

## **ITEM 9 - Action**

January 21, 2004

Approval of Letter to the  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)  
Transmitting the TPB Access for All Advisory (AFA) Committee's  
Recommendations for Transit Services for People With Disabilities

### **Staff**

**Recommendation:** Review and approve the enclosed letter from TPB Chairman Zimmerman to the Chair of the Board of Directors of WMATA transmitting the AFA Committee's recommendations for transit services for people with disabilities.

**Issues:** None

**Background:** At the December 17 meeting, the Board was briefed on the activities and recommendations of the AFA Committee regarding fixed-route transit and paratransit service improvements for people with disabilities.

**DRAFT***District of Columbia**Bowie**College Park**Frederick County**Gaithersburg**Greenbelt**Montgomery County**Prince George's County**Rockville**Takoma Park**Alexandria**Arlington County**Fairfax**Fairfax County**Falls Church**Loudoun County**Manassas**Prince William County*

January 21, 2004

Mr. Robert Smith, Chairman  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Board of Directors  
600 Fifth Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Recommendations on Transit Services for People with Disabilities

Dear Mr. Smith:

The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) has recently accepted two recommendations for improving transit services for people with disabilities developed through its Access for All (AFA) Advisory Committee, chaired by the Honorable Kathy Porter, Mayor of Takoma Park and TPB member. The AFA Advisory Committee includes representatives from low-income communities, minority communities and people with disabilities. The TPB created this committee to advise it on issues, programs and services important to these groups.

The TPB is transmitting to the WMATA Board of Directors for its consideration the enclosed AFA recommendations regarding bus and rail services in the region as well as a proposal for a study of MetroAccess.

Recently, the AFA committee was invited to participate in the newly created WMATA Regional Paratransit Task Force that will recommend actions on MetroAccess eligibility and methods to market transit services to persons with disabilities. The TPB looks forward to a continuing dialogue with WMATA on ways to provide people with disabilities greater freedom and mobility in the Washington region.

Sincerely,

Christopher Zimmerman  
Chairman  
National Capital Region  
Transportation Planning Board

TPB Access for All Advisory Committee  
Comments and Recommendations  
on WMATA's Efforts to Mainstream People with Disabilities  
on the Bus and Rail System

December 2003

---

Overall Comments

- The TPB Access for All (AFA) Advisory Committee has reviewed WMATA's *Mainstreaming Individuals with Disabilities Onto MetroBus and MetroRail* report and commends WMATA's efforts to inform and train people with disabilities to use the fixed-route system, MetroBus and MetroRail.
- The report is very thorough, provides an excellent summary of the importance of mainstreaming options, and includes many good recommendations for increasing the MetroBus and MetroRail ridership by individuals with disabilities.
- The AFA supports the mainstreaming effort and the use of travel training to help more people with disabilities use the fixed route system.
- The committee recognizes that serving a large number of people with disabilities in a region as expansive as metropolitan Washington is a challenge. Further complicating this challenge is the geographic dispersment of people with disabilities, and the number of different types of disabilities-- physical, hidden, cognitive, hearing and visually impaired – each with different transportation challenges to address.
- AFA would like to assist WMATA in the mainstreaming efforts – particularly the mainstreaming option “Customer Support Services”. Recommendations under this option include improved print information that “use pictures, symbols and simple text...”. Tactile and auditory maps, improved website accessibility, fare incentives, and service enhancements are also recommendations the AFA strongly endorses as important for mainstreaming.
- Many of these recommendations would help attract and retain the general public and people with limited English skills as well as people with disabilities.
- The report does not reference the issue of how complaints from persons with disabilities will be administered. These persons may believe they have been discriminated against or believe WMATA is not adhering to ADA requirements in terms of fixed route service. The AFA recommends that WMATA clearly delineate who in the agency administers and resolves ADA discrimination complaints—for both fixed route service and Metro Access--and the manner in which this information will be disseminated to the public.

## Concerns

- The AFA would like to emphasize the feedback from community-based and governmental organizations that were interviewed for the “Mainstreaming” study. These organizations have commented that critical improvements to the fixed-route system are needed if WMATA intends to attract and retain customers with disabilities.
- In particular, the AFA is concerned about the reliability of the fixed-route system for people with disabilities. Suggested improvements that would increase the reliability and accessibility of the system cited by these groups in the report include:
  - The elevators and escalators should work routinely in the MetroRail system;
  - Increased lighting and additional signage at MetroBus and MetroRail stations is important;
  - Enhanced awareness and sensitivity towards people with disabilities from transit employees is needed;
  - Improved location, access and maintenance of bus stops are important;
  - The bus stops and train stops need to be consistently and clearly announced;
  - Transit information needs to be improved and easier to access; and
  - Focus groups with disability partners were recommended as a way to collect information on needed system improvements.
- The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has indicated that a recurring complaint FTA gets is that riders with disabilities waiting at a bus stop are told lifts are not working and such riders have to catch the next bus. The AFA asks that WMATA operators be reminded that it is their responsibility that buses are in working order (with a properly operating lift), and that operators must offer lifts at bus stops and assist persons with disabilities.
- The AFA committee stresses the importance of coordinating with the other transit systems in the region on travel training and additional mainstreaming efforts. Many people access the Metro system from local transit systems such as the Fairfax Connector, Ride-On, the Bus and ART. Regional coordination on travel training could ensure that more customers with disabilities are reached. Customers should be knowledgeable on the full range of transit options available and each system should be accessible and uniform for people with disabilities. Fairfax County is reaching out to people with disabilities with a bus that has been designed to train people with disabilities on how to use the Fairfax Connector system.
- Feeder bus services are particularly important for assisting disabled customers in accessing the Metro system. Feeder bus services should be expanded, and coordinated with the local jurisdictions.
- There is growing evidence that deficiencies in the pedestrian environment, particularly at street crossings, render some fixed routes inaccessible. Crossing streets can be a real barrier to using transit.

- Local jurisdictions and transportation agencies need to assist with the mainstreaming effort—especially in helping to ensure that bus stops are accessible and accommodating to people with disabilities.
- The results from the bus stop studies that several local jurisdictions have conducted could be useful to WMATA in assessing the accessibility of bus stops for people with disabilities. The AFA also encourages all the large counties to conduct such studies.
- WMATA should measure the outcome of the mainstreaming efforts. The measures to be used to test for success need to be carefully defined to reflect the different types of disabilities.
- WMATA’s travel training program should describe the full range of transit options available to people with disabilities – MetroAccess, Metrobus and other bus systems, and Metrorail. As stated earlier, the travel training should be coordinated with the local jurisdictions and other transit systems.
- Travel training should be prioritized for those who need it the most.
- Travel training efforts also need to educate non-disabled transit riders who play a major role in making the fixed-route system easier to use for disabled riders. Customers need to be reminded that priority seating and elevators are for people with disabilities and they need to allow space and time for people with disabilities to board and exit trains and buses.

#### AFA Recommendations

### I. **Coordinate with Other Bus Systems and Improve Reliability of MetroBus and MetroRail**

- **Coordinate with other systems.** Mainstreaming efforts should be coordinated with county and city transit systems throughout the region. Many people access the WMATA system from the local systems, such as Ride-On and Fairfax Connector, which need to be fully accessible and reliable for the “Metro is Accessible” project to be effective.
- **Improve reliability** of the WMATA system to attract and retain the targeted riders. The AFA fully supports recommendations in the mainstreaming report to increase the reliability of train and bus systems. These specific recommendations include:
  - Ensure that elevators and escalators work routinely;
  - Increase lighting and signage;
  - Improve accessibility to bus stops;
  - Ensure that bus drivers call out stops and have working wheelchair lifts; and
  - Improve transit information.

In addition to helping people with disabilities, these improvements are also important for people with limited English skills, those traveling with small children, bicyclists and the general public.

## **II. Conduct a Study of MetroAccess**

- Given the success of the WMATA “Mainstreaming” study, a study of Metro’s paratransit service should now be conducted to identify ways to serve the greatest number of people with the current budget. The study should examine if there are there more cost-effective ways to better serve more people with disabilities who cannot use the fixed route system.
- The study should be conducted in the same time frame and budget as the “Mainstreaming” study.

This recommendation comes from budgetary concerns highlighted recently in the press that have serious implications for current and future users of MetroAccess, which is the only option for a significant and growing number of people with disabilities. This makes the timely completion of this study even more critical.