



Accessibility Advisory Committee

600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001

BUS/RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE VIRTUAL MEETING MINUTES: November 8, 2021

In attendance: Tino Calabia (Chair), Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Deborah Fisher, Melanie Henderson, Steve Kaffen, Thomas Mangrum, Phillippa Mezile, Phil Posner, Doris Ray, Denise Rush, Patrick Sheehan, and Kelley Simoneaux.

Call to Order

Anu Sharma, AAC Coordinator, took a roll call, read the Meeting Agenda, and provided some helpful information. Thereafter, Chair Calabia moved the meeting forward.

Review and Approval of BRS Agenda and Minutes:

The BRS approved November 8, 2021, Meeting Agenda.

The October 12 and September 13, 2021, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

Dr. Posner recommended to invite Dr. Loh, DC Representative to the Board of Directors, as she is active in the bicycle community.

Floating Bus Stops Discussion:

Matt Johnson, Capital Project Manager, Montgomery County, presented Montgomery County Bus Stop Program - Floating Bus Stops. Mr. Johnson stated Montgomery County is improving floating bus stops for people with vision disabilities. Discussing the evolution of floating bus stops, Mr. Johnson stated in 2017, the County built its initial four floating bus stops, which are being rebuilt soon to upgrade to best practices. At that time, Montgomery County took a group of blind and low-vision pedestrians to visit the floating bus stops along Spring Street. In 2019, three second-generation floating bus stops were built. The concerns were that wheelchair users may have challenges navigating the channelized bikeway. Whereas blind & low vision users may have difficulty finding the floating bus stop crosswalk from the sidewalk, and they cannot see or hear oncoming cyclists. He shared the access and safety features as well as navigation and calming treatments.

Mr. Johnson stated Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) is designing streets for people with vision disabilities, based on the feedback received, which is applied to MWCOC for a grant to study how to better design streets for people who have a vision disability. The study was completed on June 30 and has been posted to their website. They received recommendations for sidewalks, crossings, bus stops, lighting, public engagement, and staff training. Montgomery County is engaging with people who have vision disabilities, in the designing of their streets. For projects likely to have a major impact on people with vision disabilities, tactile graphics should be considered. Mr. Johnson stated a Testing & Training Facility (TTF) can be used to test

out designs for accessibility issues prior to implementing them. It can also be used to help train people with vision disabilities and Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialists.

The tactile cues have detectable edges, detectable changes in surface texture, detectable changes in slope, tactile walking surface indicators (TWSIs), and tactile delineator surfaces. The detectable guidance surface (DGS) is used internationally to guide pedestrians with vision disabilities. Detectable Delineator Surface uses to delineate the pedestrian space from a different space when the two must be at the same elevation and no other delineator is feasible. It may also be used to help maintain alignment in a crosswalk. There are certain considerations that it must be detectable under foot, should contrast with background surface, and must be traversable by wheelchair users.

Discussing the bus stops, Mr. Johnson shared some concerns about existing approaches: finding bus stop locations, especially when located mid-block, in areas without a landscape buffer, or with no shelter; determining which bus lines serve the stop; determining the correct bus when the bus arrives; signs that are difficult to read/recognize from a distance; lack of audio and tactile signage; inadequate lighting, vegetation impeding access; lack of direct access to nearby destinations via an accessible route; and changes in bus service due to disruptions such as construction. Mr. Johnson also shared recommended guidance, as follows: bus stops should be located in a predictable location near intersections and crosswalks; layouts should be consistent; guidance strips should be installed to assist users in finding the stop; the DGS should be installed to minimize impact to wheelchair users; a distinctive (shape and color) regional bus stop pole should be considered; and to consider Bluetooth beacons.

Sharing some images, Mr. Johnson stated for next set of floating bus stops, the considerations are as follows: co-locate with signal, raised speed table at one end, sign on sidewalk in addition to on platform, and tactile Walking Surface Indicators. In the next 10 months, they are taking the following steps: design and construction of a testing facility; upgrade of four floating bus stops to install pilot treatments; begin staff training; integration of recommendations into projects in design; pilot use of tactile graphics in projects in design; a regional summit to start working toward common design elements across jurisdictional boundaries; and installation of better wayfinding at all existing floating stops. In conclusion, Mr. Johnson stated Montgomery County would have the mock-up floating bus stops and would seek feedback from persons with disabilities, in particularly those who are blind or have low vision, or even deaf-blind. He also shared locations of all the floating bus stops that are in existence and/or planned, thus far. At this time, Mr. Johnson invited questions from the Committee.

Ms. Ray asked why there was a need for such a stop style. She is concerned not having a uniformity and about the elongated strips that are in use in other countries as well. She shared her concerns about truncated domes. She would be happy to be involved for any future reference. Mr. Johnson stated there is no national guidance, and they are looking for national consistency. They want people to come to Montgomery County and provide feedback.

Ms. Rush appreciated that Montgomery County would have mock-ups for testing purposes.

Ms. Fisher asked what kind of signage and warning are you giving to the cyclists? She is concerned about the amount of responsibility and vigilance is placed on persons with disabilities. With no signage to bicyclists, it is not a shared responsibility. Mr. Johnson stated there is signage and markings and shared an example of motorists not stopping 100% times at the crosswalks, similarly, bicyclists would not stop a 100%. He shared information about the signage and stated they are doing everything they can think of about safety. Bicyclists sharing the road with other traffic, or in the bus lanes, is dangerous. Right now, bicyclists are permitted on the sidewalk. By creating a separate bike lane, in a define space, it creates a safety measure. There are about 100 floating bus stops in the country and having a national guidance would be helpful. He also stated all the work done in the area, might help create national guidance.

Jim Hamre, Director, Office of Bus Planning, stated since our last presentation, we hosted a regional task-force meeting, that included all the region. Mr. Johnson was invited to that meeting. As a result of that meeting, within WMATA, we are creating a committee to create guidelines and proposals for these stops, and guidelines for the design documents. Carol Lopez, Director, ADAP, and Ms. Sharma are a part of the technical committee. Mr. Hamre stated we look forward to working with the leaders in the region.

Ms. Coles asked about the purpose of floating bus stops and asked about the method of marketing used to inform the public. Mr. Johnson stated the idea for floating bus stops was to manage the conflict between different users, we are trying to separate various users and improve usage of lanes, sidewalks, and streets. In regards to marketing, Mr. Johnson stated they have an email list, there is a newsletter, they mail out notices about projects, and they are trying to improve avenues of reaching out to various communities.

Dr. Posner recommended to contact Senator Tammy Duckworth's Office, the Head of the Disability Caucus in the Senate; Senator Chris Van Hollen, and Senator Ben Cardin, for national standard, as they can directly access the Secretary's Office.

Mr. Sheehan thanked Mr. Johnson, and asked Ms. Peredo Lopez and Mr. Hamre, about use of pedestrian signals as a way to indicate oral description, that there is a walk sign on that intersection, is that required under ADA as a useful communication instead of a sign on a pole? Ms. Peredo Lopez stated there is a document called Public Rights of Way, it is not the law. Even there, there is no requirement to have a signal with audible descriptions. Mr. Johnson stated all their future stops would have audible signal. Every signal in Montgomery County has audible signals. He thanked all for the feedback that has been received and looks forward to working with the Committee in the future.

Platform Rehabilitation 3 Completion and Platform Rehabilitation 4:

Hannah Ro, Senior Program Manager, Platform Improvement Program, shared information about the accessibility features for platform rehabilitation three and four, as follows: platforms have been rehabbed with non-skid tiles, lights have been upgraded with LED, elevators have been refurbished with call buttons clearly identified separate from the help button, new faregates at stations, bathrooms have been rehabilitated and brought up to ADA compliance, new passenger information display systems (PIDS) have high visibility, emergency help buttons are equipped with cameras, Emergency button is different from the Information button which is yellow in color. There are new signage and the directional signs are ADA compliant. Any manholes that are in the system will have flushed surfaces. Any areas of safe dispersal are the areas of which are used during emergencies, are newly built and ADA compliant for any emergency at a station platform. All these changes have been included in the phase three of the platform rehabilitation program, which covers six stations, four of them are on the Green line and two of them are on the Blue line. Next station the phase four will include five stations on the Orange line.

Chair Calabria referenced Ms. Simoneaux's concern that was brought over the weekend, which led to the Braddock Road hump discussion and he asked how often the measurements are taken. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated historically speaking the reason why there is 5/8 of an inch vertical gap requirement for the ADA for new stations, is because WMATA set an example and provided that. The NOMA Gallaudet was the first station to have that and then the Access Board stated we are going to do this, since WMATA can do it. Most recently in our standards we moved the rail as close to the platform as possible. In some cases, we have reduced our horizontal gaps to 1 and a quarter inches whereas the ADA allows three inches. We are less than one and a half in our newer stations and rehabilitated stations. The height is a little bit difficult to move down the gap as we already have elevators and escalators at certain height, we are allowed only a certain slope. If we see any inconsistency, we do spot check, and if there is a condition that is not ADA compliant, we alert engineering and they report it to Track so that the

issue can be resolved. ADAP is always checking stations and is in the field frequently. Each year, a visual check is done. If there is a condition that is not ADA compliant, it is reported to be fixed. For Braddock Road, there were several challenges, however that has been resolved. Chris Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, added that Braddock Road took several years however, that included capital funding, planning for the station being out of service which also is a challenge for our customers. We did the optimum boarding project as a solution until the time the platform was rehabilitated. It was indicative of us finding a detailed solution that was required. We also had rail announcements and e-alerts as a daily reminder for the optimal boarding resolution.

Ms. Ro stated Chair Calabia's question pertains to the seriousness of WMATA taking actions. As Mr. Blake stated it is a long process and there were lessons learned, which are helpful for projects afterwards. Ms. Peredo Lopez and herself are in many meetings together and they work on resolving issues before they arise. Chair Calabia asked about a list of things done. Ms. Peredo Lopez informed about the various dimensions measured.

Ms. Simoneaux stated a concern that she brought forth prior to the meeting. The matter was about a person using a powered wheelchair who had difficulty at one of the stations. Ms. Sharma had reached out to her for specifics, which Ms. Simoneaux will share as she receives it. Ms. Peredo Lopez asked if Ms. Simoneaux could get the rail car number as well to ensure that is calibrated properly. She shared information as to where the rail car number can be found.

Bus Service Changes Effective December 2021:

Mr. Hamre stated in September, we launched a very resource intensive and innovative approach to restore ridership through the frequent service all day every day. For December we will continue to support that effort. Mr. Hamre shared data for ridership showing increase in ridership and bus service. Due to Delta variant, a public health issue has increased in absences in our work force. A challenge has been to match the service with the work force. We reviewed the performance of all the serving lines and came up with some minor modifications. Our service will be aligned with the workforce, meeting our requirements for ridership, making sure there was alternative service where adjustments were made, addressing any crowding issues being identified. We are making sure to be supportive of the equity initiative that has been identified by the Board and maintaining the integrity of the big service initiative that began in September. And then respond to the local initiatives and requests, specifically, the Alexandria Vision Plan, where we had a coordinated service plan, along with DASH, that changed the network of services within the city. The amount of Metrobus remained the same but it is used in different way.

Our service changes will take effect on December 26th. The current service levels were analyzed as it relates to the ridership, and some of the routes service was reduced as justified. Mr. Hamre shared a list of some routes with reduced service, effective December 26th. Mr. Hamre stated as he mentioned earlier that the Cinderbed division will move under WMATA, for a few days, while the contractor vacates the offices, buses would service out of Shephard Parkway Division.

Metrobus E – Paper Signage Installation Locations:

Mr. Hamre stated we have been deploying a relatively new product called E-Paper, which is like a Kindle, in a larger size, allows for more flexibility for the designer on how you display the information in real time. We have a product called digital bus stop signage that is cheaper than the e-paper display, battery powered, primarily used for some initiatives that we have used in Virginia for the pandemic. We are purchasing that product from a company called the Luminator. That company also provides the destination signs on the buses. So far, we have deployed 62 signs at various bus stops across the region. 23 of them are on the right of way within the District, 26 are in Prince George's County, six are in Montgomery County, three in Alexandria, one is Arlington, and three in Fairfax. We anticipate getting another 100 of these signs until June 30th, 2021, identifying the key locations of higher priority for installations for these displays. Many of you have seen them, it is a little bit larger than a tablet, and are solar powered. Mr. Hamre stated they have been working with the DDOT on these solar powered E-Paper signs.

Mr. Hamre shared information on the orientation of various signs: 100 or more boarding at a bus stop then that requires a grid electricity, the LED sign; 50 or more boarding at a bus stop then that needs an E-Paper sign, 25 or more passengers could have the digital bus signs. The various signs have audios and the capability of having information in Spanish as well. The future of this program, for the 1205 bus stops in the system, pre-COVID would have warranted an LED display. There are over 1700 bus stops, pre-COVID would have warranted an E-Paper Sign. Post COVID, along with the jurisdictions, we are in the process of reviewing the needs. In the future, we aim to have higher reliability, along with bus capacity information, as well as detour information to our riding public.

Chair Calabia asked about the information that would be provided via audio. Mr. Hamre stated it would be the direct interpretation of the information available on the signs, including bus route and the time for the bus.

Ms. Ray stated for floating bus stops, changing the bus stop designs, she recalled that Mr. Hamre had talked with the Committee, about the bus stop flag. Having the best visible sign was discussed and the colors would be discussed. Ms. Ray also about the

bus stop numbers for bus ETA. Those signs are hung very high and recommended to move those signs down. Ms. Ray asked where the audible signs are and how to find them. Mr. Hamre stated about the height of the signs is a challenge he is discussing with the installation team. Regarding the audio buttons, a standard is being developed that would work on all the signs.

Public Comments:

There were no public comments for this section.

The public comments can be received via email: MetroAACChair@wmata.com, or via phone call message by calling 202-962-1100

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:01 p.m.