

Riders' Advisory Council

October 3, 2018

Members Present:

Katherine Kortum, Chair, District of Columbia
J. Clarence Flanders, Vice Chair, District of Columbia
Bob Fogel, Vice Chair, Maryland
Lorraine Silva, Vice Chair, Virginia
Debra MacKenzie, Virginia
Rebekah Mason, Maryland
Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/AAC Representative
Wil White, Maryland

Other Individuals Present:

Christian Dorsey, WMATA Board Member (via phone)
John Pasek, Assistant Board Secretary, Metro

Call to Order:

Ms. Kortum called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. She noted that this may be the Council's final meeting, as the Board is proposing to act to disband the group at its October 25th meeting.

RAC Operational Review:

Mr. Dorsey then joined the meeting via telephone. Ms. Kortum said that she had spoken to Mr. Dorsey about the group's proposed dissolution and addressed the Board on this topic, so she wanted to give other members the opportunity to make comments. Ms. Kortum then opened the floor to comments from Council members.

Mr. Flanders said that while he understood some of the Board's comments about collecting information via surveys or via Amplify, but that there is also a uniqueness in having individuals with direct lines of communication to Metro staff and to the Board that can't be easily replicated by those methods. He said that the work that the RAC has done has been helpful in interpreting feedback between the Board and the public, including relaying rider concerns and frustrations to the Board.

Mr. Dorsey said that in order to use the group's time efficiently, he wanted to give everyone a chance to make comments before making any remarks. Ms. Kortum then opened the floor to further comments from Council members.

Mr. Sheehan said that the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) is on record as wanting the RAC to continue. He said that he thinks there is synergy between the advice and guidance that

the RAC and the AAC provide to WMATA and the Board, with the AAC offering more operationally-focused advice, and the RAC's advice being more budget and policy-focused. He said that he would advise the Board to reconsider the group's elimination.

Ms. Mason said that she has concerns about the dissolution of the RAC and thinks that it's a mistake. She said that the platforms the Board wants to use for getting input aren't adequate. Ms. Mason said that the RAC could be more efficient if it were given more opportunities and tools to communicate effectively with the Board. She added that the RAC has had to be more reactive than proactive in its providing input to the Board. She said that members have been passionate advocates for transit and could have been ambassadors for the improvements that Metro wants to make, and urged the Board to reconsider its decision. She said that the Board's decision is demoralizing to group members. Ms. Mason added that she thought that the RAC was misled with regard to the Board's endgame for the operational review, and that the lack of appointments to fill vacancies during the review means that the Council's membership has declined and it can no longer represent the full range of Metro riders. She said that she thinks this is a horrible signal to the community that the Board doesn't care about riders.

Ms. MacKenzie noted that the Board was responsible for creating the RAC and is responsible for appointing its members, and that the Board created the group to give it better visibility of what's going on. She said that she thought that there had previously been better communication between the RAC and the Board, but due to staffing changes and reorganizations over the past few years, that has changed. Ms. MacKenzie explained that the RAC is composed of members that have extensive backgrounds in transportation planning and operations management and are out in the public talking to riders. She said that the RAC brings face-to-face accountability to WMATA, and asked that the Board reconsider its decision to dissolve the Council, though she noted that the RAC hasn't heard directly from the Board that it will dissolve the group, and, in fact had heard the opposite from the Board, specifically that it wanted to reorganize the group to help it perform better. She said that she thinks that Metro will lose input from a large segment of riders by requiring certain technologies to participate in providing feedback and that by using Amplify and other tools, Metro will control the dialogue, asking questions about what Metro wants to hear, not what riders want to share with Metro. She said that part of Metro's plan to retain and increase ridership should involve keeping the RAC.

Ms. Silva remarked that the RAC had previously been told by Board members that its input was valuable and useful. She asked Mr. Dorsey whether the Board had concerns about the RAC's staff. Mr. Dorsey replied that staffing levels were one issue that had been identified by Board members, but were not the Board's primary concern. Ms. Silva said that she thinks that the information gathered from Amplify won't accurately reflect customer sentiment and that it will discourage participation from low-income riders, who are dependent on transit. She said that online participation shouldn't be the only way for a customer-facing organization to solicit feedback.

Ms. MacKenzie asked further about the Board's staffing concerns. She noted that Amplify offered members rewards and gifts for participation, while RAC is an all-volunteer group, and that it's not clear to her what costs are involved in supporting the RAC.

Mr. White said that he spoke with a rider on his way to this evening's meeting who, in response to Metro's plan to solicit feedback via surveys, noted that no one responds to the surveys that Metro distributes. He noted that the RAC provides a face that can be out-and-about talking to the public, and explained that he joined the Council in order to try and make a difference rather than just complain. He also noted that the RAC hasn't been provided the opportunity or support to do its own social media outreach, which would have allowed the group to get a great deal of input and access to the community at little cost. He said that he thought Metro's idea to disband the group was a bad idea, especially that it isn't really a cost issue.

Mr. Dorsey thanked members for their comments and specifically thanked Ms. Kortum and Mr. Fogel for their engagement on this issue, especially during the operational review. Mr. Dorsey noted that he represents a minority on the Board in his viewpoint that the RAC should be maintained and that he would try to explain what he had heard from his colleagues on this issue. Mr. Dorsey explained that he volunteered to lead the review once the conversation began, which was centered on two areas of concerns: 1. From RAC members, to be able to provide more value to the Board, specifically that its input was appropriate and valuable to the Board's work; and 2. From the Board, how to better figure out the value of the RAC's input.

Mr. Dorsey explained that there were a series of discussions and that consensus was reached fairly early in the process on reform proposal that addressed broad rider representation as well as process reforms related to meeting frequency and committee structure as well as issues around appointments and recruitment. He said that the proposal also included clear expectations and guidelines regarding communications between the Board and the RAC so that members felt more valued for their service and Board members had a greater sense of the RAC's value. He explained that after reaching that point, the Board, now composed of only eight members, ended up with a different conclusion, namely that the value of the RAC's input could instead be supplanted by Public Participation Plan (PPP) activities, specifically Amplify.

Mr. Dorsey then reviewed his position on the Board's proposal. He noted that he disagreed with the Board's decision in that matter, and thinks that he colleagues on the Board have misunderstood that there isn't one type of feedback that is more effective than any other. He added that while he thinks that there is value in feedback obtained via Amplify, that feedback is in response to questions asked by Metro. He said that social media feedback has value. And he said that the RAC has value in providing deliberative feedback on issues that affect the agency from a rider perspective. He said that, as an agency, WMATA should be pursuing feedback from all of these channels.

Mr. Dorsey said that the net effect of the Board's decision is that RAC members feel demoralized and that there was a breach of trust and he apologized for that. He said that even though he disagrees with the Board's expected decision, he feels responsible that he was unable to persuade his colleagues with an appreciation of the value that the RAC has provided to the Board as well as the value that the group could yet provide to the Board. He said he was disappointed in his colleagues' decision and recognizes that this decision has had the effect of demoralizing members.

Mr. Dorsey explained that he expects that the Board will act on October 25th to dissolve the RAC, and that until Board acts, nothing is official. He explained to Council members that he didn't want them to hear the Board's decision just prior to Board meeting and felt that it was important for RAC to have the opportunity to gather its thoughts and relay those thoughts to the Board. He added that he will ask his colleagues to reconsider the decision and to adopt the reforms that had been previously agreed to. He noted that while he doesn't think he has the votes to change the Board's decision, he encourages RAC members to try and do so.

Mr. Sheehan thanked Mr. Dorsey on the RAC's behalf for standing up for the group. Ms. Mason and Ms. MacKenzie also thanked Mr. Dorsey for his work, with Ms. Mason adding that the group wouldn't be giving up until the Board takes action on October 25th.

Mr. Dorsey then disconnected from the meeting.

Public Comment:

Ms. Kortum then opened the floor to comments from members of the public.

James Pizzuro said that with the RAC gone, Metro will no longer have rider representation on the Board. He noted that Amplify is not a replacement for the RAC, and that social media also isn't a replacement for the RAC, in that it's highly focused on specific incidents and anonymous. He added that relying on WMATA to collect feedback via Amplify or social media is a mistake. He said that he thinks that it's ironic that Board is getting rid of RAC when it has no plan to address its ridership problem. He noted that the RAC hasn't been perfect, but because it relies on Metro for its funding and support, it was doomed from the start. He said that while riders should have representation on the Board through their jurisdictional representatives, it is clear that these representatives aren't taking rider concerns seriously. He noted that the Board will need to deliberate on Metro's FY2020 budget without the benefit of the doubt from riders. Mr. Pizzuro said that without some kind of intervention, Metro ridership will continue to decline, and explained that this failure we fall on the shoulders of Metro management and the Board.

Bill Orleans suggested that RAC should enlist current and former members to fight against the dissolution of the RAC and that any Board members voting to dissolve the RAC should be

prepared to justify their decision. He noted that the RAC isn't statutorily required like the AAC, and that he thinks that the RAC should fight its dissolution. Mr. Orleans added that he also thinks that the RAC is under-informed as to what is happening at Metro and provided the example of Metro's ongoing Bus Transformation study, which has not been presented to the RAC and was not included at its kick-off meeting or subsequent meetings. He said that the RAC should insist on its participation and more robust public participation in these and other studies.

Pat Host commended members for volunteering. He said that he thinks that Metro's biggest failing is Metro's 'willful ignorance' of what's going on with riders. He told the group that while RAC isn't perfect, he sees it as the line of interaction between Metro and its riders. He asked the RAC to call for Mr. Wiedefeld's and Mr. Evans' resignation because they are not doing anything to improve the system or to increase ridership.

Ms. Kortum asked if any other members of the public wanted to make comments. She noted that Metro staff were supposed to come and talk about the cash-free pilot on Georgia Avenue but had cancelled their presentation.

Jamie Battle noted that he was a new resident of the District of Columbia and discussed his role on the Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) Citizen Advisory Committee and the successes it was able to achieve in terms of improving service. He said that cutting out the RAC cuts out the possibility for any improvements to the system. He provided examples of improvements at HRT that are occurring because elected officials are riding transit and said that he hopes that Board reconsiders its decision.

Ms. Kortum then turned the discussion back to RAC members.

Ms. Mason said that she would draft and circulate a letter for RAC members to review. She also spoke about the lack of information that the RAC has received from WMATA regarding ongoing pilots, such as the cash-free bus pilot on Georgia Avenue and fare evasion enforcement. She said that there remain several unanswered questions from these presentations and that she thinks that it's ironic that the Board is considering dissolving the Council now that it's asking tough questions. She provided the example of asking for information about the Metro Transit Police budget and how much money it spends on fare evasion enforcement, and whether those activities take away from other policing needs.

Ms. Washington noted that she had mentioned to Lt. Cmdr. Sepulveda that there needed to be a greater police presence at the West Hyattsville station due to the amount of incidents she sees there.

Mr. Flanders noted that the RAC differs from the Board in that all of its members use the system and that they are passionate about the system, which means that they have a fundamentally

different perspective than the Board. He said that he wants the RAC to continue, but not in the same manner as it currently operates; the RAC needs greater authority to request and receive information. He also noted that the RAC is able to engage with the community in ways that Amplify and the Board cannot. He added that he didn't think that the RAC has ever been properly-utilized by the Board and that this is, in the long-run, a detriment to Metro.

Ms. Mackenzie noted that she has seen a lot of positive changes under Mr. Wiedefeld's leadership including addressing safety issues and launching the "Back2Good" campaign. She noted that he reports to the Board, and that he is constrained by that dynamic. She noted that after Mr. Wiedefeld joined Metro, but before the operational review, the RAC had greater access to and interaction with Metro staff. She said that she would like to work positively with the Board, and that she came on the RAC to help make improvements. She said that it was unfortunate that, as the RAC was developing momentum, the Board began its operational review and its work has largely been on hold.

Mr. Sheehan noted that he had attended the RAC's first meeting and may be attending its last. He explained that the RAC has the ability to be involved in back-and-forth discussions between itself and the Board, and riders, and Metro staff, something that Amplify is unable to provide. He gave examples of topics where the RAC has been able to provide input – the design of the 7000-series railcars, Metro's budget, potential bus service eliminations, etc. Mr. Sheehan said that he thinks that the decision to eliminate the RAC is short-sighted, and that the RAC should emphasize that, as a deliberative body, it develops recommendations, which is its unique value. He noted that the AAC has been able to focus on accessibility issues because the RAC was able to provide input on other issues.

Ms. Kortum explained that Mr. Fogel had some ideas on how to influence the Board's vote regarding the RAC.

Mr. Fogel noted that the RAC needs a strategy to be successful on October 25th. He encouraged members to contact elected officials who could, in turn, reach out to the Metro Board. He also suggested that RAC members attend the upcoming Metro Board meeting and provide comments to the Board, and also suggested that the RAC consider writing an opinion piece for the Washington Post on this topic. Ms. Mason said that she would draft an opinion piece and circulate it to members for their review.

Mr. Flanders asked whether the RAC had considered contacting individuals who are Metro advocates, such as Unsuck DC Metro, or the Greater Greater Washington blog. Mr. Fogel suggested that members reach out directly to Board members.

Mr. Flanders asked if there were specific concerns that are prompting the Board to disband the RAC and that the RAC should acknowledge those concerns in any communications to the Board. Ms. Kortum said that she had been told that the concern focused on the amount of staff support required for the RAC and that the Board didn't feel like the value of the RAC's input was

commensurate to the resources required. Ms. Silva noted that there have not been concerns raised about the amount of staff support required for the AAC.

Ms. Washington said that she would explore getting an article in *The Express*. She added that she participates in Amplify and that she doesn't find it effective.

Mr. Flanders suggested the RAC to review the resources it needs to operate, and to explore ways to reduce its resource burden by doing things like changing its meeting times or taking on a greater support role. He said that until the RAC provides feedback that the Board finds valuable, it will always be on the defensive regarding the amount of resources it requires.

Mr. Pasek noted that, prior to the operational review, the RAC had several committee meetings, resulting in approximately a half-dozen meetings per month, many of which weren't well-attended. He noted that since the operational review began, the RAC hasn't been holding committee meetings, so that may be less of a concern. Mr. Pasek said he didn't have much insight into concerns about other staff resources required to support the RAC or respond to questions. Mr. Flanders said that the RAC was never told about these resource concerns or given the opportunity to address them.

Ms. MacKenzie said that the RAC could work through these issues, given the opportunity, and cited issues like preparation of minutes or meeting support as issues that could be explored. She also noted that Metro staff ran into conflicts between their regular jobs and the support they provided to the RAC.

Ms. Mason said that there was a lack of data provided to the RAC about issues that prompted the operational review. She noted that the Board approves the RAC's Bylaws and has the opportunity to amend the RAC's Bylaws as it sees fit to address these issues. She said that the RAC would be happy to make changes in order to address the Board's concerns if it were provided with information on what those concerns are.

Mr. Sheehan noted that Mr. Dorsey had mentioned a proposal for changes to the RAC had been developed and agreed to, and asked whether that had been shared with the RAC. Ms. Kortum said that, to her knowledge, there wasn't a written proposal from the Board, but she and Mr. Fogel met with Mr. Dorsey over the summer and came to agreement on issues such as the size of the Council, membership selection and other issues, many of which had been put forward in the RAC's proposal.

Mr. Sheehan said that the RAC and AAC have had both committees and working groups that were focused on addressing specific issues. Mr. Fogel explained that the RAC had agreed to changing its committee structure and schedule to address some of these concerns, though he said that he

was no longer convinced that issues surrounding committees are the main reason for the Board's decision.

Mr. Pizzuro discussed the Board's voting process and the jurisdictional veto suggested that the RAC's outreach should be broader than just reaching out to Board members.

Mr. Flanders said that the RAC needs to be clear that it is willing to make accommodations in order to come to a solution. Ms. Mason said that would be drafting and circulating a letter, and agreed that it would need to be forward-looking.

Announcements:

Mr. Pasek announced that Metro will be holding a public hearing on October 23rd regarding changes to parking rates and charging peak rail fares during off-peak times when Metro provides peak levels of service, such as on July 4th or other large-scale events. He noted that the hearing would be in the evening on Tuesday the 23rd, and that outreach materials would be appearing soon.

Ms. Kortum told members that anyone who wanted to attend the Board meeting is welcome and that it's scheduled for the morning of Thursday, October 25th.

Adjournment:

Ms. Kortum adjourned the meeting at 8:13 p.m.