



**AAC**

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

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### **BUS AND RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: February 13, 2017**

In attendance: Brian Miller (Chair), Brianne Burger (Vice-Chair), Elver Ariza-Silva, Steven Kaffen, Mary Kay McMahon, Randall Pope, Doris Ray, and Denise Rush.

#### **Call to Order**

Chair Miller called the February 13, 2017 Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

#### **Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

The BRS approved the February 13, 2017 meeting agenda as amended.

The BRS approved the January 9, 2017 meeting minutes as written.

#### **Ombudsman's Report**

David Shaffer, ADA Ombudsman, provided an update on comments made about announcements on 7000-series railcars. The issue is that, at times, the train doors are closed prior to the completion of the automated announcements. He stated that this issue occurs more frequently during off peak hours when fewer customers are boarding the trains. To rectify the issue, Mr. Shaffer has proposed that Metro's Office of Rail Transportation (RTRA) instruct all train operators to wait until the line and destination announcements are complete before closing the doors since the timing of the doors on the 7000-series railcars are not automatic, and can be controlled by train operators.

Steve Kaffen stated that the announcement reminding customers that the doors are closing has outlived its purpose. He suggested that train operators only make the most important announcements, such as the line and destination.

Christiaan Blake, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, stated that the AAC discussed the possibility of changing the order of the announcements with staff. RTRA stated that the order of the announcements are important to the safe operation of the system.

Mr. Miller expressed an interest in the sequence of train announcements. Mr. Shaffer stated that the line and destination are announced first followed by the door announcement.

In a follow-up, Mr. Kaffen expressed an interest in whether train operators could have option to turn off certain announcements during non-peak hours. He stated that this change would reduce the boarding time. Mr. Blake stated that Metro provides comprehensive announcements and would not use manual announcements during non-peak hours for 7000-series trains. Mr. Shaffer announced that Metro was replacing all of its 1000 and 4000-series railcars. He stated that this change should improve announcements across all series rail trains.

Mr. Shaffer also provided an update on bus announcements. He stated that the bus annunciator system is tied to the computer system, which operates the destination signs, text system, radio, and global positioning system (GPS) for the bus. When the annunciator is not working, normally it is a computer issue, not a mechanical problem. To address the issue, Mr. Shaffer proposed that Metro's Office of Bus Transportation (BTRA) add the inspection of the annunciator to the Bus Operator Pre-trip Inspection checklist. He stated that when a bus annunciator is inoperable, bus operators are required to announce the destination, major intersections or transfer points, and end of the line.

Mr. Shaffer reported that he conducted a sensitivity awareness training during a recent BTRA safety meeting. He stated that the training focused on various issues, such as kneeling the buses, using the lifts/ramps, and monitoring the annunciators.

Ms. Burger expressed an interest in whether the safety trainings included interacting with customers who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing. The Ombudsman stated that the training spotlights various types of disabilities, accessibility features in the system, along with other service-related information.

Ms. Ray stated that it is difficult to register a complaint with Metro by phone during non-business hours. Mr. Shaffer stated that customers can report issues at any time by using the online complaint form. Customers can also contact the Ombudsman at [access@wmata.com](mailto:access@wmata.com) or by phone at (202) 962-2820. He encouraged customers to provide as much information as possible to allow for a thorough investigation of the complaint being submitted.

Mr. Kaffen expressed an interest in why Metro uses generic responses for complaints. Mr. Shaffer stated that initial responses are intended to acknowledge the complaints.

### **Emergency Exercise (Update)**

Ron Bodmer, Director, MTPD Emergency Management (OEM), provided an update on previous emergency exercises. He stated that Metro's emergency exercises are designed to train first responders and Metro staff with the critical skills necessary to rescue customers from the system during an emergency. The most recent exercise was held at the Southern Avenue station in Prince George's County. After each exercise, OEM requests feedback from all participants. Mr. Bodmer stated that the feedback from the disability community included challenges with walking on the track due to all of the tripping hazards; difficulty with walking on the narrow safety-walk; and the amount of time it took to begin the exercise. He stated that the Southern Avenue exercise began a

little late due to trouble with powering down the system, however once the issue was resolved the exercise continued smoothly. He added that it is Metro's goal to ensure the emergency exercises are as real as possible, including the response time of first responders. Therefore, responses to the "emergency" are staggered from the jurisdictions.

Mr. Bodmer also stated that the safety-walk is only 22 inches wide and extends from the tunnel to the platform. Although there was good communication throughout the exercise, the disability community noted that the train operator failed to identify himself each time information was provided to the participants.

Another comment from the disability community was that the elevator was not available to return members from the platform to the mezzanine after the exercise. Mr. Bodmer stated that local fire departments has command of the emergency exercises and determine whether a customer would walk to the platform, use the Emergency Tunnel Evacuation Cart (ETEC), or take the elevators.

Mr. Bodmer addressed earlier comments and recommendations from the Committee. He introduced Denton Rourke, Operation Manager, Emergency Operations, who handles all the emergency exercises. The comments and responses are as follows:

1. The Committee recommended that Metro appoint a central liaison to handle all the debriefing feedback from each exercise, and to distribute all feedback and lessons learned to each of the jurisdictions.

Mr. Bodmer stated that Metro collaborates with Cecilia Warren, Emergency Preparedness, Maryland Department of Disabilities, and Delores Scott, DC Homeland Security Emergency Management Agency, to share information throughout the jurisdictions about an emergency exercise.

2. The Committee recommended that Metro broaden the volunteer process to obtain a cross section of people with disabilities; those who use service animals, those who are blind/low vision, and those with intellectual disabilities, thus giving first responders an opportunity to be better prepared to address incidents involving more types of disabilities.

Mr. Bodmer stated that Metro is interested in having a cross-section of participants from the disability community take part in the exercises. He stated that Metro is the only transit property that uses customers in emergency exercises; many other transit properties uses actors or employees.

3. The Committee recommended that Metro enhance communication with customers who are deaf or hard of hearing during emergencies by including accessible signage with raised lettering in all E-Kits to communicate basic instructions.

Mr. Bodmer stated that Metro is still working on this issue. He encouraged members of the disability community to advocate to the local fire departments in each jurisdiction for training on working with the disability community.

4. The Committee recommended that Metro develop an in-person comprehensive training that includes people with disabilities to inform first responders on how to assist people with disabilities and develop a video for seniors, people with disabilities, and the general public on emergency preparedness in the system.

Mr. Rourke stated that after every exercise Metro publishes a report that is distributed to all of the jurisdictions. Metro also provides training to its staff on how to work with people with disabilities.

5. The Committee recommended that Metro improve the emergency evacuation posters to make the information more uniform, and have all of the core information be the same.

Mr. Bodmer stated that Metro has emergency evacuation posters on all railcars and welcomes any input from the disability community on how to make the posters better.

6. The Committee recommended that Metro revisit the requirements for the liability waivers, so that first responders can get the necessary training to be skilled in working with the disability community during an emergency.

Mr. Blake stated that Metro's General Manager and team have studied the issue and responded in writing to the Committee. Metro will continue to require the signing of the waiver by all individuals participating in the emergency exercises.

Ms. Rush stated that Metro should reconsider or make revisions to the waiver.

Ms. Ray agreed with OEM's points about training of first responders in the jurisdictions. She suggested that the Committee work with the disability commissions in each jurisdiction to obtain more the information.

Ms. Burger stated that the disability community is interested in participating in the emergency exercises, but is apprehensive because of the lack of protection. She also encouraged Metro to consider a later start time for the exercises and invite other

groups to participate. Mr. Rourke stated that Metro has opened up the exercises to the disability community at-large.

Ms. Rush stated that in previous exercises it was Metro's practice to evacuate members of the disability community last. She expressed an interest in whether this was still Metro's practice. Mr. Rourke reiterated earlier comments about who has command of evacuations both during the exercises and actual emergencies; local first responders. It is up to them to determine whether a customer will walk to the platform, use the ETEC, or perhaps the elevators. He stated that in previous exercises, some members of the disability community evacuated the train and walked back to the platform.

Mr. Miller stated that the planned emergency exercises are an opportunity to teach and learn on both sides of the aisle. He stated that first responders should be more flexible in an emergency exercise.

Randall Pope stated that he is a Deaf-Blind customer who uses the Metro system every day. He stated that Metro needs new ideas on working with people with disabilities, especially those who are in the deaf-blind community. Mr. Rourke stated that Metro welcomes the opportunity to work with any member of the disability community on the emergency exercises. He reiterated earlier comments about Metro's collaboration on emergency preparedness with Maryland and DC officials. Mr. Pope stated that working with the disability community is not a one-size fit all.

Mr. Miller suggested Metro use the Helen Keller National Center and Easter Seals as additional resources for information in working with the disability community in an emergency.

The BRS acknowledged that the disability community shares the same goal as Metro, that is to show customers how to evacuate the system safely in an emergency. Mr. Bodmer stated that it is Metro's goal is make these exercises better. He invited members to participate and bring a friend to any of the following upcoming emergency exercises: April 2017 – DC; June 2017 – Arlington County, August 2017 – Montgomery County; and November 2017 in Fairfax County. The BRS thanked Metro for taking the step to build a more inclusive evacuation program.

### **Bus Stop Signage (Update)**

Jim Hamre, Director of Bus Planning (BPLN), provided an update on bus stop signage. He stated that Metro has approximately 600 bus stops in its inventory with most of the stops located at Metrorail stations. Most of the bus stops in local neighborhoods are owned by the respective jurisdictions. He introduced Scottie Borders, Manager, Bus

Stop Signage and Shelters. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro is restructuring and transferring Mr. Borders' office to Plant Maintenance. This will allow them to be responsible for maintaining the physical presence of the bus stops.

In 2009, Metro adopted a policy for the design and placement of bus stops, and works with its regional partners to design bus stops that are uniform. Mr. Hamre stated that there are three type of bus stops in the region, with each stop having different types of amenities. For example, the basic stop has a bus flag and pole, and normally serves approximately 15 or fewer passengers boarding per day. While full-service stops include amenities like a shelter, bench, trash can, and other features, and serve over a 100 passengers boarding per day. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro has enhanced some bus stops by replacing the pole and bus flag, and updating the information to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Mr. Hamre stated that at most bus stops Metro also has accessible signage – the NextBus identification numbers in Braille. The Subcommittee expressed an interest in increasing the size of the tactile lettering for the NextBus identification signs. Mr. Hamre stated that signs are designed to align with the information box and fit directly above the box.

Metro has also updated the number of maps in bus shelters. These maps highlight the routes of the buses serving the bus stop. Mr. Borders stated that route maps in shelters are mainly located in D.C. and at Metro stations. In response to a question about other jurisdictions, Mr. Borders stated that the design of some of the shelters in other jurisdictions do not tend to include maps in the shelters.

Additionally, Mr. Hamre stated that with advances in technology and limited resources, Metro is considering removing time table maps from bus stops. He stated that last fall, Metro tested a bus stop arrival digital tablet. This electronic sign is 8X10 inches in size and carries bus stop information. Metro also has Real-time Passenger Displays at the shelters and the BusETA system which can be updated more easily. This means more digital information and the use of less printed materials at bus stops.

Mr. Kaffen congratulated Metro on adding the electronic bus signs to the shelters. He suggested BPLN review the cycle of information again to improve timing on major connecting points. Mr. Hamre stated that Metro revised the information and the longest message takes approximately 14 seconds.

Ms. Ray stated that she is an avid bus user, however rarely can she locate a tactile sign at bus stops. She requested a list of where Metro has placed the accessible signage at bus stops. Mr. Hamre stated that the accessible signage at most bus stops are approximately 40 inches high; however, at certain bus stops, the amenities are already installed, which mean that the accessible signage is placed higher on the pole. Mr. Borders stated that he would share that information with the Committee.

Mr. Kaffen also expressed an interest in how customers can submit suggestions on bus stops. Mr. Borders stated that customers can complete the form online. Mr. Blake stated that customers can also contact ADAP regarding bus stops at (202) 962-1100.

Mr. Ariza-Silva expressed an interest in how often Metro updates the maps and schedules at bus stops. Mr. Hamre stated that unless the schedule changes, Metro does not change the timetables. Metro wanted to replace printed materials; but due to funding constraints, BPLN has been unable.

Mr. Hamre stated that Metro does have an initiative to update maps with Evergreen information. This information includes: Metro information number (202-637-7000) along with Metro's website (wmata.com), and BusETA information. Mr. Borders stated that customers can use BusETA to locate bus arrival information for the stop. In response to a question about whether the BusETA is same around the jurisdictions, Mr. Hamre stated that if the transit property follows the regional identification number, then the jurisdictional bus stop information will also be listed.

The BRS thanked BPLN for working to improve access at Metro bus stops and across the region.

### **New Business**

The BRS suggested that the public comment be moved to the end of the meeting to allow customers arrive at the meetings.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:02 p.m.