



# AAC

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

### **Meeting (Virtual) Minutes: March 4, 2024**

#### **Attendees**

Present: Denise Rush (Acting Chair), Kelley Simoneaux (Acting Vice-Chair), Tino Calabia, Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Tajuan Farmer, Debbie Fisher, Marcie Goldstein, Steve Kaffen, Thomas Mangrum, Phillippa Mezile, Sandra Neuzil, Phil Posner, Doris Ray, Paul Semelfort, and Philip Weintraub.

#### **Call to Order**

Anupama Sharma, AAC Coordinator, welcomed everyone, shared helpful tips, read the agenda, thereafter, Madam Chair Rush moved the meeting forward.

#### **Approval of Agenda, Board Report, and Prior Meeting Minutes**

The March 4, 2024, meeting agenda was approved as presented.

The February 5, 2024, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

The Board Report was approved as written.

#### **WMATA Budget Hearings – Committee Discussion:**

Madam Chair Rush thanked everyone who came to the budget hearings and testified, wrote letters, and completed the surveys. She attended the first two budget hearings along with other AAC members, whereas Mr. Semelfort attended all three budget hearings. Madam Chair Rush stated everyone those who participated, made an impact.

Dr. Posner stated he watched all the hearings online and everyone did a wonderful job. Many persons with disabilities participated and did a great job in conveying the message. He further added that it was good to see this year different Board Members participated at each hearing. Dr. Posner stated the service-changes will not take place till July 1<sup>st</sup>, and there may be changes made until then.

Mr. Semelfort stated there were a lot of members who rode MetroAccess and many of the disability community came and spoke at all three hearings. The message conveyed was about keeping the current MetroAccess service area and hours. People shared their personal stories and the Board Members listened to them.

Mr. Mangrum stated he would like to thank all the law enforcement officers who showed up quickly on Tuesday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, at the budget hearing. He was glad that it did not turn out to be what was speculated initially, and he feels safe going to future hearings.

Mr. Calabia stated on Tuesday's budget hearing, after the incident, he came back to his testimony. Someone stated that all three jurisdictions have agreed to contribute, which is incorrect as Virginia has not come through yet. His next point was to support the positions and damage that will be done by the budget, if not met, and if WMATA will be forced to take certain steps. He is sure that MetroAccess members have stressed on that.

Mr. Kaffen thanked Ms. Ray for specific directions to the Virginia budget hearing venue. He commended Christiaan Blake, Vice President, Access Services, for being present at that budget hearing and listening very attentively. Mr. Kaffen informed that two other people at that hearing, also commended Mr. Blake for his work.

Ms. Ray also commended Mr. Blake for being at the Virginia budget hearing. She stated that people who commended Mr. Blake, are from Arlington, users of STAR and MetroAccess. It was wonderful to hear them talk about the positive changes on MetroAccess service as in the past, people in Arlington did not want to ride MetroAccess. Ms. Ray stated that shows Mr. Blake has done an enormous job. Ms. Ray further stated that in her budget hearing testimony, her focus was for the local officials to pay attention to funding as Northern Virginia's budget process has begun. Ms. Ray stated we are working to ensure Northern Virginia understands they need to fully fund Metro, now! Ms. Ray explained the importance of the decisions of the Finance Committee, and about an amendment by one of the delegates. Dr. Posner stated the Governor is going to run for Senate and this is a good time since Northern Virginia votes are needed to support WMATA. Ms. Ray stated the amendment should not get voted out. Dr. Posner clarified that the Governor could sign the amendment, and he needs to be reminded about that.

Ms. Neuzil commended Mr. Blake for coming and talking to all the AAC members on February 27, after the incident settled down and Metro Police assured that everything was fine. She also stated that it was reassuring to hear people advocating about long-term funding for Metro, and not just about the next fiscal year budget constraints.

Madam Chair Rush stated it was frightening to experience the incident on Tuesday. She has attended many Board Meetings and budget hearings however she never had that kind of experience. Those who continued to testify afterwards should be commended. Madam Chair Rush also commended a young lady of 15 years of age and said she was the best speaker that evening as she told her story and explained how important the bus service is for her and other students in getting to and from school on time. She thanked Ms. Mezile for considering to speak and give comments. Madam Chair Rush stated Metro has come a long way in the past 20 years and people love MetroAccess. The system has drastically changed, and people were commending Mr. Blake for the improvements. After the incident occurred at the hearing, the first responders were there in two seconds, and everyone felt safe. She thanked everyone who came, stayed, and testified, along with the disability community members who came to testify at all three hearings.

### **Public Comments:**

The first member of the public stated she did not attend the in-person budget hearings as she provided her comments virtually. She stated the AAC By-Laws have term limits however, every time the By-Laws were revised, the clock restarted. Thus, people have been on the Committee for a very long time. She recommended for the clock not to restart this time, allowing new people to participate on the Committee.

The second member of the public commented on behalf of a MetroAccess customer who is blind. Very often, the MetroAccess customer sends her a text message stating that he did not get picked up by Uber and he did not get the Uber link. Many times, she does not get the Uber links either thus there might be some technical glitch. She asked if someone who is blind, can text to communicate with MetroAccess instead of calling and being on hold for 40 minutes. She is in Montgomery Village and the other customer is in Silver Spring. She stated for some disabilities, there must be a lot of collaboration on MetroAccess. The person being referenced, is a very capable technically.

Ms. Sharma stated the members of the public who have experienced any incidents, can send her a direct message in the meeting chat, an email at [MetroAACChair@wmata.com](mailto:MetroAACChair@wmata.com), or call at 202-962-1100, to provide specifics of the customer and concerns.

Mr. Kaffen shared his experience while riding buses that many people do not pay their fare. He recommended the use of Metro cards by as many people as possible, weekly or monthly incremental fees, elimination of \$2 card fee, and have some subsidized process.

Mr. Weintraub shared an experience during the shutdown in December 2023. He needed to leave from Dupont Circle and reach North Bethesda area. Mr. Weintraub was provided different information and he had to go in and out of Dupont Circle Station where no bus (shuttle) showed up and eventually he got a train after waiting for 10 minutes.

Ms. Mezile clarified what happened on Tuesday's budget hearing venue on February 27<sup>th</sup>: Ms. Neuzil was testifying and there was a loud bang, a glass window shattered, and someone screamed it was a gun. Metro Police was promptly in the room, told everyone to get on the floor for safety and that there was no threat inside the building. They went outside to confront whatever the threat might be, not knowing what awaited them. Ms. Mezile wanted to give Metro Police kudos as that is a very bold and brave thing to do. Turned out, it was an errant pulley and a hook from a tow truck.

Mr. Dancy stated he wants to thank the whole team for doing their job and advocating for us every single day.

Ms. Ray followed up regarding public comment about waiting on phone for Where is My Ride for 40 minutes. Since time on waiting for an operator is one of the ADA paratransit performance requirements, she would like to make a comment with a follow up motion, or a motion for the Committee as to how long people are on hold, statistics, and updates.

Public Comments can be received via phone at 202-962-1100, or via email at [MetroAACChair@wmata.com](mailto:MetroAACChair@wmata.com)

**AAC By-Laws:**

Mr. Semelfort stated the workgroup worked on the draft in summer 2023 and the Committee began to discuss it in Fall 2023. Mr. Semelfort continued the review from

Article II, Section C, Responsibilities. He went over the first three points and the discussion began.

Mr. Calabria discussed comments from the members of the public, concerning the AAC leadership tenure and asked when that is going to be addressed. Mr. Semelfort informed that part is further in the document, and we will discuss the entire document in the order of sections. Mr. Calabria asked when the budget would be discussed and stated we need to discuss contributions from the jurisdictions rather what happened at the hearings. Ms. Sharma informed this is the last topic for today's meeting and substantial amount of time was spent discussing the budget, thus the delay in reviewing the By-Laws. We have completed the budget hearings and we need to complete the review of the AAC By-Laws.

Mr. Semelfort reviewed points 4 through 7. Responding to Ms. Ray's question, Mr. Semelfort informed that point 5 was already in the By-Laws and continued further from point 8 through 12. About point 10, Mr. Calabria asked to include the reports on what we learn about the Riders Advisory Council's (RAC) activities and vice-versa. Dr. Posner stated per the RAC By-Laws, the AAC Chair is an automatic member of that Council, attends those meetings, and shares information discussed at the RAC such as the Budget. Dr. Posner stated point 14 was discontinued by the Board thus we do not have the power to enforce it, and that we continuously invite Board Members. He recommended to remove this clause, and he will make a motion to remove it at the next meeting. Madam Chair Rush stated the next AAC Chair should know their responsibility to attend the monthly RAC meetings and share information with the AAC.

Mr. Semelfort reviewed the new language added by the workgroup to point 13. Dr. Posner recommended to add about safety exercises, where the members of the AAC are not required to sign a waiver. There was a discussion about it and Ms. Ray recommended not to include this as it is a list of AAC responsibilities and the issue should be brought up separately. She also recommended open ended language like "activities", and then to put a motion to recommend activities. Madam Chair Rush agreed with Ms. Ray that a waiver is signed/or not, per the individual's decision, it should not affect the By-Laws. Mr. Kaffen agreed with Ms. Ray and recommended to change the word meeting to activities, include the word such as, not necessarily specify events, and to exclude safety exercises. He recommended that point 13 could be eliminated. Ms. Coles stated some of us work thus, to make it optional. Ms. Neuzil informed that is already covered with the phrase "where appropriate". Ms. Simoneaux wrote a message stating she agrees with Ms. Ray.

Ms. Ray discussed point 14 and stated this could be continued if we specifically say quarterly meetings, that either the AAC or the Leadership have communication with the WMATA Board, as appropriate. She recommended to remove the reference: AAC members would actively communicate with the WMATA Board and attend meetings as requested. Ms. Neuzil stated point 14 could be left as is by removing the word "quarterly". Ms. Ray recommended to add "on a regular basis." at the end of the existing sentence.

For Section D, Carol Peredo Lopez, Director, ADAP, informed to change Access Services to Department of Systemwide Accessibility | Safety and Readiness. Ms. Ray asked why the Committee needs to go through a manager at all since the AAC Charter makes the Committee to communicate directly with the WMATA Board. Ms. Peredo Lopez informed WMATA does not have departmental changes frequently as this is the first change in her tenure of 13 years. She further explained that the AAC Coordinator works for the Department, there is a chain of command and the AAC works through the Coordinator.

Mr. Semelfort progressed to sections E and F. There was no discussion on section E. Concerning Section F, Ms. Ray recommended to add "WMATA related issues". Mr. Kaffen stated do we need something about members giving testimony or performing other communications within personal communications within WMATA or outside, should ensure it is their own communication and not the AAC's. Mr. Semelfort asked Mr. Kaffen to send his recommendation in an email and provide where to add it in the by-laws. Ms. Fisher recommended to include Mr. Kaffen's comments in the Conflict of Interest. Mr. Semelfort stated he would add it under Media for now and move it afterwards. Mr. Calabia stated he wrote a letter to the Post but never identified himself as an AAC member, and asked if we are prevented to communicate with the media as an individual. Madam Chair Rush confirmed that being the correct process. Ms. Ray stated if you are writing a letter to the Editor, it is their protocol that you share any allegiance.

Mr. Semelfort continued with Article III Membership. Section A, about Composition. Ms. Peredo Lopez recommended to change "disabled" to "people with disabilities" and "seniors" to "older adults". Mr. Calabia stated on buses and trains, the official language is seniors not older adults. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated we have been moving towards the current terminology. There was a discussion about the word seniors and alternate wording. Ms. Peredo Lopez stated we will check into that. Mr. Weintraub stated there should be people who use Metrobus, Metrorail, and MetroAccess, all assets of Metro should be accessible. Mr. Semelfort asked Ms. Neuzil as to where the comment could be inserted. Ms. Neuzil recommended to include "with knowledge of Metrobus, Metrorail, and MetroAccess". Mr. Kaffen stated to add "use and knowledge of Metrobus, Metrorail, and MetroAccess." Mr. Mangrum stated some organizations recognize people as seniors at 55 years, therefore, recommended not to include an age, rather just keep "seniors."

There was a discussion to hold a meeting to discuss only the By-Laws and the communication can continue via email, as needed.

**Bus and Rail Subcommittee (BRS) and MetroAccess Subcommittee (MAS) Reports** were not presented due to time constraints.

**The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.**