

WMATA Riders' Advisory Council

Wednesday, September 16, 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*
Jeremiah Bush, VA, Fairfax County
J. Clarence Flanders, At-Large
Bob Fogel, Vice-Chair, MD, Montgomery County
Avani Gala, VA, Arlington County
Ryan Nalty, District of Columbia
Pat Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee, Chair
Lorraine Silva, VA, Arlington County
Daniel Turk, Vice-Chair, District of Columbia
Theresa Wells, MD, Prince George's County
James Zepp, MD, Montgomery County
Mary Ann Zimmerman, MD, Montgomery County

Other Individuals

Jennifer Ellison, Board Corporate Secretary, WMATA
James Hamre, Director, Office of Bus Planning, WMATA
Julie Hershorn, Office of Bus Planning, WMATA
Jason Minser, Director of Customer Research, WMATA
John Pasek, Assistant Board Secretary, WMATA
Lisa Schooley, Office of External Relations, WMATA

Absent: *Members*
Stephanie Beechem, District of Columbia
Pablo Destefanis, District of Columbia
Sherry Doster, MD, Prince George's County
Barbara Hermanson, VA, City of Alexandria
Thaddeus Johnson, District of Columbia
Caroline Kim, District of Columbia
Deborah MacKenzie, VA, Arlington County
Deborah Titus, VA, Fairfax County
Fred Walker, VA, Fairfax County
Wil White, MD, Prince George's County

President: Dan Turk, DC Vice Chair

I. Call to Order/Roll Call:

Mr. Turk called the September 2015 meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) to order at 6:32 p.m. He noted that there were some new Council members present at the meeting and asked that members each introduce themselves and tell a little bit about themselves. Mr. Turk also asked committee chairs to provide background information about the scope and activities of their respective committees when they provide their reports later in the meeting.

II. Public Comment Period:

Mr. Turk recognized one member of the public who were signed up to speak.

Mr. Jeff Larrimore, spoke regarding Metrorail service levels on the Blue Line. He noted that, according to Metro's own statistics, the Blue Line did not meet Metro's standards for peak period crowding.

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

III. Approval of Agenda:

Without objection, the agenda was approved.

IV. Metrobus Public Hearing Package

Mr. Jim Hamre, director of Metro's Office of Bus Planning, Scheduling and Customer Facilities provided the Council with an overview of Metro's ongoing "State of Good Operations" (SOGO) public input process. He explained that as the region changes and grows, Metro proposes annual adjustments to its service to meet the region's changing needs and keep Metro's services up to its standards, as well as to be good stewards of the public's resources. He outlined the process by which service adjustment proposals are developed – from various Metro studies, from customer service comments, from local governments' transportation plans, and from Metro staff service evaluations. He also outlined the goals of the proposed service adjustments, including improving on-time performance, reducing crowding, replacing unproductive route segments, and providing for alternative service. Mr. Hamre noted that the proposed changes are budget-neutral.

Mr. Hamre then introduced Lisa Schooley from Metro's Office of External Relations and Jason Minser, the director of Metro's Office of Customer research. He gave an overview of Metro's public outreach activities, including "road show" outreach events, including "pop-up" events at bus stops, along with as attending community meetings. Mr. Hamre also gave an overview some of the other communication tactics used, such as signage and advertisements, and social media postings. He said that Metro had received over 4500 customer inputs on the proposed changes thus far.

Mr. Hamre then gave a timeline for the review and approval of proposed changes by the Metro Board of Directors and then the expected timeline for implementation of the changes that are approved.

At the conclusion of Mr. Hamre's presentation, asked for any public comments on Mr. Hamre's presentation. With no comments from the public, Mr. Turk opened the floor for questions from Council members.

Mr. Flanders asked whether the Metrobus on-time performance goal of 80% is an industry standard. Mr. Hamre said that there are variations in the ways that transit agencies collect on-time performance data, with Metro collecting data at several "timepoints" along each bus routes.

Ms. Zimmerman asked where Metro held its outreach in Montgomery County. Ms. Hershorn said that staff had been to Wheaton and Silver Spring stations. Mr. Hamre added that staff would be attending a Veirs Mill corridor meeting to solicit input.

Mr. Nalty asked whether routes that were shortened would then be scheduled to operate more frequently, since fewer buses would be required to cover the shorter route. Mr. Hamre said that the headways on shortened routes would remain the same as they are currently and that Metro would look to achieve additional efficiencies by "interlining" routes – having buses operate on more than one route.

Mr. Sheehan asked whether there was any effect on MetroAccess service from these proposed changes – specifically whether changes to routes would reduce the MetroAccess service area. Mr. Hamre responded that staff tries to avoid such an effect on MetroAccess service when proposing service changes, and that this package of proposed adjustments does not have any impact on the MetroAccess service area.

Mr. Zepp suggested that Metro should partner with additional community organizations, such as civic and neighborhood associations, to increase awareness of proposed changes and the opportunities provided for input. Ms. Schooley said that, with the Public Participation Plan, Metro has a staff member dedicated to working with community-based organizations, and that Metro also relies on its Government Relations staff to work with neighborhood groups, as well. She said that she would be happy to take down the contact information for any of the civic groups that Mr. Zepp had mentioned.

In response to a question from Mr. Fogel as to whether this year's package of proposed service adjustments was in line with what has been proposed in previous years, Mr. Hamre noted that this year's package of proposed adjustments was actually somewhat smaller than usual, because many of the relatively easy changes have already been made.

Ms. Zimmerman said that she thought increased service along Veirs Mill Road would be great. She also asked about the proposal to discontinue the 5A Dulles Airport route. Mr. Hamre said that Metro has seen increased ridership along Veirs Mill, which is why it is proposing to increase service, though without any additional resources from the State of Maryland, Metro is trying to use its resources most efficiently by proposing limited-stop service. With regards to Ms.

Zimmerman's question about the 5A, he provided a brief history of the establishment of the routes, and noted that with the opening of the Silver Line, along with new bus service established by the Airports Authority and Fairfax Connector the 5A has lost approximately one-third of its ridership, though it is still in the middle of the pack for Virginia routes in terms of subsidy per customer. He noted that the proposal to discontinue 5A service stems from the Board's discussion of the FY2016 budget, and that Metro's position, based on previous studies, was to continue operating the service until the Silver Line was completed all the way to the airport.

Ms. Gala asked about what constituted an "unproductive route segment" and how that is measured. Mr. Hamre explained the criteria that Metro uses to measure Metrobus productivity and how routes are evaluated against a system average.

Mr. Nalty asked whether Metrobus evaluations look at riders' trip length. Mr. Hamre said that planners to look at where riders are getting on/off and noted that SmarTrip® cards help Metro get better information about riders' origins and destinations. He added that Metro is developing a new set of Metrobus service guidelines, which include the directness of riders' trips as part of these guidelines.

Mr. Turk thanked staff for their participation.

V. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes:

Without objection, the minutes of the July 1, 2015 meeting were approved as presented.

VI. Committee Reports

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

Mr. Turk noted that Ms. Hermanson's July report to the Board of Directors was included in members' packets for their review.

- Chair's Report from WMATA Committee Meetings – Mr. Pasek
In Ms. Hermanson's absence, Mr. Pasek provided an overview of recent Metro Board and committee meetings.

He noted that the Safety and Security Committee had a special meeting on September 3rd to discuss the August 6th derailment of a Blue Line train.

Mr. Pasek also discussed some of the topics covered at the September 10th Customer Service and Operations Committee meeting, including Metro's Customer Care program and Metro's performance against its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). He noted that Metro is not meeting nine out of ten of its KPIs. He added that, at its Finance and Administration Committee meeting, the Committee discussed Metro's FY2017 budget and explained Metro's policy of considering fare increases every two

years. He noted that some Board members have already publicly stated their opposition to a fare increase to help fund Metro's FY2017 budget.

- Programs, Projects and Planning Committee – Mr. Nalty/Ms. Gala

Mr. Turk asked Mr. Nalty to give a brief description of the Programs, Project and Planning Committee. Mr. Nalty said that the committee wanted to focus on two items at this evening's meeting: 1) the RAC's social media presence; and 2) a discussion of Metro's involvement with transit mobile applications. He then turned the floor over to Ms. Gala to discuss the committee's recommendation regarding the RAC's social media presence.

Ms. Gala said that communications to the RAC are not, at present, very representative and that establishing a social media presence can help establish the RAC as a trusted liaison between Metro and its riders, receive more feedback from riders, consolidate communication from rider groups and help communicate information from Metro to riders. She suggested a two-phased approach to establishing this social media presence. She asked Council members to review the proposed mission and objectives and then asked to open the floor for comments and feedback.

Mr. Fogel asked how the RAC would avoid getting customer service complaints and general customer dissatisfaction. Ms. Gala said that this would need to be addressed as the RAC sets up its social media presence and in the messaging around the proposal's purpose. She said that the RAC could ask specific questions to the public to get specific information and guidance from members of the public.

Mr. Bush said that, based on his experience, soliciting feedback without responding to complaints could make the RAC lose credibility. He said that any proposal will need to clearly define the scope of the RAC's involvement.

Mr. Turk said that this would allow the RAC to represent the opinions of members and would allow the RAC to get targeted feedback in a timely manner.

Mr. Nalty said that this proposal could allow the RAC to occupy a "middle ground" between ranting about Metro service while also not praising Metro service. He said that this proposal would allow the RAC to be more engaged with customers.

Mr. Flanders noted that he agreed with the idea of having greater engagement with riders, but was concerned about the ability of RAC members to respond to all of the incoming communication. He added that the RAC's social media presence should be used to disseminate and share information, and that social media could be a more flexible way to spread that information. He said that he wanted to make sure that anything the RAC does is done in a controlled manner so that it doesn't overwhelm the RAC's ability to keep up with it.

Mr. Zepp said that, based on the research he's seen, 90% of users on social media are "lurkers" and that only about 10% of users actually express opinions, meaning that it would be difficult to determine how representative riders' comments are. He also expressed concern that this would compete with other communication channels related to Metro, such as the PlanIt Metro blog, and how to avoid this becoming a repository for complaints. Mr. Turk said that the hope is that this social media channel could reach out to a larger group to get more representative feedback.

Mr. Flanders said that the RAC needs to make sure that it focuses on longer-term issues, rather than specific, immediate-term issues.

Mr. Fogel noted that the RAC doesn't get much feedback and should try and do a more robust job of asking a broader set of people questions about RAC proposals.

Mr. Minser said that he applauded the RAC for wanting to engage riders or a more robust level and said that he wanted to remind them of Metro's Customer Community and said that he thinks that it could provide answers to many of the questions that they have.

Mr. Nalty said that he doesn't feel like the current social media situation is working; he said that many of the people tweeting are "yelling at each other" but are not providing any comments or feedback to the RAC. He said that this proposal would allow the RAC to get their input.

Mr. Minser said that he would be happy to offer the RAC some space within the Customer Community

Ms. Gala recapped some of the feedback she had received on the proposal – positives: this would allow the RAC to get greater feedback and become better known; negatives – how can the RAC control the agenda for discussion, avoid becoming a "dumping ground," effectively respond to input and how can the RAC sustain this effort. She said that she would like to take members' comments back to the committee for review and discussion.

Mr. Nalty then directed members to a proposed resolution on page 35 of their meeting packets. He said that there is a feeling that Metro isn't doing enough to oversee or certify mobile applications and that when something goes wrong, users don't blame the third-party developers, but rather they blame Metro.

Mr. Nalty moved, seconded by Mr. Bush, adoption of the resolution on mobile applications. This resolution was approved without objection.

▪ Budget and Finance Committee – Mr. Bush

Mr. Bush noted that, presently, the Budget and Finance Committee is a committee of one and encouraged members of the RAC, especially the new members, to join the committee.

Mr. Bush then provided an overview of the committee's most recent meeting, at which he met with Mark Schofield from Metro's Office of Management and Budget Services. He said that, from a rider advocate perspective, the RAC should oppose any increase in Metro fares absent any increase in service or customer satisfaction. He said that there are some ideas that could be implemented to increase customer satisfaction:

- Offer a flat off-peak fare within the District of Columbia;
- Creation of a combined rail/parking pass;
- Increase the bus/rail transfer discount;
- Adjust parking rates based on demand; and
- Encourage the Board to adopt a policy to offer refunds in the event of significant service delays.

Mr. Turk asked how these suggestions would be passed along to the Board. Mr. Bush said that he hoped to submit recommendations to the Board in advance of the budget preview in November. He said that he would encourage the RAC to focus on the adoption of a refund policy and that this could be something that could be proposed in collaboration with the AAC.

Mr. Sheehan said that the AAC is also striving towards recommending no fare increases in the FY2017 budget. He also discussed trackwork and the impact on MetroAccess fare calculation.

Mr. Bush asked that members provide any comments or suggestions to him in advance of the October RAC meeting. There was discussion of when to provide recommendations regarding fares in a timely manner.

Mr. Flanders said that the RAC needs to keep in mind that Metro needs sufficient revenues in order to make improvements to service, so the group may not want to preclude fare increases. Ms. Silva said that if Metro raises fares while continuing to provide substandard service, it will lose riders.

Ms. Zimmerman said that whatever recommendations the RAC provides need to take into account the trade-offs involved in not raising fares.

Mr. Fogel said that there are ways for Metro to reduce costs and that those need to be examined as part of the budget discussion.

- Customer Service Committee – Mr. Fogel

Mr. Fogel noted that at the RAC's last meeting in July, the Customer Service Committee brought forward four items for discussion:

1. Station manager operations;
2. Changes to station manager uniforms to help better identify themselves to customers;
3. The ability of station managers to provide information to customer during service disruptions; and
4. Assistance provided to station managers to disseminate information and address crowding during incidents/service disruptions.

He said that he hoped to bring something forward for consideration at the October meeting and would welcome any feedback from members.

- RAC Leadership – Quarterly Meeting with Metro Board of Directors

Mr. Turk noted that the RAC's leadership would be holding its quarterly meeting with the Metro Board's leadership on October 22nd.

VII. Announcements

Mr. Nalty said that it is important that the RAC have some engagement with the newly-formed Riders' Union to find out its objectives and to identify opportunities to work together.

Mr. Zepp noted that one of the driving factors in Metro's upcoming budget is increases in labor costs. He suggested that Metro needs to start thinking outside of the box for ways to raise additional revenue, such as by partnering with private businesses.

Mr. Bush asked whether there were any concerns about the Riders' Union diluting the RAC's influence or effectiveness. Mr. Turk said that this topic merits further discussion, perhaps at a later time.

Ms. Ellison announced that, following the departure of the RAC's staff coordinator, James Jackson, John Pasek would be providing staff support during the transition period and that additional information on RAC staff support would be provided to the leadership team next week and to the full Council at its October meeting.

VIII. Adjournment

Without objection, Mr. Turk adjourned the regular session meeting at 8:32 p.m.