

**Riders' Advisory Council
February 6, 2008
Meeting Minutes**

I. Call to Order/Roll Call:

Ms. Iacomini called the February meeting of the Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) to order at 6:36 p.m. She then asked John Pasek, the staff coordinator, to take roll. The following RAC members were present:

Nancy Iacomini, Chair, Arlington County
Kelsi Bracmort, District of Columbia
Steve Cerny, Fairfax County (arrived 6:38 p.m.)
Patricia Daniels, District of Columbia (arrived 6:43 p.m.)
Penny Everline, Arlington County
Susan Holland, Prince George's County
Kevin Moore, At-Large/District of Columbia (arrived 6:38 p.m.)
Rachelle Olden, District of Columbia
Kaiya Sandler, Montgomery County
Pat Sheehan, At-Large/Elderly and Disabled Committee
Diana Zinkl, District of Columbia

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

Denise Brown, Prince George's County
Sharon Conn, Prince George's County
Lillian White, City of Alexandria
Robin White, Fairfax County

Ms. Iacomini noted that the RAC did not yet have a quorum, but was not voting on any items at this point in the meeting.

II. Public Comment:

Ms. Iacomini then called for any members of the public who wished to make comments to come forward.

Kyle Boyer, a sophomore at the George Washington University said that he was at that evening's RAC meeting with representatives from several other area schools in support of a collegiate discount on Metro. He said that students had previously presented a letter to the Board of Directors in support of this initiative. He noted that these students represent 145,000 students in the Washington area. Mr. Boyer added that high school students already receive a discount on Metro. He added that establishing students' transit-riding habits now would make them more likely to use transit if they stayed in the area after graduation and would also help improve the

environment. He said that there were other points outlined in his letter.

Ms. Iacomini asked that audience members who had come to support the student discount stand so that RAC members could note their attendance. Mr. Boyer told RAC members that there were representatives in attendance from the University of Maryland at College Park, American University, Southeastern University and Marymount University. Ms. Iacomini said that both Mr. Catoe and Mr. Zimmerman were at this RAC meeting and have taken note of the students' request and she understands that Mr. Zimmerman, as Chairman of the Metro Board of Directors, has a meeting scheduled with student representatives on this topic.

Mr. Boyer said that the students hope to solicit the RAC's support for such a discount. Ms. Iacomini said that this matter would need to be taken up by the RAC at one of its subsequent meetings.

Mr. Cerny and Mr. Moore arrived at 6:38 p.m.

Joseph Vidulich told RAC members that he is the undergraduate student body president at American University. He said that it is important for students to know that they have Metro's support to create such a program and noted that other cities such as Chicago, Boston and New York have discounted fares for college students. He said that students from universities in the region have internships and perform community service in support of the region and that establishing a discount for students would recognize their contributions. He added that he thought the cost of such a discount would be offset by increased ridership.

Nick Triano said that he wanted to echo the previous speakers' comments and appreciated the RAC's attention to this matter. He said that he wanted to highlight the cost of transportation and the effect that cost has on college students' budgets. He said that college students are an integral part of the city and that over the coming weeks, students will be working on developing a more specific proposal to present to Metro modeled on programs in other cities.

Nicole Capp, president of the student government at the George Washington University said that she wanted to highlight the "interward" activity that such a program would foster by giving students a greater incentive to travel to different parts of the city.

Kellen MacBeth said that he is representing Marymount University. He thanked the RAC for listening to students. Mr. MacBeth noted that college students don't have a lot of money, especially students at Marymount where many student receive financial aid. He added that many student at Marymount are commuter students who would especially benefit from a discounted pass. Mr. MacBeth said that Metro is a lifeline for many students and thanked the RAC again for their time.

Ms. Daniels arrived at 6:43 p.m.

Matt Cohen told the RAC that he is a senior at the George Washington University and will be

graduating in May, and will be staying in Washington after graduation. He said that many students stay in the area after they graduate because Washington is such a dynamic city. He added that as part of the city's mission to keep young adults in the region and cultivate a culture of students staying in the area after completing their education, a pass program would be a great place to start.

III. Approval of January 9, 2008 Meeting Minutes:

Ms. Iacomini noted that the RAC had now achieved quorum and asked for a motion to approve the January meeting minutes.

Ms. Holland moved approval of the January 9, 2008 meeting minutes as presented. This motion was seconded by Ms. Everline.

In favor: Ms. Iacomini, Dr. Bracmort, Mr. Cerny, Ms. Daniels, Ms. Everline, Ms. Holland, Ms. Olden, Ms. Sandler, Ms. Zinkl

Opposed: none

Abstentions: Mr. Moore, Mr. Sheehan

The minutes were approved as presented (9-0-2).

IV. Approval of Agenda:

Ms. Iacomini asked for the RAC's approval of the meeting agenda. Without objection, the agenda was approved as presented.

V. Remarks by WMATA Board Chair and General Manager:

Ms. Iacomini introduced Chris Zimmerman, Chairman of Metro's Board of Directors and John Catoe, Metro's General Manager who came to the meeting to hear from the RAC and also to discuss some of their initiatives for the coming year. She noted that Mr. Catoe has discussed developing a customer expectation document, as it was clear from the recent public hearings that customer service was an issue that needed to be addressed. Ms. Iacomini said that she hoped the RAC would be involved with this document's development. She also asked that Mr. Catoe also talk about how the RAC could get access to some of the customer service feedback it collects from its customers in order to better represent riders.

Mr. Zimmerman said that he wanted to start off by addressing the university students that were present in the audience this evening. He said that he is interested in this topic and, while it's not a new topic, such a program has not been done in the D.C. area before. He said that Metro had looked at options for programs and knows that other cities have similar programs. Mr. Zimmerman added that he would be meeting with student representatives and with the General Manager on this topic in the coming weeks. He offered his congratulations on their efforts so far and said that he looked forward to discussing the issue further.

Mr. Zimmerman thanked the RAC for allowing him to come and speak to them, and noted that this is his second term as Chairman. He discussed former Board member Dana Kauffman's role

in establishing the RAC and how the RAC is progressing as it matures. He said that he has the sense that the Metro Board can do better to take advantage of the RAC and find ways to make the rider experience better, which is a common goal of both the Board and the RAC. Mr. Zimmerman noted that Metro has a goal of becoming “the Best Ride in the Nation” but that it’s not there yet. He said that he has heard over and over again at public hearings as well as from the RAC and other riders that people believe in the system – that Washington is among the best systems in North America, but that how the system is operated has a large impact on how useful Metro is as a system.

Mr. Zimmerman said that he has two areas of focus for his chairmanship:

1. How to make the day-to-day experience better for riders, in terms of reliability and communications with customers, especially during disruptions in service.
2. Looking forward - the region and the economy continue to grow, but the region needs to figure out how to address the challenges brought about by this growth, including traffic, air quality, and concerns about climate change.

Mr. Zimmerman noted that Metro has a role, as part of its Compact, as the transit planning body for the region. He said that Metro needs to figure out how to play that role more effectively. He noted that Metro needs to work more effectively with the local governments that control the roads on which buses run, especially if the region will be turning to buses for more of its transit needs in the future.

Mr. Zimmerman told members that he’d specifically like the RAC to be involved with the consideration of Metro’s budget along with other customer service initiatives where members’ experiences as riders are directly relevant. He noted that the RAC is a “ready-made” focus group with a certain level of expertise as riders. He said that he’d like to get RAC members’ reactions on more service-related items as they are considered, and would also like to see a closer relationship between RAC members and Board members. Mr. Zimmerman encouraged RAC members to reach out to members of the Board of Directors and told RAC members that he would like, by the end of the year, for his colleagues on the Board to be able to say that they’ve spoken with their RAC members and vice-versa, so that Board members will keep the RAC and its advice in mind when making decisions.

Mr. Zimmerman then turned the floor over to Mr. Catoe.

Mr. Catoe thanked the university students in the audience and related his son’s experience with transit as a college student in California. He said that he has seen a shift in the past two decades in younger students’ attitudes towards using public transportation. He added that he has a very open mind about the students’ fare proposal and noted that Metro has a lot of empty seats off-peak that he would love to see filled with college students. He also noted that any proposal would need to be discussed with the Board of Directors, and that he commended the students for taking the time to come out this evening to try to move their proposal forward.

Mr. Catoe also noted that he’s now been at Metro for a year and said that he thinks that Metro is

a great transit system and provides many benefits to the region. He added that Metro is, for many residents, their option for mobility. He said that, while Metro is a good organization, it needs to become a *great* organization – the “Best Ride in the Nation” by being safe, clean, reliable and exceeding customers’ expectations. He said that it is his job to work on improving the organization.

He noted that Metro needed to fix several issues, including safety. Mr. Catoe noted that Metro has undertaken a major campaign to improve safety.

Mr. Sheehan thanked Mr. Catoe for his support of Metro’s Office of ADA Programs and of programs for customers with disabilities.

Ms. Holland asked about Metro’s emergency preparedness and evacuation plans. Mr. Catoe discussed some of Metro’s plans, and Mr. Zimmerman also discussed what evacuation means as a practical matter. He noted that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to evacuate all 4 million people in the region but that people may need to be gotten to their homes.

Mr. Moore said that he agreed with Mr. Zimmerman that RAC members need to meet with their Board members. He added that Metro has just made the most significant decision in Metro’s history – to approve the Authority’s largest-ever fare increase, and in doing so completely ignored all of the feedback from the public and recommendations from the Riders’ Advisory Council about how to proceed.

Mr. Zimmerman noted that the Board listened to riders as well as to the RAC during the fare increase process but that it didn’t agree with their recommendations. There was additional discussion about the RAC’s recommendations and Metro’s budget.

Mr. Cortinez noted that he’s awaiting reappointment to the RAC.

Mr. Cerny asked what role Metro is playing in trying to resurrect the Dulles Rail project. Mr. Zimmerman said that it is a Virginia project and that Metro has been supportive of the project, though the Commonwealth is ultimately responsible for its implementation.

Ms. Everline asked about increased bus service in Metro’s future plans. She asked if either Mr. Zimmerman or Mr. Catoe would like to comment on future plans for expansion or for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the region. Mr. Zimmerman said that the rail system is great but that there are opportunities for growth in the region. He noted that there needs to be reliable service to achieve ridership growth and that increasing bus ridership requires working with other agencies including the agencies which control the roads.

Mr. Catoe said that Metro needs to rethink how it operates its bus service, specifically that Metro doesn’t always need to operate local-only service during rush hours. He said that he has instructed Metro’s Planning Department to plan for transit expansion that focuses on increased bus service and described the proposed 30-Line service as an example. He said that Metro is

going to aggressively work with local governments to implement service improvements on its bus network.

Ms. Olden said that it's very important that what happens in RAC and Board meetings is communicated to Metro's riders so that riders know that RAC and Board members are accountable. She said that the RAC needs to work on communication with the Board and General Manager so that everyone knows what everyone else is doing. Ms. Iacomini noted that the RAC's minutes are available to the public on Metro's website.

Ms. Sandler thanked Mr. Zimmerman and Mr. Catoe for coming and said that she agrees with the goal of making Metro "The Best Ride in the Nation." She said that Metro has cultivated image of "knowing all and seeing all" and suggested not overreaching or raising customers' expectations too high. Mr. Zimmerman said that he could appreciate keeping expectations low, but that he also understands the need for the organization to set expectations high so that Metro can achieve greater things. He said that he feels that people in the region have high expectations and that many riders in the region are choice riders. Mr. Catoe said that he thinks that part of the issue is communications. He also noted that there is a need to set high standards to motivate employees towards better performance.

Ms. Zinkl thanked Mr. Zimmerman and Mr. Catoe reaching out and asking for RAC members' input. She said that she thinks that Metro's bus and rail service is exemplary in comparison to other systems that she's ridden. Ms. Zinkl stated that she feels that the missing link is to educate riders and compare its performance to other transit systems. She added that if additional information was conveyed to the riding public about why Metro does what it does, people would be more understanding when unexpected events occur.

Ms. Zinkl said that she is concerned that many of Metro's communications with the general public are aimed at people who have access to technology and that Metro should focus on getting information to people who may not have access to the internet or mobile phones.

Ms. Daniels said that she is excited about Metro looking into dedicated transit lanes and also described problems in the Columbia Heights area related to development. She said that Metro needs to work on its communication and noted that, while drivers are probably well-trained, they aren't always accountable when out on the road.

Dr. Bracmort noted that 70% of her experience with Metro is on the bus. She said that there is frustration among RAC members that their concerns are not being listened to and that the RAC needs some kind of reassurance from the General Manager and Board that they will take action on the RAC's suggestions. She added that she also feels that Metro isn't cognizant of its bus riders or people who don't have access to technology, especially regarding customer information and communication. She said that RAC members are genuinely interested in improving Metro and want to make sure that their efforts and suggestions to for improvements are not being made in vain.

Mr. Zimmerman said that as a regular bus rider he'd be happy to work directly with the Bus Subcommittee. He added that there needs to be an action plan developed on how to better integrate the RAC, especially on items of communication, and that he is open to suggestions on how to do this. Mr. Zimmerman said that he thinks that anything communications-related should go through the RAC. He said that he expects to work closely with the RAC chair over the coming year to address the RAC's suggestions and that he is hoping for a cultural change at Metro with regards to how it interacts with its customers.

Mr. Catoe said that Metro needs to put together an action plan to address the RAC's recommendations and for a more formal communication process between himself and the RAC. He noted that the RAC won't always get the answers its hopes for in response to its recommendations, but that it needs to know that its recommendations are being considered. He said that Metro also needs to figure out a process on how to better communicate on a more regular basis with its riders.

Ms. Iacomini thanked both Mr. Zimmerman and Mr. Catoe for coming and said that the RAC needs to work on a more regular communications process with staff and the Board of Directors.

Ms. Iacomini said that she thinks that Metro staff will work with the RAC over the coming year and said that Mr. Zimmerman will also work to ensure that the RAC's recommendations are considered by staff, even if those recommendations aren't necessarily implemented.

VI. Presentation on "The Metro Channel:"

Ms. Iacomini introduced Suzanne Peck, Metro's Assistant General Manager for Communications and Sara Wilson, Metro's Assistant General Manager for Communications to talk about the Metro Channel. Ms. Wilson also noted that Ron Rydstrom, Metro's Acting Director of Marketing, was also in attendance at the meeting and has responsibility for Metro's advertising program.

Ms. Peck and Ms. Wilson gave a presentation on the Metro Channel, a proposal for dynamic advertising and customer information on flat-panel television screens throughout the system. Ms. Peck also discussed the RAC's role in providing feedback for the system and outlined the scope and structure of the Request for Proposals.

Ms. Peck then touched on some of the feedback she had received from Metro's Elderly and Disabled (E&D) Committee regarding the program, specifically related to audio capabilities of the displays. Ms. Iacomini noted that the E&D Committee had endorsed this proposal. Ms. Peck said that she received good feedback from the E&D Committee and will be coming back to get additional recommendations from them at a later date. She added that she would be happy to come back to the RAC for additional feedback as well. Ms. Peck then turned the floor over to Jamie Harvey from Metro's Office of Information Technology to show a prototype screen.

Mr. Harvey showed members the prototype and provided additional information about the

program. He noted the displays are television, which isn't as subject to the "digital divide" as customers do not need any special equipment to view it. Mr. Harvey explained that the cabinet being displayed is an actual advertising cabinet from a rail station. He said that this takes advertising space and changes it into a way to provide information to customers. Mr. Harvey then described some of the features of the signs and the information that will be displayed on the screens and its layout.

Mr. Harvey noted that there will be screens in Metro station, on railcars, buses, at stations and on Metro-owned bus shelters. He showed some of the various configurations for the signs, including how signs would look in case of emergencies or other service disruptions.

Mr. Moore left the meeting at 8:06 p.m.

Ms. Iacomini noted the time and that the RAC needed to discuss its Subcommittees before it adjourned at 8:30 p.m. She asked if staff would be willing to come back to discuss the program in greater detail at a future meeting. In response to a question from Ms. Iacomini, Ms. Peck said that she was asking for the RAC's endorsement for Metro to issue an RFP. Ms. Iacomini clarified that the RAC would still be able to discuss with staff and advise them on issues such as the displays, communications in emergencies, locations for displays, and how they will be integrated into buses and bus shelters. Ms. Peck said that yes, this would still be open for discussion and that staff would also be coming back to the E&D Committee in a similar fashion.

Ms. Iacomini then opened the floor to RAC members who had questions regarding the structure of the RFP, noting that the RAC would have additional opportunities to address specifics at subsequent meetings.

Ms. Everline said that the U.S. Access Board is developing standards for digital signs and asked that Metro incorporate these standards as part of the Metro Channel. Ms. Peck said that there will be a list of standards in the RFP that will have to be met and that this could be included. She added that ADA compliance will be required under the RFP.

Mr. Cortinez asked if messages would be in Spanish or other languages as well. Mr. Harvey responded that Metro intends to have Spanish-language capability as well as the possible capability for other languages.

Ms. Zinkl asked what scope of the project would be – how many rail stations, bus stops, etc. would have signs. Mr. Harvey said the project is a license to install the screens, but that there would be minimum coverage requirements for rail stations. He added that the licensee could add more signs in certain locations, which would largely be driving by their revenue-generating potential. Ms. Zinkl asked about bus stops. Mr. Harvey said that most bus shelters are owned by the jurisdictions, so that Metro doesn't have the authority to grant the licensee the ability to install ads in these shelters.

Mr. Sheehan asked that Metro look at the Access Board's standards as they relate to kiosks and

other stand-alone devices, which are covered under Section 508.

Ms. Iacomini asked how this would be deployed on buses. Ms. Peck said that the licensee would be authorized for both static and digital displays on the bus. She said that the only ads not covered would be the in-tunnel advertising in the subway. Mr. Catoe noted that this has been implemented system-wide in Los Angeles and has had an impact of lowering vandalism, and fights, on the bus system.

Ms. Everline asked if there would be a pilot before metro expands this systemwide. Ms. Peck noted that Metro completed an 18-month pilot of customer information screens at select Metro stations. She said that the early installations of the Metro Channel will also act as a pilot.

Ms. Iacomini asked the RAC endorse Metro seeking an RFP and that Metro come back to the RAC for suggestions on placement, content, and accessibility.

Mr. Sheehan asked if it would be possible to get NextBus information on these screens. Ms. Peck said that it would be possible to get that information displayed on Metro Channel screens.

Dr. Bracmort asked what facilities the RFP would cover. Mr. Harvey responded that the RFP's coverage is based on ownership – Metrorail facilities and Metrobus facilities (shelters, etc.) that are owned by WMATA. Ms. Iacomini noted that the RFP would include not only the screens like the one being shown, but also static advertisements bus wraps and rail wraps.

Ms. Peck noted that there would be pilots in each of the jurisdictions. Ms. Iacomini asked that the RAC be notified when the pilots are deployed and would ask that there be a way for customers to provide feedback on the pilots.

Ms. Iacomini asked that the RAC, by acclamation endorse the Metro Channel in principle and ask that staff come back to the RAC to discuss issues of placement, content and accessibility. This was endorsed unanimously.

Mr. Cortinez noted that the RAC had previously asked that Metro devote 10% of its ad space for public service announcements and he hoped that Metro would consider this as part of the program.

VII. Subcommittee Discussion and Meeting Times:

Ms. Iacomini then said that she wanted to discuss the RAC's Subcommittees.

Ms. Iacomini said that she has asked Mr. Cerny if he'd want to chair the rail subcommittee and he agreed; she asked Ms. Everline if she wanted to chair the communications subcommittee, and she agreed. She said that she would ask Mr. Moore if he wanted to chair the budget subcommittee but has not yet had the chance to. She said that she has also asked Dr. Bracmort if she wanted to chair the bus subcommittee, as Dr. Conn has relinquished her role as chair.

Ms. Iacomini asked if it would be possible to switch the meeting time of the Subcommittees so that the communications and rail subcommittees would meet 2nd Wednesday of the month and the bus and budget subcommittees would meet the following Tuesday.

Dr. Bracmort suggested that the subcommittee members figure out their meeting schedule on their own. She also asked whether the RAC's subcommittee meetings are open to the public. Ms. Iacomini responded that the RAC's subcommittee meetings are open to the public and she also said that the meetings schedules for the subcommittees needed to be decided this evening.

There was discussion among members about the proposed dates and times of the meetings and whether it would be possible to have simultaneous subcommittee meetings.

Ms. Iacomini proposed that, for the coming month, the RAC go ahead with the schedule as it has been proposed. Ms. Iacomini suggested giving better information to new members about when subcommittees meet and the commitment required to attend subcommittees. She said that she thinks that the RAC choose dates that would maximize people's opportunities to participate, but that they should be set dates for continuity.

Ms. Zinkl suggested limiting meetings to an hour each.

Ms. Iacomini laid out the following proposed schedule for subcommittee meetings:

2nd Weds: - 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.: Communications
7:00 – 8:00 p.m.: Rail

3rd Tuesday – 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.: Bus
7:00 – 8:00 p.m.: Budget

Ms. Iacomini noted that all of the meetings will take place in the Lobby Level Meeting Room.

In response to a comment from Ms. Daniels, Ms. Iacomini said that the full RAC meeting will remain on the first Wednesday of the month as it is currently.

Ms. Iacomini noted that the RAC has its work cut out for it this year and that the RAC needs to focus on some follow-up from last year as well as to begin engaging Mr. Catoe on customer service and other topics the Board of Directors may send the RAC's way.

VIII. Adjournment:

Without objection, Ms. Iacomini adjourned the meeting at 8:37 p.m.