

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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April 7, 2010

Mr. Peter Benjamin, Chairman
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Board of Directors
600 5th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Subject: National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) Access for All
Advisory Committee Concerns and Recommendations for the FY2011
MetroAccess Budget

Dear Chairman Benjamin:

In December of 2009, I wrote to the WMATA Board as Chair of the TPB's Access for All (AFA) Advisory Committee regarding concerns committee members had about the FY2011 WMATA budget discussions on MetroAccess. Since that time, the AFA has held two special meetings on proposed policy options for MetroAccess and have the following concerns and recommendations to share with the Board. An attachment provides further details on the concerns that led to the recommendations.

The AFA understands that the MetroAccess budget needs to be reduced by \$10 million because of the \$189 million shortfall in the FY2011 budget. The AFA does not take issue with the fact that WMATA is dealing with a serious financial shortfall, but does believe that the MetroAccess and the Metrobus proposals are not the most efficient way to reduce costs with the least impact to the rider.

To reduce the FY2011 MetroAccess budget by \$10 million, the **AFA recommends** the following:

1. Increase taxi usage for MetroAccess trips by 10 to 20 percent (savings could range from \$3.8 to \$7.7 million annually);
2. Self-insure the MetroAccess fleet (WMATA staff estimated a savings of approximately \$2 million annually);
3. Improve the capacity of MetroAccess's eligibility certification process to reduce the number of people being given presumptive eligibility; then after public vetting has

occurred, introduce conditional eligibility (WMATA staff has estimated changing to conditional eligibility could save between \$3 to \$5 million annually); and

4. Increase the MetroAccess flat fare and the premium fare for service outside $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile (but not by 300 or 400 percent as proposed; a more reasonable fare increase would be the same as Metrorail and Metrobus, 15 or 20 percent).

Other Recommendations

5. WMATA should immediately begin to develop a plan to restructure the MetroAccess contract structure to lessen the concentration of responsibilities and operating functions in one company.
6. WMATA should carefully review the proposed Metrobus changes to ensure that low-income bus riders are the least affected by the service reductions and fare increases.

The AFA also stresses that MetroAccess costs should be put in context with other growing costs in the WMATA budget such as health care, pension and liability insurance costs. In addition, MetroAccess costs should be put in context of the **benefits** of helping the region's most vulnerable populations. Growth in the number of MetroAccess trips means more people with disabilities are working, getting medical care, and experiencing freedom and mobility they would otherwise not have.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns and recommendations. The AFA looks forward to continued discussions about the challenges of providing accessible transportation to traditionally-disadvantaged population groups.

Sincerely,



Supervisor Catherine Hudgins
Chair, TPB Access for All Advisory Committee

Attachment

cc: Christian Kent, Assistant General Manager, Department of Access Services

ATTACHMENT: TPB Access for All (AFA) Advisory Committee Concerns and Recommendations on Proposed MetroAccess Policy Changes for the FY2011 Budget

<p>A. Align MetroAccess service area with the ADA definition and/or charge a premium</p>	<p>Option 1. Align MetroAccess service area to the ADA definition of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile around existing fixed-route services and service by day and time. This means that no paratransit service would be offered for trips that either start or end beyond $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of existing fixed-route services nor during days and times where fixed route is not operating. <i>Estimated cost savings: \$2.4 million annually.</i></p> <p>Option 2. Align MetroAccess service area with ADA definition as in Option 1, but charge for the service provided beyond the ADA corridor with a premium fare added to the base fare depending on the existing zone structure (400% increase from existing zone fare charges). <i>Estimated cost savings: \$330,000 annually.</i></p>
<p>AFA Concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the MetroAccess service area to the strict $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile around fixed-route services, or increasing the premium zone fare by 400% does not save enough to make it worth burdening riders getting this service, most of whom live in economically- disadvantaged areas in Prince George’s County. • The savings of Option 1 (\$2.4 million) represents only 2.3% of the MetroAccess proposed FY2011 budget (\$103 million). The benefits that MetroAccess customers receive by being able to travel outside the $\frac{3}{4}$ of mile area and travel during longer time periods are greater than the small amount of savings. • Customers have chosen places to live based on the availability of MetroAccess service, and the availability of affordable housing which tends not to be located near fixed-route services. • Metro could eliminate MetroAccess service to Zone 4 (9 miles beyond the corridor) now so that people making residential location decisions don’t have an expectation that MetroAccess will be available. • The AFA supports raising the premium zone for service outside the $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile area, but believes a 400% increase is too much. Most MetroAccess customers live below the poverty line and people with disabilities have two times the unemployment rate as able-bodied individuals.
<p>AFA Recommendation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The WMATA Board should not implement Option 1 nor Option 2. The AFA supports raising the premium zone fare but not by 400%. • WMATA should look at other ways to reduce costs, such as using more taxis which can save <i>more</i> than these options combined without burdening the rider. For example, if 20% of MetroAccess trips were provided by taxis¹, WMATA could save approximately \$7.7 million annually (assumes a \$20.00 average taxi trip cost)¹. • The AFA supports the increase in local jurisdictions subsidies to help defray some of the MetroAccess costs.

¹ Six to seven percent of MetroAccess trips were provided by taxis as found in the TPB *Independent Review of WMATA’s MetroAccess Service*. Final Report. Prepared by TranSystems, Inc. and KFH Group. November 25, 2008. Page 1-13.

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<p>B. Align the MetroAccess Fare Structure to the Maximum Allowed Under the ADA</p>	<p>The travel path between origin and destination for each paratransit trip will be measured against Metro’s Trip Planner to identify what fixed-route services would be available and required to provide a comparable trip. Comparable trip shall be defined as any combination of available bus and/or rail services that would facilitate travel between the requested origin and destination for the shortest possible duration. The fare for the paratransit trip will then be calculated as twice the fare of the comparable trip. <i>Estimated cost savings: \$2.4 to \$4.6 million annually</i></p>
<p>AFA Concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking MetroAccess riders to pay double the fare of the shortest possible trip, could result in them having to pay double the fare of the most expensive possible trip (since Metrorail will likely be the shortest). • The AFA has previously stated that the cost of riding Metrorail is too high for many transit-dependent individuals in the region, therefore many individuals rely solely on bus service for their transportation needs. • Asking MetroAccess riders, many of whom have fixed, limited incomes to pay substantially more for their trips could be an overwhelming burden. • The increase in MetroAccess fares for some trips could be 300% which is much greater than the 15% or 20% increase proposed for Metrorail and Metrobus, respectivelyⁱⁱ. • The proposed fare structure could be very confusing to MetroAccess customers, particularly those with cognitive disabilities. • In addition, the administrative burden to WMATA in implementing this change outweighs the potential cost savings. Since each fare would have to be calculated based on the comparable fixed-route shortest trip, reservationists may have to spend more time with each call and drivers would have a more complicated fare collection.
<p>AFA Recommendation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The WMATA Board should not adopt this change and keep the flat fare structure in place. However, the AFA recognizes the serious financial situation that WMATA is in and does support a reasonable MetroAccess fare increase in the flat fare. • WMATA should carefully review the proposed Metrobus changes to ensure that low-income bus riders are the least affected by the service reductions and fare increases.

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<p>C. Limit the Free Ride Program to Only Conditionally-Eligible MetroAccess Customers</p>	<p>Currently, all registered MetroAccess customers are permitted to ride free without limitation on Metrobus and Metrorail. The proposed change would limit this privilege to those customers who are found to be conditionally eligible for MetroAccess paratransit service. Conditional eligibility shall be defined as eligibility for paratransit service for certain trips in which prevailing conditions would make use of fixed-route service impossible for the customer in question. <i>Estimated Cost Savings (largely from allowing Conditional Eligibility): \$3 to \$5 million annually</i></p>
<p>AFA Concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This proposal is contradictory to the goals of WMATA in reducing MetroAccess demand and costs. Assuming that the Free Ride Program shifted 10% of MetroAccess trips to fixed route, the annual savings of this program is approximately \$1.5 million making the program a win-win for both WMATA and customersⁱⁱⁱ. • Enabling MetroAccess customers to ride Metrobus or Metrorail, where possible for the customer, is a cheaper and a more convenient alternative. • To take this option away from the MetroAccess riders appears to be counterproductive, in that it would force MetroAccess riders to always use MetroAccess, where the per-trip costs of the service are higher than on the fixed-route. <p>Conditional Eligibility The committee has the following concerns about the eligibility certification process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The TPB Independent review found that WMATA does not have the capacity to process all of the MetroAccess applications received within the ADA required 21-day timeframe under the current eligibly process. • WMATA needs to ensure that it has the capability to determine conditional eligibility on a trip-by- trip basis. • WMATA must implement and apply conditional eligibility carefully and ensure that the process accounts for people with conditions that can fluctuate anytime, such as Multiple Sclerosis.
<p>AFA Recommendation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Free Ride Program should remain available for all MetroAccess customers. • WMATA needs to increase the capacity of the current eligibility certification process before they have the institutional and technical ability to implement conditional eligibility. • To save limited resources, WMATA should immediately simplify the certification process for individuals with permanent disabilities.

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Endnote i.

Estimated Cost Saving If 20% of MetroAccess trips are Provided by Taxis

20% of Monthly MetroAccess trips (180,000)=
36,000

Per trip cost for Taxi 36,000 X \$20 =	Per Trip Cost for MetroAccess 36,000 X \$38 =	Cost Savings (monthly)
\$720,000.00	\$1,368,000.00	\$648,000.00

Annual Savings (\$648k X 12)

\$7,776,000.00

If 10% of trips are Provided by Taxis the Annual Cost Savings would be **\$3.8 million**

Assumptions

Average Per trip MetroAccess Taxi cost is \$20.

This assumption is based on:

“A Survey on the use of Taxis in Paratransit Programs” found that taxi-provided ADA paratransit trips cost less than \$20. Dec 2008. Easter Seals Project ACTION.

TCRP Report 121 “Toolkit for Integrating Non-Dedicated Vehicles in Paratransit Service” found ADA paratransit taxi costs to be approximately \$14.00 to \$16.00 per trip.

Endnote ii.

If the comparable fixed route fare is \$5.45, the MetroAccess fare would be \$10.90. This is a 318% increase over the current \$2.50 MetroAccess fare.

Endnote iii.

Estimated Cost Savings Resulting From the Free Ride Program

In FY2009 402,345 MetroAccess Customer Trips were Taken on Metrorail and Metrobus

If 5% of Trips Are Diverted From MetroAccess to Fixed-Route

Per trip cost for MetroAccess	Number of Trips Diverted From MetroAccess to Fixed Route 402, 345 X .05 =	Cost Savings (Annually)
\$38	20,117	\$764,455.50

If 10% of Trips are Diverted From MetroAccess to Fixed-Route

Per trip cost for MetroAccess	Number of Trips Diverted From MetroAccess to Fixed Route 402, 345 X .10 =	Cost Savings (Annually)
\$38	40,235	\$1,528,911.00