



# AAC

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

### **Meeting (Virtual) Minutes: June 1, 2020**

#### **Attendees**

Present: Phil Posner (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Darnise Bush, Tino Calabia, Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Steve Kaffen, Mary Kay McMahon, Phillippa Mezile, Anthony Oberg, Doris Ray, Paul Semelfort, Patrick Semelfort, and Kelley Simoneaux.

#### **Call to Order**

Due to COVID – 19, the AAC meeting was held virtually. Anu Sharma, Accessibility Advisory Committee Coordinator, started the meeting by making general announcements, followed by taking a roll call, and reading the Agenda. Thereafter, Chair Posner moved the meeting forward.

#### **Approval of Agenda, Board Report, and Prior Meeting Minutes**

The meeting agenda was approved as amended, removing the topic of Safety-Update.

The Board Report was approved as written.

The May 4, 2020, meeting minutes were approved as written.

#### **Safety – Update:**

Teresa Impastato, Chief of Safety, was unable to join the AAC Meeting due to the current issues affecting the region.

#### **Elevator/Escalator Update:**

Mitch Nici, General Superintendent; Rolando Grimaldi, Assistant General Superintendent; and Gedion Gebremariam, Supervisor, Department of Elevator Escalator, provided an update. Mr. Nici stated the availability of elevators and escalators has been high, above 96.5% since April, due to low ridership. Mr. Gebremariam has been working with the Office of ADA Policy and Planning, on elevator buttons and the lighting issues. Mr. Nici also shared the number of elevators and escalators that have been replaced, as well as the ones scheduled for replacement. Mr. Gebremariam stated he has been working on the issue of the call button locations inside of the elevators. His team is reviewing the help button configuration and color options for Orange line stations platform project.

Mr. Oberg asked if additional maintenance work is being done due to low ridership or as per the set schedule. Mr. Nici stated although he would prefer that additional work be done, for safety reasons, all employees are working on alternate schedule. Mr. Grimaldi added that we have employees working five days every two weeks translating to 10 days a month.

Chair Posner shared his concerns about dark color elevator buttons and elevator lighting issues at the Capitol South Station. Mr. Gebremariam stated lighting for the elevator-cab, emergency lighting, and car operating panels (COP) has been changed to a light-emitting

diode (LED). Chair Posner stated when escalators are down, station managers do not change the direction to have at least one ascending and one descending. Mr. Nici stated that is a known concern and the correct operation is to provide egress over ingress. Sometimes, mechanical issues may prevent changing direction of an escalator, however that can be addressed as was done at Farragut West. Chair Posner shared a concern of the station managers that the change of direction could cause difficulty for blind passengers.

Mr. Sheehan asked whether the recommendations provided by the AAC are being considered and asked for an email with confirmation. Mr. Nici confirmed that those recommendations are being incorporated and he will follow up with an update to the AAC.

Chair Posner stated that the inconsistency of descriptions for the elevator buttons was also part of the recommendations provided by the AAC. Mr. Nici stated he remembers the concerns and that is also being considered.

Mr. Dancy asked how we can find updates about elevators that go out of service at Union Station. Mr. Nici stated elevators are on higher priority over escalators and that he will get outages of those elevators reviewed.

A customer stated the importance of the consistency of elevator button location for people who have low vision. She made the following recommendations:

- The buttons inside and outside the elevator should be backlit
- Improved lighting outside the elevator assists in finding the unit
- Remove the need of pressing elevator buttons from one to the other floor
- Automated announcements for each floor on which an elevator arrives
- Clarify terminology: for example not everyone may know what is a Mezzanine

Mr. Gebremariam stated in regard to the location of the buttons, we are going to have the up and down buttons standardized. For horizontal call fixtures, the down button will be at the bottom left corner and the up button will be at top left corner. The right corner will be for the two-way communication, which is the help button. These standards are already being implemented on new rehabilitation projects. The elevator buttons will be a different color (bronze) on the exterior and stainless steel fixture which is easy to identify, and will be on the interior. The Code requirement is when the button is pressed, to show that the floor has been registered, it needs to be lit. All new construction will have the step and go feature for two floors where no button needs to be pressed to go to the next floor.

Carol Peredo Lopez, Director, ADA Policy and Planning, stated we have been working with Mr. Gebremariam on many elevator projects. A substantial amount of work is involved in getting those buttons in the right place and the elevator/escalator team is working very hard. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated there are only two elevators that belong to Metro at Union Station, and asked Mr. Dancy if the one he mentioned is one of them. Mr. Grimaldi stated there have been only three reported outages at Union Station since March. Mr. Nici stated sometimes reporting is a problem and Union Station elevators will be reviewed further.

Chair Posner thanked the team for attending the meeting and providing the information.

**Public Comments:**

Vice-Chair Rush asked for an update regarding the building fire at Metro Headquarters that happened recently. Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, stated the building is currently off limits to employees and will remain off limits to the public for some time. It may be in September when there may be a possibility of holding an AAC meeting in person.

Ms. McMahon stated she had someone report to her that their mobility aid on the website is recorded inaccurately. Ms. McMahon was advised to send the information to Ms. Sharma to get it corrected via the Office of Eligibility.

An Orientation Specialist of 20 years in Northern Virginia, asked if virtual AAC meetings will be held for July. Chair Posner stated until we are able to meet in-person, this is the mode that will be used for the AAC Meetings. She shared some concerns that were experienced in her work with people who are blind or have low vision:

- Information about next train is not accessible on platforms. Can it be made audible?
- When the train arrives, rail line and destination announcements should be announced first.
- The platform floor flashing lights, an indicator of a train coming to the platform, cannot be seen by a blind person.
- The train announcements are unintelligible about 50% of the times.
- On the street maps, have a directional arrow for station escalators.

Ms. Peredo Lopez stated in regard to the platform audible announcements, we have been advocating to get audible information. The platform screen will show next train arrival information and we are working on getting the audible announcements for it. Regarding the train announcements, Mr. Blake stated we have heard this request before and we can bring the engineering staff back to discuss. For safety reasons, they must start with the doors opening announcements, however we can see if there is a way to rearrange the messaging. Mr. Kaffen recalled that it was an information technology (IT) issue where the system had been pre-programmed, and engineers were reviewing the complexity of making the changes. Chair Posner stated that in Philadelphia and Europe, station managers make the announcements about the next train coming up at the platform.

Mr. Sheehan shared a previous recommendation that was made by the AAC:

- Removal of “move to the center of the car” announcement.
- The order of messaging for train automated announcements.

Chair Posner stated it is a work in process and we will follow up.

Ms. Mezile asked about the Eligibility process during this time of pandemic. Mr. Blake stated any applications received during this time are being reviewed and presumptive

temporary eligibility is being granted as applicable, until the time we can access people in person.

Mr. Dancy asked if the building is closed down how people can access an application. Mr. Blake stated the applications can be acquired through internet or an email to the Office of Eligibility and an application can be mailed to the customer. The customer's medical professional can also download, print, complete their portion, and hand it to the customer.

Kirti Suri from DC Council Member White's Office, stated their office is still open and provided her email for anyone who needed to contact her. The Council is working on the City's budget at the moment, which is separate from WMATA budget. Chair Posner thanked the Council for all the work that is being done at this time.

Ms. Sharma provided information as to how anyone interested in providing feedback, can do so before or after the meeting, if not joined during the meeting. Comments can be submitted via phone message by calling 202-962-1100, and via email: [AACChairMetro@wmata.com](mailto:AACChairMetro@wmata.com). This information is also posted on the AAC, BRS, MAS, and the Calendar pages of [wmata.com](http://wmata.com)

#### **MetroAccess Subcommittee Report:**

Mr. Semelfort provided his report and shared the topics that were discussed during the May MAS Meeting:

- Scheduling Window: no changes effective July 1, 2020.
- Summer Eligibility Process: during the platform improvement project.
- Web Booking Site: issues discussed.
- The GPS system.
- An update about the safety issues concerning the situation due to COVID-19.

Mr. Semelfort asked about MetroAccess service for today as a result of the unrest in the region. Ms. Williams-Hall stated customers who have trips this evening, have received robo-calls and the message has been added on the IVR. We have made every attempt to reach out to all customers who had trips scheduled for tonight. Chair Posner stated he received a message and was informed no one would be stranded. Mr. Blake stated there will not be any new trips after 9:00 pm and if we are successful and many customers move their trips up, then we might utilize Abilities-Ride.

Mr. Semelfort commented about the on-time performance report as the percentage has increased. Mr. Blake stated overall numbers are down, however with fewer trips even one incident makes an impact on the statistics.

Ms. Rush reminded that we also talked about MetroAccess sedans. Mr. Blake stated the vehicle purchase is moving forward, it won't be Honda Accord. The Honda Accord provided us the specs for a vehicle that would be good for use for MetroAccess, and have received a proposal for Toyota Camry Hybrid. Ms. Rush reminded that the number of

drivers who were Corona positive was also discussed and Mr. Blake had informed the number of drivers reported was 50.

Mr. Semelfort asked about MetroAccess service area with the expansion of Metrorail service area, as a result of Silver line-Phase Two. Mr. Blake stated whenever Metro service expands, MetroAccess service would expand within  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile of the station. Mr. Semelfort asked about the paratransit services across the county lines. Mr. Blake stated that is something to be expanded later on, however, Metro would try and coordinate with paratransit service in Loudoun County.

### **Bus/Rail Subcommittee Report**

Mr. Calabria discussed an agenda topic of how to improve securement devices. He read about it and has been in touch with representative of a brand and has invited him to speak at a future AAC meeting. Ride-On service has 15 of those devices on their buses, so does Delaware transit. He stated he has no interest in the company, and would also speak with a representative from other companies to have no conflict of interest. WMATA is under budget constraints and we do not know if a bus securement device would be incorporated. Chair Posner stated over the years, there has been discussions whether people who use wheel chairs, want to be locked in or not. Any purchase of procurement goes through specific protocols and we need to ensure there is no conflict of interest, for things that we think would be useful for the disability community, we would provide our recommendations to WMATA, for them to complete their due process.

Mr. Calabria asked if staff can help us understand the plan for social distancing for the future. Chair Posner stated we will invite the Chief of Safety to address these issues.

Ms. Coles asked if there was a follow up on the Eligibility process for someone who was rejected before. Mr. Blake stated no one has been denied eligibility since March 13, 2020. If someone had been denied before and they reapply, most likely they would be found eligible temporarily now until the in-person assessment process begins.

Ms. Bush asked about MetroAccess service for Tuesday, June 2<sup>nd</sup> due to the curfew in Washington DC. Mr. Blake stated no trip will be booked after 9:00 pm tomorrow. We are trying to make sure everyone gets home, but we are trying not to have trips after 9:00 pm.

Ms. Rush asked if we are looking for a place to hold the Hedding Award Ceremony. Mr. Blake stated at this point, the award may be awarded, but the event may not take place. Chair Posner stated we can possibly hold the award ceremony virtually this year, and perhaps hold the ceremony event next year. Mr. Calabria recommended to hold the ceremony in the National Museum Building. Chair Posner informed that to hold an event in that building is very expensive. Mr. Sheehan stated if we have a virtual meeting and award the nominee, his family and friends may be able to join, which could not have been possible otherwise.

**Meeting Adjourned at 7:20 pm.**