

Riders' Advisory Council June 6, 2019

Members Present:

Andrew Kierig, Vice Chair, Virginia

Wil White, Vice Chair, Maryland

Rob Cavese, At-Large

Valerie Cook, District of Columbia

Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee Representative

Lorraine Silva, Virginia

Other Individuals Present:

Catherine Vandewaart, Office of Planning, Metro

John Pasek, Assistant Board Secretary, Metro

Call to Order/Approval of Agenda:

Mr. White called the June 2019 meeting of the Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:04 p.m. The agenda was approved as presented without objection.

Public Comment:

There were no comments from members of the public in attendance.

Approval of Minutes:

Ms. Cook, seconded by Ms. Silva, moved approval of the May 1, 2019 Riders' Advisory Council meeting minutes. The minutes were approved as amended by Mr. White, with Mr. Cavese abstaining.

Cash-Free Bus Pilot:

Catherine Vanderwaart from Metro's Office of Planning provided an overview of the results of Metro's cash-free bus pilot on Route 79, the Georgia Avenue MetroExtra line. She provided information on customer perceptions of the pilot, along with operational results from the pilot. Ms. Vanderwaart explained that, while the pilot reduced dwell time for buses, it did not result in overall run time savings, and therefore Route 79 would go back to accepting cash payment effective with the upcoming schedule change at the end of June.

Mr. White opened the floor for questions from members of the Council.

Ms. Cook thanked Ms. Vanderwaart for her presentation and congratulated Metro for making data-driven decisions. She noted that, as an occasional rider of Route 79, her experience was that bus operators would inform riders of the no cash policy and they would generally accept it and wait for another bus that would allow them to pay cash.

Mr. Cavese asked whether Metro has identified any specific routes as more cash-intensive than others. Ms. Vanderwaart explained that Metro knows that its cash customers are more likely low-income. She said that she thinks cash-paying customers are a mix of people who regularly pay cash, people who have lost/forgotten their card and occasional riders. Ms. Vandewaart added that different bus routes have different cash payment levels and cited the example of REX in Virginia, with a 20% cash payment rate and cited a lack of reloading options near the route as the probable cause for this figure.

Ms. Silva asked whether Metro is looking into providing additional options for payment. Ms. Vandewaart responded that Metro is working on app that will allow for phone payment and that Metro's Treasury department is interested in expanding the retail network, though she couldn't comment on details.

Mr. White noted that dedicated bus lanes could help speed bus travel, though he noted that these aren't within Metro's control. He also noted that he saw freestanding fareboxes at bus stops on a recent trip to New York and asked whether Metro was looking into anything similar. Ms. Vandewaart explained that these fareboxes are for MTA's Select Bus Service and noted that the machines are difficult to site and expensive to maintain, because someone has to come out to collect the cash from them regularly. She added that various jurisdictions in the region have different opinions on the installation of these machines and they aren't currently under active consideration. She did note that similar machines will be installed as part of Montgomery County's FLASH BRT system. Mr. White also discussed his recent experience on Route 79.

Mr. Kierig asked whether Metro had considered proof-of-payment system. Ms. Vandewaart said that Metro is aware that other transit agencies use these systems. She added that Metro is still discussing options for fare enforcement given the recent change to laws and regulations regarding fare evasion. Mr. Kierig also asked about Metro's plan for increasing the usage of pass products and making them simpler to purchase. Ms. Vandewaart noted that Metro has recently made 7-day bus passes available in the vending machines at all Metrorail station and there was further discussion on how to better publicize this change.

Mr. White thanked Ms. Vandewaart for her presentation and moved to the next item on the agenda.

Bus Transformation Project:

Mr. White reported on the recent public meetings in support of the Bus Transformation Project. He noted that there were variations in responses between riders from different jurisdictions on issues such as free transfers between bus and rail. He also explained that participants were invited to take a survey at the end of their presentation.

Mr. White explained that following the round of public meetings, strategy advisory committee members met with the project team to review responses. He said that the project will present to the Metro Board in July and then come back to the strategy advisory group in the fall. Mr. White noted that the ultimate recommendations might be difficult to implement because they

may involve ceding authority to a new entity. He added that the Virginia systems already coordinate their services, and may be reluctant to work much more closely with operators from DC and Maryland.

Ms. Cook asked whether there was a technology subgroup, or any part of the study looking at technology changes that would be coming within the next several years. Mr. White responded that there have been discussions around bus configurations and technologies and how that would affect ridership.

Ms. Silva asked whether there were any recommendations regarding transfers between buses or between bus and rail. Mr. White noted that issues surrounding fares were one of the biggest challenges identified by the study.

Mr. Kierig asked whether the study had any conversations about using the German *Verkehrsverbund* (integrated public transport system) model, where there is a regional body overseeing and coordinating all of the service providers within a region. Mr. White said that the study has looked at several different organizational models, both across the United States and in Europe. He added that the DC region is unique given the number of jurisdictions served.

Mr. Sheehan noted that the recommendations from the RAC and the Accessibility Advisory Committee are largely in line. He noted that one of the biggest issues facing transit in the region is that of “bus deserts” or places where there isn’t any transit service. Mr. White said that there has been discussion of on-call transit service in certain areas to try and address this issue.

Employee Recognition Proposal:

Mr. Kierig told RAC members that he had proposed that the Council recognize Metro employees for extraordinary service. He explained that the more he researched the idea, the more he felt that it would be difficult and time-consuming to identify individual employees and suggested that members provide information to the staff coordinator so that he can submit them to Metro’s “Extraordinary in the Ordinary” program, which recognizes outstanding employees.

Mr. Cavese said that he supported the idea of recognizing employees, but agreed about making the recognition process too complicated. He said that he felt that if the RAC could act as a conduit to provide information to Metro, that might be the best role for it to play.

Ms. Cook said that any nominations would need to be specific as to why the employee is being nominated. She said she felt that there was a greater chance of these employees being recognized if the RAC itself presented a certificate to the employee, along with submitting something to Metro. There was further discussion between Ms. Cook and other Council members about the need for there to be a clear process if the RAC were to undertake such a program.

Mr. Pasek said that if RAC members wanted to pass along nominations to him, he would, in turn, pass them along to Metro staff through the Extraordinary in the Ordinary nominations process, which recognizes outstanding employees.

Mr. Sheehan noted that the AAC hosts an annual Accessibility Awards ceremony which recognizes employees and others for their contributions to accessibility, and has taken place for approximately the past ten years.

Mr. Cavese suggested that the RAC also do something more informal and immediate to recognize employees, such as posting nominations via the RAC's Twitter or Facebook accounts. There was further discussion about using Twitter for employee recognitions.

After further discussion, Council members agreed that, at least as an interim solution, they would pass nominations along to Mr. Pasek to forward to Metro staff.

Mr. White noted the potential difficulty of identifying specific employees, and then moved to the next item on the agenda.

Announcements/New Business:

Mr. Kierig suggested that as part of its monthly report, and in recognition of Mr. Evans stepping down as Board Chair, the RAC express its appreciation for his service as chair and the role he played in securing regional dedicated funding for Metro. Following discussion among members of the Council, Mr. Kierig withdrew this suggestion.

Mr. Kierig also suggested that the RAC ask for additional information on the following topics:

- Metro's plans and timeline to return to Automatic Train Operation;
- The status of repair work on the chiller that serves the Dupont Circle and Farragut North Metrorail stations; and
- The lack of real-time service information for the shuttles serving riders during the ongoing Blue/Yellow line shutdown.

Members also discussed asking for information about future planned Metrorail shutdowns, and Mr. White suggested inquiring about the performance of Metro's shuttle service during the current shutdown.

Members then discussed the date of the July Riders' Advisory Council meeting, noting that the first Wednesday of July falls on the day before the Independence Day holiday. Mr. Kierig moved, seconded by Ms. Silva, to move the RAC's July meeting to Wednesday, July 10th.

Ms. Cook suggested that the RAC may not need to meet in July, given the lack of issues being brought forward for its input.

Mr. Kierig's motion to move the July RAC meeting was approved, with all members present voting in favor, except Ms. Cook, who was opposed.

Members then discussed possible presenters for the July meeting, including inviting the mayor of Alexandria or other staff to provide an update regarding the ongoing Blue/Yellow line shutdown.

Adjournment:

With no further business to come before the Council, Mr. White adjourned the meeting at 7:31 p.m.