



Accessibility Advisory Committee

600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: November 15, 2021

In attendance: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Tino Calabia, Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Deborah Fisher, Phil Posner, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Anu Sharma, AAC Coordinator, started the meeting with usual announcements, took the rollcall, and read the agenda. Afterwards, Chair Semelfort moved the meeting forward.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The MAS approved the November 15, 2021 meeting agenda as amended with an additional topic: MetroAccess Vans Update by Christiaan Blake.

The MAS approved the October 18, 2021 meeting minutes as written.

Customer Service and Outreach Reports

Customer Service:

Kay Clark stated there were no outstanding public comments from October's meetings.

Ms. Clark stated MetroAccess received a total of 291 commendations as follows: First Transit 43, Transdev 68, MV 47, Challenger 46, Diamond 79, MTM 1, Eligibility 1, and Abilities-Ride (Curve) 6.

Outreach:

There was no outreach performed during this time of the pandemic.

Michael Wilson and AAC MetroAccess Safety Awards:

Marlon Bates, First Transit, presented the Michael Wilson and AAC MetroAccess Safety Awards to Dennis Watson, Operator for five years. On February 4th, Mr. Watson had an incident when there was an out of control vehicle that came rapidly rolling down the hill into the path of his vehicle. Although Mr. Watson was unable to completely prevent the guardrail collision, he showed great skill and laser focus on safety by not going over the guardrail and into the woods. His safe actions saved him and his passengers from very serious injuries. Mr. Watson enjoys transporting passengers to and from their destinations in a safe, customer friendly, and timely manner. He is a professional who can be depended upon being timely and ready to perform his responsibilities in a way we can all be very proud of. Mr. Watson thanked everyone in WMATA and First Transit for this award.

Rush Award:

The Rush Award has been deferred until the time of in-person meetings.

Return of Shared-Rides on MetroAccess – Update:

Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, stated we have returned to shared rides on MetroAccess. We are back to normal service on MetroAccess and will remain safe by continued enforcement of facemask wearing and by maximizing ventilation in the vehicles. We continue to stress that customers should not talk with drivers during the door-to-door escort or when a driver is engaged in the securement process.

Chair Semelfort shared an experience of riding a van where he had to climb over a customer using a wheelchair. He asked how to minimize a situation where customers do not get in contact with each other. Mr. Blake stated the current van is tight when we have a person using a wheelchair along with other riders. Even before the pandemic, we did not want any customer touching another passenger, therefore, drivers should be asked for assistance. To avoid customers having to shuffle, as Vice-Chair Rush states, Mr. Blake stated the effort is to minimize shared rides. Therefore, we are trying to have a maximum number of vehicles on the street. Vice Chair Rush clarified she uses the words wiggle wobble, not shuffle as stated by Mr. Blake.

Chair Semelfort asked about a message on the Interactive Voice Response (IVR). Mr. Blake stated the referenced message would still be prudent for customers to take the seats in the back unless occupied. He also stated that the IVR message will be reviewed to either keep, remove, or update with more relevant statement.

Ms. Coles shared an incident where she was delayed in reaching her destination. Mr. Blake informed her that the trips would be reviewed to ensure adequate scheduling.

For health safety and exposure reasons, Dr. Posner recommended for trips with personal care attendants (PCAs) on sedans or taxis. Mr. Blake stated supposedly, the winter months are will be challenging therefore, sedans would have one passenger at this time. We are trying to spread the customers and are utilizing resources to minimize shared rides at this time.

Ms. Fisher asked about the percentage of people taking advantage this week with restart of shared rides. Mr. Blake clarified Ms. Fisher's question, as to what percentage of trips on MetroAccess have shared ride versus direct trips. Ms. Fisher stated she wonders if the intellectual/development disability (IDD) community providers are avoiding shared trips. Mr. Blake stated shared rides is not an option and discussed a metric that provides the number of passengers per van per hour. Mr. Blake stated that he would try to share the percentage of MetroAccess customers that had shared rides this week at the next meeting. Ms. Fisher offered assistance and stated if something can be done to meet with

the IDD providers to catch them up to the latest information. Mr. Blake appreciated the offered assistance.

MetroAccess Vans – Update:

Mr. Blake stated the solicitation for larger vans was underway, however, it was pulled back as additional information was received. The information received would be used to further enhance the solicitation, which is unlikely to complete by June 30th, 2022. Mr. Blake stated his office is working on purchasing some of the wheelchair accessible mini vans by June 30th, 2022. Any acquired minivans will replace current vans in use.

Chair Semelfort asked about the size and number of the minivans. Mr. Blake stated we would purchase 100 minivans, the shape would be different, perhaps with a sliding door that would accommodate a customer with mobility device along with two other passengers. We are moving towards the look of a traditional van with wheelchair ramp.

Vice-Chair Rush stated for it to be noted, if there is a person using a wheelchair on the van, and another person boards, you do the wiggle wobble to get on. Mr. Blake stated that is what we are trying to address with the purchase of a bigger van. Vice-Chair Rush stated a blind person may not know where to duck, down or sideways.

Dr. Posner reminded that the vans were unibody construction thus the upfitters could not do much. The location of the bore-wells prevented a lot of modifications that could have solved the problems. The location of the exhaust system was the third major problem. For future reference, Dr. Posner recommended that when they come out, the upfitters need to take a look at the view-wells, move out of construction, and the exhaust system before they make the purchase to see if they can make the modifications for the wide bodies to move around. He also recommended the autonomous vehicles in the future for shorter trips. The companies are looking to pilot them and might be great pricing.

Mr. Blake stated in the next MAS meeting, the Committee would hear about autonomous vehicles. We are looking for request for information (RFI) on such a vehicle and the areas of interest would be under the RFI. The autonomous vehicles are in use in Arizona. The concept would be under the Abilities-Ride vehicles, MetroAccess branded autonomous vehicles would not be on the test. Dr. Posner stated they have large centers in Buffalo and Michigan, Carol Peredo Lopez, Director, ADAP, is very familiar with those centers.

Dr. Posner also stated that for pilots, as per the law, a person must be seated in the driver seat for the autonomous vehicles. Mr. Blake stated we will review it further and

seek any advice from the Committee. Ms. Rush commented the blind leading the blind. Dr. Posner added that MetroAccess is now being led by blind leading the blind.

MetroAccess Sedans – Update

Mr. Blake stated 50 additional sedans would be received by June 2022, whereas the next purchase will be after 2025. Mr. Blake stated the Board has mentioned of acquiring electric vehicles, however, options for our passenger base may not exist. We are looking at a multitude of vehicles.

Open Discussion:

Dr. Posner informed the AAC members about the upcoming Board Meeting this week.

Vice-Chair Rush stated AAC members attendance needs to be reviewed until June 2022. She also asked about the Hedding Award presentation. Ms. Sharma stated that in the last meeting, there was a proposal to add awards, which is to be discussed further in the December AAC Meeting, accordingly, the award ceremony would be held in either January or February. Mr. Sheehan concurred with the information shared by Ms. Sharma, and that the last ceremony was held in February.

Vice-Chair Rush asked if rides have increased on weekends due to the flat fare of \$4. Mr. Blake stated the flat weekend fare has not impacted the ridership on MetroAccess.

Vice-Chair Rush stated the Federation for the Blind had a convention over the weekend. There were about 25 people who needed to be picked up. Although, in the past, there have been problems, she received a call and was informed that there was no problem this year. She thanked Mr. Blake for this service. Ms. Rush stated she hears that she does not treat Mr. Blake right, but she does. Mr. Blake concurred that Ms. Rush does treat him well.

Mr. Blake introduced Mr. Goldstein, Editor, Transit Access Magazine, he frequently joins the MAS meetings, and occasionally has quoted him. Mr. Blake asked if Mr. Goldstein would like to make any comments, to which, he declined.

Public Comments:

There were no public comments for this meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:09 p.m.