

**Riders' Advisory Council
Metrobus Subcommittee
December 12, 2007**

I. Call to Order:

Dr. Conn called the December meeting of the Riders' Advisory Council's (RAC) Metrobus Subcommittee to order at 6:03 p.m.

II. Roll Call:

Dr. Conn then took roll. The following members of the Subcommittee were present:
Dr. Sharon Conn, Prince George's County, Subcommittee Chair
Steve Cerny, Fairfax County
Justin Chittams, District of Columbia
Pat Daniels, District of Columbia
Rodney Elin, non-voting (arrived 6:16 p.m.)
Pat Sheehan, At-Large/Elderly and Disabled Committee (arrived 6:06 p.m.)

Michael Snyder, the chair of the RAC was also present at this meeting, though he noted that he is not a member of the Metrobus Subcommittee.

III. Public Comments:

There were no comments from members of the public.

IV. Minutes:

Dr. Conn noted that, because a quorum was not yet present, the Subcommittee could not vote on approving minutes from previous meetings.

V. 30-Line Project Update

Dr. Conn said that she would like to go on record as saying that WMATA has done a wonderful job of listening to residents' concerns. She noted that she has attended many of the project meetings, including the one earlier this week.

Dr. Conn also noted that the 30-Line is one of the oldest lines in the system and hasn't changed despite all of the changes in the city since it was established. She also discussed residents' concerns with the existing service.

Dr. Conn also suggested that the RAC write a letter to Jim Hamre, who coordinated the project to congratulate him on the success of the project. She also noted that Metro is seeking to implement these changes in June 2008 and that members of the public also have the ability to send their comments to the study team and continue to be involved.

Mr. Sheehan arrived at 6:06 p.m.

Mark Niles, from DMJM Harris Consulting gave an overview of the project. He said that the study team did an analysis of the issues with the line and also went to riders and conducted a rider survey to give riders the opportunity to voice their concerns about the service being provided. He said that the project also had a set of meetings (one in SE, one in NW) to allow riders to voice their concerns.

Mr. Niles said that the study team heard about several issues with the service:

- Bus bunching
- Crowding (especially as it relates to bunching)
- Long travel times
- Bus stop conditions
- Need for better supervision.

Mr. Niles said that the second part of the study focused on solutions and brought out four concepts to the public for their comments. He said that the four concepts involved:

- Operational improvements;
- Ways to improve reliability by splitting the route with overlaps;
- Ways to speed up service, such as with limited stops;
- A family of services that serve different travel demands within the corridor.

He said that these concepts were presented to the public in October. Mr. Niles said that most of the improvements were favorably received with the exception of the proposal to split the route, which generated some negative comments.

Mr. Niles said that the study team developed a recommended set of improvements which it presented to the public at community meetings in early December. Mr. Niles then described the recommended service for the benefit of members in attendance.

Mr. Elin arrived at 6:16 p.m.

Mr. Niles also talked about other operational improvements that would be included in the revised service, including better supervision and driver training.

He noted that there are other traffic flow improvements that can be made, including increased parking enforcement, traffic signal changes, and possible transit-only lanes at certain locations along the corridor.

Mr. Niles also discussed improvements for customer service and communications included in the recommendations, including new shelters, better route and schedule information provided at bus stops, better use of on-board announcements. He added that safety and security was expressed as a concern and the study is looking at ways to have a

more-visible security presence along the route. He also said that the study is looking at line-specific training for 30-Line drivers, such as information on landmarks or connecting routes.

Mr. Niles said that the study team is looking to make the recommendations more specific and take them to a public hearing in the February - March timeframe, in order to get the improvements implemented by late June. He then described a sample trip showing customers' options at certain points along the line and asked for feedback from members.

Mr. Sheehan asked about the NextBus program and its availability for these buses. Mr. Niles said that NextBus would be available when the service comes back in 12-18 months.

Mr. Chittams asked about a shelter that needs maintenance. Mr. Pasek said that he would follow up with staff.

Dr. Conn discussed some of the concerns raised at the Monday evening meeting:

- Route 39 doesn't serve Naylor Gardens area;
- Route 31 buses serving Georgetown would get stuck in the traffic;

Mr. Niles said that keeping the 31 on Wisconsin would allow people along Upper Wisconsin Avenue to access Georgetown.

Dr. Conn also asked about how supervision would work and if the supervisors would be Metro employees. Mr. Niles responded that they would.

Dr. Conn also asked why reserved (transit-only) lanes were not included in Georgetown. Mr. Niles said there are space constraints that would prohibit the addition of transit-only lanes in this location.

Mr. Phil Stewart (member of the public) asked about the ability of communication between supervisors and operators, as well as about the placement and use of strategic buses.

Mr. Elin said that he liked the idea of better communication and said that, he has learned during his bus advocacy, that operators usually have all of the information that customers need, and customers should be encouraged to ask them questions.

Ms. Daniels said that she agrees with the concept of increased communication, but said that there is a lack of communication between operators and passengers. She noted her concerns about bus drivers' interaction, especially with elderly and disabled passengers, about issues such as priority seating, kneeling buses, etc.

Mr. Snyder noted that some of the commitments in the study are coming from DDOT and

MPD. He said that, while he understands that DDOT is part of the study, he is interested in how WMATA can get commitments from these agencies for some of the improvements that are proposed.

Dr. Conn asked about the on-board announcements and whether they would be pre-recorded or left to the operators. Mr. Niles said that this would likely be a combination of the two, depending on the situation. Dr. Conn said that she has had experiences with operators not announcing detours and said that she is interested in how operators will receive training to make announcements. She also discussed the operation of bus lifts

Dr. Conn also noted that persons with disabilities aren't able to purchase senior/disabled passes at their local supermarket and asked that Metro look into this.

Mr. Stewart said that his understanding is that the only automated announcement Metro currently has is about safety and security, and suggested that announcements could also be included about moving to the back of the bus, not eating on the bus, etc.

Mr. Elin asked about whether the new D.C. shelters would have NextBus hardware, and said that he hadn't seen these displays in any of the new shelters. Mr. Niles said that it is his understanding that the new shelters would have NextBus capability.

Dr. Conn said that NextBus was a pilot program and WMATA was reviewing the concerns raised during the pilot period. She noted that she is concerned that it will take Metro 18-24 months to work out these problems.

Mr. Elin said that he thinks that NextBus information is integral to the limited-stop service and said that he had concerns about implementing the service prior to the availability of NextBus information.

Dr. Conn asked about the NextBus information displays.

Mr. Elin said that, while the program is suspended, passengers are still able to call in to the system and find out information about certain routes.

Mr. Sheehan asked whether the information gathered from the study was integrated with the bus stop inventory program. Mr. Niles said that the study used the inventory program's information in assessing bus stop conditions.

Dr. Conn said that it is her understanding that the limited-stop service would use existing buses and recommended that there be some kind of markings on the bus or on the destination sign to alert riders to the new routes, like the Circulator and MetroExtra service along route 79.

Ms. Daniels said that, despite the existence of the 79 for several months, many people don't know about the service. She said that Metro needs to do outreach for any new service so that passengers will know about the changes.

Dr. Conn thanked Mr. Niles for coming to the meeting and for answering questions.

VI. Approval of Minutes:

Mr. Elin moved approval of the May 9th, June 13th, July 18th and September 12th minutes. Mr. Sheehan seconded this motion.

In favor: Dr. Conn, Mr. Cerny, Mr. Sheehan (3)

Opposed: none

Abstentions: Mr. Chittams, Ms. Daniels (2)

This motion passed (3-0-2).

Mr. Chittams left the meeting at 7:01 p.m. Dr. Conn noted that this is his last meeting and thanked him for his participation.

Mr. Stewart said that he heard rumors that the Georgetown Blue Bus may be discontinued and that it may be beneficial for Metro to pick up this service. Mr. Stewart noted that he has concerns about the timing of the last 38B buses of the evening - one at 1:20am and one at 12:50am; he suggested that there be a bus leaving Farragut Square earlier (around 12:15am) to connect with the 10B bus leaving from Ballston.

Mr. Elin said that he has ridden this bus, and that it is sometimes quicker to take the bus at that time of the evening due to a lack of traffic and lack of passengers. Mr. Stewart said that his main goal is for a coordination of service.

Dr. Conn asked that Mr. Stewart write down his specific concerns and provide them to the staff coordinator. She said that Metro needs to ensure that there is coordination between the train and the bus services.

Dr. Conn thanked Mr. Stewart for coming to the meeting.

VII. Group Discussion – Accomplishments for 2007 and Recommendations for 2008:

Dr. Conn then moved to discuss to bus-related accomplishments from the past year.

She discussed the 30-Line study and noted that bus pass costs will not be increased in the fare proposal under consideration.

Ms. Daniels said that she would like to see increased communication between bus operators and passengers in 2008.

Mr. Sheehan said that, overall, bus accessibility has improved, especially with the increase in the number of low-floor buses. He added that he'd like to see greater enforcement of the use of automatic stop announcements on buses because these aren't always used.

Mr. Elin said that he thought that NextBus was a great system and that the RAC should work to bring it back at an even greater penetration. He added that he has always is able to hear announcements on buses, and doesn't have the same kind of success with understanding announcements on rail.

Mr. Snyder said that he wanted to report, now that he works in Virginia, that buses there are just as lacking in having appropriate schedules as they are in DC.

Mr. Sheehan noted that many other bus systems have free rides for individuals with disabilities or senior citizens. He said that the fixed-route bus system is the backbone of the transit system and its use should be encouraged.

Dr. Conn said that Metro did a good job of notifying the public about meetings, especially as it related to the 30-Line study. She said that she doesn't think that Metro does as good a job with using its website

Mr. Pasek noted that the fare increase proposal does include an increase in the transfer time limit to 3 hours, as recommended by the RAC.

Dr. Conn said that she felt that Metro has taken the RAC's concerns into account, especially as they relate to the buses.

Ms. Daniels said that the 79 MetroExtra service is a positive. She noted concerns about passengers getting on the bus not knowing that it is a limited stop service. Dr. Conn said that the 79 is a distinctive bus, and that any proposed limited-stop service won't have distinctive buses, which could be even more confusing to riders.

Mr. Elin said that almost all buses have automatic announcements and that including information about limited-stops should be possible.

Dr. Conn discussed her concerns with clearances at the renovated Friendship Heights bus terminal that prohibit many newer buses from serving the terminal and said that she is concerned that Metro didn't catch this mistake prior to construction.

Mr. Snyder said that many people have raised concerns about construction affecting bus stops, either at rail stations or in other locations. Ms. Daniels discussed her experience

with the ongoing construction at Columbia Heights.

Lillian White, a member of the Rail Subcommittee, asked if it's Metro's responsibility to make a construction plan for the buses, or if that is the responsibility of the jurisdictions.

Dr. Conn thanked everyone for coming out and wished them a happy holiday season.

VIII. Adjournment:

Ms. Daniels moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Sheehan seconded this motion.

All members present voted to adjourn, and Dr. Conn adjourned the meeting at 7:31 p.m.

DRAFT