

Riders' Advisory Council
June 2, 2010

I. Call to Order:

Mr. DeBernardo called the June 2010 Riders' Advisory Council meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

The following members of the Council were present:

Frank DeBernardo, Chair, Prince George's County
David Alpert, D.C. Vice Chair, District of Columbia
Victoria Wilder, Maryland Vice Chair, Montgomery County
Kelsi Bracmort, District of Columbia
Patricia Daniels, District of Columbia
Kenneth DeGraff, District of Columbia
Penny Everline, Arlington County
Chris Farrell, Montgomery County
Robert Petrine, Fairfax County
Lorraine Silva, Arlington County
Clayton Sinyai, Fairfax County
Evelyn Tomaszewski, Fairfax County
Lillian White, City of Alexandria
Ron Whiting, Montgomery County
Diana Zinkl, District of Columbia

II. Public Comment:

Linda Lee, an Alexandria resident, noted that several years ago, Metro had committed to developing a revenue-sharing program with local bus systems so that they would receive some money for accepting Metrobus passes. She added that this revenue-sharing was supposed to take effect when Metro passes were made available on SmarTrip® cards. Ms. Lee explained that the availability of passes on SmarTrip®, and, therefore the revenue-sharing with local bus systems, has been repeatedly delayed and that some bus systems are threatening to no longer accept Metrobus flash passes. She said that if this occurred, it would be disastrous for flash pass users and would result in fewer transit riders in the region.

Ms. Lee also raised concerns about bus reroutes and detours over the previous (Memorial Day) weekend. She said that Metro needs to provide better information on detours, especially if they are planned in advance and are part of regularly-scheduled, recurring events.

Mr. DeBernardo noted to Ms. Lee that the Council had two committees that might be able to address some of the issues that she raised and encouraged her to attend one or both of these meetings to discuss these issues further.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Mr. DeBernardo asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Petrine moved to approve the agenda as presented. This motion was seconded by Mr. Farrell. Without objection, the agenda was approved as presented.

IV. Approval of May 5, 2010 Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Alpert moved approval of the May 5, 2010 meeting minutes. This motion was seconded by Mr. Petrine. Without objection, the minutes were approved as presented.

V. Discussion of General Manager Search:

Mr. DeBernardo then introduced Pat Friel from the executive search firm of Heidrick and Struggles to discuss Metro's search for a new, permanent General Manager and how the search would incorporate feedback from riders.

Mr. Friel provided the Council with an overview of the firm and the General Manager search process. He explained that the search process would take about 4-6 months, though it could take longer if issues arise that need to be addressed as part of the search.

Mr. Friel noted that the Board was very specific in its direction for the search firm to get feedback from the Riders' Council. He said that the firm will ask for a snapshot of what people think about the challenges facing Metro, Metro's organizational and institutional culture, the Board's function and role, details about skill sets that the new G.M. will need to be successful and his/her optimal professional background. He also noted that the search firm would be asking whether or not transit experience is critical for the new General Manager and how the candidate should be judged on his/her performance in the short-term (one year after starting) and in the longer-term (3-5 years after starting).

Ms. Zinkl asked whether there was a draft job description for the general manager position so that Council members can have a better understanding of what the G.M. is expected to do.

Mr. Alpert asked whether Heidrick and Struggles had considered soliciting feedback on a larger scale, i.e. from the general public rather than just from members of the Riders' Council. Mr. Friel responded that the goal of the survey is to get feedback from the Council and that the Board would need to make the decision about soliciting feedback from other groups or from the public at large.

Mr. Farrell asked how long Metro's General Managers had served, on average. Mr. Friel responded that while the immediate past G.M. had a relatively short tenure, others had served for longer periods.

Mr. Whiting asked about the salary for the position and whether or not Metro had provided a salary range to the search firm. Mr. Friel responded that the public sector has a generally accepted salary range for positions such as this, and that if a candidate were recruited from the public sector, his or her salary would most likely fall within that range. He added that if a candidate were recruited from the private sector, there may have to be additional conversations about salary range.

In response to a question from Ms. Wilder, Mr. Friel noted that Heidrick and Struggles did not assist with the search for Metro's current interim General Manager.

Ms. Wilder asked how the search would factor in diverse candidates. Mr. Friel responded that the search would strive to present a diverse candidate pool, and explained that the search firm has partners who specifically assist with ensuring diversity. He noted that usually it isn't an issue to provide a diverse slate of candidates.

Ms. Tomaszewski asked how Metro's workforce is being involved in the search process. Mr. Friel responded that at the Board's request, the search firm will be meeting with the union that represents the majority of Metro workers to get its feedback.

Ms. Zinkl noted that Mr. Catoe, the previous General Manager, brought a number of his staff with him from his previous employer when he came to Metro. She asked whether the search firm had gotten any feedback from the Board in terms of the feasibility of new General Manager to bring in senior staff. Mr. Friel said that he hadn't received any direction from the Board regarding that issue.

Ms. Wilder noted that Mr. Friel had said that the Board would initially be presented with a "long list" of candidates and asked how long that list would be. Mr. Friel responded that the initial list would probably include around 15 candidates, which he would like the Board to pare down to around eight individuals that would then be interviewed by the Board's search committee.

Ms. Zinkl asked who comprised the search committee. Mr. Friel explained that the search committee was a subset of the Board of Directors, consisting of four of its members.

Mr. Friel told the Council that the results of the survey would be provided to the Council once it is concluded.

VI. FY2011 Fare Increase:

Mr. Pasek, the Council's staff liaison, reviewed the proposed changes to Metro fares for FY2011. He noted that the Board's Finance Committee had provided guidance to Metro staff to allow them to begin preparing for the fare changes, but that the final approval of the changes would not occur until the June Board meeting, which would occur on June 24th.

Members had questions about specific elements of the fare changes, including:

- The proposed fares for senior and disabled passengers on express and airport buses and whether those individuals who used flash passes to ride those routes would need to pay additional fare.
- Metro's plan to communicate the proposed fare changes to its riders.
- Whether or not Metro is required to undertake an analysis of the fare increase under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Members noted that the increased differential between fares paid with SmarTrip and with cash may impact certain populations in different ways.

Mr. DeBernardo then opened the floor for a member of the public to make comments.

Doris Ray from the Endependence Center of Northern Virginia asked that the Council advocate on behalf of the disability community. She said that she wanted the R.A.C. to help get clarity on whether or not there will actually be reductions in service as part of the FY2011 budget, especially to MetroAccess service and the MetroAccess service area. She asked that, if service cuts were still on the table, that the Council advocate against them before the final FY2011 budget is adopted at the end of June.

Ms. Ray also noted that she was deeply concerned by the proposed 20¢ differential between cash and SmarTrip fares on fixed-route services. She explained that many low-income and minority individuals pay with cash, and this disparity violates Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. She said that she would like to see a Title VI analysis of Metro's fares, especially given the lack of transfers for riders not using SmarTrip cards.

Ms. Ray added that the Council needs to ensure that Metro maintain the accessible features of the fixed-route system, such as elevators and escalators and station lighting.

Ms. Everline noted that she is concerned about the Title VI issue and other equity issues associated with the proposed fare increases. She added that it appears that the MetroAccess service area will be reduced to the ¾-mile corridor around fixed-route transit service as part of the Board's approval of the FY2011 budget.

Mr. Alpert said that some of the concerns he has seen raised focus on the ability of riders to refill their SmarTrip cards without having to go to a rail station. He asked for information on opportunities for riders to refill their cards. Ms. Ray also asked whether the machines used at these locations, such as Giant and CVS stores are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Mr. DeBernardo noted that there is an interest among Council members on SmarTrip issues and that SmarTrip may be a topic that merits further discussion.

VII. R.A.C. Chair Report:

There were no questions on the Council Chair's report for June 2010.

VIII. Report from Senate Hearing:

Mr. DeBernardo told Council members that he was invited to testify in front of a Senate subcommittee regarding Metro safety. He said that he was asked questions by Senator Mikulski pursuant to his testimony, specifically:

- Is Metro safer than it was a year ago?
- Are there enough opportunities for the public to provide feedback?

IX. Orientation Session and Upcoming Committee Meetings:

Council Orientation Session:

Mr. DeBernardo explained that the first session of the Council's orientation would be repeated on June 9th to provide everyone with the opportunity to attend one of the two sessions.

Bus Committee:

Ms. Everline announced that the Bus Committee will talk about communications issues related to bus service and bus service disruptions on Monday June 14th at 6:30 p.m.

Long-Term Projects Committee:

Mr. Alpert gave an overview of the Long-Term Projects Committee and asked members to note whether they would be interested in discussing certain topics. He then reviewed these topics. (The numbers shown indicate the number of Council members and of members of the public interested in receiving additional information each topic.)

- 7000-series railcars (4+4)
- NextBus accuracy (5+3)
- Priority Corridor Bus Network (6 +6)
- SmarTrip upgrades (6+1)
- Blue/Yellow line realignment (5+2)
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Access Study (2+2)
- Platform tile replacement (1+2)
- Cell phone service (1+1)
- Mystery Rider Program (6+3)
- Retail in stations (1+1)

Ms. White noted that a presentation on the Mystery Rider program may be more appropriate for the full Council.

Ms. Zinkl asked how topics will be categorized as "long-term projects" as opposed to items that need to be presented to the entire Council. She noted that the R.A.C. has previously had presentations on these items. She said that she would like to see the Council provide input to staff in a way that allows for more of a dialogue.

Mr. Alpert responded that there is limited time to have presentations to the full Council since it only meets once per month. He said that having additional meetings of this committee would provide for additional time for presentations. Mr. Alpert said that he agreed with Ms. Zinkl in terms of getting follow-up on recommendations and said that these Committee meetings could provide an opportunity to get that follow-up or that it could be obtained offline.

Ms. White noted that she was interested in discussion station lighting. Mr. Alpert asked for a show of hands for those interested in this topic – there were three R.A.C. members interested and four members of the public interested.

Ms. Tomaszewski said that she would like a presentation that focused on safety, including the steps Metro is taking to make repairs, ensure adequate lighting and other safety-related measures.

Dr. Bracmort said that she would like to look through old meeting minutes to see what the Council's recommendations were on various issues and to ask for follow-up.

Ms. Everline said that the best way to effect change is through a formal process, such as a letter to the Board, Mr. DeBernardo noted that most of the Council's work gets done through the Committee process. He encouraged people to get involved in committee and to follow-through on recommendations.

Ms. Zinkl asked whether or not it would be more appropriate to ask staff for written updates on some of these topics. She said that she is interested in finding out what actions staff has taken in response to concerns or issues that the Council has raised and that information would help determine whether or not follow-up presentations are needed.

Mr. Alpert said that the first step should be to compile a list of topics to then determine staff's availability to make presentations on these topics. Mr. DeBernardo suggested that the next steps can take place offline. Mr. Alpert noted that presentations may be necessary in order for the Council to provide specific, detailed feedback to the Metro Board.

X. Vital Signs Report:

Mr. Pasek directed members' attention to a copy of Metro's "Vital Signs" performance report that was included in their meetings packets. He said that staff from Metro's Office of Performance would be attending a subsequent Council meeting to discuss the report, however, they wanted to provide the Council with the first edition of the report for their review.

XI. Commendation Letter to Metro Transit Police Officers:

Ms. Everline moved to send letters of commendation to four Metro Transit Police officers who were recently recognized by the Board of Directors to thank them for their service. Ms. White seconded this motion.

Without objection, the letters were approved as presented.

XII. Open Mic:

Ms. Daniels said that on Tuesday, June 1st at around 1:30 p.m. all of the H-line buses serving the stop at 14th and Irving Streets NW stopped in the middle of the street, rather than pulling up to the curb.

Ms. White said that she followed the recent U.S. Senate hearing on Metro safety and that she thought that Mr. Sarles, the Interim General Manager, did an excellent job in presenting his "Safety Top 10." She said that she wanted to know about how items on that list would be followed up on. There was further discussion on tracking this follow-up.

Dr. Bracmort said that she would like for someone from Metro staff to come and speak to the Council about bus priority corridors. She explained that the 30s buses are back to having the same issues that they had prior to their service restructuring and there have even been problems with the limited-stop 39 routes.

Ms. Everline said that she remained concerns about the lack of communication about planned MetroAccess changes that will be enacted as part of Metro's FY2011 budget and the message from the Board that next year's budget doesn't include any service cuts, when, in fact, there will be reductions in service, or in some cases, elimination of service for many MetroAccess customers.

Ms. Daniels expressed her concerns about the increases in the bus fares for senior citizens and riders with disabilities. She said that she thinks that it is outrageous that bus fares are increasing for these groups.

Mr. Alpert noted his concern about the lack of transparency of the Board's deliberations on the fare increase, as Board members took a several hour recess for lunch and then came back to the Board meeting with an agreement on the fare increase. He said that he was disappointed that those following the Board's budget deliberations didn't have the opportunity to hear Board members' thoughts on the increases that were proposed and ultimately agreed upon. He added that he feels that the Metro Board uses closed sessions excessively and discusses many items in executive session that an elected body, such as a city council, would be required to discuss in public.

Mr. Whiting said that putting concerns such as these in writing could be helpful getting those concerns on the record. He asked Mr. DeBernardo if he feels that he has a dialogue with the Board when he presents the Council's report at Board meetings. Mr. DeBernardo said that in his presentations to the Board, he has been asked questions twice. He also discussed his efforts to reach out to Board members and the recent meeting between members of the Council's leadership and Peter Benjamin, the Metro Board Chairman.

Ms. Zinkl said that she would agree with Ms. Everline's request to get more information about the recently-approved fare increases.

Mr. Alpert left the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

Ms. Everline moved that the Council encourage the Board to clarify any changes that will occur to MetroAccess service on July 1st and that this information be publicized in a timely fashion. This motion was seconded by Ms. Zinkl.

Without objection, this motion was approved.

XII. Adjournment:

Without objection, Mr. DeBernardo adjourned the meeting at 8:39 p.m.