

Riders' Advisory Council
May 7, 2008

I. Call to Order/Roll Call:

Ms. Iacomini called the May 2008 meeting of Metro's Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) to order at 6:34 p.m. Ms. Iacomini reminded members to speak into their microphones. She asked Mr. Pasek, the RAC's Staff Coordinator to call the roll.

The following members of the Riders' Advisory Council were present:

Nancy Iacomini, Chairman, Arlington County
Kelsi Bracmort, District of Columbia
Steve Cerny, Fairfax County
Sharon Conn, Prince George's County
Patricia Daniels, District of Columbia
Penny Everline, Arlington County
Kaiya Sandler, Montgomery County
Pat Sheehan, At-Large/Elderly and Disabled Committee
Lillian White, City of Alexandria
Diana Zinkl, District of Columbia

The following Riders' Advisory Council members were not present for any part of the meeting:

Denise Brown, Prince George's County
Susan Holland, Prince George's County
Kevin Moore, At-Large/District of Columbia
Rachelle Olden, District of Columbia
Robin White, Fairfax County

II. Public Comment Period:

Ms. Iacomini asked if any members of the public wished to make comments.

Brian Patrick, a resident of Northeast Washington said that he came to speak to the RAC about bicycle restrictions during the papal visit that occurred last month. He noted that Wednesday, April 16th, the day before the papal Mass, he tried to take his bike on Metro and was not allowed to do so. He said that he found out that Metro banned bikes on the system that day because of "high ridership," however, he noted that in reviewing ridership numbers, they were no higher for April 16th than for other Wednesdays during the month.

Mr. Patrick also noted that Metro had put out a press release about the bicycle prohibition, but that only one newspaper, the *Gazette* in Maryland, had carried it. He said that he was also told that the RAC had gone over Metro's plans for the papal visit, but

that in reviewing the RAC's March minutes, he was disappointed to find that the subject of bicycles was never brought up. Mr. Patrick asked the RAC to do a better job when reviewing Metro's plans in the future to avoid a repeat of this situation.

Ms. Iacomini asked Mr. Patrick to clarify which day he tried to bring his bike on the Metro. He replied that it was Wednesday, April 16th, the day before the papal Mass, and that he immediately contacted Metro to register his concern after being turned away from the system.

Dr. Conn noted that Wednesday, April 16th was Emancipation Day in the District of Columbia, and schools and D.C. government offices were closed that day, which might have accounted for the lower ridership.

In response to a question from Ms. Iacomini, Mr. Patrick said that he didn't attempt to bring his bicycle into the system on Thursday, the day of the papal Mass, as he anticipated that there would be restrictions.

Ms. Iacomini said that the RAC needs to follow-up on this with Metro's Assistant General Manager for Communications, Sara Wilson, who had presented Metro's communications plan for the papal visit to the RAC in March. She said that this is an example of something that the RAC should note so as to avoid the same problems in the future.

Ms. Sandler asked if this incident occurred during rush hour and if passengers are allowed to bring bikes onto the system during rush hours. Mr. Patrick said that bikes are not allowed on the system during rush hour and that this incident occurred at 10:15 a.m.

III. Approval of April 2, 2008 Meeting Minutes:

Ms. Iacomini asked for a motion to approve the April 2, 2008 meeting minutes. Ms. Everline moved approval of the April 2, 2008 meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Cerny seconded this motion.

In favor: Ms. Iacomini, Dr. Bracmort, Mr. Cerny, Ms. Everline, Ms. Sandler, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. White, Ms. Zinkl

Opposed: none

Abstentions: Dr. Conn, Ms. Daniels

The minutes were approved as presented. (8-0-2)

IV. Approval of Agenda:

Ms. Iacomini asked for approval of the agenda as presented. Ms. White asked whether discussion of the RAC's FY09 budget recommendations would be conducted as part of the Budget Subcommittee's report or done as a separate action. Ms. Iacomini responded that the budget discussion was listed as a separate action to ensure that the RAC would

have time to discuss and vote on its recommendations. Without objection, the agenda was approved as presented.

V. Metro Mystery Rider Program:

Ms. Iacomini then gave a brief introduction of the Mystery Rider program. She noted that the program is a priority of Board Chairman Chris Zimmerman, and that a contract had not yet been let for the implementation of the program. She added that it is her understanding that staff would be soliciting the RAC's opinion on items to be evaluated and that she expects that they would also use existing customer complaint data to help determine items to measure. She then introduced Sara Wilson, Metro's Assistant General Manager for Corporate Strategy and Communications, and Donna Murray, Metro's Director of Consumer Research, to discuss the program further.

Ms. Wilson introduced Ms. Murray, and noted that she is the head of Metro's Consumer Research department, and has been with Metro for 16 years. She said that Ms. Murray will provide an overview of the program and solicit RAC members' feedback.

Ms. Murray noted that she has seen some of the RAC's feedback and has also gotten a great deal of feedback from members of the public, since her name was printed in the Washington Post article about the program. She said that she doesn't think that people fully understand what the program is designed to accomplish, specifically that its aim is to provide an objective assessment of system operations, customer service and the riding environment, as well as to provide Metro with detailed, objective and actionable data about Metrorail and Metrobus. She told members that the contract will basically provide for service quality audits. Ms. Murray explained that 95% of the rail service will be audited on a quarterly basis and 95% of bus service will be audited on an annual basis. She went over what it would mean, as part of the contract, for Metro to measure 95% of its service.

Ms. Murray explained that Metro is looking for a "loop of continuous improvement," where would its measure its service, identify deficiencies, develop an action plan to correct those deficiencies and then measure the service again to make sure that its action plan was effective.

She noted that many transit properties in the country have similar programs, and that Metro had a volunteer program several years ago. Ms. Murray explained that in Metro's earlier program, however, inspections were performed by volunteer and that the volunteer program had limited success because it only captured information about a limited sampling of trips. She also noted that many of the volunteers were individuals who already had concerns about service issues. Ms. Murray said that the new program, as proposed, would employ professional inspectors who would have a set list of items to inspect. She explained how Metro would choose criteria to be measured. Ms. Murray further explained that Metro would evaluate attributes that are important to its customers as well as actionable – things that Metro can act on to fix and then went over the checklist of items that inspectors would monitor and rate.

Ms. Murray noted that reports would be generated quarterly and widely distributed to Metro employees. She also noted that anything needing immediate attention would be reported to her immediately for action. Ms. Murray also explained the financial aspects of the contract – that it will cost Metro \$1 million over 5 years. She said that, if Metro feels that it isn't getting its money's worth, it has the ability to modify the contract or cancel it. She concluded her presentation and said that she would welcome RAC members' questions or comments.

Ms. Iacomini thanked Ms. Murray for her presentation and opened the floor for comments from members.

Dr. Bracmort said that she now had a better understanding of the Mystery Rider program but that she still had concerns about it. She said that one of her concerns was how long it would take to see changes as a result of the program. Dr. Bracmort noted that she has submitted numerous complaints through Metro's customer service department and has not seen changes to service as a result of these complaints. She also said that Metro already has information provided for free by the RAC as well as through customer complaints that it isn't currently using, and that she was concerned that Metro would be paying to receive similar information from this program, especially given Metro's constant need for additional funds. Ms. Murray responded that the results of the surveys would be reported quarterly and that she does not expect changes to be immediate, especially as these changes will likely require the shifting of resources to address problems.

Ms. Iacomini asked what kind of follow-up would be done with the information contained in the reports, how the information would be distributed and who would hold staff accountable for making improvements based on the Mystery Riders' findings. Ms. Murray responded that the Board Chairman and General Manager will be holding staff accountable and added that the first quarterly report will only provide baseline information and that any changes or trends will not be visible until at least the second quarterly report. She also said that the reports will measure trends, not the performance of specific lines. Ms. Murray added that the program's effectiveness will be judged on whether customer complaints decrease and customer satisfaction levels increase.

Dr. Bracmort stated her concern that Metro will possibly use the findings from these surveys to assert that everything is fine with Metro service. She said that she was also unclear on how the information from the Mysery Rider program would differ from the customer complaint information that Metro already receives. Ms. Murray responded that the customer complaint information would be more global, and that she hopes that it would highlight systemic issues with training, safety, etc. She said that concerns about individual bus lines would continue to be addressed by Customer Service.

Ms. Iacomini asked if there would be time for RAC members to suggest additional attributes to measure as part of the program. Ms. Murray responded that Metro expects to begin the program in early FY09 and would like the RAC's input within the next three

weeks. Ms. Iacomini suggested that this information be discussed at the May RAC Subcommittee meetings.

Ms. Daniels thanked Ms. Murray for coming and said that she has many of the same concerns as Dr. Bracmort. She said that she rides several of Metro's lines and that she doesn't feel like Metro has worked to address the problems that its riders have been telling it about. She added that she is unsure how someone who isn't familiar with the system will be able to effectively evaluate the service any better than current regular riders.

Ms. Everline asked if the RAC will get a report of the inspectors' findings. She also asked how much money other agencies spend on similar programs. Ms. Murray responded that BART in California has 12 full-time staff for its program and that she would have to get the information from New York City regarding how much it spends on its program. Ms. Everline also suggested that the inspectors evaluate the function of accessibility options such as stop enunciators. Ms. Murray noted that the proposed scope of work includes an evaluation of stop enunciators as well as mobility-impaired and Spanish-speaking inspectors. Ms. Everline said that she wanted to emphasize that accessibility isn't limited to physical accessibility and evaluations should include features of the system that can be used by riders with cognitive or other disabilities.

Dr. Conn said that she has concerns about the program's scope and has concerns that certain factors that impact transit service, such as service disruptions won't be reflected in the evaluations. She also asked how Metro will determine which lines the inspectors will sample. Ms. Murray responded that the contractor will be required to provide a sampling plan as part of its contract that takes into account the number of bus and rail lines and will demonstrate that they will be able to sample 95% of rail service quarterly and 95% of bus service annually.

Dr. Conn also asked about how comprehensive the evaluations would be. Ms. Murray responded that the program would sample approximately 385 bus trips per quarter, or 1600 bus trips per year. Dr. Conn said that this wouldn't cover the extent of Metro's service. Ms. Murray replied that the program will not cover 95% of the trips on each line but will cover 95% of Metro's service and allow it to evaluate systemic problems with scheduling, not, however, problems with a particular line's schedule. She said that issues with individual lines would continue to be identified by using customer service data.

Ms. Zinkl asked how Metro would get global information out of the reports received from the program. Ms. Murray responded that the quarterly reports will aggregate data to provide a global overview. She added that this information will show trend lines which Metro will aggregate systemically. In response to a question from Ms. Zinkl, Ms. Murray said that both WMATA and contractor staff will look at and evaluate the data received.

Ms. Zinkl said that many items on the list have been repeatedly mentioned by RAC members and that they are known problems and aren't necessary to measure. She suggested that Metro use all of its existing information so as to make the most of the

money spent on the contract. Ms. Iacomini asked Ms. Zinkl to clarify her suggestion. Ms. Iacomini said that once Metro completes a couple of quarterly reports and its data confirms that these issues are problems, then it may be able to remove them from its checklist. Ms. Murray said that Metro has no way of knowing if something is a problem unless it is measured quantifiably. In response to a comment from Ms. White, Ms. Murray said that the program would help identify whether or not problems that are identified are being fixed.

Ms. Zinkl said that this program seems like another avenue for data gathering, and that the RAC is frustrated because it hasn't seen changes in response to the problems that it has identified. Ms. Iacomini said that this program would provide measurable data to clearly identify problems to address. Ms. Murray said that one of the reasons that she is here is to ensure that problems are fixed and that changes are being made.

Dr. Conn mentioned that certain issues relate to union work rules and said that Metro needs to analyze these issues as part of its review of the evaluation data.

Mr. Cerny asked about the length of the contract. Ms. Murray responded that the contract would be for three base years with two additional option years, though if the program isn't working, Metro will stop the program prior to the end of the three-year period. Mr. Cerny also asked about the number of contractors qualified for bidding on such a contract. Ms. Murray responded that there are many firms that do "mystery shopping" work and that the Request for Proposals would be structured to provide the best value to the authority in terms of price and technical qualifications. In response to another question from Mr. Cerny, she said that while none of the potential contractors specialize in transportation, there are firms that have previously done work for transit properties.

Ms. White said that she would prefer that Metro focus on recognizing its extraordinary employees, especially station managers, and that she thinks that Metro already has information similar to what would be gathered by the Mystery Rider program.

Mr. Sheehan said that he is pleased that this program will evaluate accessibility features and recommended that staff talk with Metro's Office of ADA Programs for a listing of all of the required access features, such as lift-equipped bus availability and elevator/escalator availability.

Mr. Sheehan also asked whether MetroAccess would be evaluated as part of this program. Ms. Murray responded that the cost of doing such evaluations would be very high because of the type of service that MetroAccess provides. She noted that it would also be very difficult to keep the auditors anonymous. Mr. Sheehan suggested that Metro look into using monies from the legal settlement on MetroAccess to cover the cost of evaluating the service. Ms. Murray said that Metro estimated that it would cost \$3 million over the five-year contract to include MetroAccess service in the program.

Ms. Iacomini thanked Ms. Murray for coming to the meeting and said that the RAC would get her its comments on proposed measurements within her suggested three-week timeline.

VI. Metro Customer Service

Ms. Iacomini then introduced Brett Tyler, the Director of Metro's Office of Customer Service. Mr. Tyler gave an overview of the Office of Customer Service's functions and also provided information about the number and type of customer complaints by mode – Metrobus, Metrorail and MetroAccess. He also noted that his office oversees Metro's sales outlets and that these locations have seen an increase in SmarTrip-related issues recently.

Following his presentation, Mr. Tyler said that he would take questions from members.

Ms. Iacomini asked how the information from customer complaints is used by the authority. Mr. Tyler gave an example of a customer calling in about a speeding bus. He said that, in general, comments about service are sent to the specific service provider – rail line, bus garage, MetroAccess, etc.

Dr. Conn asked about the distinction between the Customer Service office and the Customer Information office. She said that people who call the Customer Information line in the evenings are generally calling because of service disruptions. Mr. Tyler said that his staff is working on a project which would allow Customer Information Agents to have access to real-time information.

Ms. White said that she thinks that Customer Service does and good job and asked whether the department needs more staff. She said that if that is the case, she would prefer to see resources allocated to providing more customer service staff rather than to the Mystery Rider program.

Dr. Bracmort noted that she has submitted several complaints to Metro. She asked if there was a certain threshold or pattern of complaints that needed to be reached before that information would be forwarded on to bus garages or other departments within the authority. Mr. Tyler responded that there is not a set threshold for such action.

Ms. Zinkl asked if Metro tracked complaints by line. Mr. Tyler responded that Metro is able to track its complaints in that manner and currently does so.

Ms. Iacomini asked how the new Mystery Rider program will work with the Office of Customer Service. Mr. Tyler responded that he isn't sure yet how these program will work together. He did note, however, that Metro's management and its Board are committed to reacting to customer feedback.

Mr. Tyler noted in closing that he would like to have more staff in his office to do more statistical analysis of complaints other data that the office receives.

VII. RAC Comments on Metro's Proposed FY09 Budget:

Ms. Iacomini then asked Ms. White to read the RAC's proposed recommendations on Metro's FY09 Budget.

Recommendation One:

Ms. White moved the first proposed recommendation:

“The Riders’ Advisory Council recommends that Metro improve its annual budgeting process to make it smoother, more transparent and more open for public review by taking the following steps:

- a. Consult the RAC in the development of Metro’s annual Budget Guidelines;
- b. Publicize widely a calendar that provides a timeline of the annual budget process;
- c. Consider fare increases only within the context of each fiscal year’s budget adoption process, not separately, as was done with fare increases this year; and
- d. Continue rider outreach on its annual budget to include public hearings, town hall meetings and budget presentations.”

Dr. Bracmort seconded this motion. All members present voted in favor of the motion, with no objections or abstentions. The motion was approved. (10-0-0)

Recommendation Two:

Ms. White then moved the second proposed recommendation:

“The RAC recommends that Metro continue to evaluate and implement its Solar Equipment Project.

The use of solar power will help light Metro stations, reduce electric bills and make WMATA more environmentally friendly. The New York City MTA has installed solar panels at its Stillwell Avenue Station in Coney Island that will generate 250,000 kwh/yr. Metro’s FY09 Budget does not allocate any funds to this project.

The RAC also recommends that Metro reduce its electric consumption by turning off unneeded lights, such as after-hours at its headquarters.

These recommendations reflect the Board’s goal for Metro to become a leader in environmental stewardship.”

This motion was seconded by Dr. Conn. All members present voted in favor of the motion, with no objections or abstentions. The motion was approved. (10-0-0)

Recommendation Three:

Ms. White moved the RAC’s third recommendation:

“The RAC recommends that Metro assess its need for additional transportation planners to respond to increased ridership and to provide more timely adjustments to routes and schedules.”

This motion was seconded by Ms. Everline. All members present voted in favor of the motion, with no objections or abstentions. The motion was approved. (10-0-0)

Recommendation Four:

Ms. White moved the RAC’s fourth recommendation:

“The RAC recommends that Metro continue to work to restore NextBus service as soon as possible.”

Ms. Zinkl seconded this motion. All members present voted in favor of the motion, with no objections or abstentions. The motion was approved. (10-0-0)

Recommendation five:

Ms. White moved the RAC’s fifth recommendation:

The RAC recommends that Metro reconsider its ridership and revenue forecasts for FY09 to better reflect service improvements such as adding new bus routes, adding railcars during off-peak and weekend service, the extension of Yellow Line trains to Fort Totten and the end of Red Line turnbacks at Grosvenor-Strathmore during off-peak and weekend hours.

Ms. Everline seconded this motion. All members present voted in favor of the motion, with no objections or abstentions. The motion was approved. (10-0-0)

Recommendation Six:

Ms. White moved the RAC’s sixth recommendation:

“The RAC recommends that Metro seek additional revenue from non-fare sources, including:

- Establishment of non-food/drink retail in rail stations;
- Installation of additional automatic teller machines within rail stations;
- Pursuit of dedicated funding from federal and non-federal sources.”

Ms. Sandler noted that she had concerns about the first two bullet points of this resolution. She said that the RAC has heard from Metro staff that these suggestions have been reviewed and rejected and that recommending them would make the RAC look like it wasn’t paying attention.

Ms. Iacomini asked that the Council vote on each bullet in this recommendation as a separate item and then called for a vote on the first bullet regarding establishment of non-food/drink retail in stations. Five members voted for the recommendation and five voted against the recommendation. The motion failed. (5-5-0)

Ms. Iacomini then called for a vote on the second bullet point regarding the installation of additional automatic teller machines in rail stations. Five members voted for the recommendation and five voted against the recommendation. The motion failed. (5-5-0)

Ms. Iacomini called for a vote on the third bullet point regarding dedicated funding. All members present voted in favor of this recommendation. The motion passed. (10-0-0)

Recommendation Seven:

Ms. White then moved the RAC's seventh budget recommendation:

“The RAC recommends that Metro continue with capital improvements including:

- Upgrading public address systems in rail stations;
- Repairing and rehabilitating escalators and elevators;
- Providing radios for station managers.

This addresses a Board goal of identifying immediate capital needs that have an impact on reliability and safety.”

Dr. Bracmort seconded this recommendation. Ms. Iacomini noted that station managers have already been provided with radios. Mr. Sheehan suggested that the RAC recommend the installation of truncated domes on all station platforms instead. All members present voted in favor of this recommendation, as amended. (10-0-0)

VII. Subcommittee Reports:

Dr. Bracmort told members that they were sent a draft letter for their review that transmits the RAC's comments on the conclusion of Metro's study of the 30's Line. She moved that the RAC approve and send this letter to Metro's Board of Directors. Ms. Iacomini seconded this motion.

All members present voted in favor of this motion, and it was approved. (10-0-0)

Ms. Iacomini noted that earlier in the meeting she had suggested that further discussion of the Mystery Rider program take place as part of the May RAC Subcommittee meetings.

Ms. Everline told members that, due to communications issues coming directly to full RAC meetings and issues with attendance, the Communications Subcommittee would be dissolved, though the RAC may have working groups on specific communications topics on an as-needed basis.

Dr. Bracmort told the group that she would be away on travel during the week of the scheduled Bus Subcommittee meeting and suggested that the May meeting of the Bus Subcommittee meeting be cancelled.

Mr. Cerny said that, with the cancellation of the Communications Subcommittee, the Rail Subcommittee would move up to 6:30 p.m.

IX. Adjournment:
Without objection, Ms. Iacomini adjourned the meeting at 8:36 p.m.