

Riders' Advisory Council
April 1, 2009

I. Call to Order:

Ms. Zinkl called the April 2009 meeting of the Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:31 p.m.

The following members were present:

Diana Zinkl, Chair, District of Columbia

David Alpert, District of Columbia

Kelsi Bracmort, District of Columbia

Sharon Conn, Prince George's County

Frank DeBernardo, Prince George's County

Kenneth DeGraff, District of Columbia

Penny Everline, Arlington County

Chris Farrell*, Montgomery County

Dharm Guruswamy, At-Large

Carl Seip, At-Large

Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee Chair

Carol Carter Walker, District of Columbia

Robin White, Fairfax County

Lillian White*, City of Alexandria

* - Arrival times for members who arrived after the beginning of the meeting are noted in the body of the minutes.

The following members were not present at the meeting and had previously advised the Chair or staff of their planned absence from the meeting:

Steve Cerny, Fairfax County

Patricia Daniels, District of Columbia

Mary Kay Dranzo, Montgomery County

Susan Holland, Prince George's County

Lora Routt, Montgomery County

Evelyn Tomaszewski, Fairfax County

II. Public Comment:

Bill Orleans from Greenbelt, Maryland offered comments to the Council about Metro's plans to reduce bus service to balance its FY2010 operating budget. Mr. Orleans expressed his concerns with the Board's proposed course of action to balance Metro's budget and said that the public

hearing process represents a prime opportunity for the Riders' Advisory Council to challenge Metro's Board of Directors on this proposal.

Mr. Orleans also mentioned his concerns about specific bus routes that would be discontinued as part of the proposed cuts. He noted that the R3 route provides the only access to the National Archives in College Park and the C7/C8 route provides the only access to the Riderwood retirement community from Prince George's County.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Dr. Bracmort moved approval of the agenda as presented. This motion was seconded by Ms. Walker. Without objection the agenda was approved as presented.

IV. Approval of March 4, 2009 Meeting Minutes

Ms. Zinkl noted that the minutes for the March 4, 2009 meeting were not delivered to members until shortly before the meeting and subsequently requested that the approval of the minutes be deferred until the next Council meeting.

V. Report by Accessibility Advisory Committee:

Mr. Sheehan provided the report from the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC). He noted that members had recently identified an issue with scheduling MetroAccess trips and that, upon further research, the issue was caused by schedulers hitting keystrokes in the wrong order when making customers' reservations.

Mr. Farrell arrived at 6:42 p.m.

Mr. Sheehan also noted that the AAC had a presentation scheduled on the NextBus program at its next meeting.

Lillian White arrived at 6:44 p.m.

VI. Metrobus Priority Corridor Network:

Ms. Zinkl then introduced Jim Hamre, from Metro's Office of Long Range Planning, to provide an overview of the proposed standards and policies for the Metrobus Priority Corridor Network (PCN).

Mr. Hamre explained that the PCN is composed of 25 corridors that have sufficient ridership to sustain a range of bus services. He said that Metro's goal in establishing a priority corridor is to increase ridership along the corridor by improving bus service to increase reliability, reduce travel time and improve customer convenience.

Mr. Hamre's presentation highlighted the performance measures that Metro hopes to in implementing priority corridors: travel time (decrease by 25%), customer satisfaction (increase by 15%), incidents (decrease by 12%) and on-time performance (increase by 15%).

Mr. Hamre then reviewed the guidelines for priority corridor services. These guidelines give specific thresholds for:

- Span of Service: the time from first morning trip to last evening trip;
- Frequency of Service: how often the services in the corridor operate;
- Productivity: the number of passenger boardings per vehicle revenue hour;
- Service design: including travel time, route patterns and the coordination of schedules with connecting bus and rail lines.

Mr. Hamre also gave an overview of the design factors for priority corridors, including features such as bus stop amenities and spacing between bus stops, the factors determining the frequency of buses and the desired load factor (the number of riders/the number of seats) for both local and express service. His presentation showed the various elements that would need to be addressed in order to create a priority corridor and noted that many of these elements, such as improvements to bus stops and traffic operations were actually the responsibility of the local jurisdictions. He also reviewed the specific characteristics that differentiate Metrobus Express service from regular (local) Metrobus service, such as specially-branded buses, improved stops and shelters and dedicated supervisory staff.

Ms. Zinkl noted that one of the key components of the PCN is cooperation from Metro's partner jurisdictions. These jurisdictional partners would assist with establishing signal priority for transit vehicles or for other roadway improvements and asked Mr. Hamre if this had been the case with existing priority or express corridors.

Ms. Zinkl also expressed her concern with the proposed 30-minute weekend headway standard for PCN routes. She said that in order for riders to rely exclusively on transit, headways need to be more frequent. Mr. Hamre noted that this standard would be the minimum for service and that actual headways could be more frequent if warranted.

Dr. Conn also expressed her concern at the proposed 30-minute headway standard.

Dr. Bracmort asked how the National Harbor service bus (NH-1) was able to make the priority corridor list, since it is a new route, as opposed to other, established routes that have higher ridership. Mr. Hamre noted that the list of routes was based on jurisdictional priorities.

Mr. Seip asked about the new paint scheme for Metrobus Express vehicles and what would happen to existing MetroExtra service. Mr. Hamre said that MetroExtra service would, over time become Metrobus Express service.

Mr. DeBernardo asked about the plans for expansion of the network and whether or not those plans are sustainable given Metro's financial constraints.

Mr. Guruswamy asked why the proposed load factor for the Metrobus Express service is lower than the proposed load standard for local Metrobus service. Mr. Hamre responded that the Metrobus Express service is envisioned as a premium service, and one of the features that would help make it a premium service would be an increased likelihood of riders getting a seat.

Ms. Everline asked whether any priority corridors were being considered as relief for the rail system. Mr. Hamre said that some corridors could function as relief for the rail system though they actually stand on their own as important travel corridors. He noted that corridors which are proposed for future inclusion in the PCN offer opportunities to provide relief to the rail system at chokepoints such as the Potomac River crossings.

Mr. Alpert said that Metro should set the proposed frequencies on the priority corridors high enough to provide "rail-like" service. He also asked whether Metro has had experience with "queue jumpers" that allow buses to bypass traffic at intersections. Mr. Hamre responded that queue jumpers and other proposed improvements are considered a "toolbox" of techniques for localities to consider when looking to improve bus service.

Mr. DeGraff asked Mr. Hamre whether he thought that the changes in bus livery will do enough to change the public's perception of bus service. There was additional discussion between Mr. Hamre and Mr. DeGraff regarding Metrobus color schemes.

Mr. Farrell noted that he would be interested in seeing the distance between Metrobus stops lengthened. Mr. Hamre discussed the challenges in terms of discontinuing service to bus stops but that Metrobus Express service could provide an alternative while still allowing for those local stops to receive service.

Lillian White asked how Metro got ridership information for the buses shown on the diagram. Mr. Hamre said that bus ridership data is regularly collected by Metro. Ms. White also asked about advertising and about bus stop amenities for the limited-stop services. Mr. Hamre responded that all stops on limited-stop services will need to have shelters under the proposed guidelines.

Mr. Sheehan asked if accessibility features would be standard on the priority corridors. Mr. Hamre replied that accessibility features are standard, including that all new buses ordered by Metro and are low-floor vehicles. He added that all limited-stop bus stops will also feature accessible pedestrian access.

Ms. Zinkl thanked Mr. Hamre for his presentation. She noted that much of the responsibility for making the kinds of improvements that would lead to better bus service rests with the local jurisdictions.

VII. Council Input on FY2010 Budget:

Ms. Zinkl provided the Council with background on the development of Metro's FY2010 budget up to the present point and noted that at its March 26th meeting, Metro's Board of Directors had authorized holding public hearings on service reductions. She noted that, due to the timing of the hearings and the proposed timeline for Board decision on service reductions, that there would not be a Council meeting between the hearings and the Board's decision. Ms. Zinkl added that this would preclude the Council from offering any comments on the hearing proposals as a group.

Ms. Everline said that she was very disappointed that the options being presented to the public as part of the public hearing process don't represent real options for the public.

Mr. Sheehan noted that he wasn't sure what kind of help the federal economic stimulus package might provide Metro in addressing its budget needs, but that the Council will need to provide some guidance to the Board of Directors related to the proposals for reductions in service.

Ms. Walker added that the Council needs to figure out what kind of statement it would be able to make as a group. Mr. DeBernardo noted that the Council has already provided input to Metro's Board of Directors in the form of the resolution that it approved at its March meeting on guiding principles for any possible reductions in service.

Ms. Everline said that any reductions in service should be a last resort for Metro. Ms. Walker suggested that the Council go on record noting that increasing fares to help balance Metro's budget would be a better alternative than to eliminate services.

Mr. Sheehan said that he would like additional information on the projects that Metro will be funding using federal economic stimulus monies and asked whether funding these projects is worth having eliminations in service, as opposed to transferring some of the stimulus money over to fund operations.

Dr. Conn added that she wanted to find out additional information about what stimulus funds could be used to pay for.

There discussion among Council members about having an additional meeting to develop comments to the Board of Directors related to the proposed reductions in service. By a show of hands, members determined that the largest number of members were available the following Wednesday (April 8th) to meet and discuss this issue.

Ms. Everline then moved that the Council pass a resolution that chastised the Board of Directors for not submitting a wider range of options to the public as part of the public hearing process. Dr. Conn seconded this motion.

There was discussion among members about the proposed resolution, with members asking for more specifics about its wording and intent. Ultimately, the Council did not vote on the proposed resolution.

VIII. Council Working Groups:

Ms. Zinkl noted that, following her March report to the Board, Board Member Michael Brown had asked whether the Council had any specific concerns or recommendations related to safety and security. Ms. Zinkl asked if any Council members would want to head up a working group related to public safety issues. Lillian White volunteered to lead this effort.

Ms. Zinkl also noted that the Council may also want to form a group to focus on issues related to Metrobus and asked members to consider this or other possible working groups.

IX. Adjournment:

Without objection, Ms. Zinkl adjourned the meeting at 8:35 p.m.