



Accessibility Advisory Committee

600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
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METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: November 20, 2017

In attendance: Mr. Paul Semelfort (Chair), Ms. Denise Rush (Co-Chair), Ms. Darnise Bush, Mr. Edward McEntee, Dr. Tapan Banerjee, Mr. Elver Ariza-Silva, Mr. Charlie Crawford, Ms. Carolyn Bellamy, Dr. Philip Posner, and Mr. Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Chair Paul Semelfort called the MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) meeting to order at 4:02pm.

Review of November 2017 Agenda

Dr. Posner requested to include a question and answer period with the Abilities-Ride providers. Ms. Rush asked to include the Rush Award presentation.

Review of October 2017 Meeting Minutes

The Minutes were approved without amendments.

Customer Service and Outreach Report

Ms. Jennifer Weber, Quality Assurance Compliance Auditor, MTM, reported there was no MetroAccess Subcommittee public comments at the previous meeting, as a tour of the MetroAccess Operations Control Center was conducted. She said there was one who booked a trip to the Jackson Graham Building with intent to raise a concern during the MAS Public Comment Forum. That customer was contacted and their service concern was addressed.

Mr. David Shaffer, Access Policy Officer –ADA Ombudsman, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, reported within the last month he attended outreach events at the DC Disability Collaborative monthly meeting, Montgomery College, and the Capital Engagement Board. Information was shared and questions were answered regarding MetroAccess service, Abilities-Ride, Metrobus and Metrorail accessibility, and the Metro Travel Training program.

Employee Recognition Award

Mr. Conrad Marshall, Project Manager, Transdev, recognized Transdev operator Mr. Subbie Johnson as the Michael Wilson Staff Recognition Award winner. Mr. Marshall detailed Mr. Johnson's service, safety and customer service statistics.

Paratransit Vehicle Discussion

Mr. Donald Scruggs, Assistant Director, MetroAccess, provided an overview of the meeting with Ford, Transit Works, and Sonny Merryman, and proposed solutions to some of the issues with regard to the new paratransit vehicles. Mr. Scruggs detailed a progress report on the list of items provided by the committee to address. He

commented that some of the solutions have not been finalized. The first was regarding the dark tint in the back of the vehicle. This feature was liked by some customers and stated too dark by others. Some committee members have requested this feature for the front of the vehicle for the operator. Mr. Scruggs reported the tint in the front of the vehicle is as dark as is permitted by law. The option to lighten the tint in the rear of the vehicle is available for the 27 chassis not yet ordered for next year. He requested feedback from the committee whether to lighten the tint or keep it as is.

Dr. Posner said the person who commented about the darkness of the tint does not ride MetroAccess. He said that due to the positioning and height of the vehicle windows, customers are unable to look out and see where they are going.

Mr. Scruggs said the next item was regarding the door to the vehicle does not open wide enough. The current vehicle cannot open any wider, but the future design will have a door closer to the rear with a step entry. The exterior step was the next item discussed. The step will go from 7" to 10" in width, and will have a metal anti-slip edge so individuals with low vision that utilize a cane can detect the edge. Consideration for the use of a rubber anti-slip edge was given, but discovered that this material would not be good in snow and ice.

Ms. Rush indicated that someone's heel got stuck in the metal.

Mr. Scruggs said he would attempt to get a sample of the rubber edge to get a better idea of the material. He said they are still exploring a retractable step, however, it is not available at this time.

The assist handles was an issue for some customers as the handles were difficult to reach. A redesign is being sought for the stanchion behind the driver's seat. It may reduce the access width, but is still being considered. The possibility of hanger straps on the standee rail was discussed, and it may give a person in a mobility device something to hold on to for stability and to readjust themselves. A left side arm rest would not be possible due to the folding seat. However, placing a standee strap on the left side attached to the wall is being considered. The hanger straps on the standee rail would be a tension-fit strap and could be adjusted. The side panel straps would be in a fixed position. Regarding the double seat on the left side, it was proposed to have two larger single seats that would fold. One seat would be behind the wheel well, the other in front of the wheel well. The vehicle would still have four ambulatory seats.

Ms. Rush asked if the chair would fold up if there's a wheelchair. She said it seems that there would be a lot of movement of customers to accommodate wheelchairs in some instances.

Mr. Scruggs said it would not be any different than what is currently occurring to accommodate customers with wheelchairs.

Ms. Rush asked if the vehicle would then only be able to accommodate one wheelchair with the proposed two seats.

Mr. Scruggs said the vehicle would still be able to accommodate one wheelchair, four ambulatory.

Ms. Rush asked how the vehicle will accommodate an extra-wide wheelchair. Mr. Ariza-Silva asked for clarification on the suggestion of replacing the double seat in the back with two single seats.

Mr. Scruggs explained instead of the double seat, there would be one single seat along the wall forward and one single seat along the wall backward, both which would fold. The amount of space in the vehicle when these two seats are folded is the same amount of space that is currently in the vehicle where the one seat is folded.

Ms. Bellamy asked about accommodations for extra-wide wheelchairs and allowing movement of other passengers.

Mr. Scruggs the said there would be no change in capacity, but provide seats that were not as high, and increase the aisle space. The right side seats would be moved farther away from the wall as well.

Ms. Rush asked to see this vehicle prior to purchase.

Mr. Scruggs said he would inquire with the manufacturer if a vehicle customized in that way described is available, and will request that they provide it for review before production and purchase of the new vehicle.

Ms. Bush agreed that the reconfiguration of the seats will not accommodate more than one wheelchair.

Mr. Banerjee commented about the need for more space to accommodate more than one wheelchair. He suggested boarding wheelchairs on the back of the right side of the vehicle.

Mr. Scruggs said this may be possible with the new chassis. He said he would inquire with the manufacturer.

Mr. Ariza-Silva said the height of the back double seat is appropriate for some passengers and keeping it should be considered, he said he also does not believe the vehicle can accommodate two scooters or an extra-large wheelchair. He said better communication between the dispatch department and the driver needs to occur to ensure better coordination of ambulatory and wheelchair customers.

Mr. Scruggs continued the discussion speaking of the right side seat leg room. He said there is currently 10 inches of knee room in that space, where previously, there was 12 and a half inches. The stanchion and modesty panel in front of the seat can be moved forward by approximately two and a half inches, giving an inch more knee room. The knee space sitting in the rear seat is only eight and a half inches. This spacing can be added in future vehicles.

Dr. Posner commented about airline seats that provide more leg room by adding a tilt on the base in the back of the seat. He asked could the same design be use for the second seat in the MetroAccess vehicles.

Mr. Scruggs said he could not answer the question, but could look into it. He said to raise the GPS screen can be easily corrected and is being implemented. Longer seatbelt extenders are being sought and tested to ensure safety and fit.

Ms. Rush commented about the head room while boarding the vehicle and adequate room for the driver.

Mr. Scruggs said the solution to that issue, for the moment, was to add padding in that area for customer boarding. The space for the driver is as much as is allowed for the structure.

Ms. Bellamy stated that tall and heavy drivers have a difficult time moving around or driving in that space.

Ms. Rush commented about the need for the foot rest to be pushed in after use to prevent a safety hazard.

Mr. Scruggs said the foot rest idea is not the best solution, but the only option at the moment. This idea will require some vetting for safety.

Abilities-Ride Discussion:

Mr. Christiaan Blake, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning, explained the Abilities-Ride program. He introduced Mr. Calvin Warren from Silver Cab and Mr. Samuel Bland from Regency Taxi.

Mr. Warren introduce himself and his company stating that Silver Cab is based in Prince George's County. He said that though they have many contracts throughout Prince George's County, they are very excited to partner with Regency Taxi and Metro to provide service to the disability community. They have limited wheelchair accessible vehicles but plan to add more. To ensure all trips run smoothly and drivers are able to

locate customer drop-offs and pick-ups, they have installed the Coach App in their vehicles.

Mr. Bland stated that Regency Taxi has been in business for over 25 years. He has a passion for serving the ADA community as he was a driver for many years. Customers are able to order on demand transportation using their customer app.

Mr. Semelfort commented on his use of Abilities-Ride. He stated he has utilized Silver more than Regency, and seen improvements since the beginning of the service. He said the reservations process with Silver was confusing, but has improved. He suggested that the operators of Silver Cab learn to pick customers up on the side of the street where they are located to prevent the customer from crossing the street which poses a safety issue. He stated that Regency is based in Montgomery County, and they have an app that is easy to use. With the app, a customer can see the vehicle number, the driver assigned, and the path of travel. Regency will also accept credit card and cash payments.

Ms. Bellamy asked how many accessible vehicles each provider currently has in service, and if these providers can cross county lines to pick up customers. She commented about the difference between the counties where it relates to the number of miles the company will travel for the \$5 dollar fare.

Mr. Bland stated they are attempting to increase their fleet. He said they currently have 14 accessible vehicles, and recently received 6 new vehicles from Sonny Merryman. They expect to have a fleet of 50 accessible vehicles within the next 2 years.

Mr. Warren said that Silver Cab currently has ten accessible vehicles and will add more.

Mr. Blake commented per his count on October 13 Silver had 12 accessible vehicle, and Regency had 25 accessible vehicles through partnerships. He clarified Ms. Bellamy's comment regarding the number of miles each provider can travel for the \$5 dollar fare. He stated that it is not based on the county; the number of miles travel for the fare is based on the company. He said in their contracts, Regency stated they will travel approximately 9 miles for the \$5 dollar fare and Silver will travel approximately 7 miles for the \$5 dollar fare.

Mr. Bland commented that both companies work together to serve the ADA community; they are not competing for business. These companies are willing to refer customers to the other company if they feel the customer's needs would be better served with that company.

Ms. Bellamy asked if there was a law that the company cannot cross county lines. She also asked if a driver can refuse a trip if it does not benefit him.

Mr. Bland affirmed that there are jurisdictional laws governing taxi companies crossing county lines. He said they incentivize drivers to encourage them to take all trips.

Mr. Warren stated they have a partnership with Action Taxi in Montgomery County and are therefore able to accommodate trips in both Prince George's and Montgomery Counties.

Ms. Bellamy asked Silver Cab to consider raising the miles to 9 to match Regency.

Mr. Blake clarified the information regarding the providers operating in the MetroAccess service area between counties in Maryland. He said they have the legal authority to operate in both counties, and have indicated in their proposals that through partnerships they are able to provide this.

Mr. Semelfort asked Regency how much advance notification is needed to schedule a trip.

Mr. Bland introduced Mr. Josh Thomas, IT Developer of the Coach App for Regency. Mr. Bland said the intention of the program is for customers to be able to make trips on-demand. Mr. Thomas stated that the timing of when a trip will arrive is dependent upon the availability of the taxi closest to the customer. He said as soon as a trip is booked, whether through the app or a call, a vehicle will be dispatched to the customer. Trips may be booked 48 hours in advance.

Mr. Semelfort said the app only allows a customer to book 3 trips per day.

Mr. Thomas said this helps prevent abuse of the system and tying up drivers for trips that may not exist.

Mr. Semelfort asked if the app for Silver will have the same functions as the app Regency has implemented, and will it accept credit card payments.

Mr. Warren said the app will allow customers to book trips, see vehicle number and driver, and follow the path of the vehicle in route. The app will eventually be able to accept credit card payments.

Mr. Semelfort commented that Regency drivers have been very professional and courteous. He said he is looking forward to the same experience with Silver Cab.

A question from the public asked if taxi coupons could be utilized once a customer has reached the maximum cost.

Mr. Blake commented that each provider has their own policy related to payment.

Mr. Bland said Montgomery County Call-n-Ride cards can be used for Regency Taxi, and it may be used for the co-pay. They are investigating options for use of Prince George's County coupons.

Mr. Warren stated they will accept all coupons for Prince George's County trips.

Mr. Sheehan asked Regency if they accept credit card payment as he was aware of a customer who was told, they could only accept cash.

Mr. Bland said whoever gave the customer that information was incorrect. He asked for the taxi information of that particular trip so he could investigate.

A question from the public asked about the numbers in terms of ridership in the 2 months Abilities-Ride has been in effect. How much service is provided to Abilities-Ride by each provider and their partners, and what does Mr. Warren or Mr. Bland believe is in the contract that should not be made public.

Mr. Blake has not received the actual numbers of ridership for the month of October. He said the providers are reporting an estimate of 322 for one provider and 310 for the other provider. He will report the specific data when he receives the information.

Neither provider is aware of the number of trips outsourced to the partners at this time. Mr. Blake said there was nothing in the contract that has not been made public.

Mr. Crawford asked if there has been a material increase to hire new drivers or retain drivers as a result of this contract.

Mr. Bland stated that the awarding of this contract has been great for the taxi companies. They are hiring new drivers and previous drivers are returning.

A question from the public asked if the apps are accessible per ADA policy, and the reason Abilities-Ride is able to travel throughout Maryland for all trips and Transport DC is limited to medical/work trips.

Mr. Blake said the apps are accessible, but there are areas of the app that need to be improved. He said Abilities-Ride has a set of governing decision makers, funding sources, and service area. Transport DC has another set of the same. The purpose is to give eligible customers as many options as possible, so that MetroAccess is a safety net and not the primary option for

transportation. He reported that on December 1 through December 15, Transport DC will provide trips anywhere in DC, and then return to providing medical/work trips for the remainder of the month.

Public Comments

Comments received were with regard to: incidents of incorrect no-show, resolving issues real-time, insensitivity of Dispatch personnel, trips being “arrived” prior to actual arrival, redesign of the vehicle, circuitous routing issues, late arrival of vehicle, insensitive driver, and comments of appreciation for the service provided.

Comments from the Committee

Ms. Rush and Ms. Bellamy asked if Abilities-Ride drivers can accept direction from a customer to a location, giving the shortest route.

Mr. Bland said the customer has the right to request the route. His drivers have been told to follow the customer’s request.

Mr. Blake posed the question to the Abilities-Ride providers asking for a yes or no answer. He said because the customer has booked their trip to a specific destination via the app or by phone, and the price is provided, upon boarding the vehicle, can the customer request a route and it would not affect their price or can a customer request a route during the booking process, before a price is given.

Mr. Bland responded no, based on the question posed by Mr. Blake.

Mr. Blake said the AAC discussed how to prevent unscrupulous drivers from taking advantage of customers by driving out of the way to raise the price of the trip. Mr. Blake informed the AAC that through the Abilities-Ride program customer would know the cost of their trip up front to prevent such abuse.

Mr. Semelfort commented to Mr. Warren that drivers should know how to navigate the jurisdictions or know how to read a map, not ask customers how to get to a destination.

For detailed descriptions and resolutions of public comments made during the meeting, please refer to the November 2017 Complaint Resolution Report located at http://www.wmata.com/accessibility/advocacy_policy/subcommittee.cfm.

Meeting adjourned at 6:30pm.