



## Accessibility Advisory Committee

300 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024

March 6, 2023

Dear Chair Smedberg, and Members of the Board,

It is my pleasure to present you with the AAC report for the month of February 2023. The primary issues we reviewed were: 1) 2022 Heddinger Award, 2) WMATA's Customer Service, and 3) MetroAccess Mini-Van Update.

### Issues of the Month

#### 2022 Heddinger Award:

The 2022 Richard W. Heddinger Award was presented to Mr. James R. Hamre. He served as Director of the Office of Bus Planning, Scheduling and Customer Facilities for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). Throughout his tenure, Mr. Hamre managed Metrobus route development, planning, and service scheduling for both existing and new Metrobus services. While focused on Metrobus, for which he enhanced numerous ADA related services for persons with mobility challenges, Mr. Hamre also contributed to creating MetroAccess and the local partner service Arlington STAR, to provide sustainable paratransit services across the region. Mr. Hamre instituted low floor buses as the standard vehicle for Metrobus and operations across the region. He updated the Bus Stop Information Program design standards and implements for improved readability and accuracy of information at approximately 12,000 regional bus stops.

Mr. Hamre helped deploy Bus ETA, successor to NextBus, and operation of the real-time bus information program. Mr. Hamre was instrumental in creating the Customer Information Electronic Display System, as well as completion of Corridor and Service Evaluation studies that highlighted and coordinated service and accessibility recommendation for bus routes affecting the whole regional network, to be implemented by WMATA and local agencies. The AAC depended on Mr. Hamre to provide timely updates on changes to bus routes, new bus policies and strategic planning that WMATA considered for improved bus networks. The AAC considered Mr. Hamre as the "voice" for bus planning and bus network design. Mr. Hamre's presentations to the AAC, enabled in making effective recommendations to WMATA's Board regarding changes to the Metrobus system.

In addition to updates and grant-funded improvements to over 150 regional bus stops for safety and accessibility, Mr. Hamre helped to create the bus-replaces-rail shuttle program, in support of Metrorail Capital Improvement Projects with emphasis on accessibility, information and customer service. He also guided in updating programmatic approach to providing elevator and escalator accessible shuttle service during renovation and closure projects. For his exemplary work in making transportation accessible and his tremendous partnerships with agencies across the region to build, improve and operate safe and accessible transit centers along with numerous contributions and achievements, James R. Hamre was recognized as the 2022 Richard W. Heddinger Award winner.

WMATA's Customer Service:

Darbi Dickerson, Director, Customer Service, provided an overview about some changes to the process for responding to customer inquiries. Ms. Dickerson stated customer feedback can be received via phone calls, web forms, and/or emails. The feedback is entered in the Customer Relations Management (CRM) that creates case numbers, which gets routed to agents. With the new upgrade, the cases are automatically routed to divisions. If it is a known complaint, a message is sent to the customer, the complaint is sent to division for information, and the complaint gets closed within 24 hours. Some cases require research therefore those complaints will be sent to the respective divisions informing a follow up is required, and then the cases will be closed in five business days. Ms. Dickerson stated a standard response is sent to all customers who correspond via email and/or web form. She shared information about the timeline and metrics about customer response time and cases being resolved.

MetroAccess Mini-Van Update:

Christiaan Blake, Managing Director, Access Services, discussed the new MetroAccess minivan that was also previewed by some of the AAC members. Mr. Blake shared the features and customer-friendly aspects of the minivan. Mr. Blake stated the model displayed to some AAC members is a Chrysler minivan that is going to be placed into regular service along with 22 others soon. Describing the minivan, Mr. Blake stated it has sliding doors on both sides of the vehicle. In the interior on the right side is a fold out ramp that leads to the curb. That is where customers would board and exit the vehicle. Describing the space, Mr. Blake stated there is room for one customer using wheelchair along with up to two other passengers to be seated in the rear seat. Since this is the same type of minivan that a family may purchase, Mr. Blake suggested that all customers will be requested to duck down while going in/out of the vehicle.

The purchase continues the MetorAccess fleet strategy of purchasing consumer vehicles that would be converted to paratransit vehicles, versus purchasing the cargo vehicles and trying to convert them to passenger vehicles to be used for paratransit service. Mr. Blake stated once the minivans are added to the fleet, a broader round of feedback would be received from disability stakeholders. Eventually, the MetroAccess fleet would consists of the minivans, sedans, which would be the second largest batch of the fleet, and a smaller number of new larger vans. The Committee appreciates all the efforts put forth by MetroAccess in procuring a comfortable vehicle for its customers.

Sincerely,

Patrick Sheehan  
Chair