

Accessibility Advisory Committee

**Meeting Minutes
January 10, 2011**

Christian Kent thanked the audience for attending the Richard D. Hedding Award ceremony honoring Patrick Sheehan and informed the committee that Metro General Manager, Richard Sarles, and Metro Board of Directors Vice-Chairwoman, Catherine Hudgins, would be in attendance for the AAC meeting.

Committee Introductions

Sixteen committee members were introduced: Patrick Sheehan (Chairman), Phil Posner, Paul Semelfort, McKinley Young, Julius Fleischman, Joyce Callahan, Marilyn Lutter, Elliott Lapin, Carolyn Bellamy, Susan Holland, Michael Brownell, Tom Dowling, and Darrell Drake, Debbie Brown, Emily Singer and Tapan Banerjee. Ex-officio member, Sharon Moore, was absent.

Mr. Sheehan informed the committee of changes to the agenda to include governance of the committee by the Metro Board of Directors.

Public Comment Period

No public comments were made.

Governance Update

Ms. Hudgins expressed the importance of the committee's work and hopes that the change in governance will help to improve opportunity for the committee to continue advocating on behalf of people with disabilities. Ms. Hudgins stated that the presentation for the change in governance has already been made to the Board and will be on the Board Customer Service Committee agenda in February 2011. She said that the Board and the AAC will be better served by having a direct relationship with each other which will be similar to the relationship between the Board and the Riders Advisory Council (RAC). Ms. Hudgins remarked that there are nearly 100 advisory councils in Fairfax County and they are well informed groups. Major changes are seldom made without input from citizens. A direct connection between the AAC and the Board is very important and doesn't minimize the AAC's role with the Metro General Manager and staff but it helps the Board to understand the issues from a policy standpoint by hearing directly from the AAC. Ms. Hudgins asked the committee to discuss their suggested changes and concerns which were forwarded to the General Manager regarding the MOU.

Michael Brownell stated that there's a significant difference between governance of the RAC and governance of the AAC. He said that there's a need for continuity on the AAC so that members can fully understand the issues that transpire. He stated that Mr. Sheehan is a perfect example of how continuity is important. The AAC recommended that there be different governance for the AAC than that of the RAC. He stated that the RAC needs more rider input and the AAC needs more expertise. AAC members should not be replaced after serving 1 or 2 years on the committee. Mr. Brownell stated that it has been 1 year since the MOU was passed unanimously and nothing has happened yet and it has kept positions from being filled. Mr. Brownell suggested that there are 4 vacancies on the committee presently due to deaths and resignations. All 18 positions need to be filled as quickly as possible. One of the recommendations is to set up a system so that the committee is always operating at full membership.

Mr. Sheehan added that the AAC has jurisdictional, disability, and transportation representation on the committee.

McKinley Young stated that over his 21 years of service, many of the projects that have been done have taken some time. He stated it took 6 years to get a favorable vote for the bumpy dome tiles that are now along the platform. Mr. Young remarked that it would have been difficult to get the project completed if the same members would not have been present over that period of time because of their knowledge and understanding of the task.

Mr. Semelfort stated that the Bylaws should consider that some members of the AAC have other commitments because they work full time and often have medical appointments that could conflict with AAC meetings and other work.

Mr. Sheehan stated that some of the full AAC's effectiveness is brought upon by the work that is done by Mr. Semelfort at the MetroAccess sub-committee.

Mr. Sheehan suggested that the committee share their FY11 work plan with Ms. Hudgins.

Mr. Posner stated that Mr. Sarles tasked the committee with thinking of economic issues that affect Metro. He stated that the cost of MetroAccess is a major economic drain on the transit system. He suggested that staff figure out much money the current No-Strand Policy costs Metro and compare it to other transit systems and inquire about how those other transit systems handle the cost and still provide good service to customers. Mr. Posner estimated that the policy costs Metro approximately 5 million dollars.

Carolyn Bellamy suggested educating customers about the rules and regulations about how MetroAccess' service is supposed to work prior to them using it for the first time.

Mr. Kent outlined the budget process. Once the GM proposes a budget, Board members will relay their questions and the staff will present adjustments and changes. He plans to brief the Board when he visits with them next month. Mr. Kent stated that the MetroAccess contract will expire on June 30, 2011 which means that there are 2 more years left on the contract. He feels that the Board and the public will be interested to know what Metro's intentions are for the future. He indicated that there are customer impacts on some of these policies, and customers are going to expect Metro to use good judgment when making decisions. Once all suggestions have been gathered in terms of reducing costs, there will be a need for Metro to inform the public about the nature of any proposed changes to service or fares.

Emily Singer suggested that the spirit of the law as well as the intent of the law be considered as Metro undertake joint development activities in and around Metrorail stations. She stated that the layout and design of the Brookland Metro station's accessible route present difficult challenges for students and people with disabilities because of the distances they must travel to reach the Catholic University campus. She also suggested that Metro work with development companies such as Abdo and EYA to promote better accessibility.

Tom Dowling suggested installing more Platform Information Display Systems (PIDS) and other signage that display information throughout the platform and inside the railcars to help customers who are deaf and hard of hearing. He also suggested that more signage be installed at the street level.

Ms. Hudgins stated that she can relate to Mr. Dowling's point and also the position of persons with vision impairments because some station areas do not have appropriate signage and expressed interest in what the future technology will have for signage in stations and in railcars.

Mr. Sheehan reminded the committee that at last month's meeting the AAC received a presentation from Al Pegram regarding pay phones in stations and he was informed, as Chair, that Mr. Pegram's group was providing recommendations to the Board last week. He stated that the committee was given 4 options, one of which was to retain 1 TTY in the station's paid area. Mr. Sheehan stated that he presented the option to retain a phone with TTY capability to Mr. Pegram. Mr. Sheehan asked Mr. Dowling to discuss his concerns related to Metro's new policy on bag searches and the video which was released pertaining to bag searches.

Tom Dowling stated there was no captioned information on the website video from Metro police explaining the recent decision to do a bag search of customers. He suggested that there be an ASL interpreter within the video so that deaf customers will understand how the Metro police will approach them and search their bags. He believes there should be two different videos. One should be captioned and the other should have an ASL interpreter within the video.

Mr. Posner stated that there is a device that is used to swipe metal objects to check for explosives residue.

Darrell Drake suggested having talks with Metro police to discuss general ideas of ways to approach deaf and hard of hearing customers without scaring those individuals upon approach.

Susan Holland suggested that safety issues on MetroAccess vehicles be addressed. MetroAccess drivers' background checks should be extensive and there should be better education for drivers to ensure safety for riders and their families during transportation. The improvement of bus stops and accessible paths to the bus stops should be a continued focus.

Michael Brownell stated that the committee has asserted an aggressive campaign with trying to help MetroAccess customers use the fixed route system instead of using MetroAccess. He suggested that there be a second elevator installed at the Foggy Bottom-GWU station before escalator work begins because of heavy customer use at the station.

Debbie Brown suggested installing audio and visual stop announcements on the trains. She also suggested that the AAC have input when Metro decides to allow different vendors to sell merchandise inside the stations.

Julius Fleischman asked why it takes so long for the Board to respond when the AAC passes a motion. He questioned how does the board determine priority when money is dispersed for projects? He stated that Metro produces thousands of dollars for travel training only to train 122 people. He suggested that Metro produce more money to enhance train announcements technology in an effort to attract thousands of customers to the fixed route system. Mr. Fleischman asked if the 300 million dollars that Metro has received from federal and local jurisdictions cured the budget shortfall and if so, why more can't be done to improve the system.

Ms. Hudgins responded that she shares Mr. Fleischman's concern about train announcement equipment is old and it would be like putting new technology into an old TV. She stated that Metro is in the middle of upgrading the infrastructure of the system to support improving the audio and visual technology in the stations which is an ongoing investment and trains also need to be able to use this technology. Ms. Hudgins also stated that Metro has to have new trains that will be able to use the new technology so that all of it will be able to work together. The older trains will not be able to use the new technology effectively. Although Metro appreciates the 300 million dollar contribution, there is still nearly a \$10 billion dollar budget problem. A larger contribution is needed to be able to make more improvements. The data about what areas are being improved will be available to the public.

Mr. Sheehan suggested that Mr. Fleischman attend a RAC budget subcommittee meeting to get more in-depth information about budget issues. He stated that he will invite the committee to the budget presentation that the RAC will have.

Mr. Fleischman stated the AAC previously sent a motion to the Board concerning bus idling and never received an answer.

Mr. Sheehan explained to Mr. Fleischman that the bus idling motion can be updated and re-sent, if necessary.

Mr. Kent stated the governance discussion about having the AAC report to the board is well timed because it will give the AAC a chance to have closure on the issues they have raised. When motions are made and sent to the General Manager, staff's role is to make sure that the GM receives it. He stated that the AAC's vote is not to approve or disapprove an action but it is a recommendation to the GM. The same will be true when the AAC reports to the Board and staff will facilitate those communications. As an example, Bus services staff attended an AAC meeting and addressed the bus idling issues and informed the AAC of Metro's bus idling policy. Mr. Kent reminded the committee of the discussion which included the prospect of saving money and the environmental and operational implications of doing so. If the operator turns the bus off and can't start it for a certain period of time, there is a risk for a service interruption. When the discussion was over, there was a recommendation given and bus services chose to continue following the policy that is already in place.

Joyce Callahan stated that it is important to address the impact to customers with disabilities when there is maintenance work being done and the work involves customers having to use shuttles. She would like to explore the types of information the Board receives from the AAC concerning accessibility issues and the customer satisfaction of using the service.

Marilyn Lutter suggested that the train operator announce train information at the platform prior to customers boarding the train. She also indicated that there has been outrage in the disability community about the upcoming MetroAccess fare issues.

Mr. Sheehan suggested to Ms. Lutter that she consider trying the system that provides next train arrival by contacting Customer Service at 202-637-7000 and choosing "Next Train" option for train information which will assist her when announcements are not audible at the platform. He stated that this system provides very accurate train arrival information.

Elliott Lapin expressed frustration with the travel direction of escalators when all escalators at a station are not in service and would like to know who controls the direction of travel for escalators at different times of the day.

Ms. Bellamy expressed concern about the proposed MetroAccess fare increase and how it will affect customers who live on a fixed income.

Ms. Singer suggested that Metro adopt a fare card system that is similar to that of the Chicago Transit System which allows customers to purchase cards online and set up automatic payments.

Selene Dalton-Kumins informed the audience that the MetroAccess fare increase is currently being finalized and official communication will be communicated next week. The fare increase will be implemented in late February 2011.

Mr. Semelfort gave an overview of the MetroAccess subcommittee report. The IVR changes that have taken place include more detail and accessible options for EasyPay. He expressed the importance of relaying clear information and instructions of the changes to the SmartBenefits program.

Ms. Bellamy stated that the fare increase will cause hardship to many customers with limited financial income and urged the committee to discuss different alternatives to the fare increase.

Mr. Sheehan stated that customers who paid \$6 roundtrip will now be paying \$14 roundtrip which is a 125% increase. The committee previously recommended a fixed fare of \$3.50 for everybody who uses the service

Mr. Semelfort motioned to move the MetroAccess subcommittee meeting to May 23rd because the Memorial Day holiday will be on May 30th. The motion passed.

McKinley Young suggested going to the regional jurisdictions to ask for funding that will help customers with the fare increase.

Mr. Sheehan suggested that the committee write a letter to the GM and the Board stating that a fixed fare increase is appropriate along with other committee recommendations. A variable fare with 10,000 transactions per day will create chaos.

Emily Singer made a motion which is listed below:

Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) proposes that WMATA conduct an audit of existing Metro rail stations where:

1) there is only one external elevator and it is more than 1/8 mile from the other Metro entrance/exit (i.e. Brookland/CUA) and/or the path of travel between the two entrances does not meet ADA requirements (i.e. slope/grade).

2) there is a street entrance/exit that only has one escalator (i.e. Brookland/CUA) and it is more than 1/8 mile away from the other Metro Entrance/Exit and/or the path of travel between the two entrances does not meet ADA requirements (i.e. slope/grade), WMATA should consider putting in an additional escalator that runs in the opposite direction.

The AAC recommends that WMATA will consider putting in an additional external elevator and/or escalator in locations where these issues exist.

In addition, the AAC recommends that WMATA agree that for all future station construction or renovation to take into consideration the distance and topography of the path of travel between the different entrances that serve a single Metro station in determining the need for multiple elevators to the street level.

Julius Fleischman asked who the motion will be directed to and if there is a time limit for requesting an answer from the GM regarding Ms. Singer's motion.

Mr. Sheehan replied it is generally 30 days.

After discussion about how recommendations are handled it was determined that recommendations made by the committee go directly to the GM as facilitated by ADAP staff.

Ms. Singer's motion was voted on and was passed.

Review of Minutes

Mr. Semelfort asked that a summary of customer concerns from the MetroAccess Subcommittee report be documented in the December minutes.

Mr. Sheehan stated that Mr. Semelfort was elected to chairman of the MetroAccess Subcommittee and Tapan Banerjee was elected to vice-chairman

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.