

WMATA Riders' Advisory Council

Wednesday, July 1, 2015
6:30 P.M. Regular Meeting

MINUTES

Place: Lower Level Meeting Room, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Headquarters (Jackson Graham Building), 600 Fifth Street NW, Washington, DC

Present: *Members*

Barbara Hermanson, Chair, VA, City of Alexandria
Sherry Doster, MD, Prince George's County
Bob Fogel, Vice-Chair, MD, Montgomery County
Avani Gala, VA, Arlington County
Thaddeus Johnson, District of Columbia
Debra MacKenzie, At-Large
Pat Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee, Chair
Lorraine Silva, VA, Arlington County
Daniel Turk, Vice-Chair, District of Columbia
Frederick Walker, Vice-Chair, VA, Fairfax County
Theresa Wells, MD, Prince George's County
Wil White, MD, Prince George's County
Mary Ann Zimmerman, MD, Montgomery County

Other Individuals

Lynn Bowersox, Assistant General Manager, WMATA
Morgan Dye, Public Information Officer, WMATA
Jim Hughes, Managing Director of Intermodal Strategic Planning, WMATA
Jason Minser, Director of Customer Research, WMATA
John Pasek, Assistant Board Secretary, WMATA
Dan Stessel, Director of Communication/Chief Spokesperson, WMATA
James N. Jackson, RAC Staff Coordinator, WMATA

Absent: *Members*

Stephanie Beechem, District of Columbia
Jeremiah Bush, VA, Fairfax County
Pablo Destefanis, District of Columbia
Caroline Kim, District of Columbia
Ryan Nalty, District of Columbia
Deborah Titus, VA, Fairfax County

Presider: Barbara Hermanson, Chair, VA, City of Alexandria

I. Call to Order:

Ms. Hermanson called the July 2015 meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) to order at 6:33 p.m.

II. Public Comment Period:

Ms. Hermanson recognized members of the public who were signed up to speak.

Mr. Steve Kaffen spoke regarding Metrobus route 42. He provided photographs to the Council alleging unsafe conditions for Metrobus customers on the route in question due to charter bus parking on Connecticut Avenue.

Mr. Jeff Larrimore, spoke regarding proposed Metrorail service changes impacting the Blue Line. He emphasized hope that WMATA would reconsider service reductions to the other Metrorail lines.

Mr. Sam Briefs, spoke regarding a lack of communication from the operators of Metrorail trains when traveling at reduced speeds for an extended period of time.

As there were no other members of the public who were signed up to speak, Ms. Hermanson closed the public comment period.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Without objection, the agenda was approved.

IV. RAC Customer Community Initiative

Mr. Jason Minser, Director of Customer Research, and Ms. Lynn Bowersox, Assistant General Manager, were present to discuss the customer community initiative and to respond generally to questions and comments from the Council. Ms. Bowersox introduced the initiative as a new tool to provide on-demand feedback from customers regarding WMATA proposals and other actions within the Authority. She then expressed the importance of integrating the RAC into the customer community feedback process as the Council represented the needs of customers. Mr. Minser provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled *Customer Community*, which consisted of the following slides:

- Introductions
- Current Research Tools
- Customer Community/Research Panels
- Customer Community Profile
- "Community" Recruitment Strategies
- Next Steps

Mr. Minser described the customer community initiative as a "customer feedback panel" that would act as a dedicated group of customers who reinforce WMATA's customer engagement

and provide insight on various matters. He then listed advantages of the proposed initiative as follows:

- Immediate and high quality data
- Cost effectiveness
- Content driven, not research driven

However, Mr. Minser noted two disadvantages being the ability to find a diverse group of customers who were representative of WMATA's ridership and the general management of the panel.

Referencing slide 6, Mr. Johnson inquired about PlanITMetro. Mr. Minser responded stating that PlanITMetro was the planning blog of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. The website was used to post regular updates on the many planning activities of the Office of Planning and other related offices, and gather feedback on our work from the online community.

Ms. Zimmerman asked how staff envisioned the recruitment process for the customer panel if the RAC could be of assistance with that process. Mr. Minser welcomed Council members to assist with recruiting panel participants. Ms. Zimmerman asked that Mr. Minser expound on what participation in the panel. As an example, Mr. Minser discussed the WMATA New Electronic Payment Pilot (NEPP). He stated that the customer panel would have provided an opportunity to engage pilot participants with monthly updates and experience surveys.

Mr. Turk questioned what measures would be taken to ensure that the participants in the customer community panel would be representative of WMATA's ridership. Mr. Minser replied stating that maintain a panel representative of WMATA's ridership had been identified as a challenge. He said that every effort would be made to accomplish that objective, but admitted that the diversity of participants could be "skewed." Mr. Minser reiterated that the customer panel would not be the sole resource for collecting feedback; staff would continue to use other methods such as telephone surveys, focus groups, etc. Ms. Bowersox added that WMATA's Public Participation Plan (PPP) would continue to determine WMATA's outreach on major policy and fare matters. The customer panel would act a supplement or companion resource.

Mr. Walker questioned how the panel would solicit feedback from members of the public who do not use Metrorail or Metrobus. Mr. Minser stated that the customer panel would not be the forum for engaging those persons, non-customers where engaged through other channels such as telephone surveys.

Mr. Sheehan asked that staff remain mindful of senior citizens and customers with disabilities when recruiting members for the customer panel.

Ms. Hermanson questioned if the customer panel would be implemented in time obtain feedback on the Metrorail service optimization changes that were proposed by staff. Mr. Minser stated that the Metrorail service optimization changes required the full PPP, which would require multiple channels to obtain customer feedback. Ms. Hermanson then asked what if anything staff needed from the Council. Mr. Minser asked that RAC members keep the conversation in mind and inform customers that the customer community initiative was pending.

V. Metrorail System Optimization

Mr. Jim Hughes, Managing Director of Intermodal Strategic Planning, was present to discuss the Metrorail service optimization proposal and to respond generally to questions and comments from the Council. Mr. Hughes introduced the proposal as an alternative service plan that would improve rail performance by increasing reliability and consistency. Mr. Hughes provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled *Rail Service Optimization*, which consisted of the following slides:

- Silver/Orange/Blue/Yellow Line Challenges
- Silver/Orange/Blue/Yellow Line On-Time Performance
- Solution – Align Service with Rider Demand
- Benefits and Impacts
- Customer Experience
- Recommendation
- Next Steps

Mr. Hughes stated that it had been approximately one year since Metrorail service had been reorganized to accommodate the opening of the Silver Line, but that on-time performance had not been satisfactory. He then noted the frequent number of Metrorail service delays due to rail lines that intersect (i.e. a service delay on the Blue and Silver Lines caused by a service delay on Orange Line). Mr. Hughes then discussed declining ridership of 1.5 percent per year since 2010 and on-time performance below the organizational goal of 91 percent (with the exception of the Yellow Line). Additionally, Metrorail train schedules were not being sustained, thus creating areas of congestion at merge points and decreasing the number of trains per hour.

Referencing slide 4, Mr. Hughes stated that staff proposed to better align Metrorail service with rider demand. In the alternative, service frequencies (widened headways) would be adjusted on the Orange, Blue, Silver, Yellow, and Green Lines in varying patterns. He then reviewed the advantages of the proposed service changes as follows:

- Netter on-time performance
- Align service with rider demand
- Consistent and reliable ride for passengers
- Restore balance with Blue Line

However, Mr. Hughes noted three disadvantages being a reduction in Rush Plus service, wider headways, and crowding during peak-of-the-peak. He concluded by saying that staff recommended that the Board of Directors authorize a Public Involvement Process to obtain customer and stakeholder input on the potential revisions to optimize current Metrorail service.

Ms. Hermanson recognized members of the public who requested to comment on the presentation in question. James Jackson, RAC Staff Coordinator, informed members of the public that they may only comment on the presentations provided by staff.

Mr. Jeff Larrimore, expressed satisfaction with the service changes to the Metrorail Blue Line and recognized the limitations that WMATA faced in addressing the on-time performance issues. He commented that independent surveying of District residents found an acceptable wait time of seven minutes. Mr. Larrimore concluded by saying that staff should collect data regarding the average number of trains per hour arriving at Metrorail stations.

As there were other individuals who wished to comment, Ms. Hermanson closed the public comment period.

Referencing slide 6, Ms. Hermanson questioned the proposed service frequency on the Metrorail Blue Line. Mr. Hughes stated that the introduction of the Silver Line and Rush Plus service on the Yellow Line saw a shift of passengers to those lines from the Blue Line. He continued saying that the proposed headway accounted for the shift of passengers back to the Blue Line due to the reduced wait time and future passenger growth. Ms. Hermanson then asked if the Blue Line car counts included more 8-car trains. Mr. Hughes stated that there would be additional 8-car trains as the 8 minute headway equated to 7.5 trains per hour.

Ms. Silva questioned if the Authority's objective was to have only 8-car trains in service or if fluctuate would continue between 6-car and 8-car trains. Mr. Hughes responded stating that it was WMATA's plan to have only 8-car trains, thus the authorization by the Board of Directors to purchase new 7000 series rail cars. This would replace older rail cars and expand the fleet to allow for 8-car trains.

Referencing slide 4, Ms. Gala questioned the proposed the concept of having fewer trains in a more consistent patterns due to the increased headways. She asked if this could be done on a trial basis to test the concept. Mr. Hughes explained that staff hoped that by scheduling fewer trains through the merge points that service reliability would increase. He continued saying that conducting this on a trial basis would be difficult due to the time needed to plan scheduling and other rail operations logistics.

Mr. Walker commented that he believed that there was an option to test the concept of having fewer trains in a more consistent patterns. He also stated that the timeliness of the trains did not equate to the customers' ability to be on time due to increased wait times at the stations. Mr. Hughes responded that Metrorail performance was monitored throughout the day and that goals were not met during peak periods. He continued saying that fewer trains going through the merge points would improve reliability by having trains run consistently, thereby reducing crowds. Mr. Walker expressed his disagreement stating that crowds and ride time would be increased.

Mr. Fogel commented that the Silver Line was underutilized by up to 40-percent from original staff estimates. He questioned what impact would fewer trains have on ridership on the Silver Line. Mr. Hughes confirmed that the Silver Line end of year ridership did not achieve original staff predictions. He said that Silver Line trains were being used at the merge point in East Falls Church Station. Staff hopes that as economic growth occurs along the Silver Line extension that ridership would also increase. Mr. Fogel clarified his question asking if the Silver Line was being adequately utilized notwithstanding the merge points at East Falls Church and Rosslyn Stations. Mr. Hughes responded stating that while the Silver Line continued to carry a significant

amount of customers, that some of the stations did not have the ridership that was originally projected due to economic development.

Mr. Turk commented that the goal of a transit agency should be to use all available resources to reduce the travel time for customers using the system.

Ms. Zimmerman questioned if the station platforms could meet the capacity requirements crowding due to the increased headways. Mr. Hughes stated that staff reviewed the platforms and vertical access points and that capacity needs could be met.

Mr. White provided his observations regarding customer behaviors and rail car choice.

Ms. Wells asked if the service frequency of Orange Line would be increased once modifications were made to the Silver Line. She noted that an Orange Line trains only arrived every three trains (blue-blue-silver-orange). Mr. Hughes stated that the proposal reduced the number of trains, but increased the consistency of the trains (orange-silver-blue, orange-silver-blue, orange-silver-blue).

Mr. Sheehan stated that there should be input from senior citizens and customers with disabilities due to the potential for crowding on the platforms and mobility issues.

Mr. Hughes polled the RAC whether the proposed changes should be brought before the public to gain customer and stakeholder input.

Mr. Johnson stated that staff should solicit public comment regarding the Metrorail proposal. He requested that staff define technical terms for members of the public.

Mr. Fogel stated that WMATA suffered from a credibility problem and should use the word “reliability” sparingly. He added that staff should consider how feedback will be evaluated and how it would be used to either proceed with or reject the proposal.

Ms. Hermanson stated that staff should solicit feedback from the public, but that a clear, constructed communication strategy should be developed.

Mr. Walker stated that staff should solicit public comment, but that more analysis of the proposal was needed.

Ms. Silva stated that when the proposal was brought to the public that it should be communicated as an “experiment” to achieve consistent service and not as a “promise.”

Mr. Sheehan inquired about the timeline for implementation. He requested for staff to discuss the proposal with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) Bus and Rail Subcommittee.

VI. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Walker moved, seconded by Mr. Turk, to approve the June 3, 2015 minutes of the Riders' Advisory Council.

Ayes: Ms. Doster, Mr. Fogel, Ms. Gala, Mr. Johnson, Ms. MacKenzie, Mr. Sheehan, Mr. Turk, Mr. Walker, Ms. Wells, Mr. White, and Ms. Zimmerman

Nays: None

Abstentions: Ms. Silva

The motion was approved.

VII. Committee Reports

- Chair's Report to WMATA Board of Directors (June 2015) – Ms. Hermanson

Ms. Hermanson stated that the Chair's Report for the month of June 2015 was included in the agenda package for review.

- Chair's Report from WMATA Committee Meetings – Ms. Hermanson
Ms. Hermanson stated that she attended the WMATA Board of Directors committee meetings held on June 11th and June 25th.

She also announced that she attended the National Transportation Safety Board investigative hearing on June 23-24, 2015 regarding the January 12th L'Enfant Plaza smoke and electrical arcing incident.

- Budget and Finance Committee – Mr. Bush

In Mr. Bush's absence a status report was not provided to the Council.

- Customer Service Committee – Mr. Fogel

Mr. Fogel distributed two draft letters for consideration by Council.

The first letter discussed Metrorail station manager duties, communication, travel during emergencies, and uniform requirements. Council members discussed the work product at length.

Mr. Fogel moved, seconded by Ms. Silva, to approve and forward to the WMATA Board of Directors letter number one regarding Metrorail station operations.

Mr. Walker moved, seconded by Ms. Zimmerman, to amend letter number one the excluding bullets one and four.

Ms. Hermanson moved, seconded by Mr. Turk, to table discussion on letter number one and send back for review by the Customer Service Committee.

The motion was approved unanimously.

- Programs, Projects and Planning Committee – Mr. Turk

Mr. Turk reviewed a resolution for consideration by Council regarding mobile applications. He stated that the Committee felt that it would be in the Authority's best interest to take a direct role in developing a mobile application. Mr. Turk said that WMATA currently only provided transit-related information to third-party developers to produce mobile applications. He asked that Council members review the resolution and provide feedback, so that it may receive full consideration at the next full regular RAC meeting.

VII. Announcements

Ms. Hermanson announced that the RAC would not hold a meeting in August due to the renovations planned for the Lower Level Meeting Room and Board Room at WMATA Headquarters. The next scheduled regular RAC Meeting was scheduled for September 16, 2015.

Ms. Hermanson also solicited input from Council members regarding the RAC quarterly meeting with the WMATA Board of Directors on July 9, 2015.

Mr. Turk announced that next Programs, Projects and Planning Committee meeting would be held on July 20th at 6:30 p.m.

Mr. Fogel announced that the next Customer Service Committee meeting would be held on July 16th at 6:30 p.m.

VIII. Adjournment

Without objection, Ms. Hermanson adjourned the regular session meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

James N. Jackson
Riders' Advisory Council Coordinator