Riders' Advisory Council
December 4, 2013 Meeting Minutes

I. Call to Order:

Mr. Ball called the December 2013 meeting of the Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:42 p.m.

The following members were present:

Ben Ball, Chair, District of Columbia
Barbara Hermanson, Virginia Vice Chair, City of Alexandria
Carol Carter Walker, District of Columbia Vice Chair
Frank DeBernardo, Prince George's County
Pat Jackson, Fairfax County
Karen Lynch, Prince George's County
Pat Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee Chair
Lorraine Silva, Arlington County
Deborah Titus, Fairfax County
Fred Walker, Fairfax County
Mary Ann Zimmerman, Montgomery County

The following members were not present for any portion of the meeting:

Patricia King-Adams, District of Columbia
Candice Walsh, District of Columbia
Etta Cheri Washington, District of Columbia
James Wright, Prince George's County

II. Public Comment Period:

There were no comments from members of the public.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Without objection, the agenda was approved as presented.

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IV. 2013 Recap/Planning for 2014:

Mr. Ball provided the Council with an overview of its accomplishments in 2013. He noted that during the previous year, the Council had taken the following actions:

- Approved its report on Airport Accessibility;
- Implemented a Committee system;
- Provided recommendations on incident communications to the Board; he noted that the Council recommended specific actions and there have been some improvements in the way Metro handles communications during incidents;
- Provided feedback on emergency evacuation signage;
- Hosted "Listening Sessions" in Virginia and Maryland;
- Implemented new procedures for public comment at Council meetings;
- Drafted and approved a customer commitment statement, which was being taken up by Metro's Board of Directors.

Mr. Ball also noted that there were several items of unresolved business from 2013 that the Council would need to work on improving in the coming year, such as:

- Having more consistent committee meetings and to have those committees produce a more regular stream of issues for the full Council to consider;
- Developing a reliable and timely form of interaction with riders;
- Creating meaningful interaction with Metro staff
- Holding Metro accountable to its riders;
- Improving and deepening the Council's relationship with the Board of Directors;
- Increasing the Council's productivity.

He noted that the Council needs to focus more on overall results rather than members' personal experiences. He then opened up the floor for members' comments and asked for their thoughts on where the Council is currently and where it should try and go in 2014.

Comments from Council members:

Ms. Silva suggested that the Council have this discussion in January, when new members join the group. She said that it was too early to discuss committee participation before then.

Mr. Sheehan noted a couple upcoming items that should be on the Council's workplan:

- The "Station of the Future" modifications that are proposed for Bethesda and that will be then rolled out systemwide;
- Funding for *Momentum*, Metro's strategic plan. He said that it is important for the Council to understand the issues surrounding *Momentum's* implementation.

Mr. DeBernardo said that the committees were a good first attempt, but the Council needs to be more serious about formalizing these groups. He said that the committees need to have more

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regular membership to have greater cohesiveness and to operate better. Ms. Walker noted that some current members were reluctant to commit to an additional meeting every month, but that the recruitment process is making the time commitment required to be on the Council clearer to new members. She added that the Council lost almost one-third of its membership over the course of the year.

Ms. Hermanson said that the committee meetings needed to be more regular and predictable.

Mr. Ball asked Council members if there were any concrete products that they wanted to produce in the coming year.

Ms. Titus said that she would like for the Council to have a training or orientation session for new and returning members.

Ms. Zimmerman noted that there is tension in the Council's role between long-term and short-term issues and the Council's ability to respond to Metro presentations in ways that are both useful and timely. She said that the Council needs more consistent and timely staff support in order to be effective.

Mr. Sheehan noted that the Accessibility Advisory Committee has the bulk of its staff presentations at its subcommittee meetings, with recommendations coming to the full Committee. He also told RAC members that the AAC had implemented a policy of having alternates who could fill any vacancies on the Council as they arise during the course of the year.

Comments from Members of the Public:
Mr. Raschke noted that, concerning the Council's role, that there is a tension between it acting as a conciliator between the board and the riding public and the Council acing as an advocate for the riding public. Mr. Raschke said that when Mr. Ball noted that the Council has become closer in its relationship with the Board, it is because the Council has been more conciliatory towards the Board. He said that the Council should be taking riders requests to the Board, even if it considers those requests "unreasonable."

Mr. Raschke also said that sometimes the timing of staff's presentations to the Council are sometimes deliberate and cited examples of presentations on railcar designs and payphone availability. He said that there is an opportunity for the Council to ask the Board to have staff come to the RAC in sufficient time for its input to have an impact.

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Comments from Council members:
Mr. Walker said that the Council needs to explore having a senior Metro executive serve as a liaison to the group. He added that it isn't obvious that the Council is getting management's attention. He also suggested that the Council should focus on a few issues, and said that the group could have been more impactful if it had focused on a smaller number of issues.

Ms. Walker said that she felt that it was important for members to have opportunities to get to know each other better, and that the group could also do better in terms of planning its activities, specifically by adopting a longer planning horizon.

Ms. Hermanson said that she agreed with Mr. Walker's point about the need for the Council to focus on a few important issues, but added that she isn't sure how to marry that suggestion with the fact that Metro is making decisions on hundreds of different things.

Mr. DeBernardo said that the Council needs to look at a longer timeline for its input, specifically that the Council should look five years out to find ways to have an impact on Metro rides in the long-term.

Ms. Zimmerman asked how the Council can get riders' input and use it. She noted that there are all sorts of conversations about Metro going on – through Dr. Gridlock in the *Washington Post*, on blogs and in other places. She asked whether there is a way for the Council to link up with other groups.

Ms. Lynch said that the Council needs to focus on marketing the RAC and on letting people know that the group exists. She said that if the meetings were well-attended, this would get the Board's attention, but so long as there isn't an outpouring of public criticism, she isn't sure how much influence the Council will have.

Mr. Ball said that he would type up these comments and provide them to the Council's 2014 leadership team.

V. Maryland Listening Session Recap:

Mr. Ball noted that no members of the public showed up to the "Listening Session" that the Council held in Largo just prior to Thanksgiving. He said that one member of the Board, Kathy Porter from Montgomery County, did attend, but that was it. He said that there were many factors that could have influenced attendance – it was held during Thanksgiving week, and there was a Redskins game being played nearby, but that the publicity for this session wasn't substantially different than what the Council did for its Listening Session in Virginia, which

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attracted a lot more people. He said that the upshot is that the Council will need to find a better way to let people know about future events.

Mr. DeBernardo suggested either co-sponsoring or co-hosting events with other groups. Ms. Walker said that she was interested in what people planned to accomplish as part of the session and also noted Mr. Wright's comment at the session that the Largo area didn't have a high level of civic engagement.

Ms. Lynch said that her goal for the session was to listen to riders and to get their ideas on how Metro can improve.

VI. Meeting with Metro Board Leadership:

Mr. Ball told Council members that the Council's leadership met with the Board's leadership on November 21st. He said that about half of the meeting was spent discussing the customer commitment statement that the Council had approved in November. He noted that Board members had many of the same reactions and raised many of the same points that Council members did when they debated and eventually approved their version of a customer commitment statement. He explained that the Board's Customer Service and Operations Committee will be taking up this issue at its December 5th meeting and that the Board is taking this discussion to the next level in terms of ensuring that Metro lives up to the commitments outlined in the document.

Ms. Hermanson said that Board Vice Chair Mort Downey's goal was to have the Board approve two things – a summary statement and a more detailed statement, with each having different uses.

Mr. Pasek explained that once the Board approves the customer commitment document, it would be rolled into Metro's new customer care program for implementation.

Ms. Walker said that she thinks there will be interesting discussions after the customer commitment statement is approved and added that she hoped there would be public pressure to ensure that Metro lives up to its commitments.

Council Media Policy:

Mr. Ball noted that earlier in the year, Metro's Office of Media Relations (MREL) had asked Council members to let it know when they were contacted by members of the media. He said that the policy given to the Council leadership at its meeting with the Board's Executive Committee takes this one step further and requires RAC members to get approval from MREL before speaking with the media. He said that he thinks that the policy outlined in the document is "internally inconsistent," noting that members of the RAC are not employed by Metro and that

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he “bristles” at the idea of having to clear his comments with MREL. He added that he understood that the RAC is an extension of the Board and the need for the Board to “speak with one voice;” and that if the RAC is part of the Board, it should follow its guidelines. Mr. Ball said that he would like to hold a vote on whether or not to accept this policy and would like to have a dialogue with Media Relations about what prompted the implementation of this policy. He then opened the floor to questions and comments from members of the Council.

Mr. DeBernardo said that his initial response to this policy was negative and that he didn’t understand why no one came to present this policy to the Council directly. He said that when he served as chair, he felt a great sense of responsibility to the RAC, moreso than to the Board, and this isn’t in reflected into this policy.

Ms. Silva said that she is not sure how this policy would work, logistically – if she is contacted by the media, she wouldn’t have time to clear her comments with the Office of Media Relations.

Ms. Hermanson said that there wasn’t much of an opportunity to clarify this policy because the meeting had run out of time, but that it was her understanding that there is a differentiation between getting an email or phone call from the media as opposed to being approached in person. Mr. Ball said that, if one reads the policy closely, one is required to get prior approval in any case; he noted that the policy is internally inconsistent.

Ms. Zimmerman said that as a Council member, she would feels that it is her duty to clarify that she doesn’t speak for either the RAC or for Metro, and that the RAC already has a spokesperson – the Council’s chair. She said that she believes that the Council’s chair should have the ability to speak for the group and that if the chair made it clear that he or she was speaking for the group, not for Metro, that should be sufficient.

Mr. Walker said that this discussion provides an opportunity for the RAC to redraft this policy and send it back to the Board in a form that the Council can live with. He said that he isn’t clear of the scope of the policy as presented and whether or not there are restrictions on his talking to the press about other topics. Mr. Walker said that the Council should redraft the media policy into something that it is more comfortable with.

Mr. DeBernardo said that he agrees with Mr. Walker’s suggestion, but there first needs to be an open discussion of this policy with MREL at a RAC meeting so that members can get answers to their questions and to give Metro an opportunity to explain itself. Mr. Sheehan asked whether the proposal on the floor is to have Metro staff come and explain the policy. Mr. DeBernardo said that, after such a discussion, the Council could craft a policy it can live with. Mr. Walker said that he agreed with Mr. DeBernardo’s suggestion.

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In response to a question from Mr. Ball as to whether this should be considered by a committee or by the Council as a whole, Ms. Walker said this would likely fall under the purview of the Governance Committee.

Ms. Walker added that she didn't get the impression that Mr. Downs, the Board chair, wasn't seeking the Council's approval on this policy, he was transmitting it to them as something already in effect. Mr. Ball noted that he was "noncommittal" regarding the RAC's acceptance of this policy and didn't say that he agreed with the policy.

Ms. Silva noted that the policy, as written, says that it is effective November 21, 2013, so it is already in effect.

Mr. Walker asked if this policy was supposed to be an addendum to the Council's bylaws and asked whether there would be opportunities to discuss this policy in the context of the review of the Council's bylaws, which is planned for the coming year.

Ms. Hermanson told the Council that when Mr. Downs was explaining the policy to the Council leadership, he said that the media often likes to put groups at odds with one another and the aim of the policy was to ensure that the RAC and Metro are on the same page.

Ms. Zimmerman said that it would be helpful to clarify this policy as well as to put it into a form that can be useful to all parties involved.

Mr. Walker then revised his original motion; he moved that the Council review its bylaws and, as part of that review, discuss how the RAC interacts with the media, as well as request that someone from Metro's Office of Media Relations give the RAC guidance on this new policy. This revised motion was seconded by Ms. Zimmerman.

Ms. Lynch said that she thought the Council should draft its own media policy. Ms. Walker reminded the Council that any bylaws revisions must ultimately be approved by the Board.

Mr. Ball then called for a vote on Mr. Walker's revised motion. Without objection, and with Ms. Walker abstaining, this motion was approved.

Ms. Walker asked, given the discussion and vote on the media policy, how members are supposed to act with regard to this policy until they can obtain further clarification at the next meeting. Mr. Ball said that he put his feelings about the policy into action by speaking with NPR that morning.

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Ms. Zimmerman said that she didn't feel that the bylaws and the new protocol are in conflict with one another. She asked whether the Board had a similar media protocol.

Mr. Walker moved to table discussion on this topic until the January RAC meeting. Ms. Walker seconded this motion. Without objection, it was agreed to table further discussion on the media policy until January.

VII. RAC Business:

Mr. Ball reminded members that the elections for Council chair and jurisdictional vice chairs will be held in January and that interested individuals can declare their candidacy prior to the January meeting.

Ms. Walker said that by having elections in January, newly-appointed Council members, who have not previously attended any Council meetings are still eligible to run for office, and asked whether this should be changed in the future.

Mr. DeBernardo said that while previously, members running for office have circulated statements of candidacy prior to the January RAC meeting where elections are held, it is not required to do so.

Mr. Ball noted that a review of the Council's bylaws will begin in the new year as part of the Council's committee process.

January 2014 Meeting Date:

Mr. Ball told the Council that the first Wednesday of January fell on New Year's Day, meaning that the Council would need to postpone its January 2014 meeting by one week, to Wednesday, January 8th. Without objection, the January meeting was postponed to Wednesday, January 8th.

Mr. Ball added that there would be an opportunity for old and new members to meet and talk immediately prior to the meeting and that staff will arrange for an orientation session following the January meeting.

VIII. Open Mic:

Mr. Ball then opened the floor to members of the public and Council members who had any comments.

Comments

Ervin Pinckney, a member of the public said that he was attending his first Council meeting that evening and that it was difficult for him to find information about the meeting. He also told the Council that he rides the M6 bus, which runs in Southeast DC, and that, because of its limited

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hours, it is often difficult for him to get back home in the evening. He said that he would love to see the hours of the M6 extended later into the evening. Mr. Ball said that he would follow up with Mr. Pinckney. (ervin26@aol.com)

Without objection, the meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

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