

## **Riders' Advisory Council**

**July 10, 2019**

### **Members Present:**

Colin Reusch, Chair, At-Large  
Andrew Kierig, Vice Chair, Virginia  
Rob Cavese, At-Large  
Valerie Cook, District of Columbia  
J. Clarence Flanders, At-Large  
Katherine Kortum, District of Columbia  
Lorraine Silva, Virginia  
Yvette Washington, Maryland

### **Other Individuals Present:**

Christian Dorsey, Metro Board RAC Liaison (via phone)  
Marc Bowman, Office of Customer Service, Communications and Marketing, Metro  
Lora Byala, Foursquare ITP  
Allison Davis, Office of Planning, Metro  
Jim Hamre, Office of Bus Planning, Metro  
John Pasek, Assistant Board Secretary, Metro  
Michael Weinberger, Office of Bus Planning, Metro

### **Call to Order:**

Mr. Reusch called the July meeting of the Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:04 p.m.

### **Public Comment:**

There were no comments from members of the public.

### **Bus Transformation Project Update:**

Lora Byala from Foursquare ITP provided an overview of the Bus Transformation Project, including the underlying principles of the project, the vision and goals of the project as voiced by stakeholders, and an overview of the project's draft strategy, including recommendations arising from the study.

Mr. Reusch said that he felt that the study was good, overall, though he noted that its recommendations were ambitious and would likely require a significant commitment of resources. He asked Ms. Byala about recommendations that could be considered "low-hanging fruit" and which recommendations would require action by the Metro Board of Directors.

Ms. Byala said that she and her team have been focused on updating the draft strategy and noted that Metro has been looking into piloting a reduced-fare program for low-income

individuals. She also noted that there have been a great deal of discussions among regional transit providers about data sharing, as well as coordinated movement on fare payment updates. She said that developing a regional network (for fare payment?) is likely to happen because it doesn't require implementation funds.

Ms. Byala added that further clarity is needed on the Board's role in any changes, since the Bus Transformation Project isn't strictly a Metro project.

Mr. Reusch then asked about the decision points for Metro in the context of the RAC advising the Board. Ms. Davis noted that any changes to fares will need to be discussed and implemented through the Metro budget process, while any actions around bus priority are largely the responsibility of roadway operators such as the Virginia and District Departments of Transportation. She added that there will need to be further discussions around the further development of the regional bus network and the allocation of routes between operators. Ms. Davis added that decisions still need to be made on which entity will lead that process.

Mr. Flanders asked about ways that Metro may be able to incentivize road operators and other jurisdictions to move forward with the recommendations put forward in the study. Ms. Byala said that one recommendation is that Metro could provide matching funds to jurisdictions to help them implement bus priority treatments. She noted that one of the recommendations from the study, providing free transfers between bus and rail, would likely be difficult and costly. Ms. Davis explained that the region is currently investing a significant amount of resources into current bus service and ridership is still down significantly. She said that the region can continue along the same path of spending money and continuing to lose ridership, or make changes.

Ms. Kortum asked who might lead the task force responsible for Bus Transformation Project implementation, as mentioned in the presentation, and whether the study was considering modeling this system on the German *Verkehrsverbund* (linked transport system). Ms. Byala responded that the study is still developing the framework and ideas for the task force and will be looking at options during the remainder of the summer and into the fall. Ms. Davis noted that this recommendation was deliberately vague, but that any task force would need to include decision-makers from various organizations. She added that the task force would need to be structured in such a way that bus service is at the forefront of the conversation, which hasn't been the case previously.

Mr. Reusch said that it would be helpful to have rider representation on the task force, once it's formed.

Ms. Cook said that she was glad to see that a focus on customers is the first element of the draft strategy, though she noted that sometimes different customers have competing needs. She asked about the framework to determine how to address those competing needs and also noted the importance of allowing unfolded strollers onto buses.

Mr. Kierig noted that he had reviewed old bus service studies and wondered how this study would be different. He also touched on shifting costs between Metrobus and local bus service providers.

Ms. Byala noted that the Bus Transformation Project has a much higher level of interest and participation than previous studies, including participation by Metro's General Manager/CEO. She added that other studies focused on Metrobus, while the BTP is focused on all of the bus service in the region. Ms. Davis noted that staff doesn't want the study and its results to end up on a shelf, but added that many of the recommendations from previous studies, including Metro's *Priority Corridor Network* study, have been implemented. She said that it would also be important to create a task force as an independent body that can hold the region accountable for implementing the study's recommendations.

In response to Mr. Kierig's comments about shifting costs between Metro and regional bus providers, Ms. Byala said that the study's focus isn't for Metro to divest itself of service, and modifications to the recommendations are being made in response to comments around this issue. She added that Metrobus has, in the past, taken on responsibilities outside of its core mission.

Mr. Kierig also noted that the study recommendations included providing real-time information, but that the provision of real-time information hasn't been implemented to its fullest extent by Metro. Ms. Davis responded that the public feedback on the study was clear in saying that bus service needs to focus on fundamentals, such as providing customer information.

Ms. Silva said that any recommendations arising from the study need to avoid creating "turf wars" between Metro and regional bus service providers or local governments.

Mr. Reusch thanked Ms. Byala and Ms. Davis for their presentation and then turned the floor over to staff to provide an update on Metro's Platform Improvement Project.

**Platform Improvement Project Update:**

Marc Bowman, from Metro's Office of Customer Service, Communications and Marketing, told the group that he was excited to provide them with an update on the project from an operational and customer communications standpoint, and introduced Jim Hamre and Michael Weinberger, from Metro's Office of Bus Planning, who would also be providing an update on the project.

Mr. Hamre told the group that the shuttles are operating well. He explained that the additional shuttle between Landmark Mall and the Pentagon was finalized late in the planning process. He noted that Metro anticipated approximately 18,000 riders per day on the shuttle buses, and did a trial run the weekend of May 4-5, which provided valuable information in advance of the rail service shutdown on May 25.

Mr. Hamre added that in advance of the shutdown, the Metro Board authorized parking fees waived at rail stations and Metro provided free parking at Landmark Mall. He explained that on the first weekday of the rail shutdown, Metro estimated it had around 30,000 shuttle riders, well in excess of the 18,000 it had anticipated, and ended up operating 30 supplemental shuttle buses to address demand. Mr. Hamre noted, however, that the shuttle bus contractors didn't have excess capacity, so, initially, Metro needed to pull buses from regularly-scheduled routes to run shuttle services. He told the Council that beginning June 17, 20 additional contractor buses were put in service on shuttle routes, followed by nine more buses on June 24, with additional buses added on July 1, bringing the total number of shuttle buses deployed to 125.

Mr. Hamre then provided weekly ridership figures for the shuttle buses:

- Week 1: 148,000 riders
- Week 2: 152,000 riders
- Week 3 and beyond: 125,000 riders

He said that average weekday ridership for the shuttles is around 25,000, broken down as follows:

- Landmark – Pentagon: 900-100 riders/day
- Huntington – Pentagon Express: 5600 riders/day
- Franconia – Pentagon Express: 7000 riders/day
- Yellow Line Local Shuttle: 6200 riders/day
- Blue Line Local Shuttle: 5600 riders/day

Mr. Hamre said that the distribution of local shuttle riders between Crystal City (Yellow) and National Airport (Blue) has worked out well, though he added that there have been challenges with shuttle operations due to bus bay closures at stations and the unique situation at Huntington with two separate entrances and significant space constraints. He explained that Metro has also made changes at the Pentagon Transit Center to better serve riders and to address demand.

Mr. Weinberger noted that Metro had also made changes to better serve customer with disabilities. He explained that Metro had contracted with an ADA van service to provide on-demand shuttle service for riders with disabilities, and has been providing around 50 trips/week on this service.

Mr. Hamre told the Council that Metro was able to have additional buses on standby for July 4<sup>th</sup>, and carried around 14,000 riders. He explained that the usual surge in July 4<sup>th</sup> ridership for the fireworks was somewhat diminished by the weather.

Mr. Bowman noted that this project is currently the longest shutdown in Metro's history and that staff has learned lessons about communications. He said that rider communication has been provided using banners, floor decals and large signs held aloft on sticks, and added that much of the signage was station-specific.

Mr. Bowman also said that there has been a high level of rider awareness about the project and that Metro has been providing a blog on construction progress.

Mr. Hamre said that this project has provided a lot of good information about the staff support needed to ensure that everything runs smoothly and said that he hoped to maintain the effort through the duration of the shutdown.

Mr. Flanders asked how information from this project is being used to plan future shutdowns and whether any information from this shutdown is being used to plan bus service in other areas.

Mr. Wienberger responded that Metro is already planning for the Summer 2020 shutdowns (Greenbelt-Fort Totten and Vienna-East Falls Church). He said that Metro knows that it needs to be prepared much earlier to plan for alternate service.

Mr. Hamre added that the project has demonstrated the value of dedicated bus facilities, citing examples of the HOV lanes on I-395 and on streets in Old Town Alexandria. He said that he is hopeful that these examples will be something that Metro can point to in the future for projects on Georgia Avenue, 16<sup>th</sup> Street NW, H/I Streets NW, etc. He noted that ridership on Metroway is up by approximately 50%. Mr. Wienberger added that Metro is using Transit Signal Priority on buses on Routes 10A, 10E, 11Y and Metroway.

Ms. Silva asked how the enhanced regular route services are performing. Mr. Hamre said that ridership on Route 11Y is up 70% during peak hours, Metroway ridership is up 35% on weekdays and has seen a significant increase on weekends, and that ridership has increased 12-15% on Routes 10A and 10E. He added that the newly-added midday service on Routes 8W/Z, 11Y and 21A has been averaging between five and eight riders per trip. Mr. Hamre noted that ridership is down on Routes NH2 and REX (Richmond Highway Express), while service along the I-395 corridor and elsewhere in Northern Virginia is largely the same.

In response to a further question from Ms. Silva, Mr. Hamre said that Metro would not be retaining the extra bus service on these routes after the project ends.

Mr. Kierig said that he has gotten a lot of good feedback on the replacement service during the shutdown, and asked about the headways for the Huntington-Pentagon Express shuttle and the 11Y. Mr. Hamre said that the Huntington-Pentagon shuttle has a bus every ten minutes from each entrance (North and South) from 4:40-6:30 a.m., and then every five minutes until 8:30 a.m. He said that the exact schedules are slightly different to reflect actual ridership. Mr. Hamre also noted the challenges that Metro has been having in getting operators to volunteer to operate extra trips.

Mr. Kierig asked about the continued construction at Huntington and whether that would impact rail service after September 8<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Hamre said that Metro expects to maintain full service at Huntington, though it is still figuring out the service plan for Franconia-Springfield.

Mr. Bowman noted that the work at all stations won't be completely finished, but there will be access to rail service at all stations. He added that they are still waiting on more information about construction progress.

Mr. Kierig asked if there would be any impact from the recent flooding at the DASH bus garage in Alexandria. Mr. Hamre said that there won't be any service impacts, though DASH will need to purchase some replacement shop equipment.

In response to a question from Mr. Kierig regarding real-time information for the shuttles, Mr. Hamre said that it got subsumed into providing additional service when shuttle ridership spiked. He noted that real-time predictions for DASH-operated shuttles are currently working and Metro has a procurement for additional real-time information tracking that would allow for the tracking of contractor buses and ADA shuttles.

Ms. Kortum congratulated staff on the website showing the project's progress and said that she appreciated the transparency around this project.

Mr. Reusch thanked the presenters, and then moved to the next item on the agenda.

#### **New Business:**

Mr. Reusch told Council members that he had spoken with Phil Posner, the chair of Metro's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), who wanted to increase coordination between the RAC and the AAC when it came to making recommendations to the Board.

Mr. Reusch asked members whether they would be willing to echo the AAC's recommendations concerning escalator configuration, specifically that the escalator closest to the faregates is the one that runs down from the mezzanine to the platform. Ms. Cook said that it appears that this is already practice and that she would support including this recommendation in the RAC's monthly report.

Ms. Kortum moved, seconded by Ms. Silva, to include this recommendation from the AAC in the RAC's monthly report to the Board. This motion was approved without objection.

Mr. Reusch noted that Mr. Dorsey has asked that the RAC provide high-level, rider-focused principals that could be carried forward as part of the Bus Transformation Project. He asked that members voice those principals either now or within the next week so that they can be included in the RAC's monthly report.

-Mr. Kierig suggested that one improvement that Metro could make was regarding the legibility of its bus maps. He gave the example of the maps on bus timetables aren't always oriented such that north is up and don't always show all of the stops along a route.

Ms. Cook suggested providing free rides to kids in order to develop new riders.

Ms. Silva suggested providing better real-time arrival information.

Ms. Kortum suggested minimizing or “right-sizing” the number of bus stops in the network.

Mr. Cavese said that there should be a focus on ensuring affordability of bus service.

Mr. Reusch asked members if there were any other topics they would like to discuss at future RAC meetings.

Ms. Cook suggested that the RAC should get information from Metro on its plans for rail fleet replacement and new cars.

Mr. Flanders noted that he would need to step down from his position on the Council due to increased work responsibilities and a change in his commute.

Ms. Cook added that it would also be helpful for the RAC to get a better understanding of the rules around scooters and bikes in the city and how those interact with Metro.

**Adjournment:**

With no further business to come before the Council, Mr. Reusch adjourned the meeting at 8:02 p.m.