

Metro Riders' Advisory Council

November 6, 2013

I. Call to Order:

Mr. Ball called the November meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:34 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
Frank DeBernardo, Prince George's County
Patricia King-Adams, District of Columbia
Karen Lynch, Prince George's County
Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee Chair
Deborah Titus, Fairfax 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:

Pat Jackson, Fairfax County
Lorraine Silva, Arlington County

The following individuals were also present:

Jim Hamre, Office of Bus Planning, Scheduling and Customer Facilities, Metro
Julie Hershorn, Office of Bus Planning, Scheduling and Customer Facilities, Metro
John Pasek, Riders' Advisory Council Staff Coordinator, Metro
Kurt Raschke, Member of the Public
Loyda Sequeira, Board Secretary, Metro

II. Public Comment Period:

Mr. Ball opened the floor to comments from members of the public. There were no public comments.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Without objection, the agenda for the evening was approved as presented.

IV. Fall 2013 Metrobus Hearings – Recommendations:

Mr. Hamre provided the Council with an overview of the Metrobus public hearings that were held in September 2013, including the additional outreach that Metro staff conducted as part of the public hearing process. He also provided specific information on proposals that generated significant customer input, namely proposals to change the 30s (Pennsylvania-Wisconsin Avenue Line), the NH1 route (to/from National Harbor) and the 5A route (to/from Dulles Airport).

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

Ms. Zimmerman asked whether there was a difference between the comments that Metro received from its online survey and the comments it received in-person at the public hearings. Mr. Hamre said that there wasn't a notable difference, and added that riders all generally want the same things from their bus service – more service at greater and more reliable frequencies. He said that the Riggs Park public hearing that Ms. Zimmerman attended was the conclusion of an ongoing community dialogue about the routes in that part of the District of Columbia.

Ms. Walker congratulated Metro on these public hearings; she noted that they were well-attended and provided a good opportunity for dialogue. In response to her question about Metro's definition of disparate impact, Mr. Hamre provided a more detailed explanation of how Metro calculated whether a service change would have a disparate impact. He also explained, in response to a question from Mr. Ball, that if Metro took an action that was found to cause a disparate impact, it didn't mean that it couldn't take that action, but rather Metro would have to show that it had done everything it could to mitigate the impact of the action.

Ms. Walsh asked how Metro would enforce the “no smoking at bus stops” rule that was proposed as part of the changes to Metro's tariff. Mr. Hamre explained that this would just codify jurisdictional laws into Metro's tariff, and that enforcement would be performed by local authorities.

In response to a question from Ms. Walsh about proposed changes to the docket related off-board fare collection, Mr. Hamre said that this is something that will be tried on the new Crystal City-Potomac Yard Transitway.

Ms. Walsh also asked whether there are any changes proposed to the 50s buses that run on 14th Street in the District of Columbia. She noted that there had previously been talk of service changes. Mr. Hamre said that the study of service on 14th Street made recommendations to be

implemented in phases. He explained that some of these recommendations have been implemented, such as changes to midday service, but that Metro doesn't have additional funding or buses to implement the other changes. He said that Metro is hoping to expand its bus fleet in FY2015 and during the first quarter of FY2015, Metro will need to go through a process to determine where these extra buses should go.

Mr. Hamre did note that Metro is adding articulated buses to its 16th Street line, but all of the articulated coaches are currently assigned to service.

Ms. Zimmerman asked whether Metro had received specific suggestions for certain routes and how it planned to address those comments – she gave examples of the E-Line crosstown service and other routes mentioned at the hearing in Riggs Park that she attended. Mr. Hamre said that the changes proposed for the E-Line buses, will not require riders to change buses at Fort Totten to get to Friendship Heights. He added that riders have the ability to comment on items that are not specifically listed on the docket, and told Council members that Metro is having a dialogue with communities in Southeast DC about service on the 30's (Pennsylvania Avenue) line and also took comments about bus stops and shelters at the hearing that would be passed on to the appropriate staff.

Mr. DeBernardo noted that Mr. Hamre had said that this was the best participation in a set of bus hearings since 1995 and asked how this level of participation was achieved. Mr. Hamre said that online participation drove up the number of people taking part and also by putting staff out at bus stops, riders had more opportunities to share their ideas with Metro.

Ms. King-Adams noted that not many changes were planned for Maryland and asked Mr. Hamre if he could explain that in more detail. Mr. Hamre said that because there weren't many changes proposed and because these changes needed to be revenue-neutral, there weren't many opportunities this time around for additional investments in service in Maryland. He said that there are more investments to come in Maryland in the future.

Mr. Wright thanked Mr. Hamre for coming out to the hearing in Oxon Hill. He noted that the issue of how to best provide transit service to National Harbor is a difficult one. Mr. Hamre explained that Metro staff put out the proposal to change service on the NH1 route that serves National Harbor to give riders the opportunity to express their opinions. He added that the City of Alexandria continues to be interested in transit service to National Harbor from Alexandria, but in the coming year, the City's transit funding will be spent on the Crystal City – Potomac Yard Transitway project. Mr. Hamre noted that staff is proposing later bus service to and from National Harbor to Southern Avenue station, along with earlier weekend bus service between National Harbor and Southern Avenue.

Mr. Wright also told Mr. Hamre that he supported keeping the B30 (BWI Airport) route operating as it does currently, rather than adding service to Arundel Mills, and that Metro should add buses to the 16th Street (S-Line) service, as it is always crowded.

Mr. Ball asked Mr. Hamre what riders can expect to see regarding Metrobus changes in FY2015. Mr. Hamre responded that Metro will be looking at possible changes to routes including:

- In Maryland: routes that have been the subject of Priority Corridor Network (PCN) studies and Route W15 in the Oxon Hill area of Prince George's County;
- In D.C: the 80 (North Capitol Street) and Rhode Island Avenue lines, Route H2/H4 (Crosstown), V7/V8 (Minnesota Avenue – M Street) lines in D.C. along with connections to serve new retail in Lincoln Heights;
- In Virginia: the 29 (Little River Turnpike), 2 (Washington Boulevard), 4 (Arlington Boulevard) and REX (Richmond Highway Express) lines.

Mr. Hamre noted that Metro has completed 19 PCN studies and have implemented at least some of the recommendations from ten of those studies so far. He also told the Council that Metro will be receiving 20 additional buses next year, which will allow for additional incremental service changes as well. He said that he would welcome the opportunity to come back to the Council to talk about Bus Planning's FY2015 workplan at a later date.

Mr. Ball thanked Mr. Hamre for coming to the meeting and for the information he provided to the Council.

V. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Ball noted that there was now a quorum of members present, which would allow for the approval of past meeting minutes. Without objection, the minutes of July 2, 2013 and October 2, 2013 were approved as presented.

VI. Respect Your Ride Campaign:

Elizabeth Quintana, from the Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD) and Brooke Fosse, from Metro's Office of Bus Planning provided the Council with an overview of Metro's "Respect Your Ride" campaign, which conducts outreach to local students focusing on improving rider behavior on trains and buses. Ms. Fosse also explained her role as a liaison between schools in D.C. and Metro's Office of Bus Planning, working with the schools on issues such as scheduling as well as student behavior and about the outreach that Metro conducts with students. She also noted that Metrobus ridership by D.C. students is up significantly because of a recently-introduced program that allows students free rides on Metrobus. She said that ridership has risen from approximately 12-14,000 students last year to 20-22,000 students this year.

Ms. Quintana noted that the assemblies that Metro holds with students have helped put a “face” on Metro for the students, meaning that they are more likely to identify with Metro employees and exhibit better behavior when riding the system.

Mr. Ball then opened the floor up to questions and comments from Council members.

Ms. King-Adams asked if the “Respect Your Ride” program was working with older students, specifically those between the ages of 19-24, and described an incident she had with older students at the Anacostia Station. Ms. Quintana said that the program is currently only targeting students age 18 and under, and that the program hopes to reinforce good behavior with younger students that will continue as they get older.

In response to a question from Mr. DeBernardo, Ms. Fosse said that the program has reached about 3000 students through school assemblies, with additional students targeted at community events and back-to-school nights.

Ms. Lynch asked how Metro is measuring the effectiveness of this program. Ms. Fosse said that Metro is tracking the number of warning citations given to students for disruptive behavior on Metro, and is also reviewing how quickly principals are able to address disciplinary incidents. Ms. Quintana said that Metro also plans to track the number of students who have signed the “Respect Your Ride” Program pledge.

In response to a question from Ms. Lynch as to whether the program is conducting outreach in Prince George’s County, Ms. Quintana said that Metro staff has been to Central High School in Capitol Heights. Ms. Fosse noted that she also goes out and talks to staff at various bus divisions that identify issues with student behavior.

Ms. Washington said that the behavior issues she notices don’t occur when students are going to or from school, but rather at locations like Gallery Place, where students from different schools come into contact with one another. Ms. Quintana explained that the “Respect Your Ride” program is focusing first on school outreach, though Metro does use its crime analysis software, “MetroStat” to help identify areas where additional resources are needed. She added that officers assigned to Gallery Place also regularly attend the school assemblies that Metro holds.

Ms. Walker asked about warnings issued to students – specifically how they get them, and what happens after students get a certain number of warnings from Metro. She added that she liked the change in tone from Metro that this program represents – that it is more collaborative and less punitive. She also asked whether Metro has any internship opportunities for students that could help strengthen the relationship between students and Metro.

Ms. Titus asked whether students are required to carry identification when they ride Metro. Ms. Fosse explained that, beginning in February 2014, students will need to use their “DCOne” card, to use the Metro, which functions as both a transit card and a student ID, and has a student’s picture on it.

Ms. Walsh suggested putting a list of “rules for riding Metro” on the back of wallet cards that have the “Respect Your Ride” pledge for students to carry with them.

Mr. Ball thanked Ms. Quintana and Ms. Fosse for their presentation.

VII. Metro Website Brainstorming:

Mr. Ball noted that Metro has issued proposals to redesign its website, and said that he wanted the Council to provide input on what they would like to see in a revamped Metro website.

He started off the discussion by asking members to complete the sentence, “I wish Metro’s website featured...”

Mr. Wright said that he wished that the website was easier to use for individuals looking for information about Metro’s budget.

Mr. DeBernardo said that he wished the Trip Planner were easier to use and would save users’ destinations/points of origin. He said that using the Trip Planner is not intuitive.

Ms. Lynch said that she wished that the website was structured more simply and that frequently-accessed information was easier to get to.

Ms. Washington said that she wished there were better information provided about who to contact about specific issues of concern.

Mr. Walker said that he would like to see 360° photos of station exits and more information about SmarTrip® rules and regulations.

Ms. Zimmerman said that she would like to see more a more usable list of what is working and what isn’t working, such as escalators.

Mr. Sheehan said that he wanted to ensure that any changes to Metro’s website complied with ADA Section 508 standards.

Ms. Walker said that she would like to see better opportunities for customer feedback, similar to the “Rate Your Ride” feature on the MTA Maryland website. Ms. Hermanson added that she would like a more interactive customer comment form.

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

Comments from Members of the Public:

Mr. Raschke said that the Council should consider the scope of work outlined in the Request for Proposals. He explained that the website can things look better, but that there are underlying issues with data quality that affect the quality of the information provided to riders.

VIII. Upcoming Listening Session:

Mr. Ball reminded members that the upcoming Maryland “Listening Session” was scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Monday, November 25th at the Largo-Kettering Library.

IX. RAC Business:

Mr. Pasek provided an overview of the number of applications received for the open spots on the Council and the process by which applications were being reviewed in advance of the Board making appointments in December.

X. Reports from Committees:

Ms. Zimmerman said that she needed to determine which Council members are on the Safety and Security Committee. She added that if there is a topic for discussion, she will stand up the committee for a meeting in December, but otherwise would wait to re-form the committee in January 2014, after new members are appointed.

XI. Open Mic:

Mr. Walker said that he wanted to get some answers about the concerns he brought up about using SmarTrip® cards. He noted that if a rider doesn’t use his or her card for more than 20 days, it takes several steps for them to retrieve the money stored on the card.

Ms. Walker told Council members that she attended the recent Metro Board meeting and that there were several topics of discussion by Board members, including:

- Commendations given to Metro employees who provided assistance following the shooting incident at the Navy Yard; and
- Significant discussion of Metro’s proposed Title VI guidelines.

She added that there were also several comments from members of the public concerning accessibility issues related to proposed development at the Takoma Metro station.

Comments from Members of the Public:

An member of the public expressed concerns about the impending opening of the Silver Line. She explained that her company will be moving to Tysons Corner and she would like more information about the planned opening date for the service.

Ms. Titus said that she thought that the Airports Authority would be turning the project over to Metro in December, which would allow for the start of service sometime after that.

Without objection, the meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m.