



Accessibility Advisory Committee

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February 3, 2020

Dear Chair Smedberg and Members of the Board,

It is my pleasure to present you with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) report for the month of January 2020. The primary issues we reviewed were: 1) Board Member Meet & Greet Session, 2) WMATA Budget, and 3) Accountability for MetroAccess Trips Assigned to Taxis.

Issues of the Month

Board Member Meet & Greet Session:

It was a pleasure to have Stephanie Gidigbi, the newly appointed Board Member attend the January 2020 AAC meeting. The AAC had an opportunity to learn about Ms. Gidigbi and share some concerns of the Committee. As we learned Ms. Gidigbi is an extensive user of public transit and is committed to ensure Metrorail, Metrobus, and MetroAccess work for all. We also learned about her goal to understand the concerns of the AAC members. Some of the concerns shared with Ms. Gidigbi are the same as those presented to the Board previously: MetroAccess fares, flat fares, MetroAccess pass, reductions in bus service, the proposed surcharge of 25 cents on buses, and fare simplification, amongst others. Ms. Gidigbi was also invited to join a DC AAC member for the Ride-Along Program, which she has accepted. We look forward to a convenient schedule. Ms. Gidigbi informed the AAC that she hopes Metrobus becomes a priority and looks forward to Public Hearings and the Budget process. The AAC looks forward to working with her on various concerns that exist now and that may arise in the future.

WMATA Budget:

The AAC has submitted its proposals to the Board for the Budget (AAC motions attached): MetroAccess fares, flat fares, MetroAccess pass, the elimination of the proposed surcharge of 25 or 50 cents on cash bus fares, and fare simplification amongst others. As advocates for seniors and persons with disabilities, the AAC is disappointed with parts of the proposed Budget since none of the Committee's proposals appear to have been discussed at the public finance committee workshops. The proposed fare-increase on Metrorail and Metrobus would adversely affect MetroAccess customers in terms of higher fares (2X the increase for bus/rail riders) as well as increased complexity in calculating fares for individual trips. The proposal to keep the current maximum fare will be of some help, but the trend will be to move many customers currently paying less than \$6.50 closer to that peak (currently the average fare is \$4.95). Similarly, Metrobus customers who face financial hardship and cannot afford to purchase SmarTrip cards and do not get the benefit of Bus/Rail transfers, would end up paying higher fare by 25 or 50 cents.

The AAC appreciates the support for flat fares on the weekend with free Bus/Rail transfers and the pilot of no service changes for MetroAccess customers in case of bus service cuts. As the public hearings get scheduled, the AAC hopes all the locations will be transit accessible and/or shuttles are provided as needed for all the venues (particularly a shuttle

from New Carrollton): District of Columbia (WMATA Headquarters), Maryland, and Northern Virginia. Free rides on MetroAccess or Abilities Ride would be helpful. The AAC looks forward to extensive participation of customers in the upcoming public hearings and a positive impact of their comments on the final 2021 budget.

Accountability for MetroAccess Trips Assigned to Taxis:

Due to the growing number of MetroAccess users and the current insufficient number of vehicles, MetroAccess utilizes some taxi companies as subcontractors in order to provide trips to all the customers with scheduled rides. There are instances when vehicles run behind schedule due to various reasons. When MetroAccess vehicles run behind schedule, the staff has a way of knowing about the delays and can provide information to customers when they call. However, for MetroAccess trips that get assigned to taxis, there was no way for the staff to know about the delays until the time customers contacted the office. Since the time this issue was brought up, the staff has found ways to rectify the issue and are working on improving the procedures. The AAC appreciates the diligence of the staff in rectifying the issue and providing better customer service.

Finally, we request that the Board take time for a full and fair discussion of the AAC request for a 6-month pilot using a flat fare for MAC trips. This pilot would provide data on fare box recovery; reduced WMATA operating cost and customer and employee satisfaction compared to the current system.

Sincerely,

Philip Posner
Chair