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June 5, 2018

Dear Chair Evans and Members of the Board,

It is my pleasure to present you with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) report for the months of April and May 2018. The primary issues we reviewed were: 1) MetroAccess Service Contract Awards, 2) the MetroAccess Fleet Plans, 3) Metrobus Cash Free Pilot, 4) 7000 Series between car barriers (June 5).

Issues of the Month

MetroAccess Service Contract Awards

The AAC received an update on awarding of the new MetroAccess service provider contracts. For service beginning July, 1, 2018, there will be four MetroAccess service providers: (1) Transdev, with 35% of the service, (2) Diamond/National Express with 25%, (3) First Transit with 25%, and (4) Challenger with 15%. Two of the providers, Transdev and Challenger will have subcontracts with taxicab providers to serve as complements to the van service.

The AAC will continue to monitor the service through their own experience and customer feedback. The AAC will continue to provide staff with these observations, necessary feedback, and recommendations to help ensure a seamless transition into the new contract, as well as integration of the new service provider, Challenger.

MetroAccess Fleet Plans

The AAC was provided an update on Metro's plans for the MetroAccess fleet. In FY2017 Metro purchased 207 Ford Transit vehicles. The AAC has raised many concerns about these vehicles, and Metro has responded by agreeing to install a number of the improvements recommended by the AAC. In FY2018 Metro has ordered/purchased 227 additional Ford Transits, and for FY2019 Metro has ordered 250 more of these vehicles. The AAC was presented the process and the planned schedule for the upgrades to these vehicles. The AAC will continue to monitor these fixes.

Beginning in early FY2019, Metro staff will seek input from the AAC and other interested stakeholders aimed at developing a new vehicle design to be used in future procurements. The new MetroAccess vehicle design that will replace the Ford Transit vehicles in the MetroAccess fleet is intended to address staff's strategic and operational needs, while incorporating the recommendations of the customers to fix the problems identified in the most recently purchased vans. The AAC looks forward to participating in this effort, which could possibly create a new modern industry-wide paratransit vehicle design standard.

Metrobus Cash Free Pilot

The AAC was provided an update on Metro's Cash Free pilot project. Metro Staff asserted that cash transactions on buses can cause delays for all customers, decrease efficiency; increase Metro's operating costs, and slow the service.

With 12% of customers (200 people per day) using cash when boarding a bus, Metro is looking at services like DASH, New York City Transit, and Montgomery County Ride that have implemented cash free boarding.

Metro is proposing a six month pilot starting in June for the Metro Extra 79 (16 stop express). The local route 70 (49 stop local) will still accept cash as well as loading of cards. In addition, loading of SmarTrip cards with cash can still occur at six rail stations with fare machines, several retail locations, TRiPs Store Silver Spring Station, and Metro Center Sales Office.

The AAC expressed concern about the possible impacts of this pilot to low-income customers, including many with disabilities and the elderly, especially if the pilot is expanded beyond express routes. AAC members shared other ideas to speed up bus service including express lanes for buses, signal prioritization, and eliminating the loading of cards on the bus while retaining the ability to pay with cash.

It was also pointed out that cash payment may be approximately less than 3 seconds slower than tapping a smart trip card. The major time lost during boarding was caused while loading fare onto a card. This loading might be as long as 10 seconds slower than a smart card tap. The AAC requested that cash still be accepted, but card loading be denied. It was pointed out that many citizens with disabilities and socially disadvantaged customers do not have the financial resources (credit cards, bank accounts, smart phones) to pay anything but cash for their bus ride. Further, to deny them access to an express bus when the alternative makes more than twice the number of stops simply based upon socio-economic hardship in order to save 2 seconds of time on the express route per cash customer is unconscionable. Would WMATA next deny access to Express Buses to mobility challenged customers and seniors, since they may take far longer than 10 seconds to board the bus?

The AAC further requested to know how the pilot would be evaluated for success. What measures would be used to decide if there actually were an improvement in service and whether this balanced the potential negative impact on the 200 passengers per day that use cash on this route. How will the impact on passenger/driver interaction be assessed?

Finally, the roll out of this pilot with little notice and time for input from the AAC and RAC and no title 6 analysis or discussion with the affected communities sets a poor precedent for Community/WMATA collaboration.

7000 Series Between-Car Barriers

This issue was addressed at our June 5th meeting by WMATA Engineering staff. This followed the most recent incident at the Van Ness station involving a blind customer falling on the track. The AAC has been involved with members of the vision impaired/blind community since 2016 in an effort to have the current 7000 series between car barriers made more safe. The original AAC recommendation in 2011 was to continue the use of the barriers that were used for the 5000 and 6000 series cars. The 7000 cars were delivered using chains and bumpers on alternate cars of the 7000 2 car sets.

This was supposed to reduce risk and improve efficiency for WMATA rail yard workers and maintain safety for vision challenged passengers. As early as 2016, members of the blind community and members of the AAC expressed safety concerns about the use of bumpers. Following a second incident of a passenger falling on to the tracks in May 2018 we were given the time line for developing a fix and implementing it that involved beginning design in 2017 and with a promised fix of all 7000 series cars by October of 2019.

The AAC and members of the "vision community" present at the meeting asked the following questions:

- 1) Were the rubber bumpers used on the 7000 series cars in use in other systems and were they effective?
- 2) Following the initial incident July 2016 and the FTA notice of safety concerns it will have taken approximately 3 years to complete a fix (October 2019). Why did this take so long and why were the trains not pulled from service or delivery delayed until the fix was completed?
- 3) In addition to the "bumper issue", the problem at Van Ness was compounded by the poor track/platform lighting at that station. The lighting has been an ongoing issue pointed out by the vision community, can this issue be addressed in a more timely manner?
- 4) Will WMATA work more closely with the AAC/RAC and disability community on the design and implementation of the 8000 series rail cars?

Sincerely,

Philip Posner
Chair

From: Barbara Milleville <barbmill1@verizon.net>
Subject: NCCLV Inter-car barrier recommendations

On behalf of the low vision community, we support WMATA's efforts to improve the current inter-car barrier set-up.

Our recommendations:

-Two configurations were presented to us at the Greenbelt rail station - rope and rubber. We recommend the latter as this will increase the probability of train on-time performance and reduce the probability of rider injury.

For the low vision population especially, it'd be more effective if the rubber design was modified in the following ways:

- Extend several inches higher than the rubber design which was on the test train.
- Extend lower such that it is equivalent to the floor height of the test train.
- More visible color (not black) Reflectors alone won't make the rubber design more visible when there is limited lighting present.

This last point became more apparent after the test when some of us riders with low vision had a much more difficult time (visually) seeing the barrier on a train which happened to stop at the U Street station just after we got off. Many riders with low vision are looking for visual as well as tactile cues. In addition, it is more challenging to see the barriers and take action quickly if traveling during rush hour. Please factor in these scenarios also when arriving at your solution.

Once the final design has been chosen, we recommend that every car which services a particular line have the same barrier mechanism. And, it'd be very helpful if this changeover could take place within a set period of time. This will help set riders' expectations. Finally, inform riders with vision loss especially of this timeline by publicizing it far and wide.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Barbara Milleville
National Capital Citizens with Low Vision