



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: February 3, 2020

Attendees

Present: Elver Ariza-Silva (Second Vice-Chair), Patrick Sheehan (Past Chair), Darnise Bush, Tino Calabia, Vanessa Coles, Charlie Crawford, Rico Dancy, Melanie Jackson, Phillipa Mezile, Doris Ray, Paul Semelfort, and Remote Participation - Phil Posner (Chair).

Call to Order

Acting Chair Ariza-Silva called the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

Approval of Agenda, Board Report, and Prior Meeting Minutes

Acting Chair Ariza-Silva welcomed everyone and started with introductions of the Committee members.

The meeting agenda was approved as amended. The topic of AAC Role in Improving Bus Service was moved prior to the topic of AAC Role in WMATA Fare Evasion Issue.

The January 6, 2020, meeting minutes were approved as amended. Ms. Ray asked for her comments about the public hearing locations in Virginia, be modified.

The Board Report was approved as written.

WMATA Budget:

WMATA budget public hearing schedule will be made public on Saturday, February 8th, 2020, however, as a courtesy to the AAC, the schedule was shared with members today. Mr. Semelfort asked about the earlier starting time of the public hearing in the District of Columbia. Carol Peredo Lopez, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated we are starting earlier to ensure there is plenty of time to hear everyone who wants to testify. The District of Columbia hearing is the last public hearing and the most transit-accessible of the three, we expect that a lot of people will come to testify. We are starting earlier to accommodate the expected overflow of participants in order that attendees and staff can catch the last trains by 11pm. The hearing will likely last for several hours. In the unlikely event that we do not have anyone waiting to testify, the hearing will be kept open until at least 6:30 p.m. so that those arriving later can sign up to speak.

Ms. Ray stated in past the public hearings started at 7:00 pm, to provide time for people to get back to their localities. Her concern is for hearings in Maryland and Virginia that are earlier than 7:00pm, with no indication that the hearings will remain open until a later time to allow people to get there. Dr. Posner motioned to request that all the jurisdictions public hearings remain open until a specified time and it should be published. Anu Sharma, ACC Coordinator, ADAP, clarified the hearings may stay open for a longer duration in an event no one is waiting to testify at the starting time. Besides public hearings, customers will also have online surveys made available to provide comments.

Dr. Posner encouraged for people to use not just one but all forms of communications to submit their comments. Mr. Sheehan stated many people have been showing up at the Board Meetings to protest the bus service cuts. This indicates that many people will show up for the public hearings as well, even if people get to the public hearings a little late, they will be able to provide their comments for the record. Ms. Ray stated in regard to the proposal made by Dr. Posner, she would like to see how long the hearings will remain open. She once arrived to a hearing 15 minutes late and it was already closed, as no one was there to speak. Her concern is that there needs to be a published time, not only for the start of the hearing, but also an end time, in case there is no one to speak at the time public the hearings begin.

A customer questioned an issue about information dissemination relating to how people supposed to get information. Ms. Peredo Lopez clarified information will be made public on February 8th, however as a courtesy, it is being shared with the AAC Members in advance to it being public. The customer stated people do not know when and where the information is being published. MetroAccess needs to have information on vehicles, as should bus and rail. The information needs to be accessible to people. Dr. Posner stated in the past, it was required that the information be published in major newspapers. WMATA had information on buses and rail, as well. People do not have to have emails or go on websites; the information will be available in many modes. Ms. Peredo Lopez confirmed that in the past, the information was published in various modes and it will happen this time as well.

Dr. Posner proposed a motion to request that the meetings stay open to at least 10:00 pm and that this information gets published to inform the public. He also encouraged everyone to attend all hearings, as different Board Members would be in attendance. It is powerful to hear personal anecdotes. Ms. Ray seconded the motion to have the public hearings stay open to at least 10:00pm or until the last person has had an opportunity to speak. Ms. Ray recommended the public hearings stay open for at least 2 hours from the opening time, in case there is no one to make public comments immediately at the beginning of the hearing. Ms. Peredo Lopez shared information about the locations and schedules of the public hearings. Dr. Posner mentioned free MetroAccess rides to the public hearings. There was no response on this topic today. The proposed motion by Dr. Posner, amended by Ms. Ray, was approved by the Committee.

Mr. Sheehan asked Dr. Posner about the talking points. Dr. Posner stated people showing up at the hearings is most important, followed by sharing their stories. If anything is left out of the talking points, the Committee should feel free to add to it. Not everyone can speak about the same points in the allotted time of 2 minutes. Mr. Calabia recommended for people to also bring written testimonies for distribution. Responding to Ms. Bush, he recommended that a person to bring at-least six copies. Mr. Calabia asked Mr. Sheehan about the Riders Advisory Council's (RAC) feedback on the budget. Mr. Sheehan stated the RAC is along the lines of the AAC. The bus changes are many, making it complicated. On the Rail side, the RAC does not have any more information than the AAC does. They would like to have simplified fares. Mr. Sheehan invited anyone interested to attend the RAC meetings.

AAC Role in Improving Bus Service (Bus Transformation and Data):

Mr. Calabria shared responses to his questions received from the Bus Transformation Project (BTP) Team. The BTP was a collaborative effort among all jurisdictions in the WMATA Transit Zone. Besides WMATA, bus systems in eight separate jurisdictions deliver public bus transportation services throughout WMATA Transit Zone. What is the status of approval of those eight jurisdictions for the December 2019 BTP Action plan, if one or more of the jurisdictions does or do not agree with how the BTP affects one or more jurisdictions. On January 16, 2020, the WMATA Board adopted a resolution endorsing the BTP strategy. Between January and March, the project team will present the strategy and action plan to regional transportation boards and local elected councils/boards in each jurisdiction seeking endorsement of the strategy. Mr. Calabria shared the schedule as per the jurisdiction along with the website link.

Regarding Montgomery County's Ride-On Flex program, has the BTP envisioned adopting or adapting any such service to cover existing bus deserts or areas where the BTP would be reducing services or eliminating bus routes. The BTP did not make recommendations regarding reducing or eliminating any bus service. The project's final strategy included recommendations to develop regional standards for bus service that defines the level of service based on time of the day, development, collaboratively restructuring the bus service to make it most efficient, and customer focused. Additionally, recommendations encompass on demand service by leveraging existing efforts by transit providers to operate flexible on-demand services to supplement the fixed route network where and when warranted. This recommendation points to sharing experience with the pilots and expanding flexible on-demand services in the region.

Regarding the level of public bus transit service in the Prince George's County, the question was how would BTP significantly improve bus services throughout the county? There may be recommendations for changes to existing service in Prince George's County, however funding availability is the final determinant of what can be provided. One of the goals of the BTP was to provide citizens, bus riders, the business community and other stakeholders with the needed information to advocate for improvements to their bus service, including those who operate the service and those who own and operate the roads, sidewalks, and bus stops. Mr. Sheehan did not appreciate the response about service for the Prince George's County. He inquired as to how changes of 60 bus routes taken into consideration with the BTP.

A customer shared his feedback about the BTP with some recommendations and comments about the efforts of privatization of Metro. There had been several network redesigns throughout the country, the closest one was in Baltimore, MD. It is good to consider that service can be improved and there should be more information on how to be more inclusive. He commented about the approvals and involvement of the local jurisdictions. Ms. Ray informed that some of the bus reductions and cuts that are going forward in this budget process were negotiated last summer or fall. The counties and cities make their recommendations and they take priority with the WMATA Board. There are regional coordinating groups of different Departments of Transportation (DOT) including Virginia DOT, Maryland DOT, and District DOT, that look at local jurisdictions and allow them to take priority because the subsidies pay WMATA.

AAC Role in WMATA Fare Evasion Issue:

Dr. Posner stated it is better to define the role of the AAC and not talk as individuals. Acting Chair Ariza-Silva shared his experience about a fare evasion incident that he observed and asked how we can suggest Metro disseminate educational messages via videos on the 7000 series or flyers, messages on screens, various organizations, or other avenues. Mr. Calabria stated it is only the District of Columbia that has decriminalized fare evasion, but that does not mean that it is not a civic violation. Mr. Crawford shared an experience of his wife during her travels in St. Louis where the system does not appear to have faregates but runs on an honor or fear system, and if caught for fare evasion, the punishment appears to be severe.

Ms. Bush stated only the District of Columbia has decriminalized fare evasion and questioned the role of Metro police. Most of the people who evade the fares already have a card to pay, like students. When WMATA releases the big amount of money being lost, they may equate it to what could have been bought for that amount. For example, as a result of the lost amount in fare evasion, Metro lost 6 cars, or 8 buses, etc. Acting Chair Ariza-Silva stated there is no way to account for those people evading, thus accurate data may not be available. Ms. Ray stated our role is representing the senior and the disability communities and advise the WMATA Board. There may be people who have cognitive disability, who may think they did the right thing while paying the fares on bus, however it may not be the case. We also need to consider that WMATA may have the authority in the rails and the stations. Whereas, local police have authority on buses while they are on routes and on the exterior of the Metrorail stations.

Mr. Calabria provided an analogy of several hundred employees that could have been hired in the \$26 million that was lost as a result of fare evasions. A customer with his service dog, commented about fare evaders. Mr. Sheehan informed of the new taller faregates, with more sensors that would prevent fare evasions.

Public Comment:

A customer stated many cities are moving away from the fares. The subsidies from the three jurisdictions are coming from tax payers and WMATA takes more money from customers as fares. The information dissemination continues to be a problem. Ms. Ray stated the customer is correct regarding how to communicate with blind people. We do need to look at the money flow. In Virginia, the transit is subsidized by real estate taxes.

A customer stated one of the biggest problems is the privatization of Metro. He shared his experience with a bus operator that did not allow him on the bus with his service animal. David Shaffer, Ombudsman, ADAP, will meet with the customer to get the specifics of his experience. He also shared information about the training provided to bus operators.

A customer from the office of Council Member Robert White shared information about what their office is doing and invited the AAC to a safety meeting.

Mr. Dancy asked what is done in situations where a bus driver does not allow customers with service dogs to board. Mr. Shaffer stated bus drivers are trained on service animals. Anytime a complaint is reported, he reviews it and retrains the employee.

Ms. Ray asked how the staff is responding to the changes to ADA Title 2 regulations in 2010, that Department of Justice came down with guidance that dogs and miniature horses are the only animals considered as service animals. Mr. Shaffer stated the FTA has different rules on service animals, under Title 3, any animal could be a service animal.

MetroAccess Subcommittee Report:

Mr. Semelfort proposed two motions:

1. Public hearings: flyers get on MetroAccess Vans and the IVR messages get placed about the public hearings, after February 8th, 2020. The motion passed. Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated that the information about the public hearings will be placed on all the vehicles. Mr. Semelfort had asked about the interactive voice response (IVR) message for previous public hearings and for the same to be done for the upcoming hearings as well, so that people who are blind or have low vision can hear the information. Ms. Ray recommended to amend the motion for staff who work in the Customer Service Office have their IVR also play information while customers are on hold. Ms. Williams-Hall already made a note to notify Customer Service to place information on their IVR about public hearings.

2. The motion is to have information about the Abilities-Ride show case on the IVR, to inform customers in order they be able to attend the event. Mr. Semelfort read information about the showcase scheduled for February 8th, 2020 and recommended for this information to be placed on the MetroAccess IVR as well. Ms. Ray recommended an amendment. The motion is to have IVR announcements to have the Abilities-Ride showcases on the IVR and send mass emails to organizations and put it on WMATA Website. The motion carried.

Bus/Rail Subcommittee Report:

Mr. Calabria presented the Bus/Rail Subcommittee report. He asked the Committee to please consolidate our uniform position on various things. Dr. Posner stated we need to focus on topics that are pertinent to this budget. Mr. Calabria asked what is the relationship of the Budget with the BTP. Mr. Sheehan stated it needs to be reviewed on how the 60 bus routes being cut will be in-line with the BTP.

Ms. Ray asked that the public-announcements announce that interpreters will be at the public hearings and recommended to provide information on how customers can request the cards, assisted listening device(s), and alternative formats as accommodations, and the time frame of requesting those. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated the feedback would be provided to the Office of Board Secretary and has been done in past and will happen for the upcoming public hearings as well.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30pm.