

**Riders' Advisory Council Meeting
March 4, 2009**

I. Call to Order:

Ms. Zinkl called the March meeting of Metro's Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:31 p.m. She asked Mr. Pasek, the staff coordinator, to call the roll.

The following members were present:

Diana Zinkl, Chairman, District of Columbia
David Alpert, District of Columbia
Kelsi Bracmort, District of Columbia
Steve Cerny, Fairfax County
Patricia Daniels, District of Columbia
Kenneth DeGraff, District of Columbia*
Mary Kay Dranzo, Montgomery County
Chris Farrell, Montgomery County
Dharm Guruswamy, At-Large
Lora Routt, Montgomery County
Carl Seip, At-Large
Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee Chairman
Evelyn Tomaszewski, Fairfax County*
Carol Carter Walker, District of Columbia
Lillian White, City of Alexandria
Robin White, Fairfax County*

* - Arrival times for members who arrived after the beginning of the meeting are noted in the body of the minutes.

The following members were not present at the meeting and had previously advised the Chair or staff of their planned absence from the meeting:

Sharon Conn, Prince George's County
Francis DeBernardo, Prince George's County
Penny Everline, Arlington County
Nancy Iacomini, Arlington County

The following member was not present at the meeting:

Susan Holland, Prince George's County

II. Public Comment:

Terrence Briggs, a Metrobus rider from Germantown, noted the need for Metro to post bus schedules at end-of-the-line bus terminals, particularly for the J7 and J9 bus routes.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Ms. Zinkl asked if anyone had any changes to the agenda. Mr. Alpert moved approval of the agenda as presented. This motion was seconded by Ms. Daniels. Without objection, the agenda was approved as presented.

Ms. Zinkl noted that, while there had been previous indication that Metro Board Chairman Jim Graham might attend this evening's meeting, he was unable to make it owing to a schedule conflict.

IV. NextBus Update:

Ms. Zinkl then introduced Rob Kramer, who is in charge of the NextBus program for Metro to provide an update on the service.

Mr. Kramer then told the Council that he is Metro's Chief of Applications Development for Metro's Department of Information Technology and, as such, is overseeing the relaunch of the NextBus service. He then provided a brief update on the status of NextBus at Metro:

- Metro took the NextBus service offline in October 2007 when it discovered that its predictions weren't sufficiently accurate;
- Metro expects to restart the NextBus service in late June or early July 2009.

Mr. Kramer added that, when relaunched, the service will offer access to real-time bus information through:

- A website, which will also be accessible through PDAs;
- A telephone line with an Interactive Voice Response system;
- LED signs at major bus stops (Pentagon, Anacostia, and Friendship Heights)

He noted that Metro is also looking to make bus arrival information available via SMS text message, but that there could be a cost issue associated with such a service.

Robin White arrived at 6:42 p.m.

He added that Metro has not done thorough quality assurance testing on its data to ensure that it is accurate, and added that, in addition to doing the testing, Metro needs to post signs at bus stops and train staff before the service is relaunched to the public in June or July.

Ms. Zinkl noted that she had several concerns about the NextBus system, many of which were answered by Mr. Kramer's presentation. She asked whether LED signs would be posted at major bus stops. Mr. Kramer replied that, during the pilot in 2007, LED signs were placed at the bus bays at the Anacostia, Friendship Heights and Silver Spring Metro stations, the Pentagon Transit Center and at some bus stops in Arlington. He said that some of these signs were removed when the system was taken offline, but that they will be reinstalled and/or reactivated when NextBus comes back online this summer.

Ms. Zinkl asked whether it would be possible for arrival information to be displayed on the PIDS signs at rail stations.

Mr. DeGraff arrived at 6:47 p.m.

Mr. Kramer said that staff has not looked at putting bus arrival on existing PIDS signs, but that they are investigating the possibility of having bus arrival information on the Metro Channel signs that will be installed in stations as part of that program.

Ms. Tomaszewski arrived at 6:48 p.m.

Ms. Zinkl then asked about whether there had been any public involvement in the NextBus program. Mr. Kramer said that there had not been any public involvement in the program since it was taken offline in the fall of 2007. He explained that Metro had left the existing data feed in place after the website was taken down and that Metro hadn't realized that there was a way for members of the public to get access to the NextBus site.

Ms. Zinkl said that she thinks that there should be a way for members of the public to still access the site in the manner that it was before it was shut down recently. Mr. Kramer said that Metro has not gone to the public regarding NextBus but that he is coming to the Council to get its advice.

Mr. Seip asked whether the website, when relaunched, will include a map. Mr. Kramer responded that it will. Mr. Seip then asked whether the map and real-time information will be integrated with Metro's Trip Planner. Mr. Kramer said that the Trip Planner on Metro's website will continue to work off the published schedule data, not off of the real-time information.

Mr. Seip then asked about the cost of allowing members of the public to receive information about bus arrivals via text message. Mr. Kramer said that, initially, Metro did not include text messaging capabilities as part of its NextBus system, however it is looking at options for doing so. He noted that it would cost Metro several thousands of dollars to purchase the code to run such a service, and there would be different costs associated with having arrival information sent via text message – some fixed costs and some costs that would accrue per message sent/received. In response to an additional question from Mr. Seip, Mr. Kramer said that none of the larger transit systems that use NextBus offer text message services.

Mr. DeGraff noted that he was sympathetic to Metro's concerns about text messaging costs, since they can add up very quickly. He then asked Mr. Kramer about the software development process and whether or not it cost more to make changes earlier or later in the life of a project. In response to Mr. Kramer's answer that the earlier problems are identified, usually the less costly they are to fix, Mr. DeGraff said that this speaks to the need for Metro to continue to allow members of the public to access the website as they had been doing previously so that they could help Metro identify problems as early as

possible. He noted, as an example, that allowing riders to search for information about all bus routes that serve a particular stop, rather than having to search route-by-route would have improved riders' experience with the pilot program and would have been something that Metro could have worked on changing earlier if it had solicited the public's feedback earlier.

Dr. Bracmort thanked Mr. Kramer for attending the meeting and for his update on the system. She said that she realizes that NextBus is still very much a work-in-progress and asked for continued updates on the implementation of the service and whether there was anything that the Council could do to help expedite its launch. Mr. Kramer responded that he would be coming to Council meetings as-needed to provide progress updates.

Ms. Zinkl noted that she had concerns about NextBus being relaunched without rider input and said that there needed to be a way for riders to give feedback on the program soon to ensure that their feedback is incorporated into the project. Mr. Kramer said that he will work with the group to organize a mechanism to get feedback.

Mr. Guruswamy noted that he used the service during the pilot phase. He said that while the accuracy wasn't 100%, it was still a really useful service, especially given the characteristics of the service he uses along Columbia Pike. He said that he hoped that Metro is able to get the service back online as soon as possible. He also noted that in striving for very high accuracy with the service, that Metro might delay the launch of a really useful project. Mr. Kramer said that Metro understands that the service will never be perfect but that the agency wants to achieve a certain level of reliability before it relaunches the service.

Mr. Alpert noted his background in software development and said that he understands all of the complexities involved in getting a system like this working. He said that people had been using what was clearly a "back-door" to access the system and that these users understood that Metro didn't have responsibility for the accuracy of the information. He asked that Metro allow members of the public to access the information in an unofficial way, as they had been able to previously. He said that he had received several comments from members of the public who were using the system and found it useful. Mr. Kramer said that members of the Board and the Metro's General Manager were aware of the concerns that Mr. Alpert raised.

Ms. Zinkl asked whether there were any costs associated with using the website. Mr. Kramers said that there would be costs associated with making the site available to the public. He said that executives at NextBus and Metro staff had not realized that the site was being used by the public. In response to another question from Ms. Zinkl, Mr. Kramer said that once the website is officially relaunched, Metro will incur fixed costs. Mr. Alpert suggested that Metro could ask NextBus to waive the fees for making the website public for a trial.

There was further discussion about the status of the NextBus corporation as a contractor to Metro.

Mr. Farrell asked whether NextBus service could be expanded to other systems. Mr. Kramer replied that there are other vendors that also offer similar services as NextBus and that each service provider will need to make its own decision about whether or not to participate in providing real-time arrival information either through NextBus or another service.

Ms. Routt asked about the precautions Metro is taking with regard to vandalism of signs and other equipment. Mr. Kramer said that Metro has security, such as cameras at bus locations, to deter or prevent vandalism. Ms. Routt said that she hoped that Metro would have safeguards in place to protect the signs from vandalism rather than simply removing them, since that would cause inconvenience to riders. Mr. Kramer clarified that the signs will be reinstalled once the NextBus service is relaunched.

Ms. Walker said that she would rather see the group working on this service expending its resources on getting NextBus fully implemented rather than supporting “back door” or unofficial access.

Lillian White noted that she was on the Council when NextBus was launched as a pilot in 2007 and that everyone was very pleased with the product. She said that she didn’t understand why it has taken almost two years to relaunch the service. She asked who is in charge of oversight of the project. Mr. Kramer said that he has been given the responsibility of getting NextBus up and running in the timeframe that has been discussed. In response to a question from Ms. Zinkl, he noted that the reports to Metr’s Chief Information Officer, Suzanne Peck, and that he is also working in coordination with Metro’s Bus department.

Ms. Dranzo asked whether Metro is planning on rolling out the service for all bus lines or only for select bus lines initially. Mr. Kramer replied that Metro would be offering the service on all of its bus lines. Ms. Dranzo said that since the website will be up and running in some test capacity, that it doesn’t require much additional effort to allow public access to the site. Mr. Kramer said that he had concerns about the quality of the data and releasing that data to the public.

Mr. Sheehan said that he was very pleased to hear about the NextBus system and asked about its accessibility features. Mr. Kramer responded that the LED signs are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and that the signs at bus stops informing riders about the service are also ADA-compliant, which relates to their height off the ground. He also noted that the LED signs will have speakers so that audible information can also be provided to riders. Mr. Kramer added that he wasn’t sure about the accessibility of the phone system and the website. Mr. Sheehan said that he looked forward to following this issue from an accessibility standpoint.

Ms. Zinkl thanked Mr. Kramer for coming to the meeting and said that she looked forward to working with him as this project moves forward.

V. Approval of February 4, 2009 Meeting Minutes:

Ms. Zinkl asked for approval of the February meeting minutes. She and Ms. Walker noted that they both had some minor changes to the minutes.

Ms. Walker moved approval of the February 4, 2009 meeting minutes. This motion was seconded by Mr. DeGraff.

In favor: Ms. Zinkl, Mr. Alpert, Mr. Cerny, Ms. Daniels, Mr. DeGraff, Ms. Dranzo, Mr. Farrell, Mr. Guruswamy, Ms. Routt, Mr. Seip, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Tomaszewski, Ms. Walker, Robin White

Opposed: none

Abstentions: Lillian White

The minutes were approved as amended. (14-0-1)

VI. Report from AAC:

Mr. Sheehan then provided a report from the Accessibility Advisory Council (AAC). He said that one of the main focuses of the group is working to improve MetroAccess service and hopes to make improvements over the coming year. He noted that MetroAccess has made some improvements and cited the recent implementation of door-to-door service (as opposed to “curb-to-curb” service which had been the case previously) which also improved system efficiency. He told members of the Council that MetroAccess provided approximately 9500 rides/day and has about 25,000 registered users. He noted that the number of MetroAccess riders is increasing and that everyone needs to be better stewards of the resources involved in providing MetroAccess service.

Mr. Sheehan also added that the AAC wanted to ensure that any systems that Metro puts into place are accessible to individuals with disabilities and that it reviews many of the same things that the RAC does, but from the standpoint of accessibility. Mr. Sheehan then provided Council members with information about AAC meeting dates and times.

Mr. DeGraff asked about the criteria used to determine whether or not a customer is eligible to use MetroAccess service. Ms. Sheehan reviewed the criteria for eligibility to use MetroAccess service and explained that it is a service for individuals who are unable to use Metro’s fixed-route bus and rail system. He also explained the logistics of how customers schedule rides and how the service operates.

Ms. Daniels asked about the difference between MetroAccess service and WEHTS (Washington Elderly and Handicapped Transportation Service). Mr. Sheehan said that he wasn’t familiar with WEHTS service, but that it is likely funded by the individual jurisdiction in which it operates. In response to a question from Ms. Daniels, Mr. Sheehan provided information on meeting times for the AAC and its MetroAccess subcommittee.

Ms. Walker asked if people ever get cut off from MetroAccess. Mr. Sheehan said that users, such as those who might only have temporary disabilities, do lose eligibility for MetroAccess service, though the eligibility oversight could possibly be improved.

VII. Resolution on Service Reductions:

Ms. Zinkl then introduced the draft resolution on service reduction principles that members of the Council worked on previously

Mr. Pasek said that the specific plan for service cuts is still undecided, though it is likely that the Board will soon approve holding public hearing on proposed reductions in service. Ms. Zinkl added that the Board has been able to work with the FY2010 budget to reduce the budget gap to around \$30 million. She noted that the cuts would target bus routes across the region and may also include some cutbacks in rail service. She said that the Board will meet tomorrow to discuss this proposal.

In response to a question from Lillian White, Ms. Zinkl said that there will be at least two hearing in each jurisdiction. Mr. Pasek clarified that there may not be hearings in jurisdictions that are not proposed for cuts in service. Mr. Pasek added that staff has looked at potential locations for hearings and is working to ensure that the hearings will be held in locations that are as wheelchair- and transit-accessible as possible.

Mr. Alpert noted that he didn't have any issue with the principles put forward. He said that it may be useful for the Council to state that other options be looked at in lieu of cuts in service and that cuts not be considered until after these other options are investigated.

There was additional discussion about the specific wording of the resolution.

Ms. Zinkl then called for a vote on the resolution.

Ms. Walker moved approval of the resolution as presented. Mr. Farrell seconded this motion.

Mr. DeGraff proposed that the fourth "Whereas" clause, that begins "*Whereas*, the Authority, the Board and the member jurisdictions should search for additional cost savings and sources of revenue..." be moved up to the position of second "Whereas" clause. Without objection, this change was made.

In favor: Ms. Zinkl, Mr. Alpert, Mr. Cerny, Ms. Daniels, Mr. DeGraff, Ms. Dranzo, Mr. Farrell, Ms. Routt, Mr. Seip, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Tomaszewski, Ms. Walker, Robin White

Opposed: Mr. Guruswamy

Abstentions: Lillian White

This resolution was approved. (14-1-1). The approved text of this resolution is included at the end of these minutes.

VIII. New Member Orientation:

Mr. Pasek reviewed information that had been provided to members of the Council about Metro. The Riders' Advisory Council and Metro's Board of Directors.

Mr. Seip asked why members' names weren't listed on the Council's website and why contact information for the Council wasn't provided except for how to show up to its meetings. Members discussed the idea having "@wmata.com" email addresses for themselves. Ms. Zinkl noted that Metro was working on establishing an email address for the Council.

Ms. Zinkl said that she was hearing that most members were alright with having their names listed on the Council's website. Ms. Daniels noted her concerns with having her name so listed. Mr. Sheehan noted that Metro must have policies about what information can and cannot be provided on its website.

Mr. DeGraff noted that there is an expectation that riders should be able to identify the people who represent them on the Council.

Mr. Pasek explained that the Council has fairly wide latitude in using the space it is allotted on Metro's website.

Members of the Council arrived at a consensus that listing their names on the website was acceptable. Lillian White moved that members' names and the jurisdictions that they represent be posted on the Council's website. This motion was seconded by Mr. Alpert. Without objection, this motion was approved.

Ms. Walker suggested that Mr. Pasek find out whether members could get Riders' Advisory Council emails. Ms. Zinkl noted that there will be a generic RAC email address where riders can send emails that can then be forwarded to individual members.

Mr. Alpert said that his suggestion would be for Mr. Pasek to look into members having individual emails, though individual members would not be required to have a Council email address.

Ms. Walker noted that there were constraints in the Council's by-laws about how positions of the Council should be communicated to the public. Lillian White added that there needed to be something formalized with regards to responding to inquiries.

Mr. Cerny noted that, by agreeing to service on the Riders' Advisory Council, members have given up any claim to anonymity. He added that he also thinks that there should be a way for members of the public to contact the Council via email.

Ms. Zinkl noted that she had some concerns about having emails to the Council filtered through Metro staff and about access to the Council for members of the public who don't have email or internet access.

Ms. Zinkl suggested that the Council move on to the New Business section of the meeting and continue the orientation discussion at a later time.

Dr. Bracmort left the meeting at 7:21 p.m.

IX. NextBus Resolution:

Ms. Zinkl then discussed the proposed Council resolution on the NextBus program. She said that there may be some issues with relaunching the website, especially if it involves additional costs to metro, since Metro is currently facing a budget crisis. She added that it may be possible to open up the system to a limited number of people so that riders can have feedback on the system before it goes public, which she feels is critical.

Mr. Alpert noted that in response to concerns raised by Ms. Zinkl and in response to the discussion earlier in the meeting, he had made some modifications to the resolution that had been previously provided to members.

Mr. DeGraff said that he understood Metro's concerns about additional costs and that he would be comfortable if Metro needed to limit the number of people involved in such a system test.

Ms. Zinkl said that she would prefer that the clause relating to the earlier, unauthorized use of NextBus by some members of the public be removed from the resolution. Members then had additional discussion on the text of the resolution.

Mr. DeGraff moved approval of the resolution, as amended. Robin White seconded this motion.

In favor: Ms. Zinkl, Mr. Alpert, Mr. Cerny, Ms. Daniels, Mr. DeGraff, Ms. Dranzo, Mr. Farrell, Mr. Guruswamy, Ms. Routt, Mr. Seip, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Tomszewski, Ms. Walker, Lillian White, Robin White

Opposed: none

Abstentions: none

The resolution was approved as modified (15-0-0). The full, approved text of the resolution is included at the end of these minutes.

Mr. Seip left the meeting at 8:23 p.m.

Ms. Zinkl said that the Council would be getting started with the working group on Metro's proposed Customer Service Standards and with working groups on other issues.

X. Adjournment:

Without objection, Ms. Zinkl adjourned the meeting at 8:29 p.m.

WMATA Riders Advisory Council Resolution on Service Adjustments

Whereas, the Riders Advisory Council recognizes the need for WMATA to achieve a balanced budget;

Whereas, the Authority, the Board and the member jurisdictions should search for additional cost savings and sources of revenue, work to improve efficiency, develop a better understanding of the quantitative and qualitative benefits of the system, strongly consider additional, targeted subsidy increases, and aggressively pursue alternative funding before reducing service;

Whereas, the Advisory Council acknowledges that a balanced budget may require WMATA to achieve cost savings through service adjustments as well as non-service associated cost savings and additional jurisdictional subsidy;

Whereas, the Advisory Council believes WMATA should preserve the quality of the rider experience and not sacrifice the goal of maintaining the best ride in the nation and a high level of civility and cleanliness; now, therefore be it

Resolved, the Advisory Council adopts the following principles for service adjustments should guide any decisions made by the Board or the Authority:

- maintaining basic transportation—recognition that Metro provides a critical service, 24 hours a day, seven days per week, enabling residents of the region to travel to work, school, personal appointments, entertainment and recreation at all hours of the day and all days of the week.
- customer, employee and public safety—service adjustments should take into account direct effects on safety, such as operator training and work hours, and indirect effects on safety, such as availability, frequency and security of evening and late night service.
- interjurisdictional and intermodal equity—service adjustments should be adopted in a manner that distributes service, adjustments and the burden of those adjustments throughout the region and among modes and types of services provided by the Authority, acknowledging that existing service in some areas may already be limited under current scheduling.
- valuing social equity—providing service based on community need as well as efficiency and demand. Recognize that for transit dependent individuals, even limited service provides opportunities to participate in basic community functions that might be out of reach otherwise.

- maintaining alternatives within transit—seemingly overlapping services may provide needed options, prevent overcrowding and bottlenecks, minimize the impact of service disruptions and are not necessarily “duplicative.”
- sensitivity to “day of week” and “time of day” changes in demand—Metro should consider broader use of targeted service adjustments that reflect time of day and day of week variation in demand and minimize the impact of service adjustments on customers (for example the weekend closure of the 17th street entrance to the Farragut West Metro is one example of a “targeted service adjustment”).
- strong communication to the public on service adjustments—
 - transparency at all stages in the development of any and all service adjustments, including detailed information available to the public and open, public, noticed meetings for all discussions of service adjustments, except where directed to do so by the Board.
 - opportunity for public input into service adjustments through public hearings in affected areas for all service reductions.
 - any service adjustments need to be widely and unambiguously communicated to the public to prevent confusion, delay, and maintain strong relationships with the riding public, taking into account regular users, occasional users, tourists and special needs riders.

Approved by the Riders’ Advisory Council – March 4, 2009

WMATA Riders Advisory Council Resolution on Real-Time Bus Information

Whereas, the NextBus system allows riders to access real-time information about bus arrivals on the Web and on mobile devices;

Whereas, real-time information is extremely valuable to riders, allowing them to better time their actions to catch a bus or make decisions about which bus to choose;

Whereas, according to a UK study, real-time information also improves riders' perception of bus reliability and frequency;

Whereas, WMATA has been working with NextBus to set up a new and more accurate real-time information system for Metrobus;

Whereas, some Metrobus riders have been using NextBus at their own risk for several months, and many have found it useful despite its limitations; now, therefore be it

Resolved, the Riders' Advisory Council urges WMATA to work with NextBus to complete and officially release the system as soon as practical, and

Resolved, the Riders' Advisory Council requests that WMATA explore opportunities for RAC members and interested members of the public to start using the NextBus system in a "beta test" before it is officially launched, and as soon as possible, to receive feedback and benefit riders.

Approved by the Riders' Advisory Council - March 4, 2009