

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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Memorandum

TO: Transportation Planning Board

FROM: Wendy Klancher
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SUBJECT: Results from the TPB Independent Review of MetroAccess

DATE: November 13, 2008

This memorandum provides a brief summary of a comprehensive report prepared by TranSystems and the KFH Group entitled “Independent Review of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority’s (WMATA) MetroAccess Service” dated November 11, 2008. The full report, which provides many more detailed findings and recommendations than are provided in this summary, is enclosed with this mail-out item.

Background

The TPB’s Access for All Advisory Committee has had long standing concerns with service quality offered by MetroAccess, the door-to-door service provided to individuals who because of a disability are unable to use the bus and Metrorail system. These concerns led to the TPB conducting a study on demand responsive services in 2006, entitled “Improving Demand Responsive Services for People with Disabilities in the Washington Region”. This report was presented to the TPB on February 15, 2006 and transmitted by the TPB to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Board.

During 2006, WMATA and MetroAccess riders experienced a difficult transition to the new MetroAccess contractor, MV Transportation. As a result, the WMATA Board created an ad-hoc committee to look at how the recommendations from the TPB study could be implemented to improve the service. WMATA implemented several of the recommendations from the TPB study, including the change from curb-to-curb to door-to-door service. One of the priority recommendations from the TPB Demand Responsive Study was that the TPB conduct an independent review of management and operational issues that MetroAccess has had challenges with in the past.

How the Review was Conducted

The independent review was overseen by the TPB Access for All (AFA) Advisory Committee, which is chaired by TPB member Catherine Hudgins, and the TPB Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force, which is chaired by TPB member Timothy Lovain. These committees identified issues that MetroAccess riders continue to face, and helped create the scope of work for a review which focused on four areas: 1) Service Quality and Performance Monitoring; 2) Rider Input and Customer Service 3) Policy and Planning and 4) Eligibility Determinations.

The review was conducted between May and September 2008 by TranSystems and the KFH Group, and included interviews with stakeholders and a two day on-site review of MetroAccess in July. WMATA's Department of Access Service and MV Transportation participated fully in the review. Three joint meetings of the AFA Committee and the Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force were held to discuss the review and prioritize significant findings and recommendations.

Significant Findings:

Of the improvements identified in the report, the following four items are some of the most significant. In general, riders commented that they have noticed these improvements in their experiences with MetroAccess:

- MetroAccess on-time performance (for pick-ups), missed trips and no-shows has improved over the last year;
- Staffing levels for reservationists, schedulers, dispatchers and contract monitoring has vastly improved since 2006;
- Customer complaints are being tracked and responded to more efficiently than they were; and
- WMATA is doing a better job in being clear with customers about MetroAccess policies, as shown, for example, in the outreach efforts done for the door-to-door service.

However, riders also commented that they still have concerns about long trips, untimely pick-ups and inexperienced drivers. Some of these concerns are a result of the following challenges identified by the review:

- Staff turnover of reservationists, dispatchers and drivers remains a concern at 121%, 89% and 111% respectively. Relatively low pay and benefits that MV Transportation offers combined with the difficulty of the job appears to contribute to this issue;
- Very early pick-ups and drop-offs are an issue; as are a small percentage of very long trips. The review identified some settings in the automated scheduling system that should be changed to address these issues;
- Eligibility determinations are taking several months to complete, apparently due to limited professional capacity provided to WMATA by contractors who conduct the in-person assessments. However, service is being offered to applicants while the determinations are completed; and
- For a large metropolitan area, the structure of the contract is unusual. MV Transportation acts as a broker or turn-key operation and also operates over 60% of the service. This means that MV Transportation is responsible for monitoring its own service and has the entire responsibility for reservations, scheduling and dispatching functions. In other large metropolitan areas, the service providers and functions are typically broken out in contracts

with multiple companies to lessen the concentration of responsibilities and functions within a single company.

Recommendations

Recognizing that adopting all of the recommendations from the independent review could have cost implications for WMATA, the AFA Committee and the Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force prioritized the recommendations identified in the attached report. (It should be noted that some of the recommendations have the potential to increase efficiency and reduce costs.) Of the many recommendations in the report, the two committees felt that the following five recommendations should be brought to the TPB's attention:

- WMATA should work with the contractor to reduce employee turnover in order to retain quality, experienced managers, call center staff and drivers, and add an additional scheduler;
- WMATA should work with the contractor to reduce long ride-times and address excessively early and late drop-offs and pick-ups (through scheduling software adjustments and the development of revised on-time performance standards described in the report);
- WMATA should complete and adopt a long-term capital plan for the MetroAccess service to ensure that adequate vehicles and equipment will be available in future years. In the short term, WMATA should work with the contractor to add 24 vehicles as soon as possible to increase the fleet spare ratio from 10% to 15%;
- WMATA should consider changing the future contract structure to lessen the concentration of responsibilities and operating functions in any one company and to provide for a more stable, experienced workforce; and
- WMATA should simplify the recertification process for individuals found to be unconditionally ADA paratransit eligible and whose functional ability is not expected to improve over time. These individuals should be given a longer term of eligibility and require only a brief recertification form.

Other Issues

The AFA Committee and the Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force identified the following recommendations as particularly important since they are strongly associated with WMATA's responsibility to meet the paratransit requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

- WMATA should change the way that E&D Committee members are selected in order to address concerns about the Committee's objectivity and independence; and
- WMATA should ensure that customers who require information in particular accessible formats consistently receive materials in their preferred format (WMATA should develop and maintain a list of customer's preferred formats).

Next Steps

At the November 19 TPB meeting, the TPB will be asked to transmit the report to the WMATA Board. The AFA Committee and the Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force will continue to work with WMATA to ensure good MetroAccess service and on-going attention to cost efficient strategies for service improvement.