

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 300, Washington, D.C. 20002-4290 (202) 962-3310 Fax: (202) 962-3202 TDD: (202) 962-3213

Memorandum

TO: Transportation Planning Board

FROM: Catherine M. Hudgins
Chair, TPB Access for All Advisory Committee
Supervisor, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: General Comments on Transportation-Related Concerns of the TPB Access for All Advisory Committee

DATE: May 13, 2009

The Access for All Advisory (AFA) Committee received a presentation on the significant changes to the Draft 2009 Financially Constrained Long Range Transportation Plan (CLRP) at its February 23, 2009 meeting. In contrast to previous years, there are no significant new projects proposed for this year's CLRP update; instead most of the changes for the 2009 CLRP update will delay the completion dates of projects already in the plan.

Therefore, the AFA had few comments on projects in the plan, but during a roundtable discussion raised the following transportation-related concerns about how low-income communities, minority communities and people with disabilities may be impacted by the economic downturn.

The AFA is concerned about the expense of Metrorail fares for individuals with limited incomes.

- AFA members stated that Metrorail fare is simply too expensive for many people with limited incomes, including people with disabilities and older adults. As a result, people are taking only buses, becoming more isolated, and/or cannot afford transportation to and from work.

WMATA should target more free SmarTrip cards to low-income individuals, seniors and persons with disabilities; more education and outreach about SmarTrip is also needed.

- WMATA eliminated paper transfers on Metrobus in January; this elimination has caused low-income individuals to be burdened with a double fare since many folks cannot afford to purchase the \$5 SmarTrip card.

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- AFA members stated that in addition to low-income individuals having trouble paying for the \$5 SmarTrip card, these individuals also cannot afford the \$5 to replace their SmarTrip card.
- The AFA applauded WMATA's efforts to distribute free SmarTrip cards to disadvantaged population groups; however, more SmarTrip cards should be distributed and targeted to low-income individuals.
- In addition, WMATA should expand education and outreach to low-income communities, seniors and people with disabilities about the use of SmarTrip, Senior SmarTrip and Reduced Fare SmarTrip cards, and encourage them to utilize other currently available services provided through the Reduced Fare and Free Ride programs.
- AFA members commented that outreach and training on SmarTrip cards to seniors needs to consider that it may take longer for older adults to understand how to use the cards. Additionally, the Senior SmarTrip card should be made easier to obtain by expanding the number of locations where they can be acquired.

The AFA is concerned with how budget shortfalls will impact vital language access services.

- AFA members recommended that WMATA's budget for language access services should not be decreased. Members expressed a concern that Limited English Populations (LEP) could become even more disenfranchised if this happens.
- AFA members also expressed that non-profits can partner with transit agencies to provide greater access to transit services for their members, but these non-profits often lack the resources needed and these partnerships require funding to succeed.
- A recommendation was made that transit agencies should prioritize the translation of critical documents especially since "machine" translation is not always accurate.

The AFA is also concerned about possible reductions in MetroAccess service.

- AFA members expressed concern that the budget shortfall may result in reductions to the service area covered by paratransit services, which could occur if WMATA changed its current policy to one which strictly limits MetroAccess service only to areas within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of a fixed bus route, and if bus service to outer areas, such as Clarksburg, is eliminated.
- Many MetroAccess riders have limited incomes and are having difficulty paying the MetroAccess fare, particularly if more than one trip is needed in one day.

Bus Service is critical to mobility.

- AFA members stated that not only should transit agencies maintain current bus service but additional bus service is needed to better serve the transportation needs of people with disabilities, low-income communities and minority communities, particularly to accommodate non-traditional work hours.
- AFA members stated that these population groups often have to take several buses to reach their destination which is very cumbersome.
- AFA members reiterated that many people with limited incomes, including people with disabilities and older adults, rely solely on bus service to meet their daily travel needs.
- AFA members noted that maintaining and improving bus service is critical to people with disabilities able to ride buses since this service is more flexible and less expensive than MetroAccess.

The AFA supports coordinated land use and transportation planning.

- AFA members support the coordination of transportation and land use planning across the region so that transit and walking are viable options to satisfy more of the travel needs of people with disabilities, low-income communities and minority communities.