



AAC

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: June 3, 2019

Attendees

Present: Phil Posner (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Tapan Banerjee, Carolyn Bellamy, Darnise Bush, Tino Calabria, Erin Coneys, Charlie Crawford, Rico Dancy, Melanie Jackson, Mary Kay McMahon, Philippa Mezile, Doris Ray, Paul Semelfort, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Chair Posner called the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting to order at 5:35 pm. Chair Posner started with introductions of the Committee members.

Approval of Agenda, Board Report, and Prior Meeting Minutes

The meeting agenda was approved.

The minutes from prior meeting were approved as written.

The Board Report was approved as amended to include MetroAccess on-time report.

Chair Posner asked Dr. Banerjee to extend his term beyond June till July 2019, he agreed.

MetroAccess Fare Policy Discussion:

Chair Posner discussed MetroAccess fare calculations. He provided a background of the fares charged in past and reasons of fare changes. Chair Posner recommended MetroAccess have a flat fare to Paul Wiedefeld, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer (GM/CEO) and Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services. Chair Posner presented some calculations, and based on those he proposed 3 motions:

1. A motion for MetroAccess to have flat fares, was proposed and passed unanimously.
2. A second motion was proposed for a flat fare of \$4.25 for regular MetroAccess trips. Ms. Bellamy recommended for \$4.00 as a flat fare, so that customers do not have to worry about change. The motion for a flat fare of \$4.00 was proposed and accepted.
3. A third motion of a 15% fare reduction for trips booked via subscription becomes mute as it may not be needed if the flat fares go in effect. WMATA is trying to increase efficiency. If the flat fare of \$4 is not adopted by WMATA, then, a discount for subscription trips may be recommended. A motion was recommended and passed for the discounted fare of \$3.50 per subscription trip.

Mr. Calabria asked about the subscription trips, and if a customer needs an unanticipated trip to go somewhere, what would be the charge on that? Mr. Blake stated the general idea of a subscription trip is that the customer takes the trip on a regular basis. For

instance, a customer could have a subscription going to church every Sunday between 8:30am and 9:00am, and without having to call to book a trip every week, the customer knows the ride will arrive every Sunday between 8:30am and 9:00am and take them to church. It gives the customer a set pick-up window. The subscription is there forever, unless customer cancels too many times, or decides to withdraw the subscription. For an unanticipated trip, the customer would call, book a ride, and pay the regular fare for that trip.

Mr. Blake stated he cannot support or oppose the motions, but said he felt the Committee is off to a very good start in terms of advocacy. He added that he is trying to do include simplification and better service overall. This is a direction he came from and the Fare Calculator was new to him here. He cannot comment on the proposed fare amounts. Regarding subscription trips, Mr. Blake encouraged the Committee to continue to advocate, but consider an approach of instead of a constant lower fare, perhaps treat it as a promotion, not just for new but all subscription customers.

Chair Posner hopes to have this as a pilot program, to avoid having to go through Title VI or the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). At the end of the pilot, if WMATA finds out they have got better efficiency and lower road hours service, then they can decide whether it is worth the extra adjustment.

Mr. Dancy asked what is the Title VI? Chair Posner stated the Title VI is a Federal regulation that requires anything that raises a fare, does not poorly affect certain minority communities: age, disabilities, color, and low income.

Ms. Ray asked about time restriction/renewal of the subscription, and if a customer takes a demand trip instead of the scheduled subscription, would it cause cancelation, and how would the customer be aware of the cancelation?

In response Allison Anderson, Operations Manager, MetroAccess, stated there is no set time limit on how long someone can have their subscription services. A high number (over 50%) of cancelations would inactivate a subscription. Ms. Anderson stated we have a time frame we go by to hold customers to keep their subscriptions in place. Customers cannot switch trip times on a regular basis. The purpose of a subscription is to give convenience to the customers that travel to and from a particular location on a frequent basis. It is not a device to go through ample changes. We understand situations change, customers can book in advance and cancel, but if the cancelation rate gets too high, then we reserve the right to notify the customers that we are canceling their subscription. In those cases, customers can still book demand trips.

Chair Posner asked on Federal Holidays when subscription trips are canceled, customers who still need rides, will they be able to get the subscription fares? Mr. Blake stated yes.

Ms. Rush stated she was informed that a subscription trip needs to be canceled a day in advance, not 2 hours prior to the pick-up window begins. Is that correct?

Ms. Anderson and Mr. Blake, both said no. The subscription trip can be canceled 2 hours prior the pick-up window begins, just like a demand trip. Mr. Blake stated if a trip that is

part of the subscription is canceled, however, and the customer later tries to re-instate that specific trip, it should be easy to do so. Currently, the canceled subscription trip cannot be re-instated, and a demand trip needs to be booked. There are some challenges with that. Ms. Anderson, Mr. Blake, and the Operations Control Center (OCC) are working on that. The goal is to make these trips as simple as possible.

Ms. Rush stated she was told if a subscription trip is not canceled a day in advance, it will count against her.

Mr. Blake stated the way it counts against her is if the subscription trips are canceled more than 50%, then she may first receive a warning letter. The number of cancellations accumulate monthly. If the person has had legitimate reasons for cancellations, they can appeal. Ms. Anderson stated if the subscription is canceled due to high trip cancellation, the customer can still book demand trips. If a customer goes on vacation, they can place a "hold" on the subscription, that allows the customer not to have the subscription trip canceled and it will not be held against them.

Ms. Jackson asked how does cancellation work during the inclement weather. Mr. Blake stated for days where MetroAccess does not cancel the service, however a customer cannot take the ride, the customer can cancel the trip. Ms. Jackson asked what happens if the customer does not cancel the trip? Mr. Blake stated that will not be a subscription policy issue, that will be a late cancellation/no show policy issue, and that does count against the customer. If needed, customer does have an option to appeal.

Ms. Bush asked for clarification about cancellation policy. Mr. Blake stated if a trip is canceled 2 hours in advance, it is not held against the customer. If it is canceled within the 2 hours, that gives you points.

Ms. Jackson asked about the points. Mr. Semelfort clarified that the late-cancellation is half a point whereas a no-show is one point. The accumulation of at-least 3 points or 10% of the number of rides within a month, may adversely affect customer's service.

Ms. Ray asked for clarification about cancellation time. Mr. Blake stated a customer can cancel all the way to the time driver shows up. To cancel without any penalty, a trip must be canceled 2 hours before the window begins.

Dr. Banerjee asked about changing the trip-time on the same day. Mr. Blake stated that changing travel time on the day of the trip cannot be done with MetroAccess.

Mr. Dancy stated a person may not be able to predict sickness 2 hours ahead of time. Mr. Blake stated we understand, that is why customers would not get suspended on one-time late-cancellation, however, a suspension is possible for several of late-cancellations. If needed, a customer can appeal. If for some reason WMATA does not act in a reasonable common sense, taken into consideration customer's case, there is another avenue to appeal; the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). There are ample options for a customer.

Abilities-Ride:

Mr. Blake stated he will inform the AAC as an announcement is made. The first year was the pilot. It may not be enough (time and space) to have the providers in a MetroAccess Subcommittee Meeting. Therefore, perhaps on a Saturday, there may be a showcase of Abilities-Ride providers, similar to the ones in conventions where providers may have booths and provide their information.

Ms. Ray expressed opposition to the idea of an Abilities-Ride showcase occurring on a Saturday as some people coming from Northern VA may not have access to bus service that feeds into Metrorail Stations, thus recommended for a weekday evening schedule.

MetroAccess Global Positioning System (GPS) System:

Mr. Blake stated the issues appear to be with the third-party providers. At the MetroAccess Subcommittee Meeting we will have someone from our Information Technology (IT) Department to provide information about what happened a couple of Saturdays ago, as well as about some of the challenges we are facing. We moved our computer equipment to Carmen Turner Facility (CTF) due to security and other reasons. We have been speaking with our OCC and IT, and there appear to be a clear problem and we are looking at different ways to find a resolution.

Terrian Williams-Hall, Director, MetroAccess, stated when we decided to install real-time traffic by Inrix, at the time that was the only software that could integrate with Trapeze, which could give turn-by-turn instructions but not real-time traffic. Whereas, Inrix was supposed to route the drivers, but that system goes down quite often. As a result, drivers have to rely on turn-by-turn instructions without real-time traffic. Sometimes, the rangers themselves will go out. When that happens, drivers rely on maps. In those instances, they must pull over and look at the maps. We are still going through a data-center transfer, but we are working with Inrix a little bit closer. Trapeze now does integrate with Tom-Tom, however, there are some procurement issues with buying those devices. We may use turn-by-turn instructions without the real-time instructions for the time being.

Chair Posner stated if drivers could use their personal cell phones as taxi drivers do, it would be helpful. Mr. Blake stated, for safety reasons, we do not want to get in the position of drivers using their cell phones. We also want to avoid situations from arising where cell phones are used more often than needed.

Chair Posner stated communicating with Department of Transportations can provide scheduled road conditions and that having interactions with those groups should be useful. Mr. Blake agreed, and stated constant dialogue with all the Department of Transportations is important.

Mr. Semelfort recommends talking to Sam Bland, Regency cab, as they use the tablet technology. Mr. Blake stated he will inquire with all parties for ideas to this immediate problem.

Ms. Ray shared her experience that frequently taxi drivers use the GPS they like. As a result, they may not be aware of all road condition updates. In some cases, drivers apply their knowledge, which is important.

Mr. Sheehan shared information about the technology used by the Department of Veterans Affairs, that is tablet based. He will research and find out if that works with Trapeze. Ms. Williams-Hall stated one thing to keep in mind is if we went to manual device, every trip will have to be inserted manually. It would have to work with Trapeze.

Define Accessibility:

The topic was not discussed due to time constraints.

Public Comment:

A customer stated she agrees with the Committee about MetroAccess flat fare, and stated she is not in favor of longer scheduling times.

A second customer asked what is the expectation from the Abilities-Ride providers? The AAC should have binding powers and recommended to have a change in the constitution.

Mr. Blake stated for the Abilities-Ride and the Transport DC programs, the contractual obligations are laid out in terms of accessibility. We do not have contractual responsibility for their overall performance because they are privately held and operated companies that are providing publicly available transportation services. Their contractual relationship with Metro is a financial one not an operational one. They are not providing services on behalf of Metro. They are providing a vehicle for which Metro is saying if a customer that happens to be eligible for MetroAccess and wishes to use them in a certain context in Transport DC within the District, with Abilities-Ride for trips that begin or end in Maryland, we will subsidize a portion of their fare. The customers have the choice. Right now, it is a limited choice since it was just a start. Very soon, there is going to be an announcement and customers will have multiple choices, multiple companies from which to choose from. As a consumer, with or without a subsidy from Metro, you can choose to use one of those companies when needed. The subsidy from Metro may incentivize for customers to use them, but we are not asking for customers to use any service that does not meet your needs as a consumer.

The customer further stated if the money is coming out of public purse, it is not responsible for Abilities-Ride providers not to have any expectation for service. Expectations need to be set with penalties.

Mr. Blake stated our focus is accessibility to ensure that anyone with a disability can use any of those services. But, it is up to the consumer to decide if any one particular vendor is performing up-to their standards that they wish because at the end, while you may not be paying the entire fare because MetroAccess is paying a large portion of your fare, you are paying some of your own money and we would want you to make the same choice with your economic dollars with that program as you would with any other consumer purchase.

A third customer had a few concerns about her MetroAccess trips and incorrect information that she received for today's meeting times. The customer is blind and keeps a record about pick-up time and, thus she can prove it.

Mr. Blake stated Ms. Allison would follow up with the customer.

Mr. Sheehan stated a customer whose MetroAccess ID had expired received an extension while going through recertification, however, was unable to use the Abilities-Ride in that duration. Mr. Blake stated the providers get a list at the beginning of the month. If you became eligible for MetroAccess on the 2nd of the month, your name will not be on the list for that month. It would go on the list the following month. If the customer calls the Office of ADAP, we can help them.

Ms. Mezile requested for a Transport DC representative to come to an AAC meeting as she would like to address some of the issues she has experienced. Ms. Mezile stated that DC residents are getting robbed of choices as they are forced to use specific companies. Customers get text messages, but the vehicles do not show up. Mr. Blake stated Transport DC customers have to call a number to get a ride, not the companies directly. One particular company has limited number of what they can make within a year.

Ms. Bush stated that for a person with wheelchair, with Transport DC the customer may not get a ride for hours. Sometimes it could be 2 hours long wait to go just 10 blocks.

Ms. Rush stated about a previous trip scheduled at 3:30pm, but on the books it said 3:15pm. Was that part of the GPS or system going down? Ms. Anderson stated she reviewed various things to determine the cause, however, was unable to find a reason. She is observing other customers' experiences as well. So far, she has not seen any major replication.

A customer present at the meeting also shared a similar issue. Ms. Anderson will continue to review the issue.

Bus/Rail Subcommittee Report:

Chair Posner spoke with the group after the Bus Transformation Project (BTP) meeting today and they asked the Committee to give their feedback. He asked Ms. Ray and anyone who has seen the information and would like to see some changes to the bus service including bus stops and service, should email him. Chair Posner will send out a write-up about the BTP before the BRS meeting. Ms. Ray proposed a motion that we will do the write-up process and designate BRS to approve whatever statement that may be sent. The motion was approved.

Mr. Calabia provided an introduction of the meeting that he attended, about the Blue/Orange/Silver Capacity and Reliability Study (BOSCRS). It was made very clear that the BOSCRS was completely independent of BTP. He did not find detailed information in the BTP (a 10-years long project), that he received in the BOSCRS. The BOSCRS is under control of WMATA, whereas, the BTP involves WMATA but 8 other bus providers.

Chair Posner stated the details have been asked for. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) controls every traffic light, sidewalk, and other parts within the Commonwealth of Virginia, yet they never showed up to the BTP meetings. Other Department of Transportation (DOT) staff informed that this (BTP) is not going to happen. The BTP needs funding and the funding part is an on-going issue. For instance, Metro should have had funding for decades, whereas it only happened recently. The BTP has aspirational goals, they have pointed out issues and have asked for solutions.

Ms. Ray stated at the BOSCRS meeting, it was made very clear that it is only about rail, it has nothing to do with the bus service(s).

MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) Report:

Mr. Semelfort provided his report about the issues that were discussed at the MAS meeting: the scheduling window, taxi alternative rides, training for Abilities-Ride providers, MetroAccess trip time. Continuing with MetroAccess trip time, Ms. Rush stated customers need to be educated at the time of eligibility.

Mr. Sheehan stated when he uses Uber or Lyft, he knows of his estimated arrival time. Mr. Semelfort stated similarly, he can see all the trip information in New York's system, and he hopes to have that kind of information being available here as well. Customers can see the information on their electronic equipment or call a phone line to get the information.

Ms. Rush stated rules and regulations have changed over the years and everyone needs to be updated.

Other Items:

Ms. Ray stated on Friday, a MetroAccess trip took an hour instead of 10 minutes.

Mr. Crawford asked why the lights at the L'Enfant Plaza are off and when are they coming back on?

Meeting adjourned at 7:30pm.