetroAccess. The intent of the policy is to provide safe, reliable and courteous transportation for all customers. WMATA defines abusive behavior as intentional or irresponsible behavior which endangers the safety of the customers or employee. These behaviors include disrespectful or abusive behavior, or attempts to manipulate service.

The MetroAccess Field Operations Team conducts the investigation of the incident by receiving the following information for the Service Delivery Provider: operator statement, road supervisor report, statements from passengers and witnesses, including the victim, and a summary of the incident.

Specific types of abusive behavior warrant different levels of progressive consequences. The most common instances are physically assaulting an operator or passenger, verbal assault communicating a threat, intentional disruption of service, or delay of boarding by failure to present ID or fare. The schedule of progressive consequences includes: warning, 3 to 9 day suspension, up to 6 month suspension, or total termination of service.

During the investigation process, evidence is compiled before a decision is recommended for a warning or suspension. After the investigation is completed, the MetroAccess Leadership Team consults to recommend appropriate action. Once that decision has been made, a member of the Field Operations Team notifies the customer by phone and in writing, via formal correspondence sent by mail.

Customers have the right to appeal the abusive behavior warning or suspension, and an appeal packet is included with the letter to the customer. The customer would submit a letter to the Office of ADA Policy and Planning, who will then communicate their appeal finding directly to the customer.

Ms. Bellamy stated if a passenger hits a driver, the passenger should be immediately suspended. Other customers could get hurt in the process, so for the safety of everyone on board, the passenger should be removed immediately.

Ms. Thompson stated MetroAccess takes that situation very seriously, and when the operator communicates this incident to dispatch, a road supervisor is immediately sent to the scene to investigate the situation. This would be considered a direct threat, and the customer would be suspended from using the service.

Mr. Terry Prevost, Field Operations Manager, Office of MetroAccess Service, added the Field Operations Team takes immediate action in a case such as that. The Director of MetroAccess is informed in a direct threat situation, and a decision is made to suspend the customer immediately from the service, if the passenger is deemed to be a danger to the safety of someone else. Mr. Prevost added the Field Operations Team has been diligent and methodical in processing incidents of abusive behavior and direct threat.

Dr. Banerjee asked if customers have any recourse for fighting a suspension.

Mr. Prevost stated the customer can follow the appeal process through the Office of ADA Policy and Planning.

Mr. Blake clarified that the abusive behavior appeal goes to the Appeal Officer, and the Appeal Officer conducts an investigation. At the conclusion of the investigation, a decision is made regarding the warning or suspension. If the customer is not satisfied with the results of the appeal, the customer can file a complaint with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

Ms. Bellamy asked if there is a tracking mechanism to follow a trend of customers repeatedly violating the abusive behavior policy.

Ms. Thompson stated the Field Operations Team keeps a log to track the abusive behavior violations.

Ms. Bellamy said the same operator should not have to drive a customer who has previously abused or verbally assaulted the operator. Some customers are purposely picking on operators, and the operator still has to transport that customer.

A member of the audience asked how the incidents are reported and investigated if there is no evidence on either side.

Ms. Thompson stated the investigation starts with the documents from the Service Delivery Provider, including any road supervisor reports, witness statements, or DriveCam clips.

Ms. Brooks asked what happens if an operator displays abusive or inappropriate behavior with a customer. She has experienced times where she has been left at night in the cold for long periods of time, and when she gets on the vehicle, she is disgruntled. This could be misinterpreted as abusive behavior toward the operator.

Ms. Thompson responded this is not considered an abusive behavior issue; any instance of operator rudeness is reported to the Service Delivery Provider for proper handling and necessary retraining or corrective actions.

Mr. Donald Scruggs, Assistant Director, Office of MetroAccess Service, clarified that the abusive behavior investigation takes the whole picture of the situation into account. If a customer has been waiting for two hours, and they make a comment that is not egregious, that is not considered violation of the abusive behavior policy.

Mr. Prevost stated it crosses a line when the customer makes a statement that could be considered a threat to the life and safety of the operator or other customers. Each situation is handled and investigated individually.

Ms. Ray asked for clarification on the process between operator inappropriate behavior and customer abusive behavior.

Ms. Williams-Hall responded the operators are not WMATA employees, and therefore, any corrective actions must be implemented by their respective companies. However, if an operator has displayed egregious behavior, the MetroAccess Leadership Team can ask that the operator no longer drives WMATA vehicles.

Ms. Ray asked if the customer is immediately suspended in the case of direct threat, as outlined in the ADA. She also asked about the progression of a repeat offender's discipline.

Mr. Scruggs stated there are some cases of direct threat where the customer would be immediately suspended and stranded. This situation requires approval by the Director of MetroAccess. Mr. Scruggs also clarified that a customer who received a two week suspension for abusive behavior violation would move to four weeks if the customer was found to violate the policy again.

Mr. Scruggs recognized Ms. Nicole Mack, Service Monitor, Office of MetroAccess Service, for her outstanding work in facilitating the abusive behavior procedure and keeping the records of the incidents.

Ms. Rush asked why there is an issue with customers paying the fare prior to boarding the vehicle.

Mr. Prevost advised he will follow up with Eligibility regarding how new customers are informed of the process for paying fare when traveling. In the past week, two customer suspensions were issued for arguments that ensued from failure to pay fare. This situation is part of the abusive behavior process, and there are consequences for disruption of service with fare issues.

Mr. Crawford stated the committee is responsible for representing all members of the disability community, and he asked if types of disabilities that cause outbursts are taken into account when conducting abusive behavior investigations.

Mr. Prevost stated that staff takes these situations into consideration when investigating the abusive behavior incident. If a customer is suspended multiple times for the same behavior, staff has worked with the customer and their caregiver to find alternate transportation that works for the customer's immediate needs.

Mr. McEntee commented some customers may require a PCA in order to follow all the rules of MetroAccess. For example, the customer may need help getting the fare out to present to the operator.

Mr. Scruggs stated when he reviews abusive behavior, he looks at intent, but also the effect of the actions on the operator, other passengers, and overall service.

Ms. Williams-Hall added MetroAccess is not medical transportation and the staff is not trained to make a decision about a customer's medical condition. Staff treats every situation with both compassion and fairness. The end result is the impact to the customer and the operator.

Mr. Leroy Hayford, Financial Operations Manager, Office of MetroAccess Service, recommended the use of EZ-Pay to avoid any negative cash fare interactions and reduce service disruptions.

Dr. Banerjee suggested each customer receive a book during Eligibility with the MetroAccess policies outlined.

Mr. Prevost stated these policies are all covered within the MetroAccess Customer Guide, which each customer receives during the Eligibility process. Also, the letter the customer receives with their abusive behavior suspension outlines exactly what behaviors caused the customer to be suspended so they do not repeat the behavior.

Ms. Ray supports Dr. Banerjee's comments that customers receive an initial orientation for clarity and understanding of the policies and procedures. Also some customers using the system may not realize they need an attendant with them for best use of the service.

Mr. Prevost stated staff will come back to the committee with details on what information is provided during the Eligibility process.

Ms. Williams-Hall added Eligibility will be making a presentation to the committee regarding their part in the abusive behavior process shortly.

Mr. McEntee commented that customers should determine if they need someone there as an attendant.

Ms. Bellamy stated MetroAccess is paratransit service, not babysitters or PCAs. Customers see the Door-to-Door Policy video during their Eligibility appointment. The same customers have been disrespecting the operators without any repercussions. The policies are not followed consistently, and then customers complain because an operator is following the rules and does not let the customer get away with behaviors that other operators have allowed.

Public Comments

Comments received were with regard to: circuitous routing issues, Inspector General investigating the AAC and Riders Advisory Committee, incidents of long onboard times, and late arrival times.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the February 2018 Complaint Resolution Report located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.