

Metro Riders' Advisory Council
July 11, 2012

I. Call to Order:

Dr. Bracmort called the July 2012 meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:46 p.m. The following members were present:

Kelsi Bracmort, Chair, District of Columbia
Thais Austin, District of Columbia
Chris Farrell, Montgomery County
Dharm Guruswamy, At-Large
Barbara Hermanson, City of Alexandria
Joseph Kitchen, Prince George's County
Deborah Titus, Fairfax County
Carol Carter Walker, District of Columbia
Candice Walsh, District of Columbia
Ron Whiting, Montgomery County
James Wright, Jr., Prince George's County

II. Public Comment Period:

Juanita Stevenson of Northwest Washington raised concerns about the recent changes to the schedule of the Connecticut Avenue (L2) bus. She said that there is currently only one bus (L2) that operates up Connecticut Avenue on the weekends, as opposed to two buses (L2, L4) that had operated previously. She also raised concerns about the amount of transfers she needed to make to complete a recent trip.

Dr. Bracmort said that because many Council members ride the bus that they understand Ms. Stevenson's frustration and that the Council would make Metro staff aware of her concerns.

Mr. Guruswamy explained that L4 buses had been rerouted because of construction on 18th Street NW in Adams Morgan, and suggested that the Council should suggest that Metro reinstate the service once that construction is completed. Ms. Titus suggested that Ms. Stevenson check the Metro website for alternative trip options that might involve less transfers.

Mr. Wright said that because Connecticut Avenue is a major thoroughfare in D.C., there should be consistent service available, and noted that isn't often the case.

Ms. Walsh said that she had heard recently an announcement that one of the Connecticut Avenue lines had been eliminated. Mr. Kitchen asked that Mr. Pasek follow up with Bus Planning staff regarding the recent changes. Mr. Pasek said that he would let Bus Planning staff know of the concerns raised and try to get more information from staff about the details of the recent service changes, and what kind of feedback they've received from customers.

Ms. Titus suggested that the Council work with Metro to see if Metro could conduct a survey of riders along the line.

Ms. Austin, a newly-appointed Council member from the District of Columbia introduced herself to the other members of the Council.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Mr. Kitchen moved approval of the agenda as presented. This motion was seconded by Mr. Farrell. Without objection, the agenda was approved as presented.

IV. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Kitchen moved approval of the May 2, 2012 meeting minutes as presented. This motion was seconded by Mr. Wright. Without objection, the May 2012 meeting minutes were approved as presented.

V. Public Participation at Riders' Advisory Council Meetings:

Dr. Bracmort said that she wanted to open this topic up for discussion and asked Ms. Hermanson and Ms. Walsh to provide an overview of the proposals that the Council is being asked to consider.

Ms. Hermanson said that she and Ms. Walsh reviewed the proposals that had been suggested earlier and develop questions that would help frame the issues that the Council was trying to address with these proposals. She said that she hoped that after discussion, the Council would agree on a next step to take a proposal forward for comment or implementation.

Dr. Bracmort said that she supported additional comment by the public during portions of the Council's meetings, but that she wanted the group to have a comprehensive discussion of the proposals and the process. Mr. Kitchen suggested discussing the issue and, based on the tenor of the discussion, develop and vote on one proposal.

Dr. Bracmort added that the Council is flexible and can vote on something at this meeting and revise it as necessary later.

Mr. Guruswamy suggested that the Council allow comments to be submitted electronically by members of the public, similar to how the Board allows for electronics comments on some of its agenda items. In response to his question as to whether this would be possible, Mr. Pasek said that it could be done as part of the Council's webpage.

Mr. Whiting said that people should have the opportunity to provide comments electronically. He said that the current public comment period should be kept as-is, and suggested that comments on agenda items could be allotted at the end of the meeting. He added that he was concerned about the time impact of allowing comments during the course of the meeting.

Ms. Titus asked whether allowing comments from people not in attendance at the meeting would diminish attendance at Council meeting. Dr. Bracmort noted that allowing for electronic comments would provide an additional avenue for people who can't make the Council's meetings to provide feedback and may increase participation because it would mean that the Council would be more responsive to members of the public.

Ms. Walker said that, in her view, this debate is about power-sharing, and added that the Council shouldn't approve any provisions that would require it to "control" comments by members of the public. She said that she would also like to ensure that any comments provided by members of the public be assigned either to staff or to a member of the Council for follow-up.

Mr. Kitchen said that he liked the idea of electronic comments, and that he didn't like the first proposal presented (which would have required members of the public to provide their comments on comment cards and limited the number of questions/comments taken). He added that he liked the second and third proposal submitted, which allowed for direct comments from members of the public. He said that the Council needs to make its meetings a forum to air their concerns, though he didn't want to take comments on items that the Council has already debated and on which it has reached a consensus. Mr. Kitchen added that the monthly Council meeting should be a decision-making point and that the Council should use its committee meetings more effectively to debate and decide on positions that can be presented to the full group.

Ms. Hermanson asked if the Council had a process in place to get customer comments from Metro's Customer Service department. Dr. Bracmort said that the Council has asked for this information previously, but that Metro has indicated that that it isn't able to provide detailed information on the customer comments that it receives. Mr. Kitchen noted that riders can email the Council directly, through its website, but Mr. Pasek added that the majority of comments provided to the Council are copies of letters sent to customer service.

Mr. Guruswamy noted that if there is time carved out of the meeting for members of the public to provide comments, Council members will need to be aware that they will need to share their time.

Ms. Walker thanked Ms. Hermanson and Ms. Walsh for their work in putting together the proposals provided and added that she would prefer to discuss this issue in a smaller group and come back to the next Council meeting with one proposal for the full group to vote on.

Mr. Farrell noted that the Council itself doesn't have a lot of power – it needs to work to create relationships with members of the Board as well as create constituencies. He said the Council needs to be well-informed about issues but not get distracted by any notion of its own power.

Ms. Walsh explained that her understanding was that the Council would vote on a proposal at this meeting and try it out to see whether that works. She said that the Council needs to be a public voice and should start encouraging public comment to help it fulfill that role.

Mr. Kitchen said that the Council first needs to work on decluttering its own agenda and noted concerns about the Council receiving presentations and other items far enough in advance to review and provide thoughtful feedback on them. He added that the bylaws make it clear that the Council should be soliciting comments from the public on each agenda item and that the group shouldn't delay any further on implementing such a process. Mr. Kitchen said that while he understands members' concern about time constraints at the meeting, this isn't an issue because there have never been more than a few members of the public wanting to provide comments at any meeting. He noted that members of the public that have provided comments add insight to the discussion and, without the Council allowing for comments during the meeting, he isn't able to benefit from that insight.

Dr. Bracmort said that while she understood that

Ms. Titus moved that the Council close discussion and vote on a proposal at its current meeting. This motion was seconded by Ms. Austin.

In favor: Ms. Austin, Mr. Kitchen, Ms. Hermanson, Ms. Titus, Ms. Walsh
Opposed: Dr. Bracmort, Mr. Farrell, Mr. Guruswamy, Ms. Walker, Mr. Whiting, Mr. Wright

This motion failed. Ms. Walker and Mr. Whiting said that they would work with Ms. Hermanson and Ms. Walsh to draft a proposal that can be circulated prior to the next Council meeting. Mr. Guruswamy said that he hoped that the group would come back with one proposal for the group to vote on.

Dr. Bracmort said that the RAC leadership had asked for a presentation about the two recent events on the Green line, but was told that because those events happened very recently, Metro is still putting together information on those incidents. She said that the Council would follow up with Metro staff to get information about these events.

VI. Election of Maryland Vice-Chair:

Mr. Kitchen nominated Mr. Wright for the position of Maryland Vice Chair. This nomination was seconded by Mr. Farrell. There were no further nominations for the position of Maryland Vice Chair. Mr. Wright was elected unanimously by acclamation.

VII. Youth Town Hall Planning:

Dr. Bracmort turned the floor over Mr. Kitchen provided the Council with an overview of the planned Youth Town Hall planned for July 30th. He explained that this event is an outgrowth of a discussion at the Ward 7 Transportation Summit, and that the objective of the event is to get youth's perspective to help develop a comprehensive approach to addressing their concerns about regional transit.

Mr. Kitchen provided members with a sample agenda and gave the members an overview of the "Open Space" meeting format that would be used at the meeting, and explained that this meant that the agenda of the meeting would be participant-guided. He also noted that the goal would be not only for participant to identify problems, but also to discuss possible solutions and ways that they could help make those solutions happen.

Dr. Bracmort said that she is excited to see how this meeting plays out and sees the meeting as a listening session and an opportunity to hear from a significant group of Metro riders. She asked how Council members could assist with this meeting. Mr. Kitchen said that members were welcome to attend – either just to listen or to help record the discussions at the meeting so that, after the meeting, the Council can work with youth to follow up on the issues raised.

In response to a question from Mr. Farrell, Mr. Kitchen said that the event would be held at the Blackburn Center. He added that if members wanted to be involved in the working group that's planning this event, Mr. Pasek would let members know when that group would be meeting.

Ms. Sequeira asked the Council about its objective and structure for the meeting. She noted that there would be a large number of participants and a limited amount of time at this meeting to accomplish their objective.

Mr. Kitchen said that he thinks that the participants need to decide on the objective of the meeting themselves.

In response to an additional comment from Ms. Sequeira, Mr. Kitchen said that he did not want youth behavior to be the focus of the discussion at the meeting, though added that he did think that this item would be brought up. He said that he was hesitant to equate youth with crime.

Mr. Wright said that he would attend the event and would be willing to moderate a discussion and is hopeful that this event will start youth talking about transit. Ms. Titus suggested setting ground rules for the meeting to ensure that it is productive.

Ms. Walker said that she has seen “Open Space” meetings work successfully in the past, but that the Council needs to ensure in advance of the meeting that there are sufficient people to help facilitate discussions at the meeting.

Mr. Guruswamy said that getting input is good and that he hoped that as the Council gets more information on young people’s priorities that it follows-up to help address these priorities. Dr. Bracmort said that she agreed and hoped that this would be a first step in the discussion.

VIII. Emergency Communications/Response Meeting:

Dr. Bracmort said that the Council member who was spearheading the meeting with Metro on its emergency response, Mr. Seip, wasn’t at the meeting and asked Mr. Pasek to lead the discussion on this item. Mr. Pasek gave some background on the origins of this proposed meeting – he noted that this idea was first brought up in May following some incidents on the rail system. He added that members of the Council’s leadership had met with members of the Metro Board who were supportive of having such a meeting. Mr. Pasek said that he wanted to get Council members’ input on the objective and goals for this meeting so that he can work with Metro staff to plan this event. He referred members to a proposed outline contained in their packet.

Dr. Bracmort said that one of the objectives should be to help inform riders what they can do for themselves when an emergency occurs.

Ms. Austin asked whether this meeting would be focused on “micro” issues involving individuals, or “macro” issues – events that involve a large number of passengers such as a train derailment. Dr. Bracmort said that she thought this would cover both types of events. Ms. Austin said that may be too much to cover in one meeting.

Mr. Whiting said that he would like to hear from Metro about how it trains its staff to react to incidents and how that information is relayed to customers during events. He said that he has heard numerous complaints that staff don’t know what to do during incidents.

Mr. Kitchen said that he thought that the outline presented was sufficiently thorough for meeting planning purposes, and that staff should be able to address issues raised by the public.

Mr. Pasek said that he was asking for members' concurrence with the meeting outline presented and if there were any items missing, that they let him know.

Mr. Kitchen said that his understanding of the meeting was that it would highlight what Metro's procedures were for incidents, whether those procedures were being followed and if there were opportunities to change those procedures to improve them.

Mr. Wright said that the meeting should also include information on what Metro employees can and cannot do during emergencies, including members of the Metro Transit Police.

Ms. Walker said that she thought that combining "micro" (personal security) and "macro" (emergency response) incidents should be broken up into two meetings, because they are too broad to combine into one meeting. Mr. Guruswamy said that he agreed with Ms. Walker that the meeting should be more narrowly focused, and that it should focus on major disruptions that Metro should be expected to have developed plans for. He added that his suggestion would be to intersperse presentations with an opportunities to ask questions.

Ms. Austin said that the meeting needs focus on security and should address how to improve responses from employees. She said that the meeting needs to produce a call to action to make improvements.

IX. Comments on RAC and AAC Chair Reports:

Dr. Bracmort gave a brief overview of the Council leadership's meeting with the Board leadership and Metro's chief of staff. She said that the meeting was productive and that there were four main takeaways:

- That there would be regular (quarterly) meetings between the RAC and Board leadership;
- The Board would provide a more structured response to the Council's recommendations;
- The Board wants to partner with the Council to host an Emergency Communications/Response meeting as discussed above;
- Board Chair Hudgins would plan to attend the Youth Town Hall.

Mr. Kitchen added that Board Vice Chair Tom Downs said that he wanted to ensure that the Council's recommendations were acknowledged by staff and responded to. He said that he also appreciated that the meeting was with all of the Board's leadership, not just with one of its members.

Dr. Bracmort said that she viewed this as a very positive step forward in the Council's relationship with the Board.

X. Open Mic/Community Meetings:

Mr. Kitchen told members that he had gone to speak with students at the Cesar Chavez Public Charter School to discuss transit advocacy as part of the school's broader discussion of transit issues.

Dr. Bracmort asked members to publicize Council meetings to members of other community groups they are involved with.

Mr. Farrell announced the upcoming meeting of the Action Committee for Transit, which will be held on Tuesday, August 14th.

Ms. Walsh noted that she went to the final public meeting of the 14th Street Bus Study which was held the previous month, and that staff was preparing to implement some of the study's recommendations. She said that some of the study's recommendations included providing limited-stop bus service along the 14th Street Corridor and changing parking in the Columbia Heights area. She added that she found the meeting and its format useful.

Mr. Guruswamy announced that because Arlington Transit didn't raise its fares in conjunction with Metro's fare increase, transfers between ART and Metrobuses now cost 10¢. He said that as these types of fare changes happen, Metro should make the effort to let riders know about them.

Ms. Hermanson asked whether the Council would be following-up on some of Metro's recent changes regarding – specifically the change in fares and the Rush+ service changed. She said that she wanted to know what the Council's role in providing following up with Metro after these kind of changes. After discussion, Mr. Pasek said that he would follow up with Metro staff to see if it would be possible to get information about riders' reaction to these changes. Dr. Bracmort said that this isn't something that the Council normally did, but

Mr. Wright noted that he attended a recent public meeting in Seat Pleasant on Metro's Central Avenue bus service.

Mr. Kitchen told the Council that he attended a planning meeting on the future of the Town of Cheverly and its future transportation needs. He said that many towns in Prince George's County are undertaking these exercises.

He also asked whether Council meeting agendas were being sent to people who had attended previous Council meetings and if there was a way for people to sign up to have agendas emailed to them. Mr. Pasek noted that he did not do that for this meeting because the agenda was finalized later than normal, but that he would email out the agenda for subsequent meetings. He noted that Metro did tweet about the meeting earlier in the day.

XI. Adjournment:

Without objection, Dr. Bracmort adjourned the meeting at 8:33 p.m.