



Accessibility Advisory Committee

600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
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METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: October 20, 2014

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Carolyn Bellamy, Ms. Heidi Case, Ms. Doris Ray, Dr. Phil Posner, Dr. William Staderman, Mr. Edward McEntee, Mr. Roger Stanley, Ms. Marisa Laios, Mr. Charles Crawford, Mr. Patrick Sheehan, Ms. Mary Jane Owens, Mr. Marc Brenman, and Ms. Phillipa Mezile, Dr. Tappan Banerjee.

Call to Order

Co-Chair Rush called the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting to order at 4:06pm.

Review of October 2014 Agenda

The agenda was approved without amendments.

Review of September 2014 Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved without amendments.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Ms. Sara Morris, Senior Administrative Coordinator, MTM, reported that all public comments from the previous meetings have been addressed.

Ms. Celisse Outlaw, Service Monitor, MetroAccess, reported attendance at the Lifelong Takoma Park Resource Day where information regarding travel training and senior smart trip cards was provided to the attendees. MetroAccess has been asked and will attend the National Federation of the Blind annual Resource Day.

MetroAccess Employee Recognition

Ms. Jacqueline Quander recognized Abdul Sankoh as the Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award winner. A detailed description of Mr. Sankoh's accomplishments can be found in the accompanying document titled "Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award" located under the October 2014 heading at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Seat Belt Safety

Ms. Raquelle A. Gilbert, Department of Safety and Environmental Management, provided a presentation and information regarding seat belt safety. Ms. Gilbert explained the need for seatbelts and the statistics of injuries and fatalities while traveling in a vehicle without seat belts. For detailed descriptions of the Seat Belt safety presentation, please refer to the October 2014 Seat Belt Safety located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Questions/Comments from the committee:

Dr. Posner asked about the shoulder harness and the problems that customers have had using them. He asked if there were statistics for the use of both the seat belt and shoulder harness or the use of one or the other.

Ms. Gilbert stated that she did not find any statistics regarding the shoulder harness, but would attempt to locate the data and report back to the committee.

Dr. Banerjee asked if there was an alternative to the shoulder harness, something similar to seat belts used on airlines.

Mr. Hamlin, Field Operations Manager, MetroAccess, commented that airline seat belts are after-market products which need to be individualized. Alternatives are being sought.

Mr. Brenman asked why there are no seat belts on Metro busses.

Ms. Gilbert responded that seat belts on busses that accommodate forty-six passengers would need to release automatically in the event of an accident/incident. It would be difficult for the operator to release each passenger in a timely manner in the event that there is an urgent situation.

Ms. Bellamy commented that a campaign to locate an alternate solution for the shoulder harness should begin. She stated that her fear is that someone will get injured if they are not utilizing both the lap belt and shoulder harness.

Mr. Hamlin stated that a campaign is underway to locate an alternate and her input would be very helpful.

Mr. McEntee commented that the shoulder harness is not feasible for everyone. He agreed that an alternative is needed.

Dr. Posner stated that during one of his trips the operator utilized a seat belt extender to add to the shoulder harness which made the ride more comfortable. He said that not all of the operators have the extenders on the vehicles, but that this is a useful alternative. He also stated that training in an effort to be well versed on the physical ailments in the shoulder and abdomen area, and the damage that can occur when seat belts are utilized on individuals with these ailments.

Mr. Crawford commented that the seat belt extenders do not work in the new vehicles. He states that he has noticed the drivers utilizing posey belts with the seat belt to secure customers.

Mr. Hamlin that staff has not received information that the extenders do not work in the new vehicles. Every operator is required to have seat belt extenders, if this is not the

case, MetroAccess should be notified. If an additional extender is needed, there are procedures in which a road supervisor will bring one to the operator when requested.

Ms. Owens commented that the shoulder harness is very uncomfortable.

Ms. Bellamy commented that the committee is asking for several things and these additions will cost money. The cost of what is being proposed is what is concerning as the customers will not be able to afford MetroAccess service. She reiterated that MetroAccess is public transportation, and staff deserves credit for attempting to better the service. She said that staff needs the time to locate alternatives.

Ms. Laios stated that drivers are not aware that they may use the posey belt if the extender is unavailable or not working.

Mr. Semelfort asked how many seat belt extenders are available per vehicle, and what happens when more than one customer needs the seat belt extender. Mr. Semelfort asked if waiting for the extender would delay the vehicle from completing the assigned trips.

Mr. Hamlin stated that there is one seat belt extender per vehicle and an additional extender can be obtained by request from a road supervisor who will bring it to the location of the vehicle. He said that prior to purchasing the seat belt extenders research was conducted, and it was determined that incidents that would require more than one extender were few. Therefore one extender was placed on each vehicle with the procedures for having a road supervisor bring an additional one when needed. Mr. Hamlin stated that utilizing the posey belt to supplement the extender is incorrect and should be reported to staff if it is occurring.

Mr. Banerjee agreed with the point that the cost of new equipment should be considered, but not at the expense of safety. He said that the vehicles purchased by MetroAccess should be equipped with restraints and safety devices that would protect the customer during transport, and therefore there should not be an additional cost to the customer.

MetroAccess Eligibility Process

Ms. Cheryl O'Konek, Operations Manager, Office of Eligibility Certification, gave an overview of the application and assessment process for MetroAccess eligibility. The office of ELIG processes over ten thousand applications each year. It has been modeled after the Easter Seals project action report entitled, *Determining ADA Paratransit Eligibility: an approach, guidance and training materials*. There are two parts to the application requiring the applicant to complete their demographics and the second part is completed by a healthcare provider, which details the individual's disabilities. There are a series of questions that the healthcare provider answers to give perspective on how the disabilities affect the applicant's ability to use the bus and rail system. The assessment is not solely based on the disability but functionality as well.

The assessment appointment is scheduled by phone once the application process is complete. ELIG attempts to get applicants in for the assessment within ten (10) days. Verification of address is noted during the telephone conversation as transportation is provided to and from the assessment if the applicant resides within the service area. Type of disability is also discussed during this telephone conversation to determine the type of assessment tool needed for the appointment. The assessment takes approximately thirty minutes to an hour; reassessments are usually quicker. There are two types of assessments; 1) The functional assessment requires the applicant to walk for a one half mile distance to check for balance and safety awareness. (Applicants with intellectual disabilities are not required to perform the functional assessment but complete an interview.); and 2) the interview assessment, in which questions are tailored to the specific disability. Travel training is discussed with applicants who are hesitant to ride bus or rail. Bus stop accessibility issues are discussed and forwarded to the appropriate department for resolution. In seven to ten business days, applicants are notified of their eligibility determination.

Ms. O'Konek then explained the eligibility determinations stating that a customer who is considered Fully Eligible would not be able to independently utilize bus/rail due to their disability. A customer is considered Conditionally Eligible if they can utilize bus/rail for some trips, but may need MetroAccess for other trips. Ineligible customers are those who can take bus/rail at all times but because they have a qualifying disability are then enrolled in the Reduced Fare Program (RFP). There are a small percentage of individuals who are found not eligible for MetroAccess or the RFP. Individuals who are considered either Conditional Eligibility, RFP, or not eligible may file an appeal.

Questions/Comments from the committee:

Mr. Semelfort commended the office of ELIG stating that they have made some great improvements to the eligibility process.

Ms. Laios raise the concern that individuals may expect that MetroAccess will provide wheelchairs to customers as that is what is offered during their assessment process.

Ms. O'Konek stated that this is something that can be specified that wheelchairs are not utilized at all location, only at the Jackson Graham building for Eligibility assessments.

Ms. Mezile asked why customers that have a disability which has no expectancy of change or improvement have to recertify. She stated that it cost to go to the doctor and have them fill out the paperwork to verify the disability.

Ms. O'Konek commented that there is a list of diagnoses that receive an administrative recertification. ELIG is working on an expedited administrative recertification for customers with full eligibility, and customers who have a permanent disability and no expectancy to improve. This process would not require the documentation from the

doctor. However, at this time ELIG can defer the in person assessment and provide an administrative recertification by mail.

Ms. Ray asked what the timeframe for the completion of the expedited administrative recertification.

Ms. O'Konek stated that the first full eligibility was granted in July 2010, and it was a five year eligibility period. The goal is to have the expedited administrative recertification process implemented by the time those fully eligible individuals need to recertify, which will be in 2015.

Dr. Posner expressed the need for changing the wording on letters to individuals who are found not eligible, and instructions on how to use the reduced fare card.

Ms. O'Konek said that she will have a discussion with Mr. Frank Roth, Director, ELIG, regarding changing the wording on the letter. She also reported that all Reduced Fare ID cards are issued on a reduced fare smart trip platform. A fact sheet was developed giving information about the reduced fare card and can be provided with the letter.

Ms. Owens expressed her amazement that WMATA does not have a braille embosser.

Ms. O'Konek that ELIG does not have this capability.

Dr. Banerjee commented that trips to/from the airport should be placed on taxi as customers traveling to/from the airport will have several luggage items and the vans do not have the space to transport large quantity of baggage.

Mr. Crawford asked for clarification for periods of eligibility.

Ms. O'Konek stated one year for temporary eligibility, three years for conditional eligibility, and five years for full eligibility.

Ms. Ray asked if customers are found fully eligible are they able to utilize fixed route transportation for free.

Ms. O'Konek stated that fully eligible customers are not able to utilize fixed route transportation free.

Ms. Owens stated that it was her understanding that MetroAccess encouraged independence through utilizing fixed route and travel trainers to promote that.

Ms. O'Konek said that they do encourage customers to utilize fixed route service through the travel training program and outreach events.

Mr. Omari June, Director, MetroAccess commented that MetroAccess supports fixed route usage. Every van has been equipped with promotion of the travel training program.

Mr. Semelfort asked if ELIG provide assistance to those whose primary language is something other than English.

Ms. O'Konek stated that there are persons employed at WMATA that have assisted with interpretation. She said that there is a language line that is used when there is not a live person to interpret. Customers are asked to inform ELIG at the time of scheduling their assessment that an interpreter is needed.

Public Comments

Comments received were with regard to: Trip movement, dispatch calling drivers too much, allowing driver to have customer's phone numbers, late pick-ups, seatbelt issues.

Comments from the Committee:

Dr. Banerjee asked when it is appropriate for customers to request a taxi instead of a van.

Mr. June said that MetroAccess does not allow vehicle choice.

Ms. Ray commented that local services provide luggage rack and customers can negotiate trips to airports and train stations.

Mr. June commented that MetroAccess does not mirror express routes.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the October 2014 Complaint Resolution Report located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Meeting adjourned at 5:44pm.