

WMATA Riders' Advisory Council

Wednesday, May 6, 2015
6:30 P.M. Regular Meeting

MINUTES

Place: Lower Level Meeting Room, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Headquarters (Jackson Graham Building), 600 Fifth Street NW, Washington, DC

Present: *Members*
Barbara Hermanson, Chair, VA, City of Alexandria
Bob Fogel, Vice-Chair, MD, Montgomery County
Daniel Turk, Vice-Chair, District of Columbia
Stephanie Beechem, District of Columbia
Benjamin Chou, At-Large
Avani Gala, VA, Arlington County
Thaddeus Johnson, District of Columbia
Caroline Kim, District of Columbia
Katherine Kortum, MD, Montgomery County
Debra MacKenzie, At-Large
Lorraine Silva, VA, Arlington County
Pat Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee, Chair
Wil White, MD, Prince George's County
Mary Ann Zimmerman, MD, Montgomery County

Other Individuals

Ms. Lynn Bowersox, Assistant General Manager, Department of Customer Service,
Communications and Marketing, WMATA
John Pasek, Assistant Board Secretary, WMATA
James N. Jackson, RAC Staff Coordinator, WMATA

Absent: *Members*
Jeremiah Bush, VA, Fairfax County
Pablo Destefanis, District of Columbia
Ryan Nalty, District of Columbia
Deborah Titus, VA, Fairfax County
Frederick Walker, Vice-Chair, VA, Fairfax County

Presider: Barbara Hermanson, Chair, VA, City of Alexandria

I. Call to Order:

Ms. Hermanson called the May 2015 meeting of the Metro Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) to order at 6:34 p.m.

II. Public Comment Period:

Ms. Hermanson recognized members of the public who were signed up to speak.

As there were no members of the public who were signed up to speak, Ms. Hermanson closed the public comment period.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Without objection, the agenda was approved.

IV. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Fogel moved, seconded by Ms. Kortum, to approve the April 1, 2015 minutes of the Riders' Advisory Council, as amended.

The motion was unanimously approved.

V. Discussion on Safety Initiatives and Customer Communication

Ms. Lynn Bowersox, Assistant General Manager, Department of Customer Service, Communications and Marketing, WMATA was present to discuss current WMATA safety initiatives and customer communication efforts. Ms. Bowersox began by discussing the customer surveys that were conducted following the January 12th incident at the L'Enfant Plaza Metrorail Station. She stated that 85 percent of the respondents indicated that they were aware of the incident through a variety of sources, but that virtually none of the respondents changed their travel patterns as a result of the occurrence. Ms. Bowersox also said that respondents also indicated that they felt safe using the Metrorail system and that Metro should provide information on how customers could help themselves in the event of an emergency.

Ms. Bowersox continued saying that in response to customer feedback, WMATA produced an emergency preparedness video to assist customers in the event of a fire and/or smoke emergency. She then discussed customer focused changes to the safety portal of the wmata.com website. Ms. Bowersox then indicated that she sought RAC feedback given lower than expected customer utilization of the WMATA safety information. She questioned Council member as to what more WMATA could do to make the safety information useful for customers and increase customer engagement regarding safety. Ms. Bowersox then noted some the various methods used to direct customers to the safety information in question.

Mr. Sheehan commented on the importance of the emergency response training at the Greenbelt Metrorail Station on April 19, 2015. He said that WMATA should assemble demonstrations for individuals with disabilities, so that their safety-related questions could be answered (i.e. service animals, wheelchairs, et cetera). Mr. Sheehan said that allowing customers the opportunity to participate in the drills would be particularly helpful.

Ms. Kortum asked what level of “penetration” WMATA was hoping for with regard to customer engagement. Ms. Bowersox responded that regular Metrorail commuters accounted for approximately 400,000 trips per day and that staff hoped to reach at least half of that audience with safety-related information. With regard to the Millennial/Generation Y demographic cohort, Ms. Kortum commented that individuals born in that generation used cellular phones, specifically mobile applications to research WMATA-related information. She suggested that WMATA embed the emergency preparedness video in the WMATA mobile site or disseminated through third-party mobile applications.

With regard to the Baby Boomer demographic cohort, Ms. Silva commented that individuals born in this generation responded well to handouts and tangible information able to be read in-hand. She also expressed concern regarding the English as a second language population.

Ms. Beechem expressed her agreement with the idea of mobile applications. She continued to say that one of WMATA’s greatest strengths was “people in a captive situations.” Ms. Beechem suggested presenting emergency preparedness information in a new and eye-catching way similar to the anti-harassment campaign.

As a D.C. government employee, Mr. Johnson proposed that he ask that the WMATA emergency preparedness information be disseminated through his agency. He recommended that WMATA partner with other organizations to circulate the safety information on a regular basis. With regard to the Generation X demographic cohort, Mr. Johnson stated that outreach worked well. He suggested a “safety roadshow,” whereas customers would be engaged through interactive activities.

Ms. Zimmerman described her experience using the wmata.com mobile website. She suggested that there be an instant link to the 1-minute or 3-minute video without having to navigate through text. Ms. Zimmerman also remarked that she regularly saw visitors utilizing the tangible maps to route through the systems and suggested that WMATA use that as a means to distribute safety information.

Ms. Gala commented that she would not proactively seek the safety information, only in the event of an emergency when it was needed. She continued saying that much of the safety information discussed train emergencies, but did not cover customers being safe on the train. Ms. Gala stated that one of the largest deterrent to crime was individuals knowing that they were being watched. She suggested advertisements which publicized the surveillance by cameras and Metro Transit Police Officers. Ms. Bowersox responded in the affirmative and referenced the recent arrest of a man for an allegedly assault at the Eastern Market Metrorail Station on April 24, 2015. Ms. Bowersox noted that the arrest was made possible through tips from the public following the release of a surveillance video. She said that she hoped that such surveillance video would not only result in a conviction regarding the incident in question, but also serve as a deterrent to future criminal acts.

Referencing the WMATA safety and security webpage, Mr. Turk recommended that there be another link or page placed higher on the main website that addressed emergency preparedness. He then suggested that staff research exactly what they want customers to know related as to

how they should behave in emergency situations. Mr. Turk commented on WMATA incorporating safety communication in to a web series, movie or television show. He also said that WMATA should present various emergency situations to customers to gain their attention.

Mr. Fogel commented that WMATA had the opportunity to gain the attention of customers during the time that they were waiting for the train and during the course of travel. He suggested that station managers and train operators be instructed to remind customers about the emergency preparedness video and emergency instructions posted in the rail car. Mr. Fogel then suggested increasing the use of printed materials.

Ms. Hermanson proposed that WMATA distribute wallet cards with vital safety information and have staff present at Metrorail stations to present live viewings of the emergency preparedness video.

Mr. White suggested a “flash mob” to draw attention to the subject in question and gain interest on social media and traditional media outlets.

Discussing the most recent meeting of the RAC Customer Service Committee, Mr. Fogel asked if Ms. Bowersox was involved with the role of the Metrorail station managers. Ms. Bowersox responded in the negative, stating that the station managers did not report through her chain of command. However, she did say that she worked closely with rail operations on what occurred in the stations.

Ms. Hermanson opened the floor for public comment.

Mr. Sam Weis, recommended that staff work with the media, specifically television outlets to further emergency preparedness communication efforts.

Ms. Hermanson polled Council as to how many members had seen the emergency preparedness video on television. Two members answered in the affirmative.

Ms. Hermanson thanked Ms. Bowersox for her attendance.

VI. Committee Reports

- Chair’s Report to WMATA Board of Directors (April 2015) – Ms. Hermanson

Ms. Hermanson stated that the Chair’s Report for the month of April 2015 was included in the agenda package for review.

- Chair’s Report from WMATA Committee Meetings – Ms. Hermanson

Ms. Hermanson stated that she attended the WMATA Board of Directors committee meetings held on April 9th and April 23rd. Ms. Hermanson provided highlights from several of those committee meetings:

- Governance Committee – The Committee received public input on the WMATA General Manager/CEO search. Ms. Hermanson stated that she provided feedback to the Committee on behalf of the Riders’ Advisory Council.
- Customer Service and Operations Committee – The Committee received quarterly updates on the progress of the 2015 Customer Care program and the New Electronic Payments Program (NEPP) activities.
- Safety and Security Committee – Ms. Jackie Jeter, Local 689 President, provided the Committee with a briefing on safety at WMATA. The Committee also receive a quarterly safety report, annual CY2014 safety report and a briefing on the April 15, 2015 pedestrian bridge incident between College Park and Greenbelt Metrorail stations.

With regard to the NEPP, Ms. Gala inquired if there was any discussion about expanding the pilot program to included additional Metrorail stations or Metrobus routes. Ms. Hermanson responded in the negative stating that staff did not discuss plans to expand the pilot, but were seeking additional customers to participate in the pilot program. Mr. John Pasek, Assistant Board Secretary, added that following the conclusion of the pilot there will be a report on the effectiveness of the program and next steps. He stated that next update to the Board of Directors would be in July 2015.

- Budget and Finance Committee – Mr. Bush

In Mr. Bush’s absence, a report was not given by the Budget and Finance Committee.

- Customer Service Committee – Mr. Fogel

Mr. Fogel discussed the most recent meeting of the Customer Service Committee. He stated that the meeting featured WMATA staff from Metrorail operations: Ms. Rita Davis, Director of Rail Infrastructure Support Services; Mr. Byron England, Director of Rail Stations and Operations; and Ms. Shanita Bowman, Acting Assist Director of Rail Stations and Train Operations. Mr. Fogel reviewed key points of the meeting involving station manager qualifications and job responsibilities.

- Programs, Projects and Planning Committee – Mr. Turk

Mr. Turk provided a brief report. He announced that the Programs, Projects and Planning Committee (PPP) meeting scheduled for May 18, 2015 would feature Mr. Thomas Randall, Director, New Electronic Payments Program, to discuss the status of the pilot. He then discussed the previous meeting of the PPP Committee which featured Mr. Brian Anderson, Digital Communication Manager, WMATA, to discuss social media platforms and mobile telephone applications. He added that the Committee also held a joint meeting with the Accessibility Advisory Committee to discuss priority seating for disabled customers.

- Leadership/Governance Committee – Ms. Hermanson

Ms. Hermanson stated that she attended the April 30, 2015 WMATA public hearing regarding the draft environmental impact statement and plans for the proposed Potomac Yard Metro Rail Station in Alexandria, VA. She also said that RAC members attended the April 13, 2015 preview ride aboard the first 7000-series Metrorail train.

Ms. Hermanson also discussed her invitation to participate in a focus group designed to gather input on the development of *Metrobus Service Guidelines*. The presentation of the draft guidelines to the focus group was held on April 13, 2015.

Lastly, Mr. White reviewed RAC member participation in the full-scale emergency response drill at the Greenbelt Metrorail Station on April 19, 2015. Mr. Sheehan added that he and several other members of the AAC were also in attendance representing the accessibility community. He described in detail the emergency simulation and evacuation of passengers from rail car.

VII. Announcements

Discussing old business, Ms. Gala asserted that although the RAC is representative of the WMATA ridership, that Council does not have a “streamlined” tool to receive information from customers. She recommended that the RAC maintain a Facebook or Twitter account to receive, but not disseminate information. Ms. Kortum stated her agreement, but expressed concern that only negative feedback would be received.

Mr. Turk questioned the procedure for establishing either social media platforms mentioned. Ms. Hermanson indicated that would behoove the Council to inform the Board formally of the request. The Council discussed establishing a social media account and possibilities for other outreach to customers.

Ms. Kortum questioned if staff were available for RAC members to submit comments regarding the new “real-time” Metrobus arrival signs. She expressed frustration with the amount of time taken for the signs to scroll through the bus schedules.

Mr. Chou announced that the members of the Board of Directors and the RAC representing the District of Columbia held a “meet and greet” on April 21, 2015. He requested follow-up on several items discussed at the meeting, specifically the redesign of the WMATA website.

VIII. Adjournment

Without objection, Ms. Hermanson adjourned the regular session meeting at 8:36 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

James N. Jackson
Riders’ Advisory Council Coordinator