



Accessibility Advisory Committee MetroAccess Subcommittee

Meeting Minutes: March 18, 2019

Attendees

Present: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Tappan Banerjee, Carolyn Bellamy, Darnise Bush, Charlie Crawford, Melanie Jackson, Mary Kay McMahon, Philippa Mezile, Phil Posner, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

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

Vice-Chair Rush started with introductions of the Committee members, staff, guest speaker, and customers.

Review of Agenda & Minutes from Prior Meeting

The meeting agenda was approved as proposed to be amended by Chair Semelfort during the Bus/Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting.

The February 19, 2019, Meeting Minutes were approved.

Customer Service & Outreach Reports

Carlton Brown, MTM, provided an update on the Customer Service Report. From a committee member's comments, it was learned that the geocode for one of the locations was incorrect. The geocode was corrected and the committee member was contacted.

David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning (ADAP), spoke at Veterans Hospital as veterans are reported to be having difficulty being transported to and from the hospital. Mr. Shaffer provided information regarding the reduced fare program, MetroAccess, the Abilities-Ride Program, and the TransportDC program. The primary focus was to help the disabled veterans with transportation.

Michael Wilson Award and Rush Award

Michael Wilson Award:

First Transit recognized Blaize D'Souza on receiving several accolades for his courteous and friendly nature, experience, and knowledge. He is a reliable and safe technician, and a team player since his start date in June 2017. He is an asset; whose work and dedication are noteworthy. His duties are behind the scenes but not his commitment. He ensures safety of all customers. Mr. D'Souza thanked everyone for the award.

Rush Award:

Ms. Rush presented the Rush Award to Chair Semelfort. Dr. Posner read a bio: Mr. Semelfort and I joined the Elderly and Disabled Advisory Committee (E&D). He was active with the E&D and MAS from the start and was a strong advocate for MetroAccess

and worked as Vice-Chair of the MAS with the then Chair. He joined the majority of the group to point out that we might be old, but we are not disabled. We were neither elderly nor disabled. At that time, he was constantly assessing the system and making positive suggestions for improvements, based on his experiences with Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), as well as New York and Philadelphia. He would describe an issue and suggest a solution. Mr. Semelfort became the Chair of the MAS and has continued his leadership role and elevated customer input to the highest level by ensuring there is always time for customers to speak, be heard, and have their problems resolved. We often joked that Chair Semelfort lived in a MetroAccess van because he was always traveling to somewhere at all hours and experiencing the good, the bad, and the ugly. Always with an eye out on improving the system. He is a champion and advocating of appearing at the public hearings. Since the Abilities-Ride was implemented he has been a one-person quality assurance program. He has volunteered to improve the AAC whenever needed, as in revision of the by-laws. With all his work and contributions, it is a pleasure to present him with the Rush Award.

Vice-Chair Rush stated Mr. Semelfort became the Chair and asked her to be the Vice-Chair. He is really a Mr. MetroAccess person, and a Mr. Available, the Abilities-Ride person, and the point-person. The Rush Award is presented to everyone who is a part of the component who makes the MetroAccess service work for the public.

Chair Semelfort stated this is completely surprising and thanked for the award.

Easter-Seals Project Update:

Larry Bram, Easter-Seals, presented an update on the project since his last visit a few months ago. The presentation was shared with the committee members prior to the meeting. Mr. Bram provided information on how the program initiated, along with various stages to date. He also mentioned all the partners who have participated and provided helpful feedback in getting the app where it is today.

The presentation was followed by a question and answer session.

Chair Semelfort stated that he uses a similar app in New York City. With that app, at least an hour before the trip time, he can check the distance of his ride, timeliness, driver's location, and estimated pick-up and drop-off times. The app also gives an option to evaluate the ride. Mr. Bram said that is precisely what the Easter-Seals app is supposed to do.

Dr. Poser also asked if the app is going to be used on STAR (Arlington County's service) and the Abilities-Ride Program? Mr. Bram stated we are starting off simple and initially it will work for MetroAccess, but there is a possibility of expanding the app for other services. Dr. Posner stated since Diamond Transportation also does STAR, it will be good to have it expanded, and perhaps have Arlington County contact Easter-Seals.

Christiaan Blake, Acting Assistant General Manager, Access Services, stated we have been committed to this project from the start. We are looking at internal and external

development options. The app will work for MetroAccess service, with the possibility of being expanded on to the regional services.

Mr. Bram stated Easter Seals is not going to develop the app. It is in Mr. Blake's hands on how they develop it.

Chair Semelfort recommended this topic be a part of the work plan.

MetroAccess Sedans:

Mr. Blake stated MetroAccess has proposed to re-introduce sedans into the MetroAccess fleet for various reasons including improved fuel economy, add more flexibility to the fleet, and bring increased customer comfort and care. Criteria for vehicle selection was: (1) available on a state or a local government contract to expedite the procurement process; (2) minimum legroom of 36 inches; and (3) government rating of at least 40 mph in city driving. Based on the set criteria three vehicles are under consideration: (1) 2019 Chevy Malibu hybrid, (2) 2019 Ford Fusion hybrid, and (3) 2019 Honda Insight hybrid. One of those vehicles will be selected to be added to the MetroAccess fleet. 175 sedans will be purchased. Afterwards, a new design will be attempted to be developed, and 100 new vans will be added to the fleet early next calendar year. The sedan vehicles under consideration were on display for members to observe and provide their feedback.

Dr. Posner stated he had test rides in all the 3 vehicles over rail road tracks, potholes, and dirt roads. The 3 cars have good shock absorbers, were very comfortable, and the seats were soft and comfortable in motion.

Chair Semelfort provided his feedback on the Chevy Malibu, as it has the most leg room. The vehicle can use some rails to assist in getting in and out of the car. The Honda insight felt uncomfortable.

Ms. Mezile asked how many MetroAccess vans are there right now? Mr. Blake stated 750 now, and on December 31st, that number will be 775. It is very likely that we are going to add the sedans, and those will be 175 of the 775 vehicles. Ms. Mezile asked if 25 of the vans are going to be retired? Mr. Blake stated we are not going to retire old vehicles as many as we bring in the new vehicles for a few reasons. We are keeping our fleet at a certain size as the number of eligible MetroAccess customers, continues to increase, and ridership increases despite our efforts with the Abilities-Ride program. We anticipate greater efficiency that one day we won't need as many vehicles. The sedans will be 23% of the fleet, never to be more than 30% of the entire MetroAccess fleet.

Ms. Bush stated that the Chevy Malibu was the most spacious sedan, and she asked why a passenger cannot be seated in the front passenger seat as it may be a better option for her. Mr. Blake stated if a customer requires to be seated in the front seat, then the customer can be accommodated. Ms. Bush asked about drivers being instructed/trained to operate the sedans. Mr. Blake confirmed that the drivers will be instructed.

Dr. Posner recommended removing the front passenger seat for several reasons: leg room, animals, cameras and things, paper-work for driver on the floor, for safety, and

avoid the possibility of sexual harassment. Mr. Blake stated these will be off the lot new vehicles as we are using already established purchase orders. The types of modifications being suggested are not part of those purchase orders. Mr. Crawford stated he understands the need of sedans in the MetroAccess fleet. Are the persons not needing a van able to fit in to the sedans? Sedans have better gas mileage; however, vans can fit more than one person. Many MetroAccess customers ride with another person, how with the seating capacity will they be accommodated? Mr. Blake stated the effort of pooling trips is to best utilize the time of the driver and the vehicle in that specific time-frame. Customers may ride with someone they know or do not know. The efficient use of technology will help pool trips with another rider, in an appropriate vehicle. The goal is to have an efficient service. Since MetroAccess is public transportation, customers may end up riding with an unknown person and in a proximity, just like on Metrobus and on Metrorail.

Ms. Jackson stated the Honda Insight did not seem to fit a tall person. The Ford Fusion does not have enough room. The Chevy Malibu seems to be more spacious.

Dr. Banerjee stated the Honda Insight has a big trunk space. He asked would there be a transfer board for passengers in manual wheelchairs that fold? Mr. Blake stated the side boards are not available now, however that can be reviewed. Dr. Banerjee asked whether the sedans will have MetroAccess signs on the vehicles? Mr. Blake stated they will be clearly marked as MetroAccess vehicles.

A customer who is 6 feet and 4 inches tall, provided his feedback on the sedans. The Chevy Malibu would be his choice, it is lower than other cars thus customers can move around with ease.

Ms. Rush stated she had difficulty getting in and out of the Honda Insight. As a result, she was in pain and could not test the Chevy Malibu. The backseat doors of Honda Insight did not open wide enough.

Ms. Bellamy highly encouraged for the committee members not to vote on any of the sedans as she strongly disagrees with the concept of adding the sedans to the MetroAccess fleet. Ms. Bellamy stated it is being done to save money and that customer comfort is not considered at all. She added that AAC members should not allow staff to use them as justification for the purchase of sedans by voting in favor of either of them. Dr. Posner stated there are some people who are horizontally and/or vertically challenged. He is vertically challenged and uses many services (airplanes, buses, etc.) that are uncomfortable to him to get to his destination. This is not a limousine service even though it is door-to-door instead of curb-to-curb. If this is efficient for certain things and can be worked for some people, sedans should be considered – it is not for everyone.

Ms. Mezile asked if a person who cannot use a sedan can be accommodated by a van? Mr. Blake confirmed and stated we are going to have extensive customer education process and outreach to avoid those cases. Our biggest challenge in introducing the sedans may be the number of customers who only want to ride a sedan. Accommodation

is our business. Some requests will be denied, if it is deemed the request is based on preference not need, but a lot of requests are and will continue to be accommodated. If a person cannot ride a sedan, we will accommodate them with vans. MetroAccess has no denial policy. We cannot deny a customer's trip due to capacity. It will not happen even with sedans. Mr. Blake also added that some individuals are concerned about dogs looking out the windows. That does not happen on MetroAccess. These are service animals. The service- animals stay close-by their passenger, at their feet.

Mr. Sheehan stated sedans in MetroAccess fleet is not a new idea. The sedans were in the fleet, never to bankrupt, but to help with the fleet. Sedans have better rides. The proportion of the numbers is a welcome plan as sedans are more comfortable for some customers.

Dr. Banerjee stated safety is a priority on vans and sedans. Allowing customers to be seated in the front passenger seat should not be allowed for safety reasons.

Ms. Bellamy re-iterated her very strong disapproval of adding sedans into the MetroAccess fleet and stated Christiaan Kent and Omari June (former WMATA employees), did it right (removed sedans from MetroAccess fleet). You (Mr. Blake) are taking advantage of sick people, you know you are wrong. This is his idea. Ms. Bellamy asked the members not to vote for any of the viewed sedans. The decision should be Mr. Blake's responsibility.

Mr. Blake reminded members that the committee was not made aware of the Ford Transit vehicle until they began to show up at customers' doorsteps. Whereas, this process of adding of sedans has been most transparent. The vote is not about the committee taking responsibility for this decision,, the vote tonight is to establish the committee's preference as a matter of record. The choice has been narrowed to 3 different vehicles. The committee members can state their preference out of the 3 vehicles. One of those 3 vehicles will be the final decision, it may be same as the majority of what the committee and public comments, it may not. The reason it is "non-binding" is because for the final decision Metro is taking into consideration several factors: management experience, procurement rules and responsibilities, cost, and other factors, along with the recommendations of the AAC. We have heard some members recommend Chevy Malibu. The AAC should not walk out today assuming the AAC has decided. The decision is not the ownership of the AAC, it is going to be WMATA's decision. We want to hear from the committee if the members want to officially advise on the vehicles.

Vice-Chair Rush asked how many members present can vote? Dr. Posner stated there are 10 members voting this evening as Ms. Bellamy is not in the voting capacity.

Vice-Chair Rush stated we did not get a chance to vote on Ford Transits and WMATA is trying to see what our preferences are. We are going to get sedans in the MetroAccess fleet, that is not a question.

Chair Semelfort asked for the members to vote. The committee members provided their feedback. The Chevy Malibu was the choice of the following members: Ms. Bush, Mr.

Crawford, Ms. Jackson, Ms. McMahon, Ms. Mezile, Dr. Posner, and Mr. Sheehan. The committee members who opted not to vote are: Chair Semelfort, Vice-Chair Rush, and Dr. Banerjee.

Public Comment:

A customer commented about the committee's information about the request for proposal (RFP) on the Abilities-Ride Program.

A second customer provided a few concerns about his MetroAccess rides where drivers have trouble in being able to secure his wheelchair. As a result, he had been delayed for his destinations and the return trips were adversely affected. The customer had written testimony and will be contacted after further investigation. Mr. Blake ensured the customer that he will have some update the following day.

A third customer stated his concern, if a MetroAccess ride does not show up and customer must take an alternative ride to the destination, then MetroAccess should provide refunds for taxi rides and/or alternate rides. Chair Semelfort stated New York paratransit system gives refunds for taxi or alternate rides to passengers. Mr. Blake stated if the committee wants to make this an official recommendation, it will be on the record and the committee can support. Staff will review the feasibility of this recommendation.

A fourth customer is a Metrobus rider and brought up a concern of his sister, who is a MetroAccess rider. Her rides are too long. With the addition of sedans, he hopes that the trips will be shortened. Mr. Blake stated the sedans will not change the impact of traffic to the MetroAccess service, however we hope that the addition of sedans will help customers with more efficient service.

A fifth customer asked for an update on his bus service concern that he had shared during the Bus/Rail Subcommittee meeting. Mr. Shaffer had asked for stop location and times for further review, which had not been provided yet.

MetroAccess Customer-Guide Update:

Allison Anderson, Operations Manager, MetroAccess, thanked the committee for their participation with the revision of the Customer-Guide. The last submission received 106 recommendations and 94 were implemented. The staff was not asked to be in the committee's work-group sessions prior, however, now the staff asks the committee to have a partnership for those work group sessions.

Chair Semelfort emailed his edits to members due to lack of time for a MetroAccess Guide discussion today and recommended to have the work-group session after the Bus/Rail Subcommittee meeting on April 8th, 2019, from 6 pm to 7 pm.

Chair Semelfort asked for update from the Procurement Office and Mr. Blake stated he will email the responses to the entire committee.

Meeting adjourned at 5:55pm.