

Riders' Advisory Council
July 10, 2013

Meeting Minutes

I. Call to Order:

Mr. Ball called the July 2013 meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:37 p.m.

The following members were present:

Ben Ball, Chair, District of Columbia
Barbara Hermanson, Virginia Vice Chair, City of Alexandria
Carol Carter Walker, District of Columbia Vice Chair
James Wright, Maryland Vice Chair, Prince George's County
Pat Jackson, Fairfax County
Patricia King-Adams, District of Columbia
Kara Merrigan, Arlington County
Lorraine Silva, Arlington County
Deborah Titus, Fairfax County
Candice Walsh, District of Columbia
Mary Ann Zimmerman, Montgomery County

The following members were not present for any portion of the meeting:

Italo Cruz, District of Columbia
Frank DeBernardo, Prince George's County
Karen Lynch, Prince George's County
Alex Parcan, Montgomery County
Patrick Sheehan, Accessibility Advisory Committee Representative
Fred Walker, Fairfax County
Etta Cheri-Washington, District of Columbia

The following individuals were also present:

Chris Barnes, Member of the public
Sean Corcoran, Member of the public
Deborah Coram, Office of Equal Right and Employee Engagement, Metro
John Pasek, Riders' Advisory Council Staff Coordinator
Kurt Raschke, Member of the public

Loyda Sequeira, Board Secretary, Metro

II. Public Comment Period:

Chris Barnes raised a number of concerns about Metro service and specific incidents, including:

- Power-loss situations at rail stations;
- Escalator outages as a result of these power-loss situations that were not reported;
- Metro employees parking and blocking sidewalks and curb cuts in front of the Silver Spring station;
- Metro’s discovery of issues with railcar intercoms, after riders had been reporting problems for years;
- Changes to Metro’s on-time performance reporting measurements that make it look like service is improving when it isn’t;
- Concerns about Metro promoting “undeserving” employees, specifically poorly-performing bus operators, because they are required to under agreement with the union;
- Changes to Metro’s Twitter account; and
- The slow pace of replacing carpeting in railcars with resilient flooring.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Mr. Ball noted that the order of the agenda would need to change to accommodate the Board Chair, who would be arriving later in the meeting, but was delayed by issues on the Orange line. Without objection, the agenda was approved as presented.

IV. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes:

Without objection, the minutes of the June 6, 2013 meeting minutes were approved as presented.

V. Title VI Outreach:

Mr. Ball then introduced Deborah Coram from Metro’s Office of Equal Opportunity and Employee Engagement. Ms. Coram told the Council that she was coming to them to talk about the new requirements from the Federal Transit Administration that Metro on which Metro wants to get public comment. She explained that as a recipient of federal funds, Metro must comply with the nondiscrimination provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that covers race, color and national origin (language access). She explained that every three years, Metro submits a Title VI plan, with its next submittal due in September 2014. She said that Metro has to go out to the public and get its feedback and comments to help determine definitions for the following policies:

- Major service change;
- Disparate impact; and
- Disproportionate burden.

Ms. Coram explained Metro's plans on how it will be reaching out to the public in August with proposed definitions for the terms listed above. She said that Metro would be reaching out to Community Based Organizations, as well as conducting focus groups and intercept interviews. She asked for any help the Council could provide in raising awareness of this effort.

Ms. Coram also explained that Metro needs to solicit public comment whenever it proposes for major service changes or fare changes. She added that Metro will also be reaching out to the public to get their help in developing a formal public participation plan. She said that the public participation plan needed to be designed so as to engage all members of the community, including minority, low-income and limited English proficient (LEP) populations, and provided the Council with a timeline for this project. She said that she would keep the Council informed of this project's schedule so that they could help with outreach activities for this project.

In response to a question from Mr. Ball, Ms. Coram said that, to define a major service change, Metro would be looking at *span*, *frequency* and *coverage* of service. Mr. Ball noted that the Council is organizing a series of listening sessions throughout the area and suggested that these may be good opportunities for staff to get feedback from riders. He also noted that Council members may be able to suggest contacts for Ms. Coram and her staff to talk with.

Mr. Ball then opened the floor for questions and comments.

Comments from Members of the Public:

Kurt Raschke asked whether the public participation plan that is developed as part of this Title VI effort will be used throughout Metro. He said that it could be a very valuable addition to the Metro's processes.

Chris Barnes said that it is always great to reach out to riders and asked Ms. Coram how he could contact her with further questions.

Comments from Council Members:

Ms. Titus said that it is good to reach out to different people and asked whether Metro would be contacting individuals with disabilities as part of its outreach in developing a public participation plan. She suggested that Metro contact the National Council for Independent Living. She added that she would be willing to reach out to her county supervisor for suggestions on how to coordinate outreach. Ms. Coram said that she could provide council members with information to give out to members of the public to direct them to the online survey or provide them with paper surveys. She said that Metro could also use the RAC as a focus group for this effort.

Ms. Jackson asked whether Metro would be working with the federal government employees because of the large number of federal employees who are SmartBenefits users. Ms. Coram said that Metro will be reaching out through its database of registered SmarTrip® users.

Ms. Zimmerman noted that there are many advisory boards in Montgomery County that deal with transit and transportation issues and suggested that it may be worthwhile for Metro to reach out to these bodies as it develops its outreach plans.

Mr. Wright asked whether Ms. Coram's office also dealt with employee issues related to civil rights and discrimination concerns. She responded that yes, her office works on issues concerning both riders and employees. Mr. Wright said that he had heard that certain bus lines don't get the support or resources from Metro that they need, possibly because of the demographics of the neighborhood that they serve. Ms. Coram said that her office investigates those types of complaints under Title VI and that they work with Bus Planning to ensure that any issues raised are addressed appropriately.

In response to a question from Ms. Walker, Ms. Coram said that Title VI does not address gender equity, which is instead covered under Title VII. Ms. Walker suggested that, for its outreach, Metro "go where people already are," rather than requiring them to attend separate meetings. She added that because many people contact Metro via telephone, Metro should do outreach using phone calls as well as in-person surveys. Ms. Coram said that Metro has done "pop-up" meetings to gather feedback on this project and that it will also be speaking to community-based organizations (CBOs) and has had success with this method.

Mr. Ball said that Metro staff should gather feedback from riders directly on buses and trains. He also noted that there are many individuals in the District of Columbia that do not fall into the categories targeted by Title VI but who are nonetheless transit dependent.

Mr. Ball also suggested that Metro look for riders who have stopped riding Metrorail or Metrobus as part of its survey efforts, because they are being effectively shut out from using transit because of poor service.

Ms. Hermanson asked whether the changes associated with the Silver line, including changes to service on the Orange and Blue lines, would be considered a "major service change." Ms. Coram said that the launch of service on the Silver line is a major service change and Metro conducted a Title VI equity analysis on the proposed changes.

Ms. Walsh echoed Ms. Walker's suggestion that Metro should go to locations where people are already, rather than having them come to separate meetings. She said that she thinks that "pop-up" meetings are effective at gathering people's opinions. Ms. Coram noted that Metro was very

pleased with the response it got to its outreach for the upcoming Silver Line. She told the Council that 507 people attended the three Metro-sponsored meetings, and that when Metro develops its formal public participation plan, it will add staff to support the plan's activities.

In response to a question from Mr. Ball, Ms. Coram explained that the Title VI reports are filed with the Federal Transit Administration. She said that she would consider making these reports available after they are approved by the FTA.

Ms. King-Adams asked whether Metro had any upcoming outreach events scheduled. Ms. Coram said that it is currently doing outreach with CBOs. Ms. King-Adams volunteered that students at Catholic University, where she worked, could assist with outreach efforts.

Mr. Ball encouraged Council members to email him suggestions of community organizations that they think Metro should contact as part of its Title VI outreach efforts.

Ms. Silva suggested that Metro staff attend community events such as the Columbia Pike Blues Fest and other ethnic festivals as part of their outreach efforts.

Mr. Ball noted that many of the streetcar lines from the 1920s still exist as bus lines, and asked whether these historical patterns have any impact on transit service equity. Ms. Coram explained that, in preparing Title VI reports, Metro looks at demographic information overlaid with Metro service information, including low-income and ethnic populations. She added that Metro also does an overall equity review of its system every three years.

Ms. Titus volunteered that she is free every Friday and would be willing to assist in passing out surveys or other information in Fairfax County.

Mr. Ball noted that Mrs. Hudgins was held up by a rail service disruption and moved on to the next item in the agenda. He said that once she arrived, the Council would return to the discussion on "Customer Service and Values."

VI. Operations and Communications Committee Follow-Up:

Ms. Hermanson reviewed the information that the committee received from Metro's Customer Service staff at its May meeting on how Metro handles customer comments and complaints.

She noted that the committee learned that:

- Two-thirds of comments come in via phone;
- Staff go to great lengths to get information to identify and provide feedback to specific employees based on customers' comments;

- Station managers have no process to record and forward complaints provided to them verbally by riders; and
- The most common complaints involved late buses, waits for the Blue line and routes taken by MetroAccess vehicles.

Ms. Hermanson said that she would be interested to get suggestions from Council members or members of the public on what kind of information they would find useful to help them develop recommendations to improve customer service. She noted that some of the initial suggestions were that the online customer comment form could be intimidating for many riders and to expand the hours that the telephone customer information center is open. Ms. Walker said that she thought that these hours may be extended in the near future.

Comments from members of the public:

Mr. Raschke said that there was a differentiation between “customer information” staff and “customer service” staff and that it would be better if there was a single group that could deal with both types of issues. He said that the goal should be to have customer service coverage at all hours that Metro is operating.

Mr. Barnes noted that the only statistic related to customer service measured as part of Metro’s “Vital Signs” report is its customer complaint and commendation levels. He added that he learned that, under Metro’s tariff, the Authority isn’t allowed to provide refunds, but that it can offer riders coupons for free rides to be taken later.

Comments from Council members:

Ms. Titus asked whether Ms. Hermanson had asked for information on the process by which customer comments are routed for a response. Ms. Hermanson said that the committee was provided with some insight on this process, but that it could probably get more detailed information, if it requested it. She said she would send out an email to committee members asking them what kind of information they think would be helpful, in terms of understanding Metro’s processes and developing recommendations.

Ms. Silva explained that customer complaints are sent from the central customer service office to the appropriate department or operating divisions for response, though most of the time, the customer service representative tries to close the case on the first contact.

VII. Upcoming Committee Meetings:

Ms. Zimmerman told the Council that the next Safety and Security Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday, July 24th at 7:30 p.m. at the Metro Building.

Ms. Hermanson announced that the next Operations and Communications Committee meeting would also be held on the night of July 24th, at 6:30 p.m., immediately prior to the Safety Committee's meeting.

VIII. Council Membership:

Mr. Ball told the Council that membership was down by three people due to the recent resignations of Thais Austin and Patrick Delaney, and that the group would be losing one more member, Kara Merrigan, at the end of July. He said that efforts were underway to fill those vacancies.

Mr. Wright asked whether there was a rule against District of Columbia Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) representatives serving on the Council. Mr. Pasek said that, because they are considered elected officials, ANC commissioners are not eligible to serve on the Council.

IX. Customer Service and Values:

Mrs. Hudgins arrived and Mr. Ball then moved the discussion to the agenda item concerning customer service and values. He said that Mrs. Hudgins had come to the Council to discuss the idea of a customer pledge. Mr. Ball said that the Council has heard this idea from members of the public and at its listening sessions and that the idea has gained some traction that the Council is interested in pursuing. He explained that the discussion at this meeting would focus on process and how the Council can work with the Board on this issue, and that the discussion on more substantive aspects of a customer pledge would occur later.

Mrs. Hudgins thanked the Council for providing its research on the various customer pledges used by other transit agencies. She said that both the Board and the General Manager agree that there is a need to set expectations for customers and that, while a lot has been done to try and improve the customer experience, Metro's isn't "there" yet, in terms of fixing all of its issues. She noted that this is an opportune time to step back and try and address issues around improving customer service, now that the Board has approved Metro's strategic plan. She said that the best thing that Metro has been able to do is to go out and talk with customers and that the Board wants to work with staff to develop a process for them to reach out to customers, using the Board's Customer Service and Operations Committee as a forum to have a public discussion.

Mrs. Hudgins explained that while Metro has accomplished a lot of things that will improve the customer experience and to get the system to a state of good repair, but many of those things are invisible to the customer. She said that because much of this work has been invisible to customers, they are still frustrated by delays and incidents when they occur. She said that staff will be developing a process for outreach and information-gathering and used the previous fall's Board Safety Committee meeting and discussion on incident communications as an example. She added that it is also important to bring the AAC into this discussion as well.

She said that Metro needs to be able to figure out how to accurately measure:

- Whether it is communicating well; and
- Whether it is accomplishing its goals.

Mrs. Hudgins added that she hoped to have this discussion within a relatively short timeframe, hopefully before the end of the year.

Mr. Ball asked Mrs. Hudgins what she perceived the Council's role to be in the process, and asked whether it could provide suggestions or react to what is developed either by Metro staff or the Board. Mrs. Hudgins said that it's too early to clearly say what the Council's role will be in the process, but that one important role that the Council has already played is to have jumpstarted the discussions around this issue. She noted that the Board wanted to be engaged in the process and said that she needed to discuss this matter further with the Board. Mrs. Hudgins added that the Board is very much in agreement with the concerns that have been raised about customer service.

In response to a question from Mr. Ball as to whether it would be helpful for the Council to come up with some suggestions for the Board to consider, Mrs. Hudgins said that would be helpful, but that it will also be helpful to go out to the public in a thorough way. Mr. Ball noted that the Council's planned "Listening Sessions" provide opportunities to talk with riders directly about their concerns.

In response to a question from Ms. Zimmerman regarding a timeline for this project, Mrs. Hudgins said that she hoped to have this completed by the end of the year but that she didn't want to commit to a specific timeframe because she wanted to ensure that the process is thorough.

Ms. Titus said that she would welcome the opportunity to work with her County supervisor to get additional feedback. Mrs. Hudgins said that there is also a need for Metro to reach out to new customers, along with reaching out to current riders. She said that this outreach is important because it speaks not only to the process, but also to Metro's value system, and explained that Metro needs a customer commitment and to show that its commitment to customers is one of its values. Mrs. Hudgins added that it is important to have both the RAC and the AAC involved because those groups represent the breadth of Metro's customer base.

Mr. Wright noted that much of the growth in Maryland is occurring outside of the Beltway, in areas where Metro doesn't serve. He asked whether there is a way to incorporate customer service into reaching these potential riders. Mrs. Hudgins said that Metro needs to look at the best tools to engage communities inside the Beltway because many of these individuals don't

have time to attend meetings or get on Twitter. She said that this explains why it is important to engage the RAC and other groups, such as social service agencies, because they help to represent the breadth of Metro's customer base and their varied expectations. She said that she sees this as a partnership between riders and Metro and that both groups have a responsibility to that partnership.

Ms. King-Adams said that Mrs. Hudgins had answered her question in her discussion of engaging social service agencies in this outreach effort.

Ms. Walsh said that she understood the idea of a customer pledge, but that she wanted to know what would happen if Metro didn't live up to its standards and what kind of recourse customers would have in such a situation. Mrs. Hudgins replied that figuring that out is the task that lies ahead for the Board, Metro staff and the Council. She added that Metro has a lot of metrics that it uses to measure its progress, but these aren't always articulated clearly to riders and don't always reflect the customer experience. She said that better defining these measures helps to frame the discussion and that it is important to determine whether or not Metro is delivering quality service and, if not, what actions it can take to make improvements.

Mr. Ball then opened the floor to comments from members of the public.

Comments from Members of the Public:

Mr. Barnes asked Mrs. Hudgins whether she was aware of the outrage that the public feels towards Metro and how she, as a Board member, was reaching out to Metro's riders. He also asked about her Metro usage. Mrs. Hudgins said that in addition to her service on the Metro Board, she also serves on the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission and the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority and also has a transportation advisory group in Fairfax County. She added that she is a regular Metro user.

Mr. Barnes said that Metro's social media outreach is failing miserably and that anything she can do as a Board member to make improvements would be appreciated.

Mr. Raschke thanked Mrs. Hudgins for taking the time to come to the Council's meeting to discuss this issue. He explained that what riders are looking for from Metro is for the agency to "step up" – not just to publicly document its internal policies, but also to raise those to a higher level. He said that when an incidents happens, riders are looking for a more competent response than what they are seeing currently, and added that one of the problems is that riders don't hear about follow-up actions that Metro is taking to address issues that its finds. Mr. Raschke also discussed the idea of providing customers with a refund on their fare when service disruptions occur.

Sean Corcoran noted that rail ridership is down and that the Board can use this customer commitment to help rebuild ridership. He said that riders are frustrated because after incidents, Metro says that things will change, but then they don't, and raised the issue of malfunctioning railcar intercoms that Metro said would be addressed and wasn't as an example of this lack of follow-through. He asked what the public can do to keep these kinds of issues at the forefront of discussions.

Mrs. Hudgins said that incidents and disruptions are critically important and that we need to take the attitude that "if the customer doesn't feel like he or she is being communicated with, then he/she isn't being communicated with." She said that improvements cannot be beyond our ability to make and that determining what these improvements need to be is the work that needs to be done. She added that the Board and the General Manager hear customers' concerns and their work is to figure out the process to best address them.

Ms. Jackson asked why Metro Board members from Fairfax voted to approve the service changes on the Blue line as part of "Rush+." Mr. Hudgins responded that "Rush+" is a difficult issue and that the discussion among Virginia Board members has been how to balance the need for the Orange and Silver lines to function well along with the Blue line and to use its tunnels in the most efficient way. She said that Metro's challenge is to convince riders to change their riding patterns and that Metro has tried to find solutions, including new bus routes, but that these have not been accepted, perhaps because riders' travel patterns are already set.

Ms. Hudgins said that the capacity challenges faced by Metro that resulted in Rush+ are representative of the challenges that it will face in the future as ridership continues to grow and underscores the need to continue work on Metro's long-term strategic plan.

Mr. Ball suggested that the discussion about customer expectations and values may want to specifically separate out their expectations concerning trackwork. He encouraged the Board to think about milestones that can be used to measure progress. Mrs. Hudgins noted that trackwork would be part of the Board's discussion on this topic because it drives the much of discussion about service concerns.

Mr. Ball thanked Mrs. Hudgins for coming to the meeting and for engaging the Council in discussions on this topic. He said that he looked forward to working with her and the Board on this issue over the coming months.

X. Open Mic

Mr. Raschke raised concerns about drug innuendo in a recent Metro ad that encouraged riders to switch from paper farecards to SmarTrip®. He explained that the text, which encouraged riders to "switch to the hard stuff," could be seen as advocating drug use.

Mr. Barnes said that he was very concerned about the direction the Council was taking and where things were going with its discussions and membership.

Mr. Wright said that the Council needs to examine the Washington area's growth trends and think about who will be in the region in 2025 and 2040, demographically. He said that the Council will need to examine this information in terms of how Metro will meet the needs of these residents.

Without objection, the meeting was adjourned at 8:32 p.m.