

Riders' Advisory Council
April 4, 2012

I. Call to Order:

Dr. Bracmort called the April 2012 meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:37 p.m.

The following members were present:

Kelsi Bracmort, Chair, District of Columbia
Carl Seip, District of Columbia Vice Chair, At-Large
Lorraine Silva, Virginia Vice Chair, Arlington County
Ben Ball, District of Columbia
Stephen Clermont, Fairfax County
Frank DeBernardo, Prince George's County
Chris Farrell, Montgomery County
Dharm Guruswamy, At-Large
Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee Chair
Deborah Titus, Fairfax County
Carol Carter Walker, District of Columbia
Victoria Wilder, Montgomery County

II. Public Comment Period:

Kurt Raschke noted the Council's proposal to submit questions to Metro and said that he is glad to see that it is trying to hold Metro accountable. He said that the Council needs to ask tough questions of Metro and demand answers.

Linda Lee told the Council about an experience she had on the D8 bus where the driver made passengers fold up their grocery carts before bringing them on the bus. She said that she wanted to know what the policy was for bringing folding carts on Metrobuses. Ms. Lee also noted her concerns about the ongoing joint development at the Rhode Island Avenue Metrorail station and the effect that this development is having on bus traffic into and out of the station.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Without objection, the agenda was approved as submitted.

IV. Metro Sexual Harassment Awareness Campaign:

Dr. Bracmort introduced Caroline Lukas from Metro's Media Relations Department to discuss Metro's public awareness campaign to combat sexual harassment.

Ms. Lukas provided the Council with background information on why the campaign was being launched and how Metro worked with advocacy groups to develop its message. She explained that the campaign would consist of three phases:

- Phase One: Web portal, email address and launch, which have been created;
- Phase Two: Public Service Announcements in the Metro System, which will be rolled out in phases throughout 2012;
- Phase Three: Employee training, including brochures, training programs and employee training videos.

Ms. Lukas gave an overview of the web portal where customers can report harassment and noted that all customers who contact Metro through this portal will receive follow-up from the Metro Transit Police or another appropriate agency, if requested. She also provided a timeline for when the public service announcements would be rolled out throughout the Metro system.

Dr. Bracmort said that she was glad that Metro moved quickly to address this issue once it was raised by its customers and added that she was glad that Metro was able to use existing materials from another transit agency so that it could implement its program more quickly. She asked whether the program would also reach out to bus riders and also how people who don't have access to the internet could report issues to Metro. Ms. Lukas said that posters will also be installed on buses as part of the program. She added that the web portal is an additional option for customers to report issues, and that customers can still contact Metro through its more traditional channels.

Mr. Seip noted that sexual harassment victims aren't limited to women. In response to his comment, Ms. Lukas noted that some of the wording on the posters will be changed to reflect this and that the program will also address how bystanders can get involved to report or stop harassment.

In response to a question from Ms. Silva, Ms. Lukas explained that if the harassment reported rises to the level of a crime, Metro Transit Police will follow up. She explained that because of differences in the law between the three jurisdictions, Metro has to follow the laws of the jurisdiction where the crime took place in determining whether the harassment reported constitutes a crime.

In response to a follow-up question from Ms. Silva, Ms. Lukas said that the video that was shown as part of her presentation would be used internally for employee training, and that discussions are still ongoing about the structure of that training.

Mr. Sheehan suggested that this information be shared with MetroAccess, as MetroAccess had recently completed a study of sexual harassment/assault on its vehicles.

Mr. Farrell noted that he recently observed someone verbally harassing riders at Wheaton, even though Transit Police officers were nearby. He asked what kind of training has been provided to the Transit Police. Ms. Lukas said that a directive had been issued from the Chief and that the issue of sexual harassment has been discussed as part of officers' daily roll calls. She added that more extensive training on how to address this issue is in the works.

Mr. Clermont observed that the artwork showing sexual harassment shows crowding like the crowding that typically exists on the Metro at rush hour. He said that part of alleviating the issue of sexual harassment is by addressing overcrowding which creates opportunities for harassment. Ms. Lukas replied that she understood Mr. Clermont's point but that there is a distinction between being on crowded train and being groped.

Ms. Walker suggested that it might be helpful to include real live people to share their experiences regarding sexual harassment as part of employee training, and that such an approach may be more powerful than showing a video. She said that she also wanted to echo Mr. Seip's comment that harassment isn't limited to women. Ms. Lukas noted Ms. Walker's suggestions and said that Metro would be continually refreshing this campaign so there will be opportunities to incorporate various messages as materials are updated.

Ms. Titus said that Metro may want to include training on how deaf or hard-of-hearing customers can report harassment to Metro Transit Police and also suggested that Metro clearly note that there Metro has zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

Ms. Lukas said that she would take all of the feedback she received back to the team working on this campaign and urged Council members to contact her if they had any further suggestions. Dr. Bracmort thanked her for talking with the Council about this issue and for offering to involve them early on in this campaign.

V. FY2013 Proposed Fare Increase/Budget Committee:

Dr. Bracmort directed the Council members to a draft letter outlining the Council's position on proposed FY2013 fare increases and then turned the floor over to Mr. Seip to further discuss this draft letter.

Mr. Seip explained that the Authority is facing a shortfall in its FY2013 budget and is proposing to make up about half of that shortfall through increased fares. He said that while no one likes to pay more, this is an opportunity for the Council to provide the Board feedback on how any increase could be structured. He then opened the floor to suggested from members to propose changes to the draft letter presented.

Mr. DeBernardo suggested removing the third sentence in the second paragraph. This was agreed to without objection.

Ms. Walker asked why Metro had proposed eliminating the peak-of-the-peak surcharge as part of its fare increase. Mr. Seip explained the Budget Committee's discussion of the peak-of-the-peak and why it decided to suggest that it should be retained. Mr. Pasek explained that Metro proposed to eliminate the peak-of-the-peak surcharge because:

- It didn't shift customers' travel patterns as originally intended;
- Customer dissatisfaction and confusion with the surcharge; and
- Eliminating this surcharge would reduce the number of fare combinations, which would reduce the strain on Metro's fare collection systems.

Mr. Guruswamy added that if the peak-of-the-peak surcharge were eliminated, Metro would have to implement all of the other fare increases outlined in the docket in order to close its projected budget gap. He explained that while keeping the surcharge wasn't popular with members of the Budget Committee, it was the "least worst" option.

Mr. Ball noted that there wasn't a mention of MetroAccess fares in the letter and this was something that was brought up by a lot of people as part of the public hearing process. Mr. Seip said that the Council would defer to the Accessibility Advisory Committee's recommendations. Mr. Sheehan said that the Accessibility Advisory Committee's (AAC) position is that MetroAccess fares shouldn't increase and that the Council had the option to concur with the AAC on this issue.

Ms. Silva said that the peak-of-the-peak fare was mentioned by a lot of participants in the public hearings and was very unpopular. She explained that the Council wouldn't be representing riders if it didn't suggest elimination of the peak-of-the-peak, especially since the General Manager is also suggesting that it be eliminated. Mr. Guruswamy said that if someone wanted to suggest eliminating this surcharge, they should suggest a way to make up that revenue, since the Council's current proposal closes the revenue gap.

There was further discussion among members regarding the peak-of-the-peak and its impact.

Mr. Seip moved approval of the letter as presented. This motion was seconded by Mr. Ball.

Amendment 1:

Mr. Ball moved to amend the letter to eliminate the Council's support of increasing the Metrobus fare. This motion was seconded by Dr. Bracmort.

After discussion, the Council voted on Mr. Ball's amendment.

In favor: Mr. Ball, Mr. DeBernardo, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Walker

Opposed: Dr. Bracmort, Mr. Clermont, Mr. Farrell, Mr. Guruswamy, Mr. Seip, Ms. Silva, Ms. Titus, Ms. Wilder

This amendment was not approved (4-8).

Amendment 2:

Mr. Sheehan moved to amend the letter to Council concur with the AAC's position that MetroAccess fares shouldn't be raised. This motion was seconded by Dr. Bracmort. After discussion, Mr. Sheehan clarified that the AAC's position also included proposals that would change the structure and reduce MetroAccess fares depending on how the fixed-route fare increase is ultimately approved. After further discussion, Mr. Sheehan withdrew his amendment.

Amendment 3:

Dr. Bracmort then moved to amend the letter to note that the Council would support keeping the MetroAccess fares at their current levels. This motion was seconded by Ms. Walker.

Dr. Bracmort noted that the Council would still have the option to discuss any proposals from the AAC regarding changes to the MetroAccess fares at a later date.

This motion was approved unanimously.

Amendment 4:

Ms. Silva then moved to amend the letter to support elimination of the peak-of-the-peak surcharge. This motion was seconded by Ms. Walker.

In response to a question from Mr. Guruswamy, Ms. Silva said that she didn't have a suggestion as to how Metro could make up the lost revenue from the peak-of-the-peak, but that the Council's responsibility was to represent riders' views to the Board, not to come up with sources of revenue for Metro. Ms. Walker said that she agreed with Ms. Silva regarding the Council's responsibility to represent riders' views.

Mr. Farrell said that the peak-of-the-peak surcharge, while unpopular, is already in existence and has the capacity to change behavior, so the Council should support keeping it.

Ms. Titus suggested that Metro could defer construction of new facilities to provide revenue to offset fare increases. Mr. Pasek explained that money for new facilities comes from the capital budget, which is not funded by passenger fares.

In favor: Ms. Silva, Ms. Walker, Ms. Wilder

Opposed: Mr. Ball, Dr. Bracmort, Mr. Clermont, Mr. Farrell, Mr. Guruswamy, Mr. Seip, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Silva, Ms. Titus

Abstentions: Mr. DeBernardo

This motion was not approved (3-9-1)

The Council then voted, without objection, to approve the letter as amended, with Ms. Silva abstaining.

VI. Working Group Update:

Mr. Ball said that the Airport Accessibility working group would be meeting with the director of Metro's Office of Bus Planning on April 11th to gather information about Metro bus service to the region's airports. He said that he would send out a reminder to members about this meeting.

VII. Metro – Monthly Feedback Proposal:

Mr. Ball said that his proposal was to create a more formal mechanism for the Council to ask questions of Metro and get information. He said that this would make the interaction between Metro and the Council more public and more regular. Mr. Ball then outlined how the process would work.

Mr. Seip asked whether the Council could direct Metro staff in this manner. Mr. Pasek said that while the Council can't direct staff, it could ask for information from staff, and does have in its bylaws the ability to work with Metro staff.

Ms. Wilder said she had concerns about the possible volume of questions submitted by the Council.

Ms. Walker said that she liked this proposal because it is transparent. She suggested that this proposal be reviewed by Metro's Office of Counsel to ensure that they don't have any issues with the relationship that it lays out.

Mr. Guruswamy said that he agreed with Ms. Wilder's concern about the possible quantity of questions. He said that this proposal shouldn't be a substitute for Metro engaging the public directly, as well.

Mr. Ball said that he was open to suggestions on this proposal and didn't want to place too much of a burden on Metro, but that he didn't think that this would constitute that. Mr. Pasek noted that some questions could be more easily answered than others, and that this approach could be tried and evaluated based on how it works.

Mr. Seip noted that if Council members had questions they were always welcome to contact the chair and vice chairs to add an item to the agenda, though they have not gotten any suggestions to date. Dr. Bracmort said that she and the leadership team looked to members for their suggestions regarding agenda items and that it can be difficult to schedule items of interest to members.

Mr. Seip added that he agreed with Mr. Guruswamy that Metro needs to do a better job on its own of communicating with riders and answering their questions and that the Council should consider, in the future, passing a resolution urging Metro to broaden its communications.

Dr. Bracmort said that she would talk further with Mr. Ball and Mr. Pasek about bringing this back to the Council the following month and thanked Mr. Ball for putting this issue forward.

VIII. Questions/Comments on RAC and AAC Chair Reports:

Mr. Sheehan noted that much of his report was covered as part of the earlier discussion regarding MetroAccess fares. He added that he would like to talk with the Council at a future meeting about what the AAC is doing regarding bus stops since this was something that the Board had asked both groups to look into.

IX. Open Mic:

Dr. Bracmort said that she wanted to talk with the Council about how to reach out to the public and asked whether the Council should be more aggressive in getting people to its meetings or otherwise soliciting feedback.

Mr. Ball said that he thinks that Metro should be responsible for reaching out more to the public. Mr. Clermont suggested using electronic means to reach out to riders, such as creating a Facebook page or a Twitter account for the Council.

Mr. DeBernardo said that the only way that people know about Council meetings is to search out the information. He suggested that the Council should reach out to other rider advocacy groups to let them know what is going on with the Council and what is on its agenda. Mr. Farrell said that he agreed with Mr. DeBernardo's suggestion and said that he would also suggest inviting other advocacy groups to participate in Council meetings by including them on the agenda.

Mr. Guruswamy suggested that the Council may want to consider holding meetings in other locations, outside of downtown D.C., to make them more accessible for people to participate.

Ms. Titus suggested putting an announcement about Council meetings on the Fairfax County website and said that she could discuss this with her County supervisor.

Mr. Guruswamy noted that Metro's capital plan, as it currently exists, doesn't include any projects to expand capacity. He said that as a Council, the RAC should look at the implications of not increasing Metro capacity and advocating within the greater community for the need to fund capacity enhancements.

Mr. Farrell said that he brought a information on RideOn services to share with Council members.

Mr. Ball expressed his concern that the start-up costs for the Silver line are being passed on to Metro riders because they are being included in the FY2013 Operating Budget. He said that the Council should ask Metro whether a similar budgeting process would be used in Phase II of the project.

X. Adjournment:

Without objection, Dr. Bracmort adjourned the meeting at 8:30 p.m.