



Accessibility Advisory Committee

600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
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BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: February 10, 2020

In attendance: Tino Calabia (Chair), Anthony Oberg (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Melanie Jackson, Steve Kaffen, Doris Ray, Denise Rush, Patrick Sheehan, Phil Posner (Remote Participation).

Call to Order

Chair Calabia called the February 10, 2020, Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The BRS approved the February 10, 2020, meeting agenda as amended. The topic of "Accessibility Messaging on Soon To-Be 1900 Screen in WMATA's Metro Stations" was removed from today's agenda, to be rescheduled at a later date.

The BRS approved the January 13, 2020, meeting minutes as written.

WMATA Budget: Bus Service

James Hamre, Director, Bus Service Planning and Scheduling, and Albert Himes, Planning Manager, provided information about the proposed changes to fares and service. Mr. Hamre shared a brochure, "Balancing the Next Metro Budget to Reflect Your Priorities", that will be handed out to riders over the course of the month. The proposal is to reduce the price of the 7-Day Regional Bus Pass, add a surcharge of 25 cents for cash use, and to increase the fare on MetroExtra routes. The transfer discounts between Metrorail and Metrobus are proposed to increase and add new short-trip and weekend passes. The bus service change proposal includes improved weekend service on high-ridership routes, improved MetroExtra service, and adjust frequency as well as hours of service. Mr. Hamre provided information about bus routes that may be impacted within the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. At this time, Mr. Hamre invited questions from the Committee.

Chair Calabia asked how else are you going to publicize the changes besides the brochures. Mr. Hamre stated the Office of External Relations has a plan for outreach that includes: alerts/emails to SmarTrip card holders; sending messages to customer who have signed up for alerts; press notices; information on the website; and providing information to the elected officials so that they can repeat the information, etc. On the website, there is a new feature calculator that will help customers. Chair Calabia asked about the bus routes and stops that might be impacted. Mr. Hamre shared we have 159 lines of service, 248 route variations, close to 10,000 stops, and about 18,000 stops that MetroAccess serves throughout the region. There are approximately 25 proposed bus lines to be discontinued and another 80 that would have some change in its current service. Chair Calabia stated whether the number of bus stops may change. Mr. Hamre stated it may not impact more than 400 stops, as many locations serve more than one bus line.

There was a discussion about the proposed service changes and its impact. Mr. Ariza-Silva asked about an alternate for bus B30 post discontinuation of this route. Mr. Himes stated the alternate would be MARC service. Mr. Ariza-Silva commented about inaccessibility of the MARC service. He asked about the MetroAccess service and fares being affected by the budget proposals. Mr. Hamre stated the MetroAccess service area would not change, however, fares may be impacted due to the proposed Metrobus and Metrorail fare changes. Vice-Chair Oberg asked about the matrix by which that influences the proposals. Mr. Hamre stated it is more subjective than objective. Ms. Jackson asked about bus service changes on the Z line and about the alternate service for the Burtonsville area. Mr. Himes stated a new service in Montgomery County will start in the month of May. He provided information about the upcoming service which will focus to serve the community during peak-hours.

Mr. Kaffen recommended a pass that is simpler, which may encourage more riders due to the benefit of number of trips that can be availed. Mr. Hamre stated a pass product called Fair Fares was reviewed some years ago, however it created an issue of revenue. Mr. Kaffen stated the 25 cents surcharge may increase the dwell time. Mr. Hamre stated the theory is that if you make it more costly to add, then it would incentivize people to load multiple trips on their SmarTrip cards rather than vast majority of single or double trips and the other benefits that go with that. It speeds up everything else, it costs us less in terms of farebox, and that means we are collecting less through the farebox. It also saves money and it improves reliability. The question of 25 cents being an impediment was asked. Most of the places where you see the greatest number of single-value added, are the places where you see most fare evasions. If people would not pay their fares, chances are they would not pay 25 cents either.

Ms. Ray asked about the 5A and the 15K routes. Since Metro closes early these days, by discontinuing the 5A route, people who need to get to the airport may not be able to get there in time. There was a question regarding the cuts to 15K and 15L, which services a campus of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), a big employment source. Mr. Hamre stated when the Silver Line is extended to the airport, there is no need for a bus to provide that connection. The first train may not service as early as the first bus, however the low ridership on a bus versus the number of riders on a train, is a balance of ridership versus the timing issue. Mr. Himes stated it is a matter of productivity in relation to other routes in the system. There are a few sections of 15K that overlap on other routes. The local jurisdictions provide service on parts of the segment. The CIA is a large area of employment; however, the number of riders is medium, and that does not help our productivity.

Dr. Posner discussed the shuttles for public hearings. Only two customers using wheelchairs can board a bus. He also asked about a previously mentioned topic of MetroAccess customers getting Abilities-Rides. Carol Peredo Lopez, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, informed that we are looking into getting Abilities-Rides for public hearings. Dr. Posner assumed the information about the public hearings will be on the interacted voice response (IVR), as well as on the website to inform customers. Ms. Peredo Lopez confirmed the information will be widely shared to inform customers.

A customer shared her concerns about the proposed changes. Some people may not have accessibility and it may not be a fair comparison for people with disabilities. A person may be able to use bus service only and with the upcoming changes it may cause a great deal of accessibility issues. The customer shared a recent experience where she was passed by three buses one afternoon due to space limitation for her wheelchair on those buses. She also mentioned safety issues of the floating bus stops in the District of Columbia. Mr. Hamre appreciated being informed about the floating bus stops.

A customer asked if the brochures shared during this meeting, have been delivered to all rail stations. Mr. Hamre stated he received the brochures prior to this meeting, therefore, we are in the distribution mode. The customer asked whether the online-surveys would be available in hard copies as he cannot go online to complete the surveys. Mr. Hamre informed there might not be paper surveys, however staff may be able to aid in filling out the online surveys via using tablets. The customer asked about an Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) Meeting scheduled for February 11, 2020. Mr. Hamre informed that the meeting is only for ANCs and it is not an open meeting. However, if he wanted to come and speak, there is a Capitol Heights Town Hall on February 11, 2020. The customer asked about the duration of MetroAccess service not being impacted and about the total amount of route miles being impacted as a result of the proposed service. Mr. Hamre stated Title VI report will look at impact on riders.

Mr. Sheehan asked about the Bus Transformation Project (BTP) and stated there seems to be inconsistency with what is going forward. What is being done in the District of Columbia is consistent with the BTP. Mr. Hamre stated this is an opportunity to speak to the priorities of the region and of the riders. The BTP is a big vision process, will take many years and will have bumps in the road. The consistency is consistent in terms of focus services and higher ridership. Within the 3% context mandated by the General Assemblies of Maryland and Virginia, it must be done within a balanced budget format. Mr. Sheehan appreciated the work and efforts given to the accessibility projects by the Bus Division. Mr. Hamre stated we try to work the best we can on all the projects.

Chair Calabria thanked Mr. Hamre and Mr. Himes for their time and the detailed information.

Bus Technology: Audio Announcements/Video Screens - Safety/Fare Evasion Prevention

Chair Calabia shared recommendations on two pilots that he created by researching other transit systems. The first pilot had recommendations for bus operators to play pre-recorded announcements of fare payment or evasion, as appropriate. The second pilot recommended monitors to check the fare payments on Metrobuses. Mr. Sheehan asked how would a monitor check for fare without paper tickets. Mr. Kaffen shared his experience from transit agencies Worldwide, and stated he noticed monitors in Australia had readers for paper and paperless tickets. He preferred the bus operators playing the pre-recorded announcements, giving them flexibility to use their judgement on a case by case scenario. Chair Calabia stated he feels the monitors may take some of the responsibility off the bus operators. He has heard and seen the bus operators being harassed by passengers.

Ms. Ray stated this topic may need to be referred to the Riders Advisory Council (RAC) and the bus operators should be involved in the process. She also stated that since the establishment of operators' seat shields, she feels intimidated while riding the buses. Chair Calabia asked if Ms. Ray was saying that the shields should not be there? Ms. Ray stated for people with vision and/or hearing impairment, there could be an issue of communication raised between the rider and the operator. Vice-Chair Oberg stated unless there is a way to tie this topic with an accessibility issue, it may need to be referred to the RAC. Chair Calabia stated he has already shared the topic with the RAC Chair. Mr. Sheehan stated for the past couple of months, the RAC has been discussing the fare evasion and they should be the primary movers of this issue. Mr. Kaffen shared an observation about fare evasion: people have SmarTrip cards and the tap does not record any fare.

Mr. Ariza-Silva asked about the source of fare evasion amount of \$26 million. Ms. Peredo Lopez informed the information is on WMATA website. Mr. Ariza-Silva shared his observation of the marketing screens at the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metro Station and recommended having messages educating customers about fare evasion. Chair Calabia stated he hopes for the Committee to have information about the 1900 LCD screens soon. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated the pre-scheduled messages can be placed on the side-screens in the 7000 series railcars. She asked the Committee to provide other recommendations, if any. Mr. Ariza-Silva stated the idea is to use the entire screen to display messages rather a portion of it. Ms. Ray stated platform screens have real-time information, however, live messages cannot be on the trains at this time. The screens on the trains cannot be seen by everyone. The platform screens are bigger and have scrolling images. The messages are not displayed for a long enough duration for a customer like herself,

to notice. Chair Calabria stated the idea is for other riders to get messages about the persons with disabilities. Ms. Ray stated the messages might be helpful for visitors.

Ombudsman Report:

David Shaffer, Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, provided a report on outstanding issues. Today, he was at the National Washington Federation of Blind Seminar, recruiting college interns. Mr. Shaffer asked for the Committee to share information about the intern program and stated he will share information about it with the Committee. The pending issues were publication of information about the budget being accessible. He mentioned a list of organizations where information about the budget is being shared and asked for the Committee to provide recommendations to be incorporated in the distribution list. He is currently working on ensuring the budget documents are accessible. There is a work order for the lighting issue at the Friendship Heights Station. Mr. Shaffer will review the Rosslyn station for lighting concerns.

Mr. Sheehan asked whether WMATA: documents on the website, and the website itself, fall under section 508. Mr. Shaffer informed documents on the website would be under section 508, whereas the website falls under ADA 508 WCHE 2.1 AA compliance, and we are 95% compliant on that. Mr. Sheehan stated if people were interested in working on the usability of the website, where can their ideas be reviewed and streamlined? Mr. Shaffer stated information can be sent to him. When we do the accessibility testing, it must look at usability. Therefore, he reviews the usability, but may not be able to cover all 15000 pages.

Anu Sharma, AAC Coordinator, ADA Policy and Planning, provided an update about the questions asked by the members during the AAC meeting on February 3, 2020. The information shared pertained to the Budget hearings, and it will be emailed to the Committee as well.

Chair Calabria asked for the meeting records to be made available soon as the public hearings are this month.

Public Comment:

There were no public comments for this section.

New/Old Business and Work Plan Updates

The topic was not discussed due to time constraints.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:58 p.m.