

**Riders' Advisory Council
September 3, 2008**

I. Call to Order/Roll Call:

Ms. Iacomini called the September meeting of the Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:33 p.m.

The following members were present at the meeting. The arrival times for members who arrived to the meeting late are noted in the body of the meeting minutes.

Nancy Iacomini, Chair, Arlington County
Kelsi Bracmort, District of Columbia
Steve Cerny, Fairfax County
Patricia Daniels, District of Columbia
Kenneth DeGraff, District of Columbia
Mary Kay Dranzo, Montgomery County
Penelope Everline, Arlington County
Christopher Farrell, Montgomery County
Kaiya Pontinen Sandler, Montgomery County
Evelyn Tomaszewski, Fairfax County
Carol Carter Walker, District of Columbia
Lillian White, City of Alexandria
Robin White, Fairfax County
Diana Zinkl, District of Columbia

The following members were not present for any portion of the meeting:

Denise Brown, Prince George's County
Sharon Conn, Prince George's County
Susan Holland, Prince George's County
Kevin Moore, At-Large
Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/Elderly and Disabled Committee Chair

II. Public Comment:

Ms. Iacomini asked for any comments from members of the public.

Teresa McGervey from Arlington county noted that at the Council's last meeting, it discussed the possibility of having "flip-up" seats on Metro's new railcars and shared her experiences with this type of seating as it is used on Metrobuses. She noted her concern about the need for riders who are using these seats, many of whom are disabled, to move to allow a wheelchair to be secured. She suggested that this proposal be reviewed with Metro's disabled riders.

Ms. McGervey also mentioned that, now that school has started her bus often becomes very crowded with students and asked whether or not Metro takes these additional riders into account when planning services.

Lillian White asked what Ms. McGervey meant by “problems with flipping up seats.” Ms. McGervey described the process that requires bus drivers to ask passengers to relocate to allow for wheelchair passengers to be accommodated and noted that buses can’t move until the rider in the wheelchair is secured. Ms. White noted that under the law, Metro has to be accessible to passengers with disabilities. Ms. Iacomini noted that Metro needs to strike a balance between the needs of riders with disabilities and the needs of other riders.

III. Approval of Agenda:

Ms. Iacomini then asked for approval of the meeting agenda, as presented. Ms. Everline moved approval and was seconded by Ms. Daniels. All members present voted in favor of approving the agenda as presented.

In favor: Ms. Iacomini, Dr. Bracmort, Mr. Cerny, Ms. Daniels, Mr. DeGraff, Ms. Dranzo, Ms. Everline, Mr. Farrell, Ms. Sandler, Ms. Tomaszewski, Lillian White, Ms. Zinkl

Opposed: None

Abstentions: None

The agenda was approved as submitted. (12-0-0)

IV. Approval of July 2, 2008 Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Cerny moved approval of the minutes as presented. This was seconded by Ms. Zinkl.

In favor: Ms. Iacomini, Mr. Cerny, Ms. Daniels, Ms. Everline, Ms. Sandler, Lillian White, Ms. Zinkl

Opposed: none

Abstentions: Dr. Bracmort, Mr. DeGraff, Ms. Dranzo, Mr. Farrell, Ms. Tomaszewski

The motion passed and the minutes were approved (7-0-5).

Robin White arrived at 6:41p.m.

V. Introduction of new members:

Ms. Iacomini then asked newly-appointed Council members to introduce themselves.

Kenneth DeGraff said that he lives in the Adams Morgan neighborhood in D.C. and is an active transit rider. He said that he is on the RAC to help people better understand what Metro is and what it can do for them.

Mary Kay Dranzo said that she lives in Takoma Park, Maryland, right on the District of Columbia border and riders both bus and rail. She added that she is interested in getting D.C. and Montgomery County to work together more to better serve riders' interests.

Evelyn Tomaszewski told members that she lives in Springfield and uses both bus and rail as well as slugs to get to work.

Christopher Farrell told members that he lives in Wheaton, and uses Ride-On and occasionally Metrobus to access Metrorail and also uses either DASH buses or Metrobus on the other end of his commute. He said that he an avid transit user and has used transit in other world-class cities.

Ms. Iacomini then asked the other members of the Council to introduce themselves to the new members. She said that she represents Arlington County on the RAC and mostly uses the Metrorail system.

Dr. Bracmort told the group that she represents the District of Columbia and lives in the Hillcrest neighborhood. She said that she is most interested in making sure that the perspectives of Metrobus passengers are represented.

Ms. Daniels told the Council that she is from Adams Morgan and that she is on the RAC to represent everyone, and is specifically focused on issues faced by senior citizens and persons with disabilities.

Ms. Everline said that she represents Arlington and uses both bus and rail. She also noted that she is transit-dependant and joined the RAC to help make the transit experience the best possible for Metro's riders.

Ms. Zinkl explained that she represents the District of Columbia and lives on Capitol Hill. She said that she has used transit her whole life and is "transit-dependent by choice." She noted that she is also a ZipCar member and has a degree in urban/regional planning. She said that she thinks that Metro is among the best public transit systems but that its biggest shortcoming is not communicating its successes effectively with its riders. She also noted that, especially in the city, the bus and rail systems are complementary.

Robin White said that she represents Fairfax County and commutes to Capitol Hill via the bus and the Orange Line. She said that she has noticed the increase in ridership and that there needs to be planning on Metro's part to handle this increase in ridership.

Ms. Sandler said that she represents Montgomery County and lives in Potomac. She said that she usually drives to the Grosvenor station and rides the Red Line.

Mr. Cerny told the Council that he represents Fairfax County and commutes via the Fairfax Connector to the Orange Line and then on to Capitol Hill. He said that he has been a long-time transit advocate, both in Fairfax County and region-wide and is an original member of the RAC.

Lillian White said that she is from Alexandria but represents all riders in the region. She noted that she was previously chair of the RAC's Rail Subcommittee and is currently chair of its Budget Subcommittee. She said that she rides the DASH bus and occasionally Metrobus along with regularly riding Metrorail.

VI. Transfer Policy Change

Ms. Iacomini introduced Sara Wilson, Metro's Assistant General Manager for Corporate Strategy and Communications. Ms. Iacomini gave a brief background about the pending elimination of paper transfers, which was approved as part of the previous year's fare increase and also noted how this was tied in with pending changes to SmarTrip. Ms. Iacomini then turned the meeting over to Ms. Wilson.

Ms. Wilson thanked Ms. Iacomini and the RAC for allowing her time on the meeting's agenda. She said that some of Metro's successes over the past year have been heavily influenced by the RAC's input, including its service for the Pope's visit and for the opening of the new Nationals' baseball stadium. She said that the RAC's input helped Metro make its communication more focused and customer-friendly.

Ms. Wilson said that she didn't have a prepared presentation for the meeting because she wanted to have a discussion on some of the upcoming actions that Metro would be undertaking, or has undertaken, specifically:

- The elimination of paper transfers, which is scheduled for January 2009;
- The elimination of paper Metrocheks and transitioning users to the SmartBenefits program which is administered using SmarTrip cards;
- The discount for bus riders paying SmarTrip (\$0.10 discount), which became effective with the latest fare increase.

She said that these are all designed to move passengers to electronic payment as well as to provide riders with protection for their funds, which is possible with SmarTrip cards.

Ms. Wilson noted that Metro has done outreach and marketing aimed at its riders on the 10-cent SmarTrip discount on bus and has reached out employers regarding the SmartBenefits program.

She said that thought that the bulk of the discussion at this evening's meeting should be on the elimination of paper transfers. Ms. Wilson noted Metro wants to move away from paper transfers because of operator assaults as a result of transfer disputes and because of fraud associated with paper transfers.

Carol Walker arrived at 6:53 p.m.

Ms. Wilson said that Metro wants to target its communications at its most vulnerable riders. She noted that tokens were eliminated as part of last year's fare increase and that aspect of the fare increase was largely overlooked until the change was implemented. She explained that social service agencies had concerns after tokens were eliminated because

they rely on tokens to provide rides for their clients. She said that Metro wants to avoid a similar situation with the elimination of paper transfers by making sure that it performs its “due diligence” in communicating this change.

Ms. Wilson said that the biggest audience for the communications about the upcoming elimination of paper transfers would be social service agencies and that Metro would also investigate possibilities to mitigate the effects of this change on social services clients. She explained that Metro is, internally, investigating options such as date/time-stamped passes or disposable SmarTrip cards which could serve this limited population. She said that she wanted to start this discussion with the RAC this evening, even if there needed to be more discussions on this topic at subsequent meetings.

Ms. Iacomini noted that the RAC is hoping to have a presentation on SmarTrip cards at an upcoming meeting to address some of the concerns and questions the RAC has about Metro’s plans for the SmarTrip program.

Ms. Wilson provided the RAC with an overview of the recent reorganization of Metro’s SmarTrip office. She also discussed the distribution of SmarTrip cards following the latest fare increase. She explained that, following last year’s fare increase, Metro provided 50,000 SmarTrip cards to jurisdictional social service agencies according to the same formula that is used to calculate jurisdictions’ Metro subsidies. She noted that clients who received the cards didn’t feel like they had any value.

Ms. Daniels asked whether or not all of the kinks had been worked out with SmarTrip cards. She also asked about the weekly bus pass. Ms. Wilson responded that the weekly flash passes will be unaffected by the change in the transfer policy because riders using these passes don’t get transfers. She added that there was discussion of loading passes onto SmarTrip cards but Metro isn’t yet ready to implement that.

Dr. Bracmort asked what riders paying with cash would do if they needed to transfer buses. Ms. Wilson said that, while there will be accommodations for low-income or special needs riders, all other riders will need to get a SmarTrip card to obtain a free transfer. Dr. Bracmort expressed concerns about tourists or other occasional riders that may not want to pay \$5 for a SmarTrip card. Ms. Wilson responded that many tourists already have to buy a SmarTrip card to use Metro parking facilities.

Mr. Farrell asked about Metrorail riders who use a paper rail pass and then get a transfer to get a reduced rate on connecting buses. Ms. Wilson said that the paper rail-to-bus transfer will also go away in January and transfers between bus and rail would only be available on SmarTrip and not available for riders using paper rail passes. Mr. Farrell said he understood that passes would be able to be loaded onto SmarTrip cards and asked for a timetable of when this would be available. Ms. Wilson said that this question would better be addressed to SmarTrip staff.

Ms. Wilson told members that the time of the transfer period would also increase to three hours from the existing two hours.

Ms. Dranzo noted her concerns about the elimination of paper Metrocheks for riders that use other transit services such as Maryland MTA commuter buses. She also noted that she had contacted Metro to get a replacement SmarTrip card and never received it.

Ms. Wilson noted that Metro understands that the cost of the SmarTrip card (\$5) is pretty significant, but explained that Metro doesn't make a profit on selling the cards. She said that Metro is looking at options for a lower-cost disposable card.

Ms. Dranzo added that, if Metro allows for paper transfers for a specific set of individuals, it will still have to deal with all of the issues associated with paper transfers. Ms. Wilson agreed but added that it would be on a much, much smaller scale than now.

Mr. DeGraff first thanked Ms. Wilson for the videos that Metro has put out to encourage people to take transit to special events. He added that he wanted to ask about other incentives that Metro has come up with to move more people to SmarTrip, such as price caps that exist in other cities and noted his concerns about the existing distribution network for SmarTrip cards. Ms. Wilson said that Metro is looking at setting up point-of-sale devices at sale locations like Giant and Safeway. She added that Metro has tried to incentivize using SmarTrip cards by providing a discount for bus passengers when paying with SmarTrip, but that it needs to be mindful of the incentives that it provides - Metro has capacity issues, especially during peak hours. She noted that Metro only does marketing for off-peak periods and does not market to attract riders during peak periods. Ms. Iacomini noted said that some incentives should still be in the mix as part of the effort to move people to using SmarTrip.

Ms. Zinkl said that she would advocate for "creativity" in the fare structure. She said that the current fare structure is thin on options - that there is a need a diversity of options for people who interact with the system in different ways. She said that it would make riders feel more 'recognized.' Ms. Zinkl said that a large part of riders' resistance to using SmarTrip is heartburn because they are afraid of seeing their costs go up.

Ms. Zinkl also asked if it were possible for social service agencies to have a program similar to SmartBenefits. Ms. Wilson said that Metro could do this, but social service agencies are reluctant to provide cards to clients that could be turned into cash. Ms. Zinkl asked if there were similar fraud problems with the existing tokens. Ms. Wilson responded that there are, in fact, some of those problems now.

Ms. Zinkl asked why more machines that sell SmarTrip cards aren't located in the District of Columbia. Ms. Wilson gave a brief history of why SmarTrip dispensers are installed at certain stations, specifically those with parking lots. She noted that this was in response to a theft of parking lot funds by Metro's parking contractors. Dave Couch said that Metro doesn't have short-term plans for additional SmarTrip vendors but that it is investigating possibilities over a longer-term period to provide additional opportunities to dispense cards.

Ms. Iacomini reminded members that they need to focus on the elimination of paper transfers and to save the questions more directly related to SmarTrip for the next meeting.

Ms. Zinkl asked whether bus-to-bus transfers would go away. She was told that, yes, this would be eliminated in January. Ms. Zinkl also asked if Metro's fee structure would change – specifically, would passengers still receive the existing rail-to-bus transfer. Ms. Wilson said that the fee structure would not change, though Metro was, longer-term, looking to provide a discount from bus-to-rail as well as rail-to-bus, but this wouldn't occur until all regional bus systems accept SmarTrip. Ms. Zinkl suggested that Metro put signs on every bus alerting riders to this change.

Ms. Everline suggested Metro put together working group of people who work with these populations to get their feedback and input. Ms. Wilson said that Metro is reaching out to social service agencies and other organizations that currently buy Metrobus tokens. Ms. Everline also noted that other transit agencies have gone through a similar process and suggested talking to peer transit agencies. Ms. Wilson noted that Metro has talked with agencies in Chicago and Boston who have dealt with similar transitions. Ms. Everline also noted that she has concerns about how this would affect vulnerable populations, many of whom do not receive social services.

Lillian White clarified that Metro would still offer transfer discounts, just not using paper media and that this needs to be emphasized to riders. Ms. Everline noted that she has concerns about the cost of the SmarTrip cards.

Ms. Walker suggested using audio announcements on buses and also suggested that Metro go to houses of worship, community outreach events, etc. She said that she thinks that people need to have demonstrations on how to use SmarTrip cards as a way to make people more familiar using them.

Ms. Iacomini summed up the RAC's suggestions to Ms. Wilson:

- Signage on buses;
- Signage on rail-to-bus transfer machines located in rail stations;
- Bulkhead signs on buses and trains.
- Public service announcements.

Ms. Iacomini then asked members for additional suggestions.

Ms. Dranzo suggested communications in languages other than Spanish and English.

Robin White suggested using station managers to help disseminate information and also that Metro needs to provide very clear “how to” information on how to use SmarTrip. She noted that Metro needs to do outreach in non-written formats as well.

Ms. Wilson noted that Metro has a new director of community outreach who has extensive experience working with the Spanish-language media, and that, in many cases, Spanish-language media has a broader focus on

Ms. Zinkl said that if Metro is going to require SmarTrip cards to get transfers, Metro needs to make SmarTrip cards much more accessible and easier to purchase.

Ms. Everline suggested announcements on the Metrorail system. Ms. Iacomini suggested running public service announcements on various local media outlets, if Metro is able to do so.

Dr. Bracmort said that, as part of its marketing campaign, Metro needs to emphasize the benefits of using a SmarTrip card. She said that Metro also needs to look at providing additional benefits for bus riders as part of this transition.

Lillian White suggested that Metro issue lots of press releases.

Dr. Bracmort suggested communication with neighborhood email listservs.

Ms. Dranzo suggested displaying information prominently on Metro's webpage.

Ms. Zinkl suggested that Metro start its outreach as early as possible.

VII. System Infrastructure Renewal Program:

Ms. Iacomini explained to members that Metro is planning on a large-scale rehabilitation program and is looking at administering this program differently to minimize impacts on riders. She noted that this information was presented to the Board in July and Board members had some questions about the plan. She then introduced Dave Couch from Metro's Infrastructure Renewal program to discuss Metro's plans.

Mr. Couch noted that Metro is over 30 years old and much of its basic infrastructure needs to be replaced. He explained that, unlike other systems, Metro doesn't have the flexibility to perform trackwork because it is a two-track system. He told members that, with the extension of Metro's operating hours on weekends, its longest "window of opportunity" to perform trackwork is on weeknights after the system closes, but that this doesn't give Metro enough time to get sufficient work done during that "window." He said that Metro has been looking to find different and better way to do repairs to keep the system in a state of good repair. He said that Metro is also looking at how it manages its contractors and that Metro can't continue with its current practice of how it schedules work contracts - it needs to get more work done than is able to be done now.

Mr. Couch explained that under the new program, Metro would do all repairs at the same time, under one contract, on one stretch of the system. He said that Metro would start with the oldest part of the system which is the Red Line from Dupont Circle through to Silver Spring, scheduling work zones between interlockings.

He explained that he wanted to get the Council's feedback on how to best inform riders about the work and how communicate with them as the work progresses.

Mr. Couch told members that Metro formulated its contracts so that work wouldn't start until either 8 or 10 p.m., that there is too much happening in the system to start earlier than that. He noted that, in the downtown core, work would probably start around 10 p.m., while outside of the core, work would start around 8 p.m. and would take place Sunday nights through Friday early morning. He said that the intention is to schedule work segments between interlockings.

In response to a question from Ms. Iacomini, Mr. Couch went over the items that would be repaired as part of the program. He explained that some items on the repair list are things customers would see such as the replacement of the scissors gates at the bottom of escalators, while other items such as the replacement of sewage ejectors or other behind-the-scenes items customers wouldn't see.

Ms. Iacomini asked Mr. Couch to address what riders would feel and experience while work is taking place and used the example of work being performed on heating and cooling systems or work requiring single-tracking as something that passengers might notice.

Mr. Couch responded that Metro wouldn't do any station air-conditioning work during the "cooling season." (15 May - 15 October). He said that examples of projects that riders would notice are the replacement of public address systems as well as the replacement of platform tiles and slabs at outdoor stations.

Mr. Couch explained that there is only one section of the first phase that would have an impact on train schedules, which is the section between Farragut North and Judiciary Square. He said work on the other sections would not impact train headways, since trains would be on 15-minute headways while work is taking place.

In response to a question from Ms. Walker, Mr. Couch gave more detailed information on what Metro defines as the "core" of the system on its various lines.

Mr. DeGraff asked Mr. Couch whether Metro has given any thought to announcing which days delays would occur. Mr. Couch responded that Metro would like to improve its website, specifically to add an area to the website that would give specific information on schedule, progress, etc. for the project. He said that Metro is also planning on providing email alerts, PIDS signs, announcements and other types of alerts for riders.

Ms. Dranzo suggested that Metro provide better signage at stations in the affected area.

Ms. Iacomini suggested installing banners or other prominent signage in stations.

Ms. Dranzo also suggested that Metro provide signs on the buses as well on the faregates.

Mr. Couch said that he wanted to make a distinction between the weekend trackwork that is currently taking place and what would take place in the future – he said that the rehabilitation work that he's talking about will be a continuous process. He said that

keeping the system in a state of good repair will be an ongoing effort, which is why Metro has structured it so that it won't be influenced by weekend special events

Ms. Iacomini suggested that, if this work will be continuous, then Metro needs to adjust train and bus schedules accordingly.

Ms. Everline suggested that Metro let riders know what their "non-rail" options are, since some trips may be quicker by bus. She also asked whether all Red Line trains would run all the way from Shady Grove to Glenmont when work would be taking place. Mr. Couch responded that except for the section from Judiciary Square to Farragut North, the work shouldn't have an effect on travel times, though riders will notice that work is taking place.

Ms. Tomaszewski asked if this work means that Metro won't be ever able to increase frequencies during off-peak hours. Mr. Couch said that trains' headways are determined by ridership and if ridership merits changes to headways, then that is an adjustment that Metro can make. She said that Metro needs to emphasize that this work is taking place to ensure that Metro is able to provide regular and reliable service during rush hours.

Robin White noted that these schedules are based on a "best case" scenario and asked how responsive the contractor could be to problems or disruptions to make changes, noting that Orange Line riders suffered through several major disruptions recently. Mr. Couch said that Metro would make adjustments to or suspend repair work to address other service disruptions that may occur. He noted as an example that work on the Green Line is scheduled to take place outside of baseball season to not affect stadium traffic.

In response to a question from Ms. Dranzo, Mr. Couch noted that there will still be some work occurring on weekends, especially when Metro has to replace crossovers.

In response to a question from Mr. Farrell, Mr. Couch said that the recent trackwork on the Blue and Yellow Lines near National Airport was successful, but that it would take a few days before trains would return to full speed over that section of track.

Mr. Cerny asked if the schedule shown on p. 4 or Mr. Couch's presentation is firm. Mr. Couch responded that schedule is about three months off of the one shown in his presentation.

Lillian White asked Mr. Couch if this system is cheaper as opposed to replacing all of the same components (such as lighting) throughout the entire system. Mr. Couch explained that this system will give the contractor a full 8 hours of productive time, so that they will be able to get more work done.

In response to a comment from Lillian White, Mr. Couch said that this is modeled on London's approach to track repairs that allows all work to take place at one time. Mr. Couch noted that this approach was used on the recent trackwork on the Blue and Yellow Line. He said that this approach allows for more work time and increases efficiencies.

Ms. Zinkl asked about passengers' gate-to-gate time and specifically how headways and travel time will be affected. Mr. Couch replied that Metro will be able to maintain existing headways and that passengers' trip time should remain the same with the exception of one section (Farragut North to Judiciary Square).

Lillian White noted that there were delays and disruptions as part of the recent Blue/Yellow Line trackwork. Mr. Couch said that, whenever Metro has to establish a bus bridge, there will be disruptions because buses have much lower capacity than trains.

VIII. Subcommittee Reports:

Ms. Iacomini asked the various Subcommittee chairs to discuss their respective subcommittees.

Dr. Bracmort, the chair of the Bus Subcommittee gave an overview of the kinds of issues that the Subcommittee addresses and noted that Scottie Borders from Metro staff would be coming to discuss bus stop customer information.

Mr. Cerny gave an overview of the Rail Subcommittee and noted that it meets the second Wednesday of each month. He said that he isn't sure what is on the Subcommittee's agenda for its next meeting but that it has been discussing Metro's station repair program. Ms. Iacomini said that this might be an interesting discussion for the Subcommittee to have in light of Mr. Couch's earlier presentation.

Lillian White said that the Budget Subcommittee meets the third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. and will likely be discussing Metro's proposed Capital Budget. She said that if members are interested in serving on the Subcommittee they should let her know. She mentioned some items that were included in the capital budget.

Ms. Iacomini encouraged members to look at Metro's website, specifically at meetings of Metro's Board of Directors and its various Committees. She said that it's interesting to hear the Board's discussion on various issues.

Lillian White said that the Budget Subcommittee won't meet in September but will plan on meeting in October.

IX. New Business:

Dr. Bracmort asked if the RAC is recognized for its suggestions and efforts. Ms. Iacomini asked Mr. Pasek to respond. Mr. Pasek said that the Board Chair does acknowledge the RAC and also is very clear that staff proposals should come before the RAC. Ms. Iacomini noted that Ms. Wilson's presence at this evening's meeting showed that staff is interested in coming to listen to the RAC.

X. Adjournment:

Without objection, Ms. Iacomini adjourned the meeting at 8:33 p.m.