



# AAC

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

### **Meeting (Virtual) Minutes: September 2, 2025**

#### **Attendees**

Present: Patrick Sheehan (Chair), Susan Bowmaster, Tino Calabia, Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Debby Fisher, Steve Kaffen, Sandy Neuzil, Phil Posner, Sarah Radt, Paul Semelfort, and Philip Weintraub.

#### **Call to Order**

Anupama Sharma, AAC Coordinator, welcomed everyone, shared helpful tips, read the agenda, thereafter, Chair Sheehan moved the meeting forward.

#### **Approval of Agenda, Board Report, and Prior Meeting Minutes**

The September 2, 2025, meeting agenda approved as presented. The July 7, 2025, Meeting Minutes were approved as written. The Board Report was approved as written.

#### **Meet & Greet:**

Jayne Johnson, Executive Vice President and Chief Safety & Readiness Officer (EVP SARE CO) thanked the Committee for inviting him. Mr. Johnson informed about the organization changes in the Executive Leadership Team (ELT), including his promotion as EVP SARE CO. Mr. Johnson informed that after leading Safety and Readiness for a few years, Theresa Impastato is now the Chief Infrastructure Officer. Furthermore, Andy Off has moved from being the Chief Infrastructure Officer, to his new position as the Deputy General Manager. The theory behind organization changes is that the General Manager can step away from direct involvement in running the organization. Allowing the General Manager to focus on politics, financial arrangements for the organization, securing the short- and long-term relationships. Andy Off will manage SARE, Infrastructure, Operations, and Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD), the four key groups running the organization.

Mr. Johnson shared his work experience and stated he started in the transportation industry eight years when he joined WMATA. He started as Chief Operating Officer's Leader of Strategic Initiatives, then moved to Bus/Rail Control Centers, followed by Safety. In his current role, Mr. Johnson leads SARE, which comprises of Safety; Occupational Health and Wellness (OHAW); Quality Assurance (QA), Internal Compliance and Oversight; Technical Training and Development, System-Wide Accessibility (SWACC), and Special Projects. Before coming to USA and joining WMATA, Mr. Johnson was a police officer in the Metropolitan Police in London, England. That is where he got his passion for assisting those who need access to public services, i.e. investigating sexual offences. Mr. Johnson stated that his mother is an OBGYN doctor, and the passion and interest go back in his family. Mr. Johnson is excited to work with SWACC and the AAC, appreciates the work done by the Committee thus far. He looks forward to having more collaboration and effective engagement with the AAC through SWACC staff, for higher rewarding results.

Chair Sheehan thanked Mr. Johnson for working with the AAC and stated the Committee will work through SWACC to provide feedback and communicate to him. Chair Sheehan extended the courtesy for Mr. Johnson to contact the AAC, as needed.

### **Priority Seating Decals Pilot for Metro Rail:**

Jamie Rosen, Acting Director, Special Projects, Customer Experience and Transformation; and Bonnie Sullivan, Transformation Analyst; discussed the priority seating decals pilot for Metro Rail. Ms. Sullivan stated the motivation is to remind customers who might need to use priority seating. She shared images of three decals and discussed those messages. The first decal from Transport from London (TfL) was posted on the floor by the priority seat and stated Priority Seating (written in the direction of the person standing) Look up, Give the seat to anyone who needs it more (written in the direction facing the person seated). The second decal from Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA, New York) was placed on the back of the seat and stated Priority Seating, For persons with disabilities. The third decal from Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) was on a window of the train states Priority Seating Area, Please vacate these seats for people with disabilities, seniors, pregnant women and adults carrying children. The message was also in Braille and had five icons depicting people with disabilities, seniors, pregnant women, and adults carrying children.

Ms. Sullivan stated the Project goals are to reinforce priority seating area, remind customers that it is okay to ask for a seat, provide examples of who might need priority seating, and collect feedback on pilot and evaluate for expansion. Sharing images of two decals, Mr. Sullivan stated for our pilot project, we will use two 12-inch round decals mainly with a gray background and blue text on top. The first decal states Priority Seating (written in the direction facing the person standing), Heads up! Please offer this seat to anyone who needs it, Not all disabilities are visible (written in the direction facing the person seated). The second decal states Need a seat? Its ok to ask (written in the direction facing the person standing), This priority seating is for (icons depicting) persons with disabilities, older adults, pregnant women, adults carrying children.

Discussing the Scope, Ms. Sullivan stated it is a three-month pilot. The decals will be in 240 rail cars (20% of entire rail fleet) of the 7000 series trains only. There will be a survey with a QR code. The AAC coordination is being done by informing about the pilot before and requesting feedback at end of the pilot. The pilot will be launched in Fall 2025.

Mr. Calabria discussed a red button used in Seattle's trains to help keep doors open longer. The red button is placed near the decal about disabilities and can be pressed as needed. He asked if the red button could be considered for WMATA's trains. Ms. Sullivan stated she can only speak to the specific pilot but she can note it for any future work. Mr. Calabria asked to consider a more dynamic decal rather the International Accessibility Symbol (IAS). Ms. Sullivan informed that WMATA uses a universal icon library to find the most consistent kind of international standards for icons.

Mr. Kaffen stated no one looks down for information and people will have their feet over the decals. He commented about the phrasing that is used. Mr. Kaffen stated on buses, decals are by the first front forward seats and completely blocks the window, which is a safety issue, and recommended to raise them higher. Ms. Rosen appreciated the feedback and stated in terms of the floor decals, many times people are looking at their phones, thus looking down. The idea behind the lookup! is fun, catchy and encouraging people to be more aware of their surroundings. It is a good point about the phrasing, and we will look at that. In terms of the bus decal, again, this project is focused on rail, but we can consider it for future projects.

Mr. Weintraub stated he has seen the red button (inside and outside) in the Madrid system, as described by Mr. Calabria. Mr. Weintraub asked how a blind person would get the message on the decals. Ms. Sullivan stated the idea with the priority seating decals on the floor is that those will be in addition to the existing priority seating signage. Floor decals is another opportunity for signage.

Ms. Radt appreciated inclusion of an icon of a person with hidden disability and expanding the icons. Ms. Radt stated the traditional ISA is confusing to her as there is no space for a wheelchair, yet it has a symbol of a wheelchair. She asked if there are any floor stickers in the designated spaces for wheelchairs. Ms. Sullivan thanked Ms. Radt and stated we are excited to include the icon for invisible disabilities at the advice of Maggie Butler, Vice President, System-Wide Accessibility. She will follow up with Dr. Butler about any needed changes to existing signage. The scope of this pilot is just the priority seating decals. Ms. Sullivan was unaware of a floor decal for wheelchair space, however, noted that down for any future projects. Ms. Radt added her support for the dynamic wheelchair symbol to be used rather the ISA.

Chair Sheehan thanked Ms. Sullivan and Ms. Rosen and invited them back with results.

### **DMV Moves:**

Chair Sheehan stated DMV Moves meetings are expected to end in September. DMV Moves is looking at keeping Metro Rail and Metro Bus in a state of good repair. DMV Moves discussed rail automation, and all six lines are now on automatic train operation (ATO). At the task force level, the discussion has been about results of the ATO, i.e. improved efficiency and on-time performance (OTP). Thereby saving money and reinvesting it back into the system. Train capacity, particularly in Rosslyn, Virginia, was part of the discussion along with the need to replace the signals from 1970s. The teams have done studies of different systems globally and found automation increases cost efficiency. For instance, in Paris, the cost savings increased by 30%. Train schedule has improved during the automation. The rail cars cost about \$3 million per car, hence for an 8-car train, the cost is \$24 million. Automation will help take out five train out of service every day while maintaining the same service level, saving \$120 million, which can be reinvested into the system.

Chair Sheehan stated training, maintenance, train efficiency from turnarounds, etc. are the factors that will increase efficiency. As a result of the higher efficiency, cost savings will increase, and those savings will be reinvested into the system. Eventually it will reduce the cost of running the system over time. Chair Sheehan stated the trains are operated and tracks are managed by WMATA thus, it is a closed system. There is substantial amount of work to be done, for instance updating the train signals, etc.

Chair Sheehan stated the next area of focus is bus prioritization, which is a little more complex. Bus prioritization looks at how buses are used throughout the system, where they are used, and where the high frequency bus lanes are going to be. WMATA and the jurisdictions run bus systems and there are areas where buses routes are not well coordinated. Some improvements have been made with Better Bus Network (BBN), a part of the bus prioritization effort. Chair Sheehan stated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and BBN are two parts of the Bus Prioritization Plan. A more detailed plan will look at BRT with about 20 or 30 lines and how to increase bus service across jurisdictions. The concept of bus lanes creates traffic issues for rest of the vehicles on the road. DMV Moves will look at what the local jurisdictions are doing with BRT and how it is being done. The regulations and laws in different states and localities will need to be coordinated.

Chair Sheehan stated there are six working groups of the DMV Moves, and one of them deals with Bus Prioritization. If allowed by DMV Moves, Chair Sheehan asked more AAC members to join to work on Bus Prioritization going forward. Making the Bus as efficient as the Rail, is going to be critical as the DMV Moves would like to treat Bus Prioritization and give it the same emphasis as they have done with Rail.

With the current traffic congestion in Washington, D.C., WMATA is paying extra \$70 million to have the same service, prior to the increased traffic. Therefore, the effort is to reduce that numbers, improve efficiency, and keep the buses moving. The task force has agreed to establish a regional bus prioritization fund, that can be used to establish priorities for the bus prioritization network going forward.

Chair Sheehan stated there is no dedicated funding plan yet and WMATA's borrowing capability on its current bonds will be over in FY28. There is a proposal of a regional levy from Maryland, D.C., and Virginia, between \$500 million and \$600 million a year. Each of the states would put into a pod, however, who is going to run it, has not been decided. It will be indexed to inflation, which was not the case back in 2018. The two proposed plans include either a 1% sales tax or a dedicated amount of money from each state. Based on how they fund transportation within the state, jurisdictions were not in favor of the sales tax. To develop their own funding source, states would have a bill that would be paid every year. Essentially, that would be the dedicated Funding source of \$500 to \$600 million each year. These funds would also cover the bus prioritization network which is expected to be about \$150 million. A lot has changed from the fall 2024 when the financial picture was not as rosy as it was in the spring 2025.

Chair Sheehan stated as the DMV Moves wraps up this fall, the subcommittee groups are going to be available for us to participate in. They are working on bus prioritization, signage, and other projects including acquisition. The AAC has already done some work on way finding, therefore, Chair Sheehan hopes to have some of the members' involvement on that project. Mr. Calabia stated there are not many reports about the DMV Moves beyond May or June 2025. He has not seen much about the track signals however, has seen a lot of information about rail automation that will improve efficiency and reliability. Chair Sheehan clarified that the data on automation will be available in about six months. Responding to Mr. Calabia's inquiry about efforts on dedicated funding, Chair Sheehan stated the General Manager is looking at ensuring the funding. In FY26, WMATA must have everything ready for FY27 as the borrowing power ends by FY28. Mr. Calabia emphasized that dedicated funding from the federal government is important.

### **Hedding Award 2025, AAC Membership, AAC Elections:**

Hedding Award: Chair Sheehan stated Richard Hedding Award 2025 will be held at the beginning of the December AAC meeting. The nomination packets will be sent to the Committee along with the award criteria. The voting process needs to complete on the AAC meeting on November 3rd.

AAC Membership and Elections: Chair Sheehan stated Kelly Simoneaux has resigned from the AAC. Therefore, there is a vacancy representing Northern Virginia. The AAC elections need to be held for the Chair, Vice-Chair, and the Second-Vice-Chair positions. The election will be held on October 6<sup>th</sup> AAC meeting. Any AAC member who would like to run, should be prepared at the next month's meeting. We will conduct the votes as done in the past with raised hands.

### **Public Comments:**

A member of the public asked if an image of MetroAccess ID on customer's phone can be shown to the driver rather the physical ID. Mr. Semelfort stated the ID that we get is the official one that we should use. Mr. Semelfort further stated that he is not aware of any other paratransit that allows an image of the ID, whereas, a government ID can be used temporarily. Christian Blake, Vice President, Access Services, stated MetroAccess is not accepting images of at ID card. As Mr. Semelfort pointed out, if for some reason a customer does not have their MetroAccess ID, can show a government-issued ID card. At this point, we are not distributing a digital ID, but we can investigate that.

Mr. Dancy shared his experience with Police Officers who could not use the VRI app, that is used to communicate with deaf people or someone who is hard of hearing.

Ms. Neuzil asked if the Subcommittee would also have elections along with the AAC elections. Mr. Semelfort stated the elections are for officers of the AAC, whereas the subcommittee leadership is appointed by the AAC Chair. Chair Sheehan confirmed this information and stated the elections will be for AAC not including the subcommittees.

Public Comments can be received via phone at 202-962-1100, or via email at [MetroAACChair@wmata.com](mailto:MetroAACChair@wmata.com)

**Bus and Rail Subcommittee Report:**

Mr. Calabia stated the following topics were discussed at last month's BRS meeting:

- Summer 2025 Shutdown, Phase II
- Better Bus Network Update
- Temporary Bus Stop Signage, Permanent Bus Flags

Besides giving the BRS Report, Mr. Calabia asked about new bus schedules at the stops. There was a brief discussion about inviting the Better Bus Network team to provide an update. The tentative invitation could be for late fall.

**MetroAccess Subcommittee Report:**

Mr. Semelfort stated the following topics were discussed at last month's MAS meeting:

- Americans with Disabilities Act, 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary
- MetroAccess Service Updates
- Uber Updates

Ms. Coles shared an experience and asked how to resolve the issue of Uber drivers dropping off at incorrect locations. Mr. Semelfort stated he has experienced similar situation; however, he was able to guide the driver to the correct location. Mr. Blake stated we will report it to Uber, advocate for the customers, and encourage the drivers to provide better service. He further stated that in some instances, MetroAccess may be a better mode of transportation. Ms. Coles stated in the specific instance when the Uber driver left her at a wrong location, MetroAccess could not send her a driver as she did not have an address of that building. Ms. Coles further shared her experience of using paratransit service in Columbus, Ohio, and stated MetroAccess is more robust than any system and she was happy to be back using this service. Kudos to WMATA and MetroAccess.

**The meeting was adjourned at 7:09p.m.**