

Riders' Advisory Council
August 1, 2012

I. Call to Order:

Dr. Bracmort called the August 2012 meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:38 p.m.

The following members were present:

Kelsi Bracmort, Chair, District of Columbia
Carl Seip, District of Columbia Vice Chair
Lorraine Silva, Virginia Vice Chair, Arlington County
James Wright, Maryland Vice Chair, Prince George's County
Ben Ball, District of Columbia
Stephen Clermont, Fairfax County
Chris Farrell, Montgomery County
Barbara Hermanson, City of Alexandria
Joseph Kitchen, Prince George's County
Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/ Accessibility Advisory Committee Chair
Deborah Titus, Fairfax County
Carol Carter Walker, District of Columbia
Candice Walsh, District of Columbia

II. Public Comment Period:

Yvonne Smith said that she was concerned about the hours of the Metro Sales Office at Anacostia, specifically that it closes too early (4:30 p.m.). She said that because of its early closing hours, it can be difficult for residents to reload their bus passes onto their SmarTrip cards, and suggested that it be open later at least one day per week.

Ms. Smith also asked about possible changes to the M8, M9 and W3 bus routes. She said that Metro staff had mentioned changes at previous community meetings in Southeast, but she has not received any further information.

Mr. Sheehan asked whether there are nearby CVS locations where riders could purchase and reload their SmarTrip® cards. Ms. Smith responded that because the Anacostia station is a major bus hub, the sales office there is more convenient for bus riders than CVS/Giant locations, which are further away and not served by as many bus routes.

Dr. Bracmort said that Ms. Smith's concerns are a good reminder for the Council to check in with Metro to see what kind of progress is being made on increasing opportunities for riders to purchase and reload SmarTrip® cards.

In response to a question from Mr. Wright, Ms. Smith said that the sales office should stay open until at least 8 p.m. one evening per week to allow for riders to purchase/reload their cards. In response to Ms. Titus' suggestion that riders could go to other Metro sales offices, such as the ones at the Pentagon or Metro Center, Ms. Smith said that riders don't like the idea of being told they have to travel long distances or travel outside their neighborhood to purchase their transit fares.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Dr. Bracmort asked for a motion to approve an amended agenda that moved the presentation from Metro staff up in the order of proceedings. Mr. Farrell moved approval of the agenda as amended. This motion was seconded by Dr. Bracmort. Without objection, the agenda was approved as amended, with Mr. Kitchen abstaining.

IV. Metro Outreach to Low-Income and Limited English Riders:

Deborah Coram, from Metro's Office of Civil Rights, provided the Council with an overview of federal civil rights laws and how those apply to Metro. She also gave information on the makeup of Metro's ridership, including information on the percentages of riders who have incomes below the poverty level, and those who speak languages other than English.

Ms. Coram also described Metro's efforts at developing a public participation plan to comply with federal guidelines and explained that Metro has convened a staff working group to develop a plan, which will take place over the next 12-18 months. She added that Metro is basing its proposed public participation plan on one developed by the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system in the San Francisco area, and provided the Council with an overview of BART's plan and how it was developed.

Ms. Bowersox, Metro's Assistant General Manager for Customer Service, Communications and Marketing, said that she was glad to get the Council's input on how Metro should conduct its outreach. She noted that developing a plan is an ongoing process and that in addition to conducting focus groups with specific sets of customers, Metro does significant amounts of other outreach. She told the Council that Metro wants people to feel like it is part of the community and that it wants to be engaged with the community.

Ms. Bowersox shared examples of ads that Metro has run in other languages that provide information on Metro service, such as weekend trackwork, Rush+ service changes, and fare changes. She noted that Metro is trying to spend a greater proportion of its advertising budget in

minority communities. She said that an in-person dialogue is also needed and that Metro would like the Council's input on how to better serve these communities – what tools can be used, which groups can Metro be involved with to broaden its outreach, etc.

An attendee asked for information on outreach related to Prince George's County's "TheBus" service. Ms. Bowersox said that when Metro contemplates bus service changes, it always holds public meetings. She suggested that if there were particular routes that the attendee was concerned about, Metro could provide information on possible changes.

Ms. Smith noted that she lives in a predominantly low-income neighborhood and suggested that Metro needs to do outreach at locations where people already are, such as neighborhood festivals and high schools. She added that Metro should also look at reaching out to specific groups such as high school students, since those students will pass along the information to their parents, and to senior citizens, because seniors have the ability to get people's attention. She also suggested putting information about Metro outreach on the NextBus system.

Mr. Kitchen asked whether the Council would be involved in the steering committee that is developing Metro's new public participation plan. Ms. Bowersox suggested that the Council chair should reach out to the Board chair to discuss the Council's involvement in this effort.

Mr. Kitchen added that while he appreciated Metro's increased efforts at communicating service changes, that he isn't sure that those efforts count as "engagement" with riders. He suggested that Metro reinstitute its previous practice of holding "Line Team Meetings" with riders at rail stations and said that by being out in the community on a more regular basis would help Metro earn legitimacy.

Ms. Walsh asked what Metro's ultimate goal is for this effort. Ms. Coram responded that the goal is to have a public participation plan that will guide Metro's outreach efforts for different scenarios and to have participation by the public during every stage of Metro's processes. She added that Metro also wants to enhance its existing outreach practices.

Mr. Ball said that Metro has a communications issue across the board and needs to reach out to all of its riders, not just those in low-income or limited English communities. He liked the idea of Metro staff attending ethnic festivals and also suggested a "bus ambassador" program that would reach out to Metrobus riders.

Mr. Farrell asked whether the minority publications in which Metro advertises are subscription-only, meaning they aren't available for general distribution. Ms. Coram said that Metro also has mailing lists and is developing a database of resources for non-English speakers. Ms. Bowersox added that community engagement is a two-way process, and it's hard to measure the impact ads

have in a community because they're only one-way. She said that by communicating across multiple channels, Metro will increase its opportunities to get feedback.

Mr. Seip asked whether Metro had asked community groups for input on the public participation plan. Ms. Coram responded that Metro plans to do so and that the feedback it has received thus far has been that Metro should reach out to people "where they are," and provided examples. She added that while developing the plan is expected to take 12-18 months, Metro won't wait to implement outreach strategies – it will roll those out throughout the process.

Ms. Silva said that it is often difficult for her to get a copy of "El Tiempo Latino" even though it's a free publication. She also said that because there aren't any public hearings targeted specifically at limited-English speakers, they don't attend hearings because they wouldn't be able to participate. Ms. Coram notes that Metro translates all of the materials for its public hearings and sends out notice in advance of public hearings that translators are available. Ms. Bowersox noted that this option is often underutilized and said that Metro is open to doing things differently and would welcome suggestions.

In response to a question from Mr. Seip, Ms. Coram said that there have been no requests for interpretation services at any public hearings within the last year.

V. Public Participation at Council Meetings:

Ms. Walker provided some background about the proposal to allow for increased participation by members of the public at Council meetings. She then moved approval of the proposal as presented. This motion was seconded by Ms. Seip.

Dr. Bracmort thanked everyone who worked to develop this proposal.

Mr. Kitchen said that he thought the proposal is good and had a couple of amendments to offer. He noted that one of the issues in improving Metro service is a lack of organized advocacy groups and raised concerns with limiting their comments at Council meetings. Ms. Walker responded that the proposal would provide the chair with the discretion to limit comments from members of advocacy groups, it does not mandate that he or she does so.

Mr. Kitchen also noted that as the Council moves to conducting more of its business in committees, that it should allow comments from members of the public on its committee reports. Dr. Bracmort noted that the Council's committee meetings are already open to the public and that members of the public are welcome to participate in those meetings. Ms. Walker and Mr. Seip agreed to strike the language which would preclude comments from the public on committee reports.

Ms. Hermanson said that it is a good idea to allow for comments from members of the public on reports and it's also part of the Council's mission if the reports are considered public-facing items.

Ms. Titus asked how the Council will use the comments. Mr. Kitchen responded that the public will be provided with the opportunity to comment on what the committee is asking the full Council to approve.

Mr. Kitchen also asked how the Council would include follow-up items at its subsequent meetings.

After discussion, the proposal to allow for members of the public to comment at meetings was approved without objection.

VI. Youth Town Hall Follow-Up:

Mr. Kitchen gave a recap of the Youth Town Hall and provided information on participation, the issues discussed and possible next steps. Dr. Bracmort added that many of the concerns brought up by the youth participants are the same as those regularly brought up by adult riders.

Ms. Walker, who attended, said that she was shocked that youth didn't see themselves or their behavior as an issue. Mr. Seip added that he was surprised that safety and security wasn't raised as an issue at the meeting and asked that the issue be raised as part of any follow-up actions.

Mr. Kitchen said that he discussed the lack of mention of crime and safety issues at the meeting with the D.C. youth mayor, who noted that adults may overstate issues of crime on Metro and that many of the kids come from neighborhoods that are significantly less safe than the Metro system, so crime wouldn't necessarily be as big an issue for them.

Mr. Wright said that he wanted to congratulate Mr. Kitchen on a successful meeting and noted that youth and adults share many of the same concerns about Metro service. He said that many of the attendees had questions about the kind of customer service training that Metro bus operator receive.

Mr. Farrell asked what kinds of concerns were raised by the Montgomery County students who attended the town hall meeting. Mr. Kitchen said that these students had different concerns regarding fares than District students because of Montgomery County's free-fare program for students.

Kurt Raschke, a member of the public, asked whether Metro staff were in attendance. He noted that if Metro staff attended the meeting, it would have been helpful for them to educate the attendees that some of their requests weren't feasible.

In response to Mr. Raschke's comments, Ms. Walker said that the Council had made a conscious decision not to include Metro staff at the town hall, since it was designed as a listening session. She said that having Metro staff in attendance would have created a completely different meeting. Mr. Kitchen added that the goal of the meeting was to find out about youth riders' issues and then figure out how to connect with staff to get those issues addressed.

VII. Questions/Comments on RAC and AAC Chair Reports:

There were no questions on either of these reports.

VIII. Open Mic/Community meetings:

Dr. Bracmort asked Council members to continue to publicize the RAC's meetings and let people know that they are welcome to attend.

Mr. Ball asked when Metrobuses would be rerouted back onto 18th Street NW in Adams Morgan now that the streetscape project was completed. Mr. Pasek said that he would check with Metro staff to find out.

Mr. Ball also asked whether Metro's proposed rail service criteria would be coming to the Council for its comments. Dr. Bracmort said that there is a presentation planned for the September meeting.

Mr. Ball mentioned a recent newspaper article about overcrowded buses leaving riders behind. He asked how Metro determines what constitutes a "full" bus and what happens if a bus is too full to take on additional riders who are waiting. Mr. Seip noted that one of the items that the General Manager asked the Council to look into was how to get riders onto and off of buses more quickly.

Mr. Kitchen asked how members of the public would be able to provide comments on RAC agenda items, now that the Council had approved its procedures for enhance public comment at its meetings. Mr. Pasek said that there would be an option on the website. He also asked whether there would be a follow-up presentation on Rush+ service. Dr. Bracmort said that the Council was hoping for such a presentation in October. Ms. Hermanson suggested that information on Rush+ could also be included in the rail service standards presentation in September.

Mr. Kitchen also asked about the status of the planned meeting on emergency communications and preparedness. Mr. Pasek said that staff was putting together a draft proposal for the Council

to review and that it would be sent out for their comments in advance of the Council's September meeting. He explained that at the present time, the Board is hoping to hold this meeting in the early- to mid-October timeframe.

Without objection, Dr. Bracmort adjourned the meeting at 8:31 p.m.