



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Bus and Rail Subcommittee Meeting Minutes: June 10, 2019

Attendees

Present: Tino Calabia (Chair), Elvir Ariza-Silva, Darnise Bush, Erin Coneys, Rico Dancy, Melanie Jackson, Mary Kay McMahon, Phil Posner, and Denise Rush.

Call to Order

Chair Calabia called the Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Chair Calabia started with introductions of the Committee members.

Approval of Agenda and Prior Meeting Minutes:

The modified meeting agenda was approved.

The topic of Pantograph Style Inter-Car-Barrier was added for committee discussion.

The May 13th Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

Silver Line Phase 2:

Dusty Smith, Outreach and Communications, Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project, delivered a presentation on the status of the Silver Line Phase 2. Mr. Smith provided background of Silver Line Phase 1 and continued to the new six Silver Line Phase 2 stations: Reston Town Center station, Herndon station, Innovation Center station, Dulles Airport station, Loudoun Gateway station, and Ashburn station. The construction of Phase 2 is more than 94% complete. The stations and track are more than 92% complete, whereas the Rail Yard and Maintenance Facility are more than 98% complete. The opening date will be determined by WMATA. He talked about parking (unavailability), bus drop-off/pick up, kiss & ride, bicycle racks, lockers and other racks, per station. Mr. Smith also provided information about the planned and potential growth around each station.

At this time, Mr. Smith invited questions from the Committee members.

Chair Calabia asked if pictures of the new elevator buttons are available for the Committee to review. Mr. Smith stated he will share the pictures as requested.

Dr. Posner stated he hopes the Committee has an opportunity to review the Phase 2 stations for accessibility in advance of the opening and asked about the operating staff. Mr. Smith stated that is WMATA's decision, however, regarding the operating staff, he has heard that WMATA is considering contracting out for staff for all of the operations.

Ms. Mezille asked about moving walkways at the Dulles Airport station along with elevators at all stations. Mr. Smith stated the number of elevators may vary for each station.

A customer asked about buses at the new Silver Line Phase 2 stations. Mr. Smith stated it will be a combination of local bus services based upon the county of the station, whether it is Fairfax and/or Loudoun.

Dr. Posner asked if Loudoun County would use SmarTrip® cards or some other system. Mr. Smith stated they would use the same system. Dr. Posner also stated that buses at some of the Phase 1 stations are at very far distances, thus not accessible and hopes that would not be the case for the Phase 2 stations.

Pantograph Style Inter-Car-Barriers:

Chair Calabria stated the Committee was invited to the demonstration of the pantograph style inter-car-barriers. He had shared information about it in an email to the Committee in advance of the meeting and asked if the members have any feedback.

Dr. Posner stated the new barriers are more effective than the two chain barriers. The chain barriers must be unchained at the end of the rail yard. About a year ago, there was an incident causing personnel and property injury because of the chain barrier falling on the third rail. That was one of the reasons for removing them in favor of the clam-shells. Now we have the proposed pantograph style inter-car barriers.

There was a discussion to get clarification about all railcars being retrofitted with the pantograph style inter-car barriers. Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services (ACCS), stated that it is his understanding that Metro is considering retrofitting all 7000-series railcars with the new style barriers. We have completed the first project, as we committed to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), to the AAC, and to the public. All railcars in the system today, officially as notified to the FTA, have chains between cars. The clam shell barriers are all gone. This new barrier is an effort to continue improving safety for our customers as well as for our colleagues and co-workers. The Project Manager and representative from Safety wanted to hear feedback from the Committee and RAIL, therefore, Mr. Blake has forwarded the report that Chair Calabria shared with the Committee. If the response is positive, then there likely will be a retrofit project to take out the chain barriers and put in the pantograph barriers. Although not yet confirmed, there is a possibility of a retrofit on the legacy trains as well.

Chair Calabria stated the Committee's preference is for the open-gangway trains, which may resolve the issue of the gap in-between cars and possible incidents. The open-gangway trains are not in use at this time, however, the New York system may get some cars as a pilot in the next couple of years. Chair Calabria shared some pictures that he took of the pantograph style inter-car barriers at the time of the demonstration and stated he felt these are superior to the previous car barriers. He added that moving a strap to a lower position may be helpful in reducing the gap that exists in-between railcars.

Ms. Rush stated the material of the pantograph style inter-car-barrier is a lot stronger, however, someone's foot could possibly slip in the gap that exists between cars. Chair Calabria stated Ms. Rush had mentioned at the time of the demonstration that when she used Metrorail she was pushed around by other riders, therefore, the gap between cars is of a higher concern.

Dr. Posner stated the gap will exist even with an articulated train. The purpose of the new car barriers was for people with visual disabilities to be able to test it with a cane.

The pantograph style inter-car-barrier is tight enough for a customer with a visual disability to gauge that there is a barrier. Dr. Posner made a motion to go forward with the pantograph style inter-car-barriers. The motion was approved and forwarded to the AAC.

Mr. Blake asked about the open-gangways, what kind of feedback has Chair Calabria received from other agencies? Chair Calabria stated he has shared emails about other trains that also have curved tracks and maintenance yards concerns. Dr. Posner stated Metro can fix some of those concerns, however, it is a question of finances and priorities.

Ombudsman Report:

David Shaffer, ADA Ombudsman, stated the major issue he has been working on is the status of escalators at the Ballston and Courthouse stations. He has been working with the Rail and Elevator and Escalator (ELES) departments. They undertook a study of the stations; studied the traffic flows of the stations; and developed an understanding of the concerns. Mr. Shaffer provided an explanation of the configuration at the Ballston station. He also explained the configuration at the West Falls Church station in contrast to the configuration at the Ballston station, and he outlined Arlington County's involvement regarding the entrance of the station that may be modified, pending the County decisions.

Dr. Posner provided information about the escalator situation at the Ballston station, and stated the other station to be reviewed was Clarendon. Mr. Shaffer stated he would have that station escalator configuration reviewed and provide an update during the next BRS meeting.

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated he has seen the station managers change the direction of escalators at some stations. Dr. Posner clarified that can happen at busy stations during rush hours, however they were referring to stations that were not as busy and during non-rush hours.

Mr. Shaffer confirmed that lighting is an issue at the L'Enfant Plaza station. He has contacted ELES and the Lighting department to focus on those issues for resolution. Dr. Posner stated an issue that Doris Ray has previously mentioned is about lights that are blinding due to their position since they are not overhung. Mr. Shaffer stated he will review the matter.

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated the L'Enfant Plaza elevator towards Branch Avenue is very dark. Mr. Shaffer stated we are looking at WMATA's 10 standard candle feet, which is higher than the ADA standards. Dr. Posner stated the elevator button color is also a factor and recommended for LED light on the call buttons. Mr. Shaffer stated that is a good point and he will follow up on his recommendation.

Chair Calabria stated a concern he received from a customer. The short stairwell by the northwest exit at the Friendship Heights station is very dark. Mr. Shaffer added it to the list.

Dr. Posner stated the wall signs at the Rosslyn station's lower level need a power wash.

A customer recommended for rail announcements (line and destination) when trains pull into a station. The customer also asked about escalator direction. When an escalator is out of service, the operating unit is in descending instead of ascending direction.

Mr. Blake stated the 7000-series announcements will be faded out soon. He added we agree that the announcements can be reviewed. The order of announcements is being reviewed as recommended by the AAC as to the line and destination of the train being placed first.

Mr. Shaffer stated if an escalator is out of service and the other escalator needs to be changed to ascending direction, that change requires 2 staff members. Sometimes, after changing the direction, escalators do not work and break down. Some escalators are tricky and shut down when direction is changed. Generally, we try to change the direction, but not always able to do it.

Ms. McMahon spoke about maintenance of a bus stop that belongs to the local jurisdiction. Mr. Shaffer stated he will contact the Office of Bus Planning and request they contact their counterparts in the District of Columbia.

Mr. Ariza-Silva spoke about lighting. He said the platform flashing lights are very dim, and he has not seen stations where these lights have not changed at all, and asked if this project is coming up? Mr. Blake stated in case the lights are dim, he should inform us with specific station details. There was once a power issue where banks of lights were out, but that largely has been resolved. The platform edge lights were changed to white from red color. Mr. Shaffer stated there could be a cleaning issue as well. Mr. Ariza-Silva asked if the white lights are LEDs? Mr. Blake stated that would need to be reviewed.

Bus Transformation Project (BTP):

Chair Calabria read a letter about the BTP. A motion was proposed to approve the letter for submission to the Board. The motion was approved. The letter will be placed on the AAC stationary, co-signed by the AAC Chair and BRS Chair, to be forwarded to the Board.

Blue/Orange/Silver Reliability and Capacity Study: New/Old Business and Work Plan Updates:

Chair Calabria attended the first meeting in place of Dr. Posner and noticed that unlike the BTP's executive summary, which virtually had no details, the recommendation was for the Blue/Orange/Silver Reliability and Capacity Study (BOSRCS) to have details soon. The goal is to improve ridership with respect to the Blue/Orange/Silver lines.

Dr. Posner stated it is important to know if Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is going to be involved. The Rosslyn station is the issue where all lines come through, however, it is not designed to handle that kind of traffic. A recommendation was to have another station; Rosslyn South, and possibly give a station to Georgetown as well, which was rejected the first time. The major problem experienced is the bottleneck, which is going to get worse with the Silver line extension. The Silver line took some of the Orange line ridership, however, not as many people drive to Silver line stations because of

unfriendly situations, resulting in decrease in ridership. When Silver line ridership increases as the Orange line used to be, the Orange/Silver crush will return, then the bottleneck will get worse. Currently, some Blue/Yellow stations are closed until September.

Chair Calabia said we are all cognizant of the budget constraints that WMATA faces. As Dr. Posner stated, a second tunnel may be the solution. Dr. Posner stated the tunnel could be shared with cars and trains to alleviate traffic from Key Bridge as well.

Public Comment:

A customer stated her concern about lack of announcements on the shuttle buses to/from the Huntington station. She recommended for operators to announce the station name at the time of departure and arrival. The customer recommended for improved lighting at various bus stop locations and stated that Metrorail destination announcements need to be improved.

A second customer recommended for the talking Passenger Information Display Systems (PIDS).

Mr. Dancy stated his observation about captioning not working inside some Metrorail cars. The signs were blank. Dr. Posner stated the cars that are below the 5000 series, and if they are coupled together, the signs may not work. For instance, if a 5000-series railcar and a 6000-series railcar are coupled, the signs will not work properly. As the 2000 and 3000 series cars are taken out of the system, this problem will be resolved.

Mr. Ariza-Silva stated the ascending escalator at the Tenleytown station is very dark. There are two bright lights on the top and that is the only bright light there. At Metro Center's 11th & G Streets entrance, he has noticed different panels at the sides of the escalators, and asked if that is going to be added to other stations? Mr. Blake stated those are the advertisement monitors and the lights changing makes it bright. Carol Lopez, Access Design Review Manager, ADAP, stated there are a lot of advertisement screens being placed. Dr. Posner stated at Metro Center, they do have screens by escalators to give information about trains.

A customer email received by Chair Calabia, was read for the record, as follows:

Rail recommendations: *One of the biggest challenges for people who are blind is to locate objects and read signs at a metro station. This causes blind and low vision riders to become frustrated and delay their commute. Following are recommendations that could be considered: Talking Signs—Talking, signs similar to what can be now found at airports should be installed. Tactile Indicators—It is very difficult for people who are blind to locate the correct entrance and exit gates at a Metro station. There are non-tactile lit arrows that show sighted riders which gates to enter and swipe their card, but blind people do not have and equivalent indicator. Blind people will eventually locate the correct gate through trial and error, but this is frustrating and causes delay. Placing the bumpy strips in front of the appropriate entrance and exit gates will enable a blind person to use the cane to locate them much more efficiently. Audio Directional Signs or Tones—For people who are blind it is very difficult to locate escalators, steps, and elevators at Metro stations. Blind riders have to depend on the public to assist assuming there is anyone*

around at the time the help is needed. Also, it would be helpful if blind riders could be provided with some way to identify the various station street exits. For example, after locating an escalator at the Farragut North Metro station, it would be helpful to know if that escalator takes you to the K Street exit or the L Street exit. Talking signs and/or tones could be strategically placed in order to direct the blind rider to the desired escalator or elevator for the desired street exit.

Bus Recommendations: *Bus Talking Signs—All busses should be equipped with talking signs so that a blind person can know immediately the bus number and destination as soon as it arrived at the bus stop. I understand that many buses are already equipped with this feature, but many of the drivers simply turn it off. An effort should be made to identify the best way for blind people to independently locate a bus stop. There are GPS technologies that can give you an approximate location for the stop but not everyone can use GPS technology.”*

Chair Calabria shared 2 photographs in support of the email:

Other Items:

Ms. Rush stated it is important for the Committee to have participation when given an opportunity to review items such as the railcar barriers. Chair Calabria supported the comments made by Ms. Rush.

A customer asked can the public attend such demonstrations/events if the Committee members are not able to do so? Chair Calabria stated that is a good point, however, he was not sure if the public is invited to such events. Chair Calabria stated the BTP had open-houses in various jurisdictions and he was not sure how the public was made aware of such events. He shared an observation while visiting Los Angeles (LA). He saw information about various events being displayed within the system. That was to inform ridership of events and recommended for WMATA to adopt use of similar visual displays.

Mr. Ariza-Silva asked if “Accessibility” and the “ADA Parking Spots” were discussed. Chair Calabria and Dr. Posner were unsure as to why the topics were added to the draft agenda and referred the question to Mr. Blake who was under the impression that it came from the Committee. Mr. Blake stated in some instances, Metro goes above and beyond the ADA requirements. Mr. Ariza-Silva stated things have changed and sometimes people do not understand what to expect. For better understanding, it was recommended to provide clarification and to set expectations. Dr. Posner stated for individual cases, for instance, bench heights are as per the ADA, however, that height does not work for Ms. McMahan and Mr. Ariza-Silva. Chair Calabria stated the ADA requirements are good however, we need to look at the spirit of the ADA as there are other needs that come up.

Chair Calabria discussed about parking spot shrinkage for people with disabilities as a result of additional bike and scooter racks, the rapid bus lanes at H & I streets, and rental car spots. Dr. Posner recommended to discuss curb management, as done in the BTP.

Meeting adjourned at 5:59pm.