



Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting (Virtual) Minutes: November 1, 2021

Attendees

Present: Phil Posner (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Tino Calabia, Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Deborah Fisher, Marcie Goldstein, Melanie Henderson, Thomas Mangrum, Phillippa Mezile, Doris Ray, Paul Semelfort, Patrick Sheehan, and Kelley Simoneaux.

Call to Order

Anu Sharma, AAC Coordinator, welcomed everyone, took the roll call, read the agenda, and shared some helpful tips. Thereafter, Chair Posner moved the meeting forward.

Approval of Agenda, Board Report, and Prior Meeting Minutes

The November 1, 2021, meeting agenda was approved as presented.

The October 4, 2021, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

The Board Report was approved as written.

Motions Made, Motions Passed:

As per the recommendation of Chair Posner, Mr. Sheehan proposed a motion that this committee put together the criteria for a second award which could include members of WMATA staff or the members of the Board, who have provided extraordinary service for the disabled community and have really gone above and beyond what is expected of their job, duties, and activities. The motion was passed with an amendment to include one such award for the 2021 Hedding Award.

Customer Relations Complaint and Customer Information Processes:

Barbara Moulton, Senior Director, Customer Care, and Darbi Dickerson, Acting Director, Customer Service, informed that Customer Service (CSVC) has four departments: Customer Information, Customer Relations, Social Media/Live Chat, and Lost and Found. Ms. Moulton shared data about total communications and stated it is at 50% of pre-pandemic volume whereas, for the year 2021, the volume increased 24% over last year. She shared the data for total complaint volume handled by Customer Relations, in the third quarters of the two years for Metrobus, Metrorail, and MetroAccess. She also shared the total volume of Social Media, during the third quarters of 2020 and 2021. Comparing third quarter of 2020 to 2021, Ms. Moulton stated that live chat volume increased this year by 215% in part due to expanded hours from 7am to 7pm, Monday through Friday. She also talked about a new metric called 95/5, where the goal is to resolve 95% of customer concerns within five business days.

While discussing the complaint volume related to accessibility, Ms. Dickerson stated a total of 120 complaints were received from bus and rail customers for the three quarters for 2021. While assessing the total volume of complaints received, versus the volume of accessibility related issues, the accessibility complaints are less than 1% of total complaint volume. Ms. Dickerson shared the top three accessibility complaints by mode. For

Metrobus complaints, the top three issues can be categorized as Following-Procedures, Did Not Stop, and Unprofessional Behavior. Whereas for Metrorail complaints, the top issues reported were Accessibility, Unprofessional-Behavior, and Following-Procedures. At this time, Ms. Dickerson invited questions from the Committee.

Ms. Ray asked about the breakdown of high priority complaints. She inquired about a metric for malfunctioned annunciators on Metrobuses. Ms. Ray further asked about Customer Information operating hours. Ms. Moulton stated there is priority of escalation for safety issues that go directly to the Safety and Police Departments. Ms. Moulton stated during her entire tenure, the top three complaints have been about service, employee behavior, malfunction on fare products, i.e. SmarTrip card. With respect to Customer Information operating hours, Ms. Moulton stated we do not see an ability to extend the weekend hours on the horizon because of the available self-service options.

Mr. Calabia asked for examples of accessibility related complaints, along with the nature of the complaints, and asked for examples of complaints received from customers who use wheelchairs. Ms. Dickerson stated majority of the accessibility complaints received are from people who use wheelchairs and/or walkers. Some complaints are from people who are blind or have low vision yet, not too many complaints are from deaf people. Ms. Dickerson stated the example of complaints from persons using wheelchairs could be that the operator did not fold the seat up for the customer to get in that spot or did not curb properly. Mr. Calabia asked if most of the complaints regarding customers using wheelchair are on the bus side. Ms. Dickerson stated she cannot share that information.

Mr. Sheehan thanked the team for a breakdown of the complaints and asked if it has an impact on Metrobus and Metrorail staff training. He also asked how to lodge complaints about MetroAccess service. Ms. Moulton stated we take MetroAccess complaints on a different system than the Metrobus and Metrorail, in order that their staff to work towards resolution. Regarding the training, Ms. Dickerson's group shares the information with Operations, and that Metrobus and Metrorail have their own training.

Ms. Simoneaux asked about the time for resolution when there is a breakdown that prevents customers to use the service. Ms. Moulton informed of the new metrics of 95% of the complaints being resolved within five days. Ms. Simoneaux asked what has WMATA established as a timeline for issues, such as an elevator that is out of service. Ms. Moulton clarified that the question is about how quickly the issues are fixed, not the process of Customer Service, and stated we are all about safety and service. Ms. Moulton is not in those departments thus she does not have the specifics on the time needed for resolution.

Ms. Goldstein asked whether the complaints reach the bus drivers so that they are aware of the reported issues. Ms. Moulton stated yes, the operators are made aware of the complaints and for employee issues, we even distinguish the tone of voice versus any other rude behavior concerns.

Mr. Mangrum asked if elevators and escalators are checked regularly for maintenance or are the issues fixed upon being reported by customers. He also asked for the Customer Information phone number. Ms. Moulton provided the phone number and stated she knows that there is a schedule for the checks however, she does not have the specifics.

Chair Posner thanked Ms. Moulton and Ms. Dickerson for their presentation.

Heddinger Award:

Chair Posner asked can we nominate staff for a Heddinger Award? In the past, we have given the Heddinger Award to a Board Member and a former Ombudsman after his retirement. We have some thoughts about the current staff of WMATA who have been so good during the pandemic in keeping things running in the face of a lot of problems. Chair Posner invited comments from the AAC and stated we have given awards to teams.

Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, stated in terms of the Heddinger Award, he would not recommend a current staff or team. If the AAC wants to recognize an employee or team, that is not out of order. He recommended it should be separate from the Heddinger Award, and to treat it as special category done for above the norm efforts, not to be held annually.

Chair Posner stated we have created special awards for a former AAC member, as well as for Allison Anderson, Operations Manager, MetroAccess. They were big statues and appropriate awards. That has been done in the past and it is worth an AAC discussion.

Vice-Chair Rush stated she was told the person was doing their job. Everyone does their job. A former Ombudsman received his award after retirement. Vice-Chair Rush stated if we wait for the person to retire, we may not be around to award them.

Ms. Ray stated in the past two or so years WMATA staff, particularly the staff we deal with, the AAC, and people who are making policies about Operations for all three modes, have gone way beyond what she expected, and have cared for people in the region, especially for people with disabilities. Ms. Ray further stated it would be fitting for the AAC to do the special awards mainly to recognize for people with disabilities, specifically, advance the cause of public transit. This time of the pandemic especially warrants special awards to WMATA staff. Ms. Ray hopes the AAC would consider doing that.

Mr. Sheehan agreed with Ms. Ray and stated he would like to review the criteria for the Heddinger Award again, it was made towards an individual who was taking individual time to make a difference for the accessibility. However, it is a different set of criteria for the ADAP staff, or perhaps for the Board who have supported, there is room for a second award. There have been individuals who have gone above and beyond. He supports a good name for this criterion and the award.

Chair Posner asked for a motion as there is a universal feeling, for people who have given tremendous support, of outside and inside of WMATA. Chair Posner recommended a few recommendations for the name of the award: crisis award, the pandemic award, etc. He also stated that WMATA has an award ceremony every year, and ADAP staff have received awards. We may even recommend for WMATA to give that award to a person or persons.

Mr. Sheehan proposed a motion: This committee put together the criteria for a second award which could include members of WMATA staff or the members of the Board, who have provided extraordinary service for the disabled community and have really gone above and beyond of what is expected of their job duties and activities. Mr. Sheehan stated we really need to put together a criteria for such an award and would like to take the time to choose an appropriate name for such an award that would show our appreciation for the dedication for the work that the people have done.

Chair Posner appointed Mr. Sheehan for the committee to work on this award along with any member who volunteers for it.

Ms. Ray recommended a friendly amendment to the motion, that the ADAP staff be awarded and recognized along with the Hedding Award this year, as it is appropriate. Afterwards, create a criterion for awards going forward. Mr. Sheehan agreed with her recommendation as the individual has done an outstanding job. Chair Posner stated the members could volunteer by November MetroAccess meeting, then to be finalized by December AAC meeting. The motion passed with the proposed amendment.

The nomination received for the 2021 Hedding Award was confirmed. The recommendation was to hold the ceremony in January or February of 2022.

Public Comments:

A member of the public voiced her concern about the return of MetroAccess shared rides. Mr. Blake stated he understands her concerns and explained that MetroAccess is one of the last paratransit services to restart the shared rides. Following the science, with face masks and ventilation in the vehicles, we are going to proceed unless some reason arises that warrants us to go back to direct trips, we will continue with shared rides.

A second member of the public stated there is no ventilation on vehicles and stated Metro should not be looking to get more money whereas people's lives should be a high priority. Mr. Blake stated it is not a matter of getting more money from MetroAccess rides. We are taking a right, safe, and equitable approach. If there is a driver who is not allowing the ventilation, then customers should report that. We are following the science and as the region opens, MetroAccess is also proceeding with shared rides.

Chair Posner inquired if the filtration system is same as on Metrobuses, which might especially help the customers with weaker immune system. Mr. Blake stated we are getting much more circulated air in vans and sedans, than those filters would allow, given

the location where those will have to be installed. Open windows will allow more ventilation. Mr. Blake further stated the number of shared rides is expected to be low as the resources continue to be expanded.

A third customer asked if Metro has a procedure in place that will address the issue of the riders who have chosen to stop riding Metro system overall. Are there any special efforts in place to try and get those riders back?

Ms. Ray stated we need a process of high priority complaints, in particularly, how are the out of service elevators/escalators addressed and how quickly are they serviced. Ms. Ray recommended a mode of communication/follow up from Customer Relations.

Ms. Goldstein asked if any of the AAC members are going to American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Conference. Mr. Sheehan stated the AAC does not have a budget to travel for APTA event. Chair Posner stated if Mr. Blake could review APTA's ability to have a virtual component, then an AAC representative could attend it.

Ms. Coles asked for clarification about number of passengers in a MetroAccess van. Mr. Blake stated a total of four people including the driver, could be in a MetroAccess van.

The public comments can be submitted via phone message by calling 202-962-1100, and via email MetroAACChair@wmata.com.

Bus/Rail Subcommittee Report:

Mr. Calabria provided the BRS Report and stated the following topics were discussed in the last meeting:

- Floating Bus Stops, Arlington County
- AAC Discussion, Floating Bus Stops
- Rosslyn Station Study

MetroAccess Subcommittee Report:

Mr. Semelfort stated the following topics were discussed in the last MAS meeting:

- Introduction of the AAC MetroAccess Safety Award
- MetroAccess 10-minutes pre-arrival call discontinued
- MetroAccess GPS System Update
- MetroAccess Eligibility Process: Application Process, Review the denial, Rationality on the eligibility

Meeting Adjourned at 7:30 p.m.