



Accessibility Advisory Committee

300 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

December 4, 2023

Dear Chair Smedberg, and Members of the Board,

It is my pleasure to present you with the AAC report for the month of November 2023. The primary issues we reviewed were: 1) Board Chairman's Visit to the AAC, 2) Transfer of Leadership, and 3) MetroAccess OCC Update.

Issues of the Month

Board Chairman's Visit to the AAC:

Paul Smedberg, Board Chairman, WMATA, visited the AAC during its full committee meeting. Mr. Smedberg discussed the challenging financial times ahead and how the pandemic has impacted further. He stated it has garnered a lot of attention, concern, and engagement from WMATA's jurisdictional partners. Mr. Smedberg applauded the General Manager (GM) and his team for all that they have done in terms of outreach to the community. Mr. Smedberg informed about the work with the local, state, and federal elected officials, business community, other business groups that would hopefully support us reaching some long-term goals. He commended the WMATA team led by the CFO that has worked hard to come up with solutions to lower the \$750 million deficit and make it manageable for the jurisdictional partners.

Mr. Smedberg recommended that the AAC should articulate clearly about all the important things that should be maintained and supported. A lot of progress was made with the flat fare last year with the support of the Board members and the effort is to maintain that. Mr. Smedberg stated the work on the 8K rail cars and other projects will continue. When the Budget is introduced, he encouraged the AAC to contact the local elected officials to ask for support WMATA in general, and the agenda that the AAC might have. He advised to keep a short and concise list. Mr. Smedberg stated there might be a two-phase approach, we might get FY25 and then deal with FY26. However, a long-term solution is needed for WMATA's financial situation.

Transfer of Leadership:

Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, stated we are having a transition in the leadership and Dr. Maggie Butler, Vice President, System-Wide Accessibility will be leading the organization's efforts in overall accessibility, particularly fixed-route accessibility. Mr. Blake will focus on the MetroAccess service moving forward. He thanked the AAC for all the advice and guidance, for being the eyes and ears and feelings for WMATA. Mr. Blake stated we have tried our very best to implement the recommendations and moved forward. Our commitment on paratransit would continue to be 100%. Mr. Blake stated we look forward and welcome Dr. Butler, to do great things with Metro's accessibility overall and the AAC. Mr. Blake thanked the AAC and asked the members to generate the same level of support as done for him in the last several years, to Dr. Butler for great things she has planned with the AAC and the community overall.

Dr. Butler stated her role as the Vice President of System-Wide Accessibility is overseeing the vital aspect and the engagements that lie ahead for WMATA and its customers. System-wide accessibility in public transit encompasses the implementation of inclusive measures and features within transportation systems, ensuring accessibility and usability for everyone. Dr. Butler stated she is currently conducting a system-wide accessibility assessment of WMATA and will share more about the System-Wide Accessibility plan in the upcoming months highlighting the priorities, achievements, and future initiatives set for early, 2024. Dr. Butler stated she looks forward to working with the AAC.

The AAC congratulated Dr. Butler and thanked Mr. Blake for everything he has done to support the AAC. The AAC is most organized and impactful, it is a testament to the individuals involved. The team under Mr. Blake's leadership that has now come under Dr. Butler is very good, first-class, first-rate, hardworking individuals who know their job. It is probably bittersweet for Mr. Blake as building and growing a team is once in a lifetime opportunity, and he is giving Dr. Butler, one of the best teams. The AAC looks forward to working with Dr. Butler.

MetroAccess OCC Update:

Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, provided an update about the Digital Assistance, a new tool for customers while contacting the Reservations Call Center. Ms. Williams-Hall stated we initiated the digital assistant pilot last week on Tuesday November 14 afternoon, taken 300 calls and booked numerous customer trips. Ms. Williams-Hall stated the calls are reviewed and customer feedback is received, and the customer satisfaction is 4.6 Ms. Williams-Hall stated Tim is expected to answer calls that are not being answered within the two-minutes window. Ms. Williams-Hall stated the digital assistant is a thinking machine, thus it will learn and improve with customer usage. When the information is received, the system will respond by I Got That. The AI will take the information verbatim and place it in the reservation.

The AAC has tested the AI tool and liked how it works. With its usage, the call hold time has been reduced.

Sincerely,

Patrick Sheehan
Chair