



Accessibility Advisory Committee

300 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

BUS/RAIL SUBCOMMITTEE VIRTUAL MEETING MINUTES: March 11, 2024

In attendance: Tino Calabia (Chair), Steve Kaffen (Vice Chair), Sandra Neuzil (Second Vice-Chair), Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Debby Fisher, Marcie Goldstein, Phillippa Mezile, Phil Posner, Doris Ray, Denise Rush, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Anu Sharma, AAC Coordinator, took roll call, read the Meeting Agenda, and provided helpful information, thereafter, Chair Calabia moved the meeting forward.

Review and Approval of BRS Agenda and Minutes:

The BRS approved the Meeting Agenda for March 11th, 2024.

The BRS Meeting Minutes from February 12th, 2024, were approved as amended.

8K Rail Car Soft Mockup:

Lynn Bowersox, Senior Vice President, Rail Transformation, and Stanley Tsoi, Deputy Chief Mechanical Officer, presented the 8K Rail Car Soft Mockup. Ms. Bowersox stated there will be an Expo of Metro's fleet of the future, on the National Mall, from March 20th through April 3rd, from 9:00am to 5:00pm. The Committee has provided a lot of input into the 8K, and the historic soft mockup during the Cherry Blossom week will be in a very public display right outside of Smithsonian Station. Ms. Bowersox provided specifics of the soft mockup that is fully accessible. She stated there is a ramp that is being constructed to allow people who need assistance with walkers and wheelchairs, or who use other devices to access the soft mockup. Ms. Bowersox further stated the soft mockup will provide placement of things, sense of the space, and how things are laid out. There is an opportunity for the final design for a couple of small tweaks but nothing big, no big changes at this point. Ms. Bowersox invited questions from the Committee.

Chair Calabia asked if the soft mockup is with or without the operator's cab and if the number of seats changed since last Spring. Mr. Tsoi confirmed that the soft mockup is with the operator's cab. Ms. Bowersox stated there is not much of a change for seating.

Second Vice Chair Neuzil asked about AB cars being connected by the inter car barrier. Ms. Bowersox confirmed and stated it would be different from the barriers on 7K rail cars.

Ms. Coles asked about improvements concerning safety features referencing a previous smoke incident, and about audio announcements. Ms. Bowersox stated that incident was more about the use of tunnel fans to evacuate smoke away from passengers in trains and stations. The installation of improved fans has been very effective, and the improved filters with higher MERV number onboard the rail cars has improved the air quality. The 8K will be the first all-digital cars and the audio quality will be per the ADA, and the audios

coming from trains to platform will be of higher quality. Mr. Tsoi added that there will be many larger digital screens to help customers with wayfinding. Ms. Bowersox stated even the maps will be digital with higher contrast and large lettering.

Vice Chair Kaffen stated the DC Environmental Film Festival is taking place about the same time as WMATA's Fleet of the Future Expo, and recommended to coordinate with the Festival, for them to mention Metro's environmental aspects. Ms. Bowersox thanked Vice Chair Kaffen for sharing the information and stated not only transit is greener than automobiles, but the new vehicle is also greener as it has aluminum shell that helps the environment, and recycled material that use less electricity than the previous generations. Vice Chair Kaffen stated the digital maps on 7K series are a little small and sometimes a customer has to lean over the person sitting. Ms. Bowersox stated the screen in 8K is bigger, and there are additional screens by the doors, which would help customers. Mr. Tsoi stated the digital screen are about 43" and would have more information about next stations, etc. Mr. Bowersox stated the angle of the screens will enable people to see them from different parts of the trains, not just by the doors.

Ms. Mezile commented about the station ahead signs and the digital signs that give information, at the lower level of L'Enfant Plaza Station. Ms. Mezile also stated the signs for escalators, instead of listing the end of the line station names, the signs state North or South, which is not helpful. Ms. Bowersox stated she will share the feedback with Sarah Meyer, Vice President of Customer Engagement.

Chair Calabria asked about security cameras on 8K rail cars, cameras with screens for train operators to see the length of the platform, and the folding seats at the wheelchair space. Ms. Bowersox stated we will have adequate number of cameras on the new rail cars and that 6K rail cars are being retrofitted with cameras. When we have sufficient 8K rail cars, the older cars will be retired and 6K, 7K and 8K will remain in the fleet. Mr. Tsoi stated we are discussing with the manufacturer to have exterior cameras giving capability for the operator to see the length of the platform. Ms. Bowersox stated the final decision was not to have folding seats in the designated space for wheelchairs as people may take those seats not allowing space for people who use wheelchairs. That also involves maintenance issues of the folding seats.

Second Vice Chair Neuzil asked about the seat material, the digital screens are helpful with the end of the line station names instead of north/south, particularly for the Red line. Ms. Bowersox stated we will send you information about the seat material.

Responding to Vice Chair Kaffen about open gangway, Ms. Bowersox stated we wanted to have operational flexibility of having either 6 car or 8 car trains, as needed. The lifts we have to raise up the rail cars to do maintenance, have limits. There would be investment requirement for our facilities to be retrofitted. Vice Chair Kaffen commented about safety aspects. If it is totally open gangway, you can yell out for help and move to other parts of the train. He also stated that station ahead signs on Silver Line stated destination is Ashburn, and recommended to add via Dulles Airport or IAD. Ms. Bowersox stated she will pass it along to Ms. Meyer.

Ms. Ray stated the importance to ensure the audio announcements are adequate and the message in its entirety is clear. She stated a concern of between cars detectable warnings, and the foot lights with high intensity are blinding. She further stated the cameras and the operator looking out the cab window needs to be installed. Sometimes she hesitates in getting a train and fears doors closing on her. Ms. Bowersox stated the light features in 8K will be helpful for the customers. The automatic door feature for opening on all lines will make it more predictable as to when the doors are going to open.

Ms. Coles asked about the gap between the train and the platform and asked for announcements informing blind people if they are closer to the door rather open space. Mr. Tsoi provided about the standards and the threshold that extends. He stated that the referenced announcement when train arrives at the platform, will be reviewed.

Chair Calabria stated that totally open gangway trains would be more secure and would prevent incidents. He thanked Ms. Bowersox and Mr. Tsoi for their presentation.

Arlington County Floating Bus Stops - Update:

Diane Trent, Bus Stop Manager; Paul Mounier, Kirk Dand, Arlington County's liaison with WMATA; and Kevin Cassady, Lead Engineer in Implementation; from Arlington County, presented an update on the floating bus stops in the county. Mr. Mounier discussed the floating bus stops, the process of developing the standards, and how they work with WMATA to implement the services. Mr. Mounier stated the floating bus stops are dedicated waiting and boarding areas for passengers that streamline transit service and improve accessibility by enabling in-lane stops. The floating bus stops are separated from the sidewalk by a bike channel, eliminating conflicts between transit vehicles and bikes at stops. For buses, boarding islands allow the creation of accessible in-lane stops with near-level or level boarding.

Mr. Mounier provided information about the Guidance for Arlington County's Street Design and Operation and provided references that were used. He discussed the 13 listening sessions involved for Arlington Bus Stop Guidelines Development. Mr. Mounier shared the Community Concerns that were heard from the community sessions and stated they are trying to address them by taking feedback from other partners in the area. Mr. Mounier stated he has some examples and provided information about moving forward, they plan to apply existing guidelines to new design and installations, review new relevant standards as they emerge and apply them as appropriate, update guidelines when necessary, and coordinate with WMATA on installations in the County. He also had a list of Floating Bus Stop Projects that included installed and planned locations.

Chair Calabia asked how the bicycle organization felt about the design of these stops, their speed about safety of people with disabilities, and if rumble strips have been discussed to slow down the bicycles. Chair Calabia also asked about the e-scooters. Mr. Mounier stated the bicycle community is very supportive of these stops. The recent legislation tells the bicyclists to stop for pedestrians and a STOP sign will be placed, whereas it used to that the bicyclists to YIELD to pedestrians. Mr. Mounier stated there has been a discussion about the rumble strips and they not safe however, markings that are raised, has been discussed. Mr. Cassidy stated the rumble strips are not safe due to adverse effects that causes safety concern. We are looking into raised markings. Cyclists will feel a little bit of a bump. Mr. Cassidy stated e-scooters are allowed to use the bicycle lanes, following the same rules as they are legal in sidewalks in Virginia.

Vice Chair Kaffen stated the physical notification to bicyclists is needed for them to slow down and the redundancy might be needed. He asked how would a blind person know that it is a floating bus stop. Mr. Cassidy stated we only have one of these stops and we are trying to implement linear guiding strips. Every stop will have those included. He shared information about the stops being compliant per PROWAG.

Ms. Ray asked about a tour, shared her concerns about installation, and stated Arlington County has decided to cost down the traffic signals. She referenced the Wilson Blvd stop and the pedestrian right of way. Ms. Ray stated many of the installations may be mid-block rather cross block and people crossing to the islands, is a safety concern. She asked for an update about the installations since October 2021. Mr. Cassidy stated none of the stops have been installed by Arlington County. The site plans were designed many years ago and it is not in their control when the designs get implemented. They plan to incorporate the newer standards for the future floating stops.

Mr. Sheehan stated his concern about the mid-block floating bus stops and recommended effective communication to inform bus customers about the type of bus stop, as per the ADA. Mr. Cassidy stated as long as the ADA and PROWAG are followed, the stops will be compliant. Mr. Sheehan clarified that PROWAG has not been yet signed by the DOT or DOJ and discussed the need to install the APS to maintain effective communication. He also discussed the lack of uniformity of floating bus stops in the region making it difficult for blind customers in identifying the floating bus stops. Mr. Cassidy stated we are trying to have uniformity as much as possible.

Second Vice-Chair Neuzil asked about the bus diagram on Wilson Blvd. and the audible signal at cross walks, and asked if a blind person could use that signal safely. She believes in terms of uniformity, the raised crosswalk to the bus island should have an audible signal with a red light. It should automatically turn red as the bus pulls up. Mr. Cassidy stated the red-light signal might confuse drivers on the road and there are other design criteria they would have to be other alternated.

Ms. Ray stated Arlington County has decided not to use the spoken signal. If there are going to be regional meetings with disabilities, she would like to participate. So did Chair Sheehan.

Metro Bus Stroller Area:

Christopher Conway, Anthony Harris, George Harris, and Mira Patel provided information about the open stroller space on Metro buses. Mr. Harris provided background about the open stroller policy and stated we decided to create a new designated area for open strollers to get strollers out of the priority seating area and improve passenger circulation and reduce space conflicts in priority area. Mr. Harris stated we are building off strategies from other transit systems and referenced an example of open stroller area in New York. He stated that no seat would be removed or changed to priority space and shared additional considerations including no change to priority seating, 38 seats will remain, and strollers/carts would be in front of the passengers. Mr. Harris shared examples of stroller area signage giving guidance about the open stroller priority area, stating that one stroller can be placed per space, asking customers to please keep stroller out of aisle, to stay in control of stroller by strapping the child in stroller and applying brakes.

Chair Calabria asked about DC Circulator's policy about open stroller on buses. Mr. Harris stated he knows that those buses have far fewer seats, which are aisle facing thus provides wider aisles.

Vice Chair Kaffen stated may be 2 in 10 customers have strollers. He recommended to have flip up seats rather have an open space particularly when buses get crowded. The strollers would have to move through the narrow aisles, and buses would have to stay put until the strollers are in or out of the bus. Mr. Harris appreciated the feedback and stated the reconfiguration is just for one bus at this time. If we get positive feedback, we will only reconfigure with the existing fleet. Any future fleet will have other options and flexibility as we start to purchase new buses. Mr. Harris further explained that for this project, we did not want to purchase any additional seats. We are going to create a lot of floor space, even for standees, thus will have added benefit overall. This area could be used with priority for strollers, however, for luggage or other carts, if needed.

Ms. Patel emphasized that the configuration is for one bus. It is going to be reiterated process, and asked for feedback if any of the AAC members happen to ride this bus.

Dr. Posner agreed with Mr. Harris about mobility devices conflict. These objects make it difficult for everyone to move through the bus. He recommended to test it on certain routes and agreed with Vice Chair Kaffen about the flip up seats. Mr. Harris stated this is just one bus now and will do limited routes assigned to that garage. The vision is to have eventually all routes with designated space.

Ms. Ray stated the idea of testing the seats behind the priority seating should be piloted, but she also wonders if any buses have low floor ramps on the back doors. We have rear door boarding now thus leaving strollers there would be appropriate. She recommended not to restrict the aisles. She likes to sit close to the front to hear the announcements and to talk to the operator, if needed. Anthony Harris responded that rear door boarding is we are exploring and are looking at solutions. It will also mitigate the prior concern to resolve the congestion. We will consider all your recommendations.

Public Comments:

The first member of the public stated in the past we had talked about adjustable height seats on the new rail cars and wondered if that had been included.

Public Comments can be received via phone at 202-962-1100, or via email at MetroAACChair@wmata.com

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned late at 6:00 p.m.