

NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION TRANSPORTATION PLANNING BOARD



Improving Demand Responsive Services for People with Disabilities

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

THE STUDY STEERING COMMITTEE

Chaired by TPB Member Kathy Porter, Mayor, Takoma Park, MD.
Committee members:

- AFA members including persons with disabilities who use paratransit;
- Human service agencies;
- Office of MetroAccess and local paratransit providers;
- Easter Seals Project ACTION and the Community Transportation Association

WHAT IS THE AFA?

The Access for All (AFA) Committee advises the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) on issues and services important to persons with disabilities, low income communities and minority communities.

For more info:
www.mwcog.org/transportation/committee/afa

STUDY BACKGROUND

For several years, customers of MetroAccess, the Washington region’s transit service for people with disabilities who are unable to use the bus and rail system, have expressed concerns about the quality and reliability of the service.

These concerns prompted the Access for All (AFA) Advisory Committee of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) to call for a regional study to identify ways to improve paratransit services. The study was conducted between April and December of 2005 under the guidance of a study steering committee comprised of a wide variety of stakeholders.

This publication provides an overview of **the five priority recommendations** as well as other key recommendations for improving service and efficiency of paratransit, specifically MetroAccess.

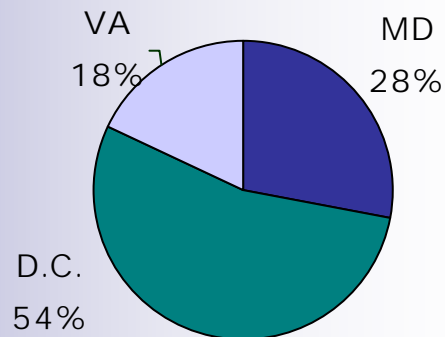


Photo Credit: Easter Seals Project ACTION.

Demand Responsive services, also called paratransit, are provided to people unable to use the bus or rail system because of a disability. These services are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

WHO USES METROACCESS?

- 24% are wheelchair users
- 64% are female
- 51% are African American
- Median income is \$24,000
- Median age is 60



Source: WMATA Survey, December 2002.

MetroAccess Users by State

1. IMPROVE INFORMATION ON METROACCESS



MetroAccess should provide extensive, well-organized information in multiple, accessible formats, and make this information widely available.

2. IMPROVE THE METROACCESS 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, and should be categorized and tracked. Customers should receive meaningful and timely feedback.



MetroAccess customers feel that their concerns are not being heard or responded to.

3. CREATE AN EFFECTIVE METROACCESS USERS GROUP

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.

4. PROVIDE PREMIUM SAME-DAY TAXI SERVICE TO METROACCESS USERS

WMATA should implement a pilot program allowing users to call taxi companies directly and pay a subsidized fare (higher than the MetroAccess 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.



5. CONDUCT ON-GOING REVIEW OF METROACCESS

An independent review of MetroAccess should be conducted by January 2007 with involvement from persons with disabilities and the TPB Access for All Advisory Committee.

The review should use the checklist identified by the study that is based on management and operational considerations that MetroAccess or other paratransit systems have had difficulties with in the past. The review would establish a baseline for future reviews. The checklist is provided not only to guide a review of the service, but also as a tool for WMATA in ongoing service monitoring and management.

CREATE A DOOR-TO-DOOR SERVICE POLICY—

To respond to the need of some people with disabilities to have additional service beyond “curb-to-curb”, and to respond to recent FTA guidance on “origin to destination” service, WMATA should create and implement a door-to-door service policy.

ADOPT A MORE USER-FRIENDLY “NO-SHOW” AND “LATE CANCELLATION” POLICY— The policy should consider the percentage of trips missed, not just the absolute number; define late cancellations as one or two hours before the scheduled trip; not count trips missed for reasons beyond the rider’s control; and inform riders of their right to appeal.

PROVIDE CLEAR PUBLIC INFORMATION ABOUT CHANGES TO THE ELIGIBILITY PROCESS AND GET FEEDBACK FROM USERS—

Clear information about the changes to the eligibility process should be readily available to clarify the goals of the changes. Users should have the opportunity to comment and understand what will change, when and for what reason.

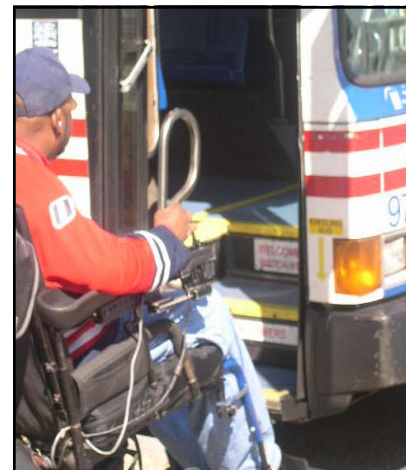
USE INCENTIVES AND SUBSIDIES TO ENCOURAGE MORE WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE TAXICABS— Local governments should establish a pilot program to provide the financial subsidies and incentives necessary to encourage taxis and other transportation firms to provide a sufficient supply of accessible service.

PROVIDE SEVERAL DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRAVEL TRAINING, SUITED TO DIFFERENT USERS, AND MAKE THESE SERVICES WIDELY AVAILABLE— WMATA and local transit agencies should coordinate the provision of travel training to people with a wide range of disabilities.

IMPROVE BUS AND RAIL ACCESSIBILITY— Transit agencies and local governments should provide information on accessible bus stops, improve pedestrian access to bus stops, purchase more low-floor buses, and thoroughly train bus and rail staff on disability issues and ADA requirements.



MetroAccess service is currently “curb-to-curb” but some customers need door-to-door service.



Many, but not all of the region’s buses are wheelchair accessible.



Accessible sidewalks and bus stops are needed to provide people with disabilities full access to the bus and rail system.

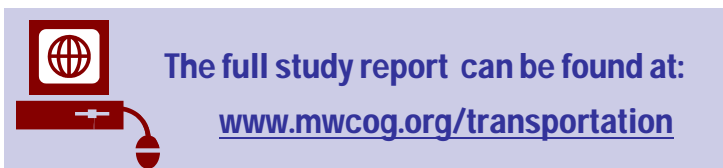
COORDINATION OF SPECIALIZED SERVICES

In addition to MetroAccess, more than 60 local government and non-profit programs provide specialized transportation services for people with disabilities. Medicaid is the second largest provider of specialized transportation services, next to MetroAccess. The study recommends that:

LOCAL JURISDICTIONS SHOULD EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

In addition to the coordination that is already occurring at the local level, human service agencies and transit providers could consider coordinating regularly scheduled paratransit trips and broadening local alternatives to MetroAccess; and

THE REGION SHOULD EXPLORE ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, such as a regional information clearinghouse and an accessible taxi program, through regional Human Service Transportation Coordination planning efforts.



"We are not doing this for us, but for you. As you age, you might need a wheelchair. Your vision could get worse."

Dr. Raymond "Bud" Keith, AFA Member
TPB Disability Awareness Event, October 2004



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