

Riders' Advisory Council
November 7, 2012

I. Call to Order:

Dr. Bracmort called the November 2012 meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:35 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
Thais Austin, District of Columbia
Ben Ball, District of Columbia
Frank DeBernardo, Prince George's County
Chris Farrell, Montgomery County
Barbara Hermanson, City of Alexandria
Joseph Kitchen, Prince George's County
Kara Merrigan, Arlington County
Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Council Chair
Deborah Titus, Fairfax County
Carol Carter Walker, District of Columbia
Candice Walsh, District of Columbia
Ron Whiting, Montgomery County

Other individuals present:

Al Himes, Office of Bus Planning, Metro
John Pasek, Council staff coordinator, Metro
Loyda Sequeira, Board Secretary Metro

II. Public Comment Period:

There were no comments from members of the public.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Mr. Ball moved approval of the agenda as presented. This motion was seconded by Ms. Silva. Without objection, the agenda was approved as presented.

IV. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes:

The approval of past meeting minutes was deferred until a subsequent meeting.

V. Bus Stop Livability Grant:

Al Himes from Metro's Office of Bus Planning provided the Council with an overview of two grant programs that Metro will be using to make improvements to bus stops around the Washington region.

Mr. Himes told the Council that Metro is receiving \$1.5 million as part of the New Freedom program, which will be used to improve 50 bus stops throughout the region. He explained that under the terms of the grant, the improvements must benefit customers with disabilities, and noted that members of Metro's Accessibility Advisory Committee and jurisdictional staff members worked to develop criteria to prioritize bus stops that should be included in the program. Mr. Himes noted that 75 bus stops have been selected for initial design work. He then provided an overview of the criteria that were used to rank bus stops. Bus stops were ranked according to the following weighted criteria:

- Have been requested for improvement through Metro's ADA office;
- Be located in a census tract with two of the following three criteria:
 - Contain moderate or low-income individuals;
 - Contain households with no vehicle available;
 - Contain persons with disabilities;
- Be a common destination from the census tracts described above; and
- Be located on a priority corridor or high-frequency bus line.

Mr. Himes also described the second grant that Metro received to make bus stop improvements, which is through the Bus Livability Program. He explained that Metro has a \$1.686 million budget for this program, which will pay to improve 66 bus stops in the region. He said that Metro has estimated that each stop will require approximately \$21,000 for improvements, split into \$3500 for design work and \$17,500 for construction. He also noted that the improvements under the Bus Livability program are not directly targeted at individuals with disabilities.

Mr. Himes then discussed the criteria for selecting bus stops to be included in the Bus Livability program and also solicited suggestions for how to get input from members of the public on which stops should be improved. He asked Council members for their ideas on how Metro could use online tools to get input and how Metro should go out into the community to get riders'

feedback. He explained that Metro's goal is to develop a priority list of bus stops that could be used not only with this current grant, but also when future grant monies become available.

Dr. Bracmort then opened the floor to questions and comments from members of the Council.

Mr. Farrell asked whether one of the criteria was to speed boarding and alighting from buses by allowing greater use of the back door. Mr. Himes responded that the goal is that any improved stop would accommodate both doors of the bus, and that speeding entry/exit could be made part of the ranking criteria. He said that some of the improvements that could be funded through the grant included sidewalks, bus shelters, curb cuts and concrete landing pads.

Ms. Hermanson said that she appreciates having a shelter available when waiting for a bus. She added that she was surprised at the amount of money being spent to prioritize bus stops planned for improvements. Mr. Himes replied that he will try to maximize the amount of money available for construction.

Mr. Ball said that a lot of issues at bus stops are caused by streetscape elements installed by the jurisdictions, such as trash cans and tree boxes. He also suggested that Metro look at the stops at Adams Mill Road/Irving Street NW (e/b) and U/14th Streets NW (e/b) for possible improvements, and asked whether the grant money can be used to provide for real-time arrival signage at bus stops. Mr. Himes said that these signs would be an acceptable use of grant money, though Metro would need to figure out criteria for installing these signs and how to evaluate installing such signage versus making accessibility improvements.

Mr. Kitchen asked what the timeline is for Metro to receive feedback. He also asked that the Council be provided with additional information on Metro's planned outreach to the public, and suggested that any public meetings that Metro holds on bus stop improvements also cover other topics so as to generate greater attendance by members of the public. Mr. Himes said that he will be looking for opportunities to "piggyback" on other public outreach meetings and that Metro expects to be soliciting online feedback in January. He added that he will be working with Metro's Office of Civil Rights to develop an inclusive outreach plan. Mr. Kitchen asked that the Council be kept apprised of Metro's outreach efforts as part of this grant program.

In response to a question from Mr. Sheehan about the timeline for improvements funded under the New Freedom grant, Mr. Himes said that Metro is working with the jurisdictions to develop construction timetables, though it doesn't have a specific timeline at present. Mr. Sheehan said that he would appreciate any information Mr. Himes could provide on the status and timeline for improvements.

Ms. Silva asked whether jurisdictions were providing any money to help fund the planned improvements and whether stops selected for the New Freedom grant have been identified. Mr. Himes said that the stops under the New Freedom grant have been identified and shared with the AAC and could also be shared with the RAC.

Mr. Himes also talked about the selection criteria and explained that Metro selected 75 stops even though it only has funding to improve approximately 50 stops since it would be infeasible to make improvements at certain stops. He said that once Metro gets cost estimates, it would decide which stops could be improved.

Dr. Bracmort asked about the timeline for improvements and whether there is a deadline to spend the money. Mr. Himes explained that Metro has three years from the date of the grant to spend the money.

In response to a question from Dr. Bracmort about what elements could be provided at a bus stop for \$21,000, Mr. Himes said that it depended on what would be needed at each particular location. Dr. Bracmort said that her prioritization of features would be first for a concrete landing pad, then for schedule information and then for factors that would improve a stop's cleanliness. She also identified specific stops that could benefit from real-time arrival signs.

Dr. Bracmort also provided suggestions on outreach and noted that Metro will need to go out to bus stops to talk to bus riders as well as to community meetings and to schools to talk to people.

Mr. Seip suggested Twitter and online outreach, as well as direct outreach to bus customers. He said that he hoped that Metro staff would also review customer complaints and talk with drivers to get suggestions for possible bus stop improvements. Mr. Himes noted that Metro does have a form for employees, including bus operators, to report bus stop issues on its internal website which has provided

Ms. Merrigan suggested that clear maps and schedule information are helpful to riders in planning their trips and should be considered as part of proposed bus stop improvements. Mr. Himes noted that Metro does have other programs where it is trying to improve the information provided at bus stops.

VI. Incident Communications Panel Follow-Up:

Dr. Bracmort said that she was extremely pleased by the incident communications panel discussion which took place at the Board's Safety and Security Committee meeting on October 11th.

Mr. Seip said that he thought that the discussion was a good first step and that it was good to get information on how Metro's various departments and jurisdictional first responders work together to respond to an incident. He said that a video of the incident should be posted soon and that the Council will take comments from the public as part of posting the video on the Council's webpage.

Dr. Bracmort thanked members for working cooperatively with the Board on this panel discussion and noted that Board members are also looking forward to the Council following up on the issues raised at the panel.

Ms. Walker noted that the Board members had many of the same questions as had been raised by Mr. Seip as part of the panel discussion.

Ms. Hermanson asked Mr. Seip about the general outcome of the discussion. He responded that the discussion focused on explaining staff's different roles during an emergency event, and noted that one of the issues that arose from the discussion, and was echoed by the Board, was that there isn't always a good sense of who is in charge during an emergency event. Mr. Seip noted that while there is always someone in charge, riders would appreciate having more visibility and consistency of who is in charge.

Mr. Kitchen said that he thought that the meeting was good for what it was, though he noted that while the panel discussion covered how incident response was supposed to work, he and the Council have also heard from riders about how things actually work. He said that the Council needs to hear more from riders about how Metro's actual emergency response, and that the Council also needs to allow riders to directly inform the Board about this issue.

Mr. Seip noted that the panel discussion consisted of a lot of talk about how things are supposed to work, and while many times incident management goes according to plan, many times it doesn't.

Ms. Merrigan asked about next steps. Mr. Seip responded that the first step is to get the video of the panel discussion posted and take comments on it. Ms. Sequeira said that the Board leadership is meeting with staff to develop next steps following the panel discussion so that it can discuss them at its next meeting with the Council's leadership

VII. Council Comment Procedures:

Ms. Walker said that she would like for Council members to provide their input on how they think the Council's revised public comment procedures are working, and, if there are minimal comments, for the Council to adopt those procedures permanently at this meeting. She said that

is there are a significant number of comments or concerns, the Council will need to convene a working group to suggest revised language.

Mr. DeBernardo noted that the public comment process is still new and suggested that rather than adopting a permanent procedure, the Council should add in language that calls for a regular review of the procedure going forward. He said that it doesn't feel like there has been enough time to see how the process is being used or other opportunities for input that are available to the Council.

Mr. Seip said that he agreed with Mr. DeBernardo's comments and added that he didn't think that the Council needed to ask for speakers' organizational affiliations when they sign up to speak. He noted that members are usually able to tell when a group is in attendance at a Council meeting.

Mr. Ball asked Ms. Walker to address the issue of Metro staff not answering questions from members of the public at Council meetings. Ms. Sequeira said that reason staff members attend Council meetings to make themselves available to the Council as part of its discussions and deliberations and that Council members have the opportunity to raise any issues brought up by members of the public. Mr. Ball responded that this is an example of the filters that Metro has put up between itself and the public; this creates the sense of lack of responsiveness and feeds conspiracy theories about Metro. He noted that it is the chair's responsibility to manage the meeting.

Mr. Seip said that Council members have the opportunity to ask questions of Metro staff and if there are comments or questions posed by members of the public that Council members feel are worth asking, they have the opportunity to pose those questions to staff themselves. Ms. Walker added that there are philosophical differences between Council members and staff on this issue, but the Council cannot resolve this issue; the Council chair cannot compel Metro staff to answer questions posed by members of the public. Dr. Bracmort said that while she doesn't agree with this process, she has to respect it, and that she realizes that the Council did not bring in staff to get their input on the Council's comment procedures. She noted that the Council views public participation differently than Metro and that this is an issue that the Council can work on over time.

Mr. Kitchen said that he thinks that the Council should try to find a middle ground in terms of allowing the public to ask questions and that he thought that the Board would be interested in working with the Council to find such a position.

Ms. Walker said that, as a former bureaucrat, she could understand Metro's reluctance to have staff answer questions from the public at Council meetings, but that the Council should work with the Board to try and encourage Metro to be more open and transparent.

Dr. Bracmort said that she didn't think the issue of Metro staff answering questions from members of the public could be resolved at this meeting and asked Ms. Walker whether any additional revisions to this policy were needed.

Ms. Walker said that this proposal needs to have a regular review and that the Council should remove the requirement that speakers provide an organizational affiliation. She said that the Council needs to accept what the public wants to provide in terms of comments.

Mr. Whiting said that the public comment procedure needs to have more time to work before any drastic changes are made to it. He added that he thought that knowing a commenter's organizational affiliation is helpful because it provides Council members context for their comments.

Mr. Seip said that he would appreciate a clarification of the wording of the comment procedures that makes it clear that people don't have to belong to an organization to make comments. He said that he thinks that the Council should approve a procedure so that it can be implemented.

Dr. Bracmort asked whether the Council needed to form a working group to address some of the comments raised or whether a procedure could be adopted at this meeting.

Ms. Merrigan asked whether, when the floor is open for the Council to make comments, if it is also open for members of the public to make comments. She said that she doesn't want the Chair to have to be in the position to decide who has the opportunity to speak. Dr. Bracmort said that this hasn't been an issue yet, though if more people come to meetings to provide comments, it could become an issue. Mr. Seip said that he wasn't opposed to putting a time limit on comments to ensure that everyone would have an equal opportunity to provide comments.

Mr. Kitchen suggested that the Council have a reporting mechanism to ensure that it follow up with members of the public who come to its meetings. Ms. Walker noted that, under its public participation procedures, there was a provision for the chair to assign appropriate follow-up, but that the Council had not been applying that provision. Mr. Kitchen said that he was concerned that the Council wasn't following up with members of the public who had come to its meetings. Mr. Pasek noted that he did follow up with members of the public who provided their contact information. Ms. Walker suggested that any follow up actions be reported to the full Council to make sure that everyone is aware of any actions taken. Mr. Seip suggested that these actions could be included as part of the meeting minutes.

Ms. Walker said that the public should have the opportunity to comment on the Council's agenda. Dr. Bracmort responded that members of the public have the opportunity to suggest future agenda items for the Council during the "Open Mic" period, they would just not have the opportunity to comment on the current agenda that is up for approval by the Council.

Ms. Walsh said that she thought that the Council needed to just go ahead and approve the public comment procedures and focus instead on drumming up more public participation at its meetings.

Ms. Walker suggested that the Council revised its public comment procedures to revise the language about members of the public disclosing any affiliations and to affirm a review of such procedures by the Council every three months. Mr. Pasek suggested that, since these procedures had already been approved by the Council, that it was not necessary to take a vote to reaffirm the procedures.

Mr. Seip suggested that the public comment procedures could be revisited every six months and also stated that he preferred that time limits on commenters be set as part of the policy to ensure that there isn't the perception that anyone was being treated unfairly because of either their affiliation or their previous comments to the Council.

Ms. Hermanson said that she wanted to clarify that any "comments" provided by members of the public included their opportunity to ask questions as well as to make comments. Dr. Bracmort confirmed that commenters would have the opportunity to make comments as well as to ask questions.

Ms. Walker moved to revise the Council's public comment procedures to request that members of the public provide their organizational affiliations, "if any," when providing comments, and that there be a regular review of these procedures by the Council. This motion was seconded by Dr. Bracmort. Without objection, this motion was approved.

Mr. Kitchen moved to include follow-ups to questions and comments provided by members of the public are included in the meeting minutes. This motion was seconded by Ms. Merrigan.

Ms. Hermanson said that the minutes of a meeting are a record of that meeting and should only include what transpired at that meeting, not later follow up actions. Mr. Kitchen withdrew his motion.

Dr. Bracmort said that the Council's leadership has heard members' concerns about Metro staff not answering questions from members of the public and that she would take those concerns to the Board's leadership.

In response to a comment from Ms. Hermanson, Dr. Bracmort said that said that Metro staff won't take questions from members of the public; they have indicated that they come to Council meetings to provide information to Council members. Ms. Hermanson said that people should be able to ask questions, even if staff doesn't want to answer all of those questions.

Mr. Sheehan noted that this is a non-issue at Accessibility Advisory Committee meetings, and that Metro staff's unwillingness to answer questions at RAC meetings isn't consistent with how it addresses questions at AAC meetings.

VIII. 7000-Series Railcar Visit:

Ms. Silva provided the Council with a recap of members' visit to view a mock-up of Metro's new 7000-series railcar. She noted that the tour also included a stop at the New Carrollton station to see the new SmarTrip® vending machines installed there.

Ms. Silva said that in response to many issues brought up by participants at the visit, staff said that it was too late in the process to make changes. She said that she was particularly disappointed by the lack of a feature that would display audio announcements as text, and which had been raised as an issue at a visit to an earlier version of the railcar mock-up.

Ms. Silva said that, overall, she thought that the changes made to car design were good, and that they addressed many issues raised by riders with mobility impairments. She said that many participants at the visit had concerns about the gap between the railcar and the platform, though Metro staff wasn't able to offer much of a solution to this issue.

Mr. Seip told members that Metro had made changes to the new SmarTrip® vending machines that clarified that the \$10 cost for a card included \$5 in value and \$5 for the cost of the card. He noted that this was in response to comments made at the New Carrollton visit.

Mr. Raschke said that the Council had tried to provide Metro with comments on 7000-series railcar design back in 2010 and was rebuffed then, with staff saying that critical design elements had already been decided on. He told the Council that it needs to recognize that Metro isn't a transparent organization and that it needs to look at this as a systemic issue – not just in relation to issues regarding railcar design – and that it is at the heart of how Metro behaves as an organization.

IX. Bus Public Hearings Recap:

Ms. Hermanson told the Council that she attended the Shirlington hearing, and that about a dozen riders attended. She said that one person had a specific comment about one of the proposals, some other riders in attendance had general bus-related questions and that one person came to the hearing to specifically raise concerns about Metro's Rush+ service.

In response to a question from Mr. Kitchen, Ms. Sequeira said that the hearings cancelled because of Superstorm Sandy were being rescheduled, but needed to be readvertised, and that it is anticipated that those hearings will take place at the end of November. She said that staff will provide the Council with information on these rescheduled hearings once they are finalized.

Mr. Kitchen told the Council that he attended the hearing in Anacostia as well as Metro's open house in Cheverly. He said that the Anacostia hearing was sparsely attended. He also noted his concerns with Metro's plans to discontinue service on portions of certain routes after 8 p.m. He said that while he understood the issues Metro was facing, the hearing was in a different neighborhood and was held at a time that those riders affected would be out riding the bus and not necessarily able to attend a hearing. He noted that he has met with Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners in the area regarding this issue and that there are people who weren't aware of this proposed discontinuance. He added that the attendees at the Cheverly meeting were accepting of the proposed changes in Maryland.

Ms. Hermanson noted that there was an article about the proposed route discontinuance in Southeast D.C. in the Washington Post.

Dr. Bracmort said that she also attended the hearing in Anacostia and said that she liked that the director of the District's Department of Transportation (DDOT) was in attendance at the hearing to listen to riders' concerns, especially since many of the issues riders have with Metro involve DDOT. Mr. Pasek noted that the DDOT director had recently been appointed to the Metro Board of Directors.

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

Mr. Sheehan noted that the AAC had provided 20 comments to Metro regarding 7000-series railcar design and that Metro had incorporated 19 of those comments.

He also told the Council that members of the AAC are working on a study of lighting levels in Metrorail stations and on bus stop accessibility and improvements. He added that Metro was recognized by the American Public Transportation Association for its work on MetroAccess eligibility and its work with the disability community.

Mr. Sheehan also described Metro's response to issues with SmarTrip® vending machines and noted that, while Metro made mistakes with the initial procurement, it resolved to fix those issues once they were identified. He said that Metro's response is an indication of the accomplishments possible when advisory groups work together with Metro to address issues.

XI. Open Mic/Community Meetings:

Mr. Ball told the Council that he will be setting up a conference call with a representative from the D.C. Tourism Council in the near future as part of the Council's review of airport accessibility.

Mr. Ball also suggested that the Council should follow up with Metro about proposed changes to Blue and Orange line service with the launch of the Silver line. He also suggested that the Council should discuss transit connections between D.C. and Virginia – especially the lack of bus transit connections. Mr. Ball also said that the Council should revisit issues concerning Metro's release of information to the Council about Rush+ customer feedback and about its interactions and communications with the public.

Mr. Seip moved that the Council form a working group to discuss how it can use its meeting time more effectively and whether its meetings are structured in the most effective way. This motion was seconded by Mr. Kitchen. Without objection, this motion was approved.

Mr. Seip also noted that the Council would be livestreaming the audio of its meetings over the internet beginning with its December meeting.

Mr. Wright asked why Metro will be charging rush hour fares on January 21st, which is Martin Luther King holiday, as well as Inauguration Day. Mr. Pasek noted that the Board had previously reviewed Metro's plans for Inauguration Day at a meeting of its Customer Service and Operations Committee; Ms. Sequeira said that staff would forward information from that discussion to Council members. Mr. Kitchen noted that Metro had launched an Inauguration-specific Twitter account, which contradicted Metro's statements about its policy of having only one Authority-wide Twitter account when it denied the Council's request to set up a separate Twitter account.

Mr. Kitchen noted that the Council was still waiting for a response from Metro on its proposals on how Metro can improve its communications with customers. He asked that, if the Council hadn't received a response, that this be brought up during the next meeting with the Board leadership.

Ms. Hermanson said that she would be interested in the Council getting a presentation on the customer complaint process – what happens to a complaint when it comes in to Metro, how it is

resolved, etc. Mr. Pasek said that staff had previously presented this information to the Council but it may be appropriate for them to come back and present this information again.

XII. Adjournment:

Without objection, Dr. Bracmort adjourned the meeting at 8:37 p.m.