



Accessibility Advisory Committee

300 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

METROACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES: March 18, 2024

In attendance: Paul Semelfort (Chair), Denise Rush (Vice-Chair), Tajuan Farmer (Second Vice Chair), Tino Calabia, Vanessa Coles, Rico Dancy, Debbie Fisher, Marcie Goldstein, Steve Kaffen, Thomas Mangrum, Phillippa Mezile, Sandy Neuzil, Phil Posner, Doris Ray, and Patrick Sheehan.

Call to Order

Anu Sharma, AAC Coordinator, started the meeting with announcements, took the rollcall, read the agenda, thereafter, Chair Semelfort moved the meeting forward.

Review and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The MAS approved the March 18, 2024, Meeting Agenda as presented.
The MAS approved the February 20, 2024, Meeting Minutes as written.

Customer Service, Commendation, and Outreach Reports:

Customer Service Report: Dolan Chittams, MTM, stated there were two outstanding comments from February MAS meeting that needed investigation. The first comment was about the digital assistant and abilities ride experience. Corrective action was taken to correct the digital assistant and Mr. Blake contacted the customer for the Abilities-Ride experience. The second concern was about the MetroAccess sedan policy; and follow up could not be performed due to lack of customer information. The current policy permits two customers in a sedan.

Commendation Report: Mr. Chittams stated in February, MetroAccess received a total of 447 commendations as follows: First Transit 82, Transdev 94, MV OCC 103, Challenger 55, Next Maryland 95, MTM 0, Eligibility 0, and Abilities Ride 18.

Outreach Report: Christiaan Blake, Vice President, Access Services, presented to the Arlington Aging Committee, and attended the budget hearings to answer questions. On March 19th, Mr. Blake will present at the Fairfax Transportation Advisory Committee.

Michael Wilson Award:

The award was presented to Tierra Manor, MV Dispatch Supervisor, an employee since 2001, who was promoted to her currently held position within 6 months. Ms. Manor excels in her job, performs great service, takes lead to develop new dispatch training, and plays a key role between dispatchers and drivers. She goes above and beyond with every single customer and takes tremendous pride by ensuring that every customer is safe and on time. Her customer service focus is a model for all employees. Ms. Manor thanked everyone for the award, and stated it is her purpose in life to help others and that there

is no better way than to provide independence to people with disabilities. She is delighted to work with this great team.

Abilities-Ride Provider Solicitation Update:

Mr. Blake stated we completed a solicitation for the Abilities-Ride program and the existing six companies will remain in the program. The companies are as follows: Silver Cab (Prince Georges County), Regency Taxi and Action Taxi (Montgomery County), Old Dominion (Northern VA), Curb and Yellow Cab (Washington DC), and Silver Cab working as VIP will be eligible for some trips in DC. Mr. Blake stated Lyft has been accepted, but they have not signed the contract yet. Uber is also a part of the program. A new provider, Uzurz, is also being added. These are private vehicles same as Uber, but Uzurz will provide door-to-door service, unlike other providers that provide curb-to-curb service. Currently, Uzurz is also providing non-paratransit service in Alexandria, however, with MetroAccess, they may be anywhere in the region depending upon their recruitment of drivers. Mr. Blake stated that Uzurz also provides paratransit service in the Baltimore area. Mr. Blake further stated that the providers will be available to the AAC at a later date for the Committee to correspond.

Chair Semelfort stated when Lyft starts the service, it would be similar to Uber. He asked if Uzurz service-hours would be similar to some of the taxis during daylight, or eventually it would be 24/7 in the whole region. Mr. Blake stated we will not know until the company completes its recruitment and the 60 days training. Providing an example, Mr. Blake stated in Baltimore, Uzurz is performing 15,000 to 20,000 trips monthly.

Based on the information provided about the taxi companies per area, Mr. Mangrum asked if customers would have to transfer from one to the other provider if going across jurisdictions. Mr. Blake stated if a customer is on a ride from MetroAccess, they will not have to transfer vehicles even if their ride is on Abilities-Ride. He clarified that customers would continue to make their reservations on MetroAccess, and then their trip through a lottery system, may be placed on one of the service providers of Abilities-Ride.

Ms. Coles asked if Abilities-Ride has a potential of extending beyond the MetroAccess service area, and if customers would receive a link similar to Uber. Mr. Blake clarified that Abilities-Ride is only for the MetroAccess service area. The trips would have to be booked through MetroAccess and then the trips may be moved to an Abilities-Ride provider. Regarding customers receiving the link, Mr. Blake stated Lyft would work in that manner, however, taxis would service based on the pickup window, as done in the past.

Vice Chair Rush asked about awareness training for Uzurz drivers, and number of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) as a part of the solicitation. Mr. Blake stated they are currently providing ADA service in Baltimore, they have a training module, and the training is 60 days long. They have provided us with their training materials and selection process of drivers. Mr. Blake stated they will have a third party for wheelchair accessible vehicles. Mr. Blake further stated that currently we are doing about 80 WAV trips through the Abilities-Ride program daily. He stated that in the solicitation, we ask an estimate of WAVs the providers will have, and we require a commitment for them to increase that number. Mr. Blake stated we have also provided other ways of equity outside of Abilities-Ride program.

Ms. Ray asked if Uzurz is providing door-to-door, not door-through-door. Mr. Blake confirmed the service will be door-to-door; what MetroAccess currently offers, door-to-door, to and from the exterior most door of the building. Ms. Ray asked if a customer's ride does not come on time, the trip can switch to Uber or other providers. Mr. Blake stated a MetroAccess customer books a trip, then through the lottery if their trip is moved to taxi or Uber. If the ride is late, customers could get Uber or taxi, free of charge, as an alternative ride.

MetroAccess Service Area Update, FY2025:

Chair Semelfort asked if the service area will remain the same for FY2025, or would it be what is shown in the proposed map provided by Metro. Mr. Blake stated we do not have an update yet. We have presented a map that shows the area in color purple, the full-service area that will remain in the yellow color in the middle or have some areas with limited service. If we followed strictly the ADA guidelines of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile, there may be some changes. As per the advocacy of the Committee members, it was recommended to maintain the fares and service areas as is. We have identified a small number of customers in the purple area and are prepared to reach out to them if there is a need, based upon the final decision made by the Board. Mr. Blake hopes that WMATA continues the long-term funding, and he would share information as it becomes available.

Chair Semelfort asked about the map and stated it specified weekdays service only and not the weekend service. Mr. Blake stated those who live on the outskirts of Northern VA and PG County, the service area is different on weekends. Once the decision has been made, we will know who to outreach and inform customers about the impact. Chair Semelfort stated once the decision has been made, it will be placed online, and the customer guide will be updated. Mr. Blake confirmed and stated we have not received any hard cash from the jurisdictions yet. Various possibilities are being explored for bus

and rail service. The map reflects current funding, and it will be continuously monitored as things change.

Vice Chair Rush stated the service area is regulated by the bus and rail, hence, if bus service gets cut, the service area is automatically cut for MetroAccess. Mr. Blake stated that is correct. However, thanks to WMATA Leadership and the advocacy of the AAC, we have been able to keep MetroAccess as the most accessible paratransit that provides service beyond bus and rail as it relates not just to service area, but service hours as well. We are trying to maintain MetroAccess at the current service or close to it, even going forward.

Ms. Ray asked if the service area is cut, would it still be defined at Metro bus service plus regional bus service, or would it be cut to Metro bus service only. She further asked what would happen to localities particularly in VA, if the jurisdictions propose the money needed. Mr. Blake stated the ADA requires paratransit per Metrobus and Metrorail. We have included the locally operated bus services. If there are corresponding cuts, it will still include the locally operated bus services. Mr. Blake stated he does not have any additional information about funding, other than what has been in the news.

Mr. Dancy asked why the General Manager does not take the time to ride MetroAccess or buses, and cut his salary instead of cutting service and raising fares. Mr. Blake stated the General Manager and several of the Board Members have taken the mystery rides. Mr. Blake stated he has taken mystery rides himself. Given the deficit is \$750 million, cutting the salary would not make any difference. As the Committee has pointed out, it is not a matter of salaries of WMATA employees, the issue is a stream of dedicated funding. Even if we all work for free, it would not make a dent for the overall fiscal challenge.

MetroAccess Customer Guide, Insert Pamphlet:

Allison Anderson, Operations Manager, MetroAccess, stated we are waiting for the final decision, and then the work begins with placing that information in Customer Guide along with any service changes. We had minor changes and revisions made to the Customer Guide, we will update the audio version and the Spanish language version. We are also looking to establish an official timeline as to making updates to the Customer Guide during the year so that customers have the most updated version.

Chair Semelfort asked if Abilities-Ride phone numbers can be added into the Customer Guide. Mr. Blake stated yes, however the providers are supposed to be providing customers that number once they have been informed about a customer's trip being

moved to their service, so that the customer can track their trip and contact the provider as needed. Mr. Blake further clarified that customers may receive the text the night before or even the same day as the trip gets moved to Abilities-Ride through the lottery system. Mr. Blake stated we will have a section in Customer Guide, to clarify that customers cannot call the companies directly to book MetroAccess trips.

Ms. Ray recommended to update the Customer Guide as any changes occur through change page alerts, rather than waiting to update the entire document. Chair Semelfort stated the two big changes that took place were put on the IVR almost immediately to inform the customers and placed on the Customer Guide. Ms. Anderson stated because it is online, the document can be updated quickly.

MetroAccess Mini-Van Update:

Mr. Blake stated we are proceeding with the minivans. Although we do not transport more than two people at a time, we test how many people can be seated in a minivan. The new minivan will have a seat divider in between the two seats. Mr. Blake referenced a concern from a previous meeting as to why buy minivans and not test them with the Committee first. Mr. Blake referenced the process of sedans from 2019. He stated the sedan purchase was of new, off-the-lot vehicles. The previous vehicles were not comfortable for customers. Hence, the decision was made to purchase comfortable vehicle, which were new, off-the-lot vehicles. We developed a set of criteria based on the feedback received from the Committee and the disability community. Mr. Blake stated we ended up getting Toyota Camry. When we went to purchase the mini-vans, we went for a new, off-the-lot minivan. The first set of seats were removed to accommodate wheelchair securement.

Ms. Fisher asked if the divider would hinder in operator assisting the customer in placing the seat belt. Mr. Blake stated the seat divider would not cause any hinderance.

Public Comments:

The first member of the public asked if the AAC Zoom meetings information remains the same. Ms. Sharma confirmed. The member of the public shared concerns about late trip credit and shared information from her rides from September 2023. Ms. Anderson explained the process of late trip credit that is provided to customer's EZ Pay account automatically, towards the end of the next month, if MetroAccess fails to perform the trip within the window time. Mr. Blake stated we will follow up with the customer.

The second member of the public stated her son has a disability and she lives beyond the service area. She has noticed that MetroAccess services a customer in her neighborhood

who has been grandfathered. She asked if the neighborhood could be grandfathered if there is a customer in that neighborhood who has been grandfathered. Mr. Blake stated that is a creative idea, however, that was not a part of the decision made in 2010 and that would need to be advocated for and would have to be approved.

The third person of the public stated they were glad about the new contract and asked if there will be an option to use the specific provider. Mr. Blake stated we will do everything we can towards that effort, and it depends on how many drivers that company hires and in the areas of service.

Ms. Coles commented about Uber canceling trips for customers and asked about Uzurz service. Mr. Blake stated if a customer's trip has been moved to be picked by Uzurz, it gets final only if their driver accepts it the night before. Ms. Coles asked about declining a driver. Mr. Blake stated we can ask the providers to exclude a specific operator. Customers have the option to state they would not like their trips on Abilities Ride or Uber, and their trips can be placed on MetroAccess, whether it is for a few days or longer.

Ms. Neuzil thanked Mr. Blake for the explanation about the process of choosing the sedans, and apologized for coming down hard on Sarah Meyer, Executive Vice President and Chief Officer of Customer Engagement and Experience, at her last presentation to the AAC.

Mr. Dancy asked about the VRI for police officers. Mr. Blake stated they should touch base with you.

Chair Semelfort reminded the Committee to review the AAC By-Laws.

Public Comments: phone 202-962-1100, or email MetroAACChair@wmata.com

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 5:50 p.m.