



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

300 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

April 23, 2026

Dear Chair Santos,

It is my pleasure to present you with the AAC for the month of March 2026 through its full committee session and standing subcommittees (Bus & Rail; MetroAccess). Discussions focused on system modernization, wayfinding and signage, winter operations, fare and boarding policy considerations, and continued evolution of MetroAccess service delivery. The Committee appreciates WMATA staff engagement and recognizes areas of progress while identifying priority accessibility risks and decision points requiring continued coordination.

Issues of the Month

Rail Modernization and Automation

The Committee received a detailed briefing on WMATA's Rail Modernization Program and automation planning, including CBTC, fleet modernization, platform screen doors, and future operating models. Members recognize the safety and reliability benefits of modernization, while stressing that accessibility considerations—boarding times, predictable boarding locations, and emergency communication—must be explicitly designed into automation decisions. The AAC requests continued briefings as the Red Line proposal advances and urges early accessibility engagement before design decisions are finalized.

Wayfinding and Signage Modernization:

The Committee discussed findings from the Wayfinding Focus Group and WMATA's accelerated timeline for signage installation at L'Enfant Plaza. The Focus Group unanimously opposes bottom-to-top reading orientation for Station Ahead maps, citing conflicts with standard U.S. reading norms and disproportionate cognitive burden on riders with low vision and cognitive disabilities. Concerns regarding font size, color contrast, lighting, and systemwide consistency remain. Substantive design corrections should occur prior to wider rollout.

Bus Operations and Boarding Policy:

The Bus & Rail Subcommittee examined rear-door boarding practices. Members agreed wheelchair boarding must remain front-door and operator-visible at all times. Limited rear-door boarding may reduce dwell time only in specific circumstances and introduce safety and fare compliance concerns. Any expansion should remain discretionary, clearly communicated, and evaluated for equity and safety impacts.

Winter Storm Operations:

The Committee reviewed WMATA's February storm response and acknowledged staff efforts under extreme conditions. Key concerns included elevator exits leading to uncleared paths of travel, property-boundary ambiguities, bus stop usability, and communication challenges during detours. The AAC encourages stronger pre-season jurisdictional coordination to ensure accessible paths do not terminate abruptly at station boundaries.

MetroAccess Service Delivery and Technology:

The MetroAccess Subcommittee discussed fleet transition, digital tools, and the AbilitiesRide program. The MyTransit app shows promise but continues to present usability, cancellation, and cognitive accessibility challenges. Members emphasized multi-channel outreach, accessible training materials, and preservation of human support. The addition of Lyft as an AbilitiesRide provider is generally viewed positively, with ongoing refinement needed.

Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month

March is recognized as Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Awareness Month. The Accessibility Advisory Committee acknowledges the many riders, employees, and community members living with MS and other episodic and mobility-impacting disabilities. MS highlights the importance of designing transit systems that account for variability in stamina, balance, vision, cognition, and fatigue—not just permanent or visible disabilities. The Committee continues to emphasize that accessibility decisions must support riders whose needs may fluctuate day-to-day, ensuring dignity, predictability, and independence across the system.

Cross-Cutting Accessibility Priorities

Across all discussions, the Committee emphasized predictability, consistency, and proactive communication as core accessibility principles. Members stressed the importance of early accessibility input to mitigate risk and avoid shifting cognitive or physical burden onto riders.

The AAC appreciates continued collaboration with WMATA leadership and staff and looks forward to ongoing engagement as initiatives progress from planning to implementation.

Respectfully submitted,
Patrick Sheehan
Chair, Accessibility Advisory Committee