

ITEM 9 - Information

May 17, 2006

Report on Improving MetroAccess Service for People with Disabilities

Staff

Recommendation: Receive briefing on the enclosed interim report released on May 2 by the WMATA ad-hoc committee. A final ad-hoc committee report is expected in June.

Issues: None

Background: At its February 15 meeting, the Board was briefed on the report entitled: "Improving Demand Responsive Services for People with Disabilities in the Washington Region," which includes both long-and short-term recommendations for improving MetroAccess service. The TPB approved transmitting the report to WMATA and requested that the WMATA Board of Directors receive a presentation about its findings and recommendations.

On February 16, the WMATA Board created an ad-hoc committee to address issues raised in the Demand Responsive report, review the MetroAccess service and recommend improvements. Kathy Porter, chair of the TPB Access for All Advisory Committee, is a member of the WMATA ad-hoc committee. The ad-hoc committee established a subcommittee of service professionals and users to complete a review of "best practices" in paratransit services that is chaired by Wendy Klancher, Department of Transportation Planning staff.

MetroAccess Ad Hoc Advisory Committee

Interim Report

Committee Formation

On February, 16, 2006 the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Board of Directors created an ad hoc committee to review WMATA's MetroAccess (MACS) paratransit service. The Board tasked the committee with recommending improvements for MetroAccess service.

The Board requested that the advisory committee complete its report to the full Metro Board in 90 days, and to provide an interim report in 45 days. This report is the ad hoc committee's interim report.

Membership

Metro Board member Dana Kauffman and Riders' Advisory Council Chair Dennis Jaffe serve as co-chairs of the advisory committee. Other members include:

- Board member Jim Graham
- Board member Robert Smith
- Patrick Sheehan, chair of Metro's Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee
- Mary Williams, chair of the Riders' Advisory Council's MetroAccess Subcommittee and a MetroAccess rider
- Penny Reeder, Maryland MetroAccess rider
- Ann Pimley, Virginia MetroAccess rider
- Harold Snider, chair of the Montgomery County Commission for People with Disabilities and a MetroAccess rider
- John R. Hudson, Program Manager of the Disability Services Planning and Development Department for Fairfax County
- Takoma Park Mayor Kathy Porter, who is Chair of the Transportation Planning Board's Access for All Committee which did the recent report on MetroAccess service
- Scott Vining, chair of the Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee MetroAccess Subcommittee

Committee Scope

The committee met on March 6, March 30 and April 24.

The committee agreed to a general scope of work to review existing WMATA MetroAccess services to develop recommendations for improving service. The committee's scope includes:

- 1) Providing a venue for MetroAccess riders to give input into ways to improve service and incorporate rider recommendations**
- 2) Reviewing "Best Practices" for paratransit service and identification of best practices for WMATA to implement**
- 3) Developing a program for improving MetroAccess service and responding to recommendations made by the TPB Access For All (AFA) advisory Committee study "Improving Demand Responsive Services for People with Disabilities in the Washington Region"**

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The ad hoc committee's work in each of these areas has been guided by the priority recommendations of the COG TPB report on improving MetroAccess service. The report identified shortcomings in existing WMATA MetroAccess paratransit services from the perspective of customers, human service agencies, and transportation providers.

The AFA report made 15 recommendations in total, and identified the following as priorities:

- **MetroAccess should improve informational materials to clarify what users can expect** – MetroAccess should provide extensive, well-organized information in multiple, accessible formats, and make this information widely available.
- **MetroAccess should improve its complaint process** – Complaints should be handled entirely within WMATA (not by the provider or broker), should be linked with first-hand observations of specific vehicles and drivers, should be categorized and tracked, and customers should receive meaningful and timely feedback.
- **MetroAccess should ensure that users have direct input** – A new user group should be established to bring together users, transportation providers, and management staff. The user group should be able to communicate directly with the WMATA Board, and should be involved in monitoring customer satisfaction through surveys, a mystery rider program, and performance reports.
- **WMATA should provide premium same-day service to MetroAccess customers** – WMATA should implement a pilot program allowing users to call private transportation companies directly and pay a subsidized fare (typically higher than ADA fare), based on successful programs in Baltimore, Houston, Seattle and Chicago. In addition to providing users with more options, a steady demand for same-day service creates additional incentive for accessible taxicabs and can reduce the demand for traditional paratransit service.
- **Conduct an independent review of MetroAccess by January 2007 with the “check list”** An independent review of MetroAccess should be conducted based on the check list identified in the report, with involvement from persons with disabilities and the TPB Access for All Advisory Committee. The check list is based on management and operational considerations that MetroAccess or other paratransit systems have had difficulties with in the past. The checklist is provided not only to guide a review of the service in 2007, but also to be of assistance to WMATA in ongoing service monitoring and management.

Interim Findings and Status Report

The interim findings and status report for each of the four areas identified in the committee's scope of work are as follows:

- 1) **Providing a venue for MetroAccess riders to give input into ways to improve service and incorporate rider recommendations**

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The Riders' Advisory Council and the Elderly and Disabled Advisory Committee sponsored two forums for MetroAccess riders on Monday, March 13. The forums were held to allow riders to voice their concerns about MetroAccess service.

The forums took place at the Jackson Graham Building at Metro Headquarters. MetroAccess riders and others who are interested in improving MetroAccess largely voiced specific areas of dissatisfaction with the service and made suggestions. Customers also had the opportunity to discuss individual concerns one-on-one with MetroAccess and MV staff.

Additionally, WMATA staff polled a random group of people who attended the forums to determine the best ways to communicate with MetroAccess customers. From this information, staff is developing a new customer communication plan (see section 3).

Comments from the meeting were delivered to the full MetroAccess ad hoc committee at the committee meeting of March 30, 2006. The committee will incorporate the information gathered at these forums into the final report on recommended improvements to MetroAccess service.

The DRAFT "Summary of Comments" from the Riders Advisory Council and the Disabled Advisory Committee is attached as appendix 1.

The ad hoc committee has also created an Interim MetroAccess Board Advisory Team, independent of the ad hoc committee, to review and monitor MACS progress on improving the complaint process and customer service reports and the implementation of the 'best practices' recommendations. The Interim MetroAccess Board Advisory Team has been created, in part, to address the AFA report recommendation for development of a user group that can ensure that users have direct input on MetroAccess. Mary Williams of the Riders Advisory Council and Patrick Sheehan of the Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee will chair this effort.

2) Reviewing "Best Practices" for paratransit service and identification of best practices for WMATA to implement

The committee established a team of service professionals and users to complete a review of "best practices" in paratransit services and to address issues raised in the AFA report. The best practices sub-committee is chaired by Wendy Klancher, from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG). Members of the sub-committee include:

- Dan Dalton, Easter Seals Project ACTION
- Jachebed Jordan, IONA Senior Services
- John Smolenski, MTA Deputy Administrator
- Harold Snider, Montgomery County Commission for People with Disabilities
- Penny Reeder, MetroAccess rider
- Mary Williams, Riders' Advisory Council
- Steve Yaffe, Fastran- Fairfax County
- Carolyn Bellamy, MetroAccess rider
- Elizabeth (Buffy) Ellis, KFH Group
- Christian T. Kent, Director of MetroAccess Services
- Jon Monson, MV Transportation.

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The team is using the Easter Seals Project ACTION brochure on “Innovative Practices in Paratransit Service,” the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) survey and report “Practices in No-Show and Late Cancellation Policies in ADA Paratransit” and the COG TPB report to support its work. The sub-committee is also acquiring information on the policies and practices of various U.S. transit provider paratransit programs. The team is also using, courtesy of COG, the services of Russell Thatcher, of Transystems, Inc., who served as the expert consultant on the COG MetroAccess TPB report.

The scope of the best practices team includes:

- Reservations, scheduling, dispatch and driver/vehicle operations
- Door-to-door v. curb-to-curb service
- No shows and late cancellation policy
- Same day service
- Human service transportation coordination

The team is currently focused on MetroAccess policy and operational practices for reservations, scheduling, dispatch and driver/vehicle operations. Additionally, the team is examining peer transit agency practices in the key policy areas of door-to-door v. curb-to-curb service, no shows and late cancellation policy and same day service. The team has held four meetings. A copy of the best practices team report provided to the ad hoc committee on April 24, 2006 is attached as appendix 2.

3) Developing a program for improving MetroAccess service and responding to recommendations made by the TPB Access for All advisory Committee study “Improving Demand Responsive Services for People with Disabilities in the Washington Region”

WMATA staff, under the guidance and review of the members of the committee, has begun to undertake an extensive review of WMATA MetroAccess customer service practices, and are continuing to develop a series of recommendations to improve the quality of customer service. The goal of this effort is to provide high quality and timely responses to customer questions and complaints and to use information from MetroAccess customers to improve service delivery.

The review is examining areas for improvement within 90-days, 180-days and the long-term. Improvements are based upon industry standards for customer service and customer communication, and respond to requests from current MetroAccess customers for service that is more sensitive to their needs. Recommendations which may be unfunded will need to be addressed in the final report.

WMATA and MetroAccess are developing specific recommendations and actions for consideration to improve the customer complaint process, ensure that customers have direct input and improve customer informational materials, including:

- Revising customer complaint process to ensure appropriate and effective management and oversight controls, including timely and substantive responses to complaints
- Developing standards of interaction that improve sensitivity to customer needs
- Developing a recurring sensitivity training regimen

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- Improving customer service employee familiarity and knowledge of MetroAccess policies and services, and standards for customer service related to customer service employee familiarity and knowledge should also be established, and should include training and on-going monitoring of customer service employees
- Developing MetroAccess “specialists” in customer service
- Improving all customer service scripts and standardizing all scripts along all points of customer contact, including reservation, follow-up, where’s my ride, and customer service calls
- Developing a process to inform customer service agents of events that impact customer (ie: system failure, power outage, etc...)
- Installing a call monitoring system for MV phone system and improved monitoring of customer service agents and dispatchers
- Adding all new MetroAccess customers to WMATA Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database
- Periodically reconciling MV and CRM customer databases
- Integrating MV and WMATA customer databases
- Creating “How Do We Rate” customer survey cards in accessible formats to be used by MetroAccess for review and action, with review and assistance from the advisory/team users group
- Creating customer satisfaction surveys for customers upon completion of reservation and dispatch communication, with implementation review and assistance from the advisory/team users group
- Acknowledging written complaints upon receipt
- Developing and including an accessible format Customer Bill of Rights in all vehicles
- Creating a quarterly newsletter
- Re-developing the Users Pocket Guide reflecting changes in policy and practice
- Strengthening the new customer enrollment process to provide better orientation for new MetroAccess customers about the service, including their rights and responsibilities, and opportunities for providing feedback.

Interim Report Conclusion

The MetroAccess ad hoc committee is focused on the development of critical, achievable and sustainable improvements to the delivery of WMATA’s paratransit service. It is especially important that these improvements be delivered consistently to MetroAccess customers so that gaps between the program's standards and the program's actual operations be eliminated.

The work of the committee to date has identified a number of potential changes and improvements that can be made to enhance this service over the short, intermediate and long-term. The committee intends to continue its efforts and to provide a final report, including specific policy, programmatic and operational recommendations with cost analysis where applicable, to the WMATA Board of Directors in June.

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APPENDIX I

RAC MetroAccess Public Forum
Monday, March 13, 2006
Summary of Comments

Executive Summary:

Nearly 60 MetroAccess customers or family members spoke at the MetroAccess Public Forum held by the RAC on Monday, March 13, 2006. Speakers addressed the need to improve communication and overall customer service, create more efficient and effective scheduling and reservation processes, and ways to improve program management. Details of complaints and suggestions are presented below in the following topic areas: Scheduling, Reservations, Drivers, Communication and Overall Customer Service, Program Management and Recertification. The five COG Priority Recommendations are included in the appropriate topic area.

Details:

1. Scheduling -- Complaints

- a. Trips are scheduled too close together.
- b. Drivers say their schedules are impossible to keep
- c. Poor routing - circuitous and goes back and forth (3)
- d. Schedulers and drivers don't have a working knowledge of the region (2)
- e. Pick up times are too far ahead of the needed arrival time. Customers often are left waiting outside and unprotected. (3)
- f. Trapeze scheduling system isn't working well
- g. Shared ride trips take customers way out of the way and cause them to ensure physically uncomfortably long trips
- h. Long wait times for pick up (2)
- i. When customers are delivered late to their destination, no accommodation is made to pick them up at a later time, e.g., for doctor's appointments, dialysis, dining out

2. Scheduling - Suggestions

COG Priority Recommendation:

– WMATA should provide premium same-day service to MetroAccess customers

- a. Schedule shared trips on a regional or geographic basis (2)
- b. Establish a standard of "critical scheduling"
- c. Need to look at how rides are being dispatched
- d. Include apartment numbers on the manifest
- e. "Re-visit" scheduled pickup times after 4:30 p.m. each day with the intent of revising scheduled pick up times for the next day so that the pick up time is closer to the needed arrival time.

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- f. Set parameters for routing that include
 - i. Limits by mileage or time on the length of a shared trip
 - ii. Route does not go back and forth, passing the original pick up location
 - iii. Route does not go perpendicular to the original pick up location

3. Reservations -- Complaints

- a. Agents are nonchalant, i.e., not willing to resolve needs on the first call.
- b. Reservation information is unreliable, i.e., it changes after the reservation is made.
- c. Customers are told that addresses don't exist, including government office buildings (2)
- d. Drivers don't question information on the manifest, even when it differs from what is actually happening.
- e. Reservation agents don't make sure address is correct, then driver goes to the wrong address and customer is documented as a no show.
- f. Reservation process takes too long
- g. Should be allowed to make more than 1 reservation at a time
- h. Difficulty/unsuccessful in setting up subscription service (2)
- i. Matching the vehicle to need
 - i. Customer requires a sedan, but is sent a van
 - ii. Customer requires a van (for 3 customers) but is sent a sedan

4. Reservations - Suggestions

- a. Cancellation policy needs to have the flexibility that accommodates the regular lives of its customers.
- b. Change pick-up procedure for dialysis patients, e.g., call ahead to see if they are ready.
- c. Consider offering non-shared rides
- d. More people answering telephones for reservations, etc. (2)

5. Drivers -- Complaints

- a. Drivers arrive before the ½ hour window, alert the customer they are there, and then leave in 10 minutes if the customer doesn't come to the vehicle.
- b. Dispatchers say things to drivers about the customers with the customer in the vehicle. (2)
- c. Drivers ignore instructions on the manifest, i.e., to assist in getting in/out of vehicle and with groceries (2)
- d. Drivers don't speak English well enough to communicate with customers
- e. Drivers tried to drop off customer at the wrong place, even when the customer tells them it's the wrong place.

6. Drivers - Suggestions

- a. Use the same driver for the same customers
- b. Drivers should identify themselves for blind customers
- c. Establish a way to identify MetroAccess vehicles among others that may provide similar services to nursing homes
- d. Use a new procedures to identify when vehicle arrives

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7. Communication and Overall Customer Service -- Complaints

- a. New policies were implemented on January 15 without appropriate communication.
- b. No response after a complaint is made (3)

8. Communication and Overall Customer Service - Suggestions

COG Priority Recommendation:

- MetroAccess should improve its complaint process
- MetroAccess should improve informational materials to clarify what users can expect
- MetroAccess should ensure that users have direct input

- a. Improve communication with the disabled community, e.g., fares, subscription service
- b. Public Participation
 - i. Hold these meetings regionally (2)
 - ii. Include MetroAccess changes in public hearings scheduled for fares and other items
- c. Customer service
 - i. Managers need to establish customer service standards and maintain them
 - ii. Provide on-going sensitivity training to eliminate discourteous employees
 - iii. Require employees to use the service so they understand it better (2)

9. Program management -- Complaints

- a. The program's managers don't understand the needs of the riders and contract requirements
- b. Not sure we are meeting ADA standards for service, including the length of time customers are in the vehicle (2)
- c. When the vehicle doesn't show up as scheduled, the reservation is changed to match the pick up time. (3)

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10. Program management - Suggestions

COG Priority Recommendation:

- Conduct an independent review of MetroAccess by January 2007 with the “check list”
 - a. Hire a separate contractor to monitor MV’s performance
 - b. Review contract and practices to ensure ADA requirements are being met, especially for
 - i. Length of trip (time)
 - ii. Determination of eligibility
 - c. Use “street supervisors” to help out drivers and maintain schedules (2)

11. Recertification Process seems to be aimed at reducing the number of people eligible to use MetroAccess

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APPENDIX II

Status Report on Best Practices Peer Review Working Group
MetroAccess Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee
April 24, 2006

Working Group Scope

- Reservations, Scheduling, Dispatch and Vehicle Operations
- Door-to-Door Service
- Changes to the MetroAccess no-show and late cancellation policy
- Human Service Transportation Coordination
- Same-Day Service (Pilot)

Observations

- Difficulties with the transition are a *symptom* of long-standing structural *problem*
- Unusual to have one contract and “Turn key” operation -- Multi-contract strategy utilized in New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, Denver and Seattle
- More oversight and management of contract key to improvement

Peer Review: Reservations, Scheduling, Dispatch and Vehicle Operations

- A 2005 report* found out of 134 agencies surveyed:
 - 59% Take reservations in house
 - 60% Do scheduling in house
 - 54% Handle dispatching in house

*Source: TCRP Synthesis 60. *Practices in No-Show and Late Cancellation Policies for ADA Paratransit. February 2005.*

Reservations, Scheduling, Dispatch and Vehicle Operations

- Improve customer service and communications
- Ensure adequate, experienced and stable staffing
- Utilize scheduling and software strategies
- Strengthen contract oversight and monitoring

Preliminary Recommendation

1. Improve customer service and communication
 - Need for a “Customer-First” Focus

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- Hold off implementing more advanced technology (i.e. web-based reservations) until operation is running smoother
 - Ensure stranded passengers calling after normal business hours have the option to quickly contact an employee
2. Ensure adequate, experienced and stable staffing
- WMATA should require MV to increase staffing levels
 - Each MV scheduler manages between 70 and 125 runs
 - Best Practice: Scheduler should be managing about 40-50 runs
 - Ensure pay and benefits attract experienced and stable workforce
3. Utilize scheduling and software strategies
- Reduce 14-day advanced reservation window to 7 days
 - Keep vehicles and drivers in familiar geographic areas
4. Strengthen contract oversight and monitoring
- WMATA does not have the capability at this time to verify performance data or monitor service quality
 - Increase the number of staff in the Office of MetroAccess to allow for:
 - Performance data verification
 - Service quality monitoring
 - Customer service
 - Complaint resolution and response
 - Ensure adequate fleet spare ratio
 - Industry Standard is 20%
 - WMATA ratio is 10%