



# AAC

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

### Meeting Minutes: June 17, 2019

#### Attendees

Present: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Tapan Banerjee, Carolyn Bellamy, Darnise Bush, Tino Calabia, Charlie Crawford, Rico Dancy, Phillipa Mezile, Phil Posner, and Doris Ray.

#### Call to Order

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

Chair Semelfort started the meeting with introductions of the Committee members, staff, guest speakers, and customers.

#### Review of Agenda & Minutes from Prior Meeting

The meeting agenda was approved.

The prior meeting minutes were approved as written.

#### Customer Service & Outreach Reports

Carlton Brown, MTM, stated there were no pending customer issues to be resolved. Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services (ACCS), asked about follow-up for the customer who attended the AAC meeting this month. Allison Anderson, Operating Manager, MetroAccess, confirmed that follow-up was done with the customer.

Mr. Blake attended the Americans Council for the Blind, Northern Virginia Chapter meeting in Fairfax. He received several questions and provided information. Mr. Blake plans to attend a disabilities convention in Fairfax on June 29<sup>th</sup>.

#### Michael Wilson Award and Rush Award

The Michael Wilson Award was presented to Challenger employee Anthony T. Forleh. Mr. Forleh is Challenger's longest serving operator with 20 years within MetroAccess, and he provides outstanding service for seniors and people with disabilities. Mr. Forleh thanked everyone for presenting him with this award and he loves the MetroAccess family.

The Rush Award was presented to two recipients and Chair Semelfort read brief bios:

- (1) Kathy Williams, Transdev, has been with MetroAccess for 14 years and provides excellent service to all the customers. Ms. Rush stated the award is a "thank you" from customers. Ms. Williams thanked the MetroAccess family for this award.
- (2) Bernard Mead, Transdev, has been providing outstanding service to MetroAccess customers for 9 years. Ms. Rush stated when riding with Mr. Mead she knows she will reach her destination on time. Mr. Mead gave many thanks for being chosen for the award.

### **MetroAccess IT Discussion: Telephone System and Trapeze Software**

Robert Dunham, Director, Transit Systems, Department of Information Technology (IT), responsible for Trapeze for MetroAccess; and Al Short, Vice President and Chief Information Officer, IT, addressed the MetroAccess technology issues that were brought forth by the Committee.

Mr. Dunham stated there were 2 major events:

(1) on May 18<sup>th</sup>, as part of a project to replace a significant component of this building's infrastructure, the universal supply data center in this building was shutdown. Everything was moving appropriately in that process, but at approximately 6:15am the connection to the Verizon network was lost and that took down all of WAMTA phones, not just MetroAccess. A later discovery was that this was a misconfiguration in the Verizon system, which has been corrected. These steps have been taken in the disaster recovery plan: double check that specific reconfiguration before it goes down in the future and ensure it has been verified with Verizon that they have the correct configuration now and know how to execute against a power outage. MetroAccess service was brought back up by rerouting the phone lines to another connection. Now a method of doing that has been developed. Although it is not anticipated, the procedure has been corrected in case of a repeat event.

(2) The second outage occurred on June 1<sup>st</sup>. That was also part of the same electrical universal supply replacement project. A server should have been replicated at both data centers. It was discovered one server did not exist at the back-up data center. It was not replicated until the main data center was brought back online. Since then, the problem has been corrected, including procedures to ensure this event does not repeat itself. Although unintended, it provided us with an opportunity to test our disaster recovery plan, and to correct and take preventive measures for future events.

There is one more power outage to execute in order to finish this electrical system installation, and that outage is scheduled for the last weekend of June, on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>. Based on lessons learned from the first 2 outages, no problems are anticipated. However, with various layers of work, problems may be discovered. Testing has been done to see if there are any layers to be found and thus far, none have been found.

Regarding the scheduling, the schedule system changes have been done many times before. The problems of the first 2 outages were with the infrastructure, not the system. At this time, Mr. Dunham invited questions from the members.

Dr. Posner asked if there was an appropriate fare calculator for MetroAccess since the Blue/Yellow lines do not have service south of the National Airport. Dr. Posner also asked whether the phone system can be modified so that callers can speak with a live dispatcher without having to go through the options of an automated system.

Mr. Dunham stated the fare calculator should provide fares with consideration of no rail service south of the National Airport. Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated that the phone system can be reviewed.

Ms. Rush asked if the outage caused any issues for the reminder calls or the call upon arrivals feature?

Ms. Anderson stated that the outage did not affect the reminder calls. Ms. Williams-Hall, Director, stated the calls upon arrival feature was impacted. Ms. Anderson clarified that was a separate issue, which has since been resolved.

Ms. Rush asked what should customers expect to experience from the upcoming outage?  
Mr. Dunham stated, based on the testing they have done, no problems are expected.

Mr. Ariza-Silva asked is there any way to have the telephone system have recordings in other languages, such as Spanish.

Ms. Williams-Hall stated that would involve working on the Interactive Voice Response system (IVR). She added that she believes that functionality is available.

Chair Semelfort stated, in the past, any issues that surfaced were caught by IT before being discovered by the customers. However, he discovered the issue before IT did. What can be done for IT to discover the issues before customers experience them?

Ms. Williams-Hall stated these issues occurred because of the data-center transfers. Now they know of the issues that may arise, we hope not to have a replication of the issues.

Dr. Posner asked is there any way to map out routes for drivers, especially around the White House area where the Global Positioning System (GPS) seems to drop more often?

Ms. Williams-Hall stated that is not provided by the WMATA IT team but is provided by the MV IT Team and the question will be taken back to them.

#### **Abilities – Ride Providers:**

Hossein Korsha, Silver Cab, provided an update on the improvements Silver Cab has been making to their services. There has been improvement on the training and IT infrastructure. The goal is to provide friendly service to MetroAccess customers. Silver also plans to have 2 phases of surveys by reaching random customers and drivers to seek feedback on areas of improvements.

Chair Semelfort asked if Silver has online scheduling?

Mr. Khorsha stated they have a multi-purpose application (app) that MetroAccess customers can use by contacting staff first to ensure proper MetroAccess fares are charged. They have had difficulty in bringing MetroAccess customers to use it and if it is not used enough, the drivers phase it out. Mr. Khorsha asked the Committee would share app information with other riders.

Chair Semelfort asked about driver training.

Mr. Khorsha stated Ms. Bellamy has been gracious enough to attend the sessions and there will be more coming up. Ms. Bellamy stated they were very open to the training, however, we also need to train our customers.

A customer said she has ridden the wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV) as well as regular vehicles and found them to be very dirty. She said she has also experienced very long wait times for a WAV.

Mr. Khorsha asked for the customer to provide him with specifics of her trips, so that he could investigate further. About the cleanliness, all the vehicles are inspected bi-weekly. Concerning the long wait time for a WAV, Silver has 17 WAVs in its fleet, and they are trying to incentivize more drivers. He added that WMATA has been gracious in that effort.

Another customer shared second-hand challenges. A friend has difficulty in getting picked up from Washington DC and going to Prince George's County. He has spoken to 8 Silver Cab drivers who are willing to do those trips but were told that Silver Cab does not assign drivers to those trips. The customer recommended to consider assigning drivers, especially since some say they are not even making money. Rather, they are doing a service by picking up MetroAccess customers.

Mr. Dancy asked about the number of WAVs in the Silver Cab fleet and whether customers can receive text messages. Mr. Khorsha stated they have 17 WAVs, and that they have a service that allows text messages.

Another customer shared her experience about unprofessional customer service she received from Silver Cab schedulers, and dirty vehicles that smell like smoke. Mr. Khorsha asked for the customer's phone number to check the call history to review the employee(s) who answered her phone calls. He stated that the Silver Cab has a standard way of answering phones, and they have bi-weekly vehicle cleanliness inspections.

Mr. Khorsha stated drivers make more money on MetroAccess trips, especially the WAVs. He will review about assigning drivers to customers.

Mr. Blake, in response to customers and specific drivers working out pick-up and drop-off arrangements, stated he wants the Abilities-Ride program to grow and give people the chance to try it. If assigning personal drivers is a way to encourage people to try the program, then systematically, it can be reviewed for trips going to work, school, or dialysis. However, as the program grows he would be much more stringent regarding such arrangements. Drivers being assigned to specific customers has a great potential for fraud and it will create a lot more problems than it will solve.

Ms. Bush asked how many of the WAVs are on the street at one time, hours of service, and what are the incentives for drivers to pick up wheelchairs?

Mr. Khorsha stated there are several incentives. For instance, lower rental fees for drivers, if a driver picks up a certain number in a week their rental is free for the week. The number of WAVs varies as per time of the day. During the day they have 10 WAVs, at night time they have 3 fully active.

Ms. Ray stated Regency and Silver work together on Abilities-Ride reservations and that there was a required minimum number of available WAVs. Ms. Ray asked about the process of Silver calling Regency if a WAV is not available; how are the drivers trained

not just on availability, but also on ADA compliance; and how the taxi companies practice on how the drivers are abiding by local taxi ordinances.

Mr. Khorsha stated Silver and Regency do not work together, they are competitors, and are completely different companies. There have been a few instances when wait times were a bit longer for a WAV. In such cases, customers may contact the other company. Customers' needs are not shared with the drivers as it is not a cab company's right to know about customers' disabilities. Jurisdictions do not allow any type of prejudices; a customer can report a cab driver to the county and Silver will remove the cab driver. They do have incident reports. At a certain number of incident reports, they will review the partnership with that driver. About cleanliness, the inspection is performed every 2 weeks. If there is an issue with the vehicle, until the issue is resolved, that vehicle cannot be placed back in the fleet.

Mr. Blake stated there is no fixed number of WAV requirement in the Abilities-Ride contracts, but there is a cleanliness requirement in the contract. The companies are regulated by the local counties. If there is a systemic issue, customers have county officials that can review the concerns. Metro pays a \$10 surcharge for Abilities-Ride trips that require use of a WAV.

Dr. Banerjee asked Mr. Khorsha if they have a training manual and added that he would be interested in reviewing it.

Mr. Khorsha stated they have a training manual and he can email it to Dr. Banerjee for any suggestions.

A representative from the Regency cab stated they have 45 WAVs and that they have a no-smoking policy.

#### **MetroAccess Van Seat Re-Configuration:**

Mr. Blake provided an update on the proposed seat reconfiguration on some MetroAccess vans. The proposal is to reconfigure between 60-75 MetroAccess vans to have side-facing seats like Metrobus and Metrorail side-facing priority seats. All other seats would be removed from the vehicles. Wheelchairs will be situated further back in the vehicle, providing customers space to maneuver to the side-facing seats. There was a discussion about the seat re-configuration.

Ms. Bush stated the newer vans are narrower; and stated her concern about sufficiency of the space for wheelchairs and passengers seated on the side facing seats.

Mr. Blake explained how the seats and the wheelchair location will be situated on the vans.

Chair Semelfort stated he has ridden on vehicles like that. Typically, those vehicles are much larger, and the drivers have Commercial Driver's License (CDL) because of the size of the vehicle.

Ms. Rush stated these vans do not have the capacity of having 2 wheelchairs and passengers on the seats. Mr. Blake stated 2 wheelchairs on a Ford Transit MetroAccess

van only occurs in extreme situations. Our focus is on giving passengers space to get to and be seated comfortably on the side-facing seats. Having seat belts on the side-facing seats is a new concept. This reconfiguration was the most viable idea to address the accommodation concern that came up in the staff discussions.

Ms. Bellamy stated it will be difficult for a person to transfer out of their chair and to be seated on the side-facing seats. She asked how would the driver tie down and secure the 2 wheelchairs situated in the back of the vehicle? Mr. Blake stated the focus is the side-facing seats as 2 wheelchairs in one van will be extreme circumstances. He is asking for the Committee to think about it and to be observant during their trips.

Dr. Posner asked whether there would be any other place to be seated other than the two side-facing seats? Mr. Blake informed those will be the only two seats on these vehicles. Dr. Posner stated it is important to have an armrest for those seats. Mr. Blake stated that is a fair point about an armrest for support.

Ms. Ray stated her concern of not having lumbar support for the seats as it makes it difficult for people with disabilities and seniors. The side-facing seats on Metrobus and Metrorail have more padding on the seats and the back of the seats; however, the 2 front facing seats on Metrobus are also considered priority seats. She hopes that the consideration will be given, and that 1 van be configured and tested.

Mr. Blake stated these changes are required, so we can provide reasonable accommodation for specific customers. We are in the public transportation shared ride business. It is a challenge to adjust for every single customer. At this moment, there does not seem to be any other viable solution for these particular cases.

### **July 1<sup>st</sup> MetroAccess Changes:**

Mr. Blake provided information about the up-coming changes effective July 1<sup>st</sup>:

- The MetroAccess pilot of new scheduling window: 45 minutes before and after the requested time.
- The commitment for trips booked with appointment time: the goal is not to drop customers more than 30 minutes prior to the appointment time.
- Another pilot - the pre-arrival call: customers will receive a courtesy call 10 minutes prior to the vehicle arrival. The required 5 minutes wait time begins when the driver gets to the door. The only other call customers will get is that the ride is going to leave. That gives a customer convenience and flexibility of time, as well as ample time to get to the door: 15 minutes from the time the first call is made. There will be messages on the IVR to inform customers of this new pilot.
- Reservations: currently, customers can try different timings only 2 times, however, that is changing to 5 times - before the customer will be transferred to a second reservationist.

Mr. Blake stated the Abilities-Ride will be announced in the next few days. The Committee will be informed before the news gets to the media.

A customer stated even though he does not use MetroAccess frequently, he has observed improvements in the service. He is monitoring service on the Abilities-Ride. Regency cab made a commitment to improve and that has happened. Concerning the side-facing seats, he does not remember seat belts for those seats on Metrobus and has a concern about it as the seat belts may hurt customers due to their position in the van.

Ms. Bellamy stated when something is given to customers, something else (a lot) is taken away from customers. She recommended for the Committee to be vigilant in monitoring the changes in MetroAccess.

Ms. Bush shared a ride experience of another customer whose ride was late, and he did not have a cell phone. Ms. Bush stated some consideration should be given to customers who do not have phones. How are they able to call MetroAccess to get update on rides?

**MetroAccess Work Plan:**

Due to time constraints, the topic was moved to the next month's MAS meeting agenda.

**Public Comment:**

A MetroAccess rider since 2006 stated the service has improved in the last year, however, it deteriorated this past month. The majority of her trips (3 out of 4 in one day) have been delayed and the routing has been inadequate as customers were picked up from one location, however, they were going in complete opposite directions. The customer also stated that she should not be on the vehicle for 2 hours. Another concern of this customer was about the late trip credits; when customers are picked up late they still must pay for those late trips, why do customers have to wait for a month before getting credits? The customer stated some of the drivers smoke and she can smell it on the van.

Mr. Blake stated the customer's trips will be checked. Based upon the information he has, from May 1<sup>st</sup> until now, she has taken 181 trips and only 7 were delayed. As per these numbers, 96% of her trips are on time. Mr. Blake stated that the numbers will be verified to ensure accuracy of the data. He added that MetroAccess is a shared ride service, and we must schedule as a shared ride service, but there is definitely room for improvement in our scheduling, and it is being worked on. Mr. Blake also clarified that a MetroAccess ride can be as long as the equivalent fixed route trip.

Ms. Anderson clarified about the late trip credits. All the trip data must go through the reconciliation process, which takes time thus the late trip credits are in arrears by a month.

Dr. Posner shared information about his shared ride with Christian Dorsey, WMATA Board Member. They took a MetroAccess ride and Mr. Dorsey stated they (MetroAccess driver) did not tell him how many stops would be made before they got to their destination. Dr. Posner stated they would tell me when I ask, but they cannot always tell as there may be some insertions. Mr. Dorsey stated it would be nice for them to inform and say there may be some changes if any insertions occur. Dr. Posner informed Mr. Dorsey that he will bring it up during the meeting.

Mr. Blake stated we will officially review this proposed policy, and possibly implement as soon as possible. He added that hopefully, having a smart phone application for

MetroAccess would help provide estimated drop-off times, such as what TNC customers enjoy.

Dr. Posner also stated Mr. Dorsey sat on the baby seat and he sat on the bench seat on the MetroAccess van. When asked by Mr. Blake if the trip went perfectly, Dr. Posner stated it all went well, the only glitch was that the trip was inaccurately scheduled for 1:15am, instead of 1:15pm. When he called the dispatch office the night before, he was told to call back in the morning, which he did, and the time was corrected. He had no problems. Dr. Posner and Mr. Dorsey came back on Metrorail and rode the 7000-series train.

Mr. Blake stated Ms. Rush and Dr. Posner have ridden with Board members and stated if any other Committee members would like to ride with a Board member of their jurisdiction, they are most welcome to arrange the trip. If the Committee member wishes to inform Mr. Blake about their trip, they can. However, they can go on the mystery ride.

**Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.**