

**Riders' Advisory Council**  
**June 5, 2013**

**Minutes**

**I. Call to Order:**

Mr. Ball called the June 2013 meeting of the Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:33 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, At-Large

James Wright, Maryland Vice Chair, Prince George's County

Frank DeBernardo, Prince George's County

Patrick Delaney, Montgomery County

Pat Jackson, Fairfax County

Patricia King-Adams, District of Columbia

Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee Representative

Lorraine Silva, Arlington County

Fred Walker, Fairfax County

Candice Walsh, District of Columbia

Etta Cheri Washington, District of Columbia

Mary Ann Zimmerman, Montgomery County

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

Thais Austin, District of Columbia

Italo Cruz, District of Columbia

Karen Lynch, Prince George's County

Kara Merrigan, Arlington County

Alex Parcan, Montgomery County

Deborah Titus, Fairfax County

The following individuals were also present:

Chris Barnes, Member of the public

Jim Bongiorno, Office of the Treasury, Metro

Drew Hunter, Member of the public

John Pasek, Council Staff Coordinator

Kurt Raschke, Member of the public

Loyda Sequeira-Castillo, Board Secretary

**Approved July 11, 2013**

## **II. Public Comment:**

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

Mr. Barnes discussed that Metro has metrics to measure its performance through its “Vital Signs” reports, but does not have any kind of measurement to show the effectiveness of its communications efforts. He noted, for example, that Metro’s @MetroForward Twitter account, which is supposed to provide information about Metro’s rebuilding efforts, hasn’t tweeted since May 3<sup>rd</sup>. He urged the Council to ask Metro to implement this type of measurement.

Mr. Hunter said that Metro is deeply distrusted by its customers and that he lays the blame for that distrust squarely on the shoulders of its public relations department, specifically the department chief, Dan Stessel. He raised questions about some of the statements made by Mr. Stessel regarding recent service disruptions and asked the Council to question him about these statements. Mr. Hunter also read the Council a couple of tweets from Twitter users who were concerned about their safety on the Metro system and asked the Council whether other transit systems riders’ are as concerned for their safety as those who ride Metro.

## **III. Approval of Agenda, Past Meeting Minutes:**

The agenda and the minutes of the May 1, 2013 Riders’ Advisory Council were approved by unanimous consent.

## **IV. Offboard SmarTrip® Reloading:**

Mr. Ball then turned the floor over to Jim Bongiorno from Metro’s Office of the Treasury to discuss Metro’s plans to install machines at bus stops that would allow customers to add value to their SmarTrip® cards, rather than doing so at the bus farebox.

Mr. Bongiorno explained that a significant number of Metrobus riders add value to their SmarTrip® cards at bus fareboxes, which causes delays for buses and riders. He provided the Council with an overview of the project to install machines that would allow offboard loading at select bus stops, focusing on:

- the different types of machines that are being considered;
- the requirements the machines would need to meet;
- the criteria for selecting potential locations; and
- the locations identified by applying these criteria.

Mr. Bongiorno asked for the Council’s feedback on the proposed locations and their ideas on how to market the use of these machines and any possible incentives to encourage riders to use these machines rather than continuing to load value at the bus farebox.

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

*Comments from members of the public:*

Mr. Raschke asked whether Metro would be open to selling limited-use, disposable SmarTrip® cards from these machines in addition to their functioning as locations to reload regular SmarTrip® cards. Mr. Bongiorno said that he appreciated the suggestion, though the machines would have to support this type of vending capability, which the parking meter-style machines being considered do not. He added that this function may require more power than could be provided using solar power.

Mr. Barnes said that he is happy to see that Metro is moving forward with this project and added that he hopes that this project coincides with the upgrades to Metro's faregates that are being planned. He noted that there was nothing in the presentation about protecting riders who would be inserting cash into these machines in low-light or otherwise isolated conditions. Mr. Bongiorno responded that these machines wouldn't be on Metro property and that riders would need to use their best judgment as to whether or not it's safe to add value to their cards at their location.

Mr. Hunter said that he thought that Metro was trying to move riders away from paying with cash, so he wasn't sure why Metro was considering installing these machines. Mr. Bongiorno said that, even as Metro moves forward with its new payment systems, there will still need to be a way for riders to use cash to pay for their trips or to add value to their contactless "smart" cards. He noted that these devices would have open technology, and so they could be adapted to Metro's planned open payment system.

Mr. Ball then closed the floor for comments from members of the public and opened the floor to comments from members of the Council.

*Council member comments:*

Ms. Washington said that Metro needs to think about the safety concerns associated with installing these machines at bus stops in high-crime locations. She suggested that Metro think about installing these types of self-service machines in CVS or Giant stores instead, since one of the barriers to riders adding value at CVS and Giant currently is that it is often difficult and time-consuming to deal with store staff.

Ms. Zimmerman suggested that Metro evaluate the % of cash loads on buses before and after these machines are rolled out to determine whether or not they have been successful. Mr. Bongiorno said that Metro would definitely be able to do this kind of before/after measurement using farebox data. Ms. Zimmerman added that there may also be a way to evaluate how useful customers find these machines versus the current system.

Mr. Walker asked whether Metro had talked to riders about why they add value to their cards at the bus farebox instead of other locations. He also noted that Metro's proposal lacked any "rider requirements" – things that riders should expect from the machines once they are installed. He also suggested that Metro partner with more stores to expand card loading capabilities to additional locations.

In response to Mr. Walker's comment about having more in-store card loading locations, Mr. Bongiorno said that many of the proposed machine locations are in front of retailers that have card loading machines in their stores. He said that Metro was puzzled by why there was so much on-board SmarTrip® loading at stops immediately adjacent to Customer Point-of-Sale (CPOS) locations. He noted that Mr. Walker's comments are helpful in explaining why riders may find it more convenient to load value on the bus rather than go into a store, wait in line, etc.

Ms. Walsh said that she thought that installing machines in locations that are not located near a CPOS (Customer Point-of-Sale) device or a rail station would be great convenience for customers. She said she thinks the reason that riders don't reload their cards at CVS because they either don't know or don't remember that they can add value to their cards there, or they're rushing to catch the bus. She suggested installing signage at bus stops to let people know about nearby opportunities to add value to their cards. Ms. Walsh also noted that once inside a CVS, it can be inconvenient to try and add value because riders have to seek out or wait for the correct staff person to help them. She recommended adding self-service machines inside existing CVS/Giant locations.

Mr. Delaney said that, from a security aspect, he considers these machines like ATMs, and noted that most ATMs have either mirrors mounted on them to allow customer to see behind them, or have cameras installed in them. He asked whether Metro has considered any of these safety monitoring features in these reloading machines. Mr. Bongiorno said that these features have been discussed, but Metro considers these machines akin to parking paystations, which don't have these features. He noted that, unlike an ATM, users would only be inserting small amount of cash and could use their credit/debit card to eliminate any cash handling. He said that because of these reasons, he thinks that the security risk would be lower at these machines than at ATMs.

Mr. Delaney also noted that the map showing proposed locations was broken down into machines at bus stops and machines at rail station bus bays. He asked whether Metro would consider reducing the number of machines at rail station bus bays and adding machines at additional bus stops since riders are already able to load their SmarTrip cards at rail stations. Mr. Bongiorno said that Metro is trying to evaluate the placement of these machines from a human behavior perspective – riders don't add value to their cards at rail stations now, even though they're currently able to, and said that he would like to know what Metro can do to encourage riders to use these already-existing options.

Ms. Jackson said that Metro should educate riders about the negative effects that they have when they load their SmarTrip® card at the bus farebox, and suggested that signage may help in this regard. Mr. Bongiorno said that Metro is thinking about launching a customer awareness campaign to try and discourage riders from loading their cards on the bus. Ms. Walsh added that giving riders more options would speed up bus loading; many riders don't realize there are other locations where they can load their cards besides the bus farebox.

Mr. DeBernardo said that he was excited to hear about this project until it was mentioned that Metro is considering parking meter-style machines. He explained that he has had numerous problems using parking paystations in the area and wants to make sure that whatever type of machines Metro ends up ordering, they're high-quality. He added that the best way to incentivize riders to use these machines to add value their cards is to give them a discount for using the machines.

Ms. King-Adams told Mr. Bongiorno that, due to past experiences, she now refuses to load more than \$5 on her SmarTrip® cards because she is concerned about losing her money and the length of time it takes to recover that money. She noted that many Metro riders don't have a lot of money to add to their SmarTrip® cards. She asked whether there would be a way for Metro to partner with a financial institution to allow people to add money to their SmarTrip® cards at ATMs.

Mr. Bongiorno said that he understood Ms. King-Adams' comment about people not having much money to load onto their SmarTrip® cards; he noted that out of all of the transactions that Metro analyzed where value was added to a card at a bus farebox, 55% of these were for \$2 or less. He added that Metro has enhanced its website to allow riders to add value to their cards online and has also established an "auto-reload" feature that replenishes a card's balance when it gets low. He said that there is a need for Metro to better market these features to get more riders to use them.

Ms. Silva asked for a more detailed map of proposed locations outside of the District of Columbia, specifically in Arlington County, so that she could provide her comments on these locations. She added that, with regards to incentives, Metro used to give a "bonus" to riders who added more than a certain amount of money onto their farecards. She also expressed her concern about the reliability of solar power for these machines and recommended that the machines have instructions in languages other than English.

In response to Ms. Silva's comment about the reliability of solar power for the machines, Mr. Bongiorno noted that the devices can run on battery power for up to a week in complete

darkness. He said that, in speaking with the District's Department of Transportation which uses similar machines, they have had not had any issues with the reliability of the solar power.

Mr. Wright noted that there were very few proposed locations shown in Prince George's County.

Ms. Walker said that there are issues with the employees at CVS that make it difficult to reload one's SmarTrip card there. She suggested that Metro look into other retail locations near rail stations such as 7-11s and gave the 7-11 near the Fort Totten Metro station as an example.

Mr. Ball suggested that Metro install reloading machines in front of the National Cathedral at Wisconsin and Massachusetts Avenues since that is a popular location for tourists who add value to their SmarTrip® cards on the bus. He also asked whether Metro can coordinate the installation of these machines with the upgrades being done to bus stops to install real-time arrival screens.

Mr. Ball suggested that Metro also install these reloading machines at check cashing stores, since that is where many unbanked individuals go to get money. He also recommended that bus operators hand out brochures to people that load value onto their SmarTrip® cards on the bus to provide them with information about alternative loading locations.

Mr. Ball thanked Mr. Bongiorno for his presentation.

**V. Report from Budget and Finance Committee:**

Mr. Wright reported that Bill Greene, Metro's budget director, provided a thorough overview of Metro's budget. He noted that the committee is currently without a chair and is trying to figure out whether or not to hold a meeting in June.

**VI. Report from Safety and Security Committee:**

Mr. Delaney reported that he was elected chair of the Council's Safety Committee at its previous meeting, despite the fact that he wasn't in attendance. He said that he will be providing an update to members shortly.

**VII. Report from Operations and Communications Committee:**

In Ms. Lynch's absence, Ms. Hermanson provided the report from the Operations and Communications Committee. She told the Council that representatives from Metro's Customer Relations department came in to talk about Metro's customer complaint process – its staffing levels, hours of service, the nature of customer complaints and how those complaints are resolved. Ms. Hermanson said that there was an encouraging exchange of information between Council members and Metro staff present at the meeting and that she would look forward to sharing additional information with members.

### **VIII. RAC Public Participation Process**

Ms. Walker noted that there was discussion at the Operations and Communications Committee meeting about the Council's process by which members of the public participate in Council meetings. She said that the committee approved the following changes, which, are being presented for approval by the full Council.

- The process, as proposed, would apply at RAC committee meetings as well as at the monthly full Council meeting;
- The proposal provides a timeframe for when members of the public can submit comments electronically; and
- The process would be subject to review on an annual basis.

Ms. Walker moved that the Council adopt the revised public comment procedures, as proposed. This motion was seconded by Ms. Zimmerman.

#### *Comments from members of the public:*

Mr. Barnes thanked the Council for being more open to input from members of the public.

Mr. Raschke said that the public comment process, as approved by the Council several months ago, has been functioning well and that the overall atmosphere of Council meetings is better.

#### *Comments from Council members:*

Mr. DeBernardo said that he had a question about the inclusion of the approval of the agenda and previous meeting minutes as part of the administrative items that would be done by unanimous consent. Ms. Walker said that this issue had been discussed previously and that it was informally agreed that the public had the right to comment on the agenda itself, though that would take place during the initial public comment period, not during the agenda approval item.

In response to a question from Ms. King-Adams, Ms. Walker and Mr. Ball reviewed the changes to the public participation process that were being proposed.

Mr. Delaney moved to end debate on this motion. Without objection, debate on the motion proposed by Ms. Walker was ended.

Mr. Ball then called for a vote on the main motion, as presented by Ms. Walker. Without objection, this motion was approved.

### **IX. Council Membership:**

Mr. Ball told members of the Council that, with some members leaving the Council, there will be some vacancies to be filled, primarily from the District of Columbia. He said that those vacancies would be filled as soon as possible.

**X. July Council Meeting:**

Mr. Ball explained that the July Riders' Advisory Council meeting is currently scheduled for the evening of July 3<sup>rd</sup>, which is immediately prior to the Independence Day holiday and asked for members' thoughts on moving the meeting back by one week to July 10<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Walker moved to reschedule the July Council meeting to Wednesday, July 10<sup>th</sup>. This motion was seconded by Ms. King-Adams.

Mr. Delaney said that the change to the Council's monthly meeting would now have it conflicting with the Safety Committee scheduled for July 10<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Ball said that, because there are five weeks in the month of July, it would be possible to shift all meetings back by one week. Mr. Delaney said the he would like to discuss the scheduling of the June Safety Committee meeting with the Committee's members, and may try to hold it on July 10<sup>th</sup>, prior to the Council's monthly meeting.

Without objection, the Council approved moving the monthly meeting to July 10<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Ball told members that there was a Metro system map available for them to sign as a farewell card for Mr. Seip, who has left the Council. He then added that the Council would be adjourning the meeting to go downstairs to preview new faregates and turnstiles that Metro is currently testing, and that this preview was only open to members of the Council.

Mr. Ball also provided members with an update on discussions concerning the idea of a customer pledge for Metro. He said that he had been in contact with Board Chair Tom Downs about this issue, and that there had been some discussions about this at the Board's Executive Committee. He said that he hoped to have a more detailed update at the Council's July meeting.

**X. Open Mic:**

Mr. Ball then opened the floor for comments.

*Comments by Members of the Public:*

Mr. Raschke said that the evening's preview of the proposed faregate alternatives only being open to Council members is yet another example of Metro not reaching out to some of its most loyal followers, such as himself and Mr. Barnes. He cited the example of the mock-ups for the 7000 Series railcars that were not open to the public and the focus groups that Metro did regarding the seats for the new railcars, which also weren't open to the broader public. Mr. Raschke said that such actions by Metro do not help it earn any goodwill from people who would likely be very strong supporters.

Mr. Barnes told the Council that he had filed a PARP (Public Access to Records Policy) request with Metro to find out who Metro has blocked on Twitter, because he is one of the people that



Metro has blocked on Twitter. He said that he thinks that no government agency should be blocking people from receiving information. He said that he will pass along any response he receives.

Another member of the public, who did not identify herself by name, said that she bought a weekly Short Trip Pass and was surprised to learn that it did not also cover bus fares in addition to Metrorail fares.

In response to Mr. Barnes' earlier comment, Mr. Delaney said that as the Council moves in the direction of being more open with its communications, social media will definitely be a part of those communications. He noted that there are a lot of comments on Twitter that are not constructive or civil, but they are still out there as comments. He added that some comments are civil. He said that this communication will only work if the Council fosters a dialogue. He said that while he doesn't agree with everything that is said on Twitter, he will continue to use it to learn about people's concerns and to gather information.

Mr. Hunter said that Metro needs to do a better job telling tourists about station closing times, especially since those are often prior to midnight. He told the Council about attending a recent Nationals game where fans had to leave before the game finished because of Metro's last train times. He said that something needed to be done about this, because Metro is stunting the city's growth. Mr. Ball noted that this issue has been raised and the Nationals have refused to pay for extra service.

*Comments from Council members:*

Ms. Hermanson said that the Council has, at various time, talked about the upcoming changes to Blue Line service when the Silver Line opens and whether there is anything that can be done to help those riders. Mr. Ball said that this would be discussed at the Council's next meeting.

Mr. Walker told the Council that on Monday there was a switch failure at the Vienna station, and during his hour and forty-five minute ride to Vienna from downtown, he didn't hear any announcements about the delay from the train operator.

Ms. Zimmerman said that she keeps getting notices about signal problems at Silver Spring and said that it would be helpful to find out why these problems keep occurring.

Without objection, Mr. Ball adjourned the meeting at 7:55 p.m. for the Council to take a tour of the proposed new faregates.