

**AFA Subcommittee on Transit Information for Limited English Speakers
Barriers and Recommendations from the November 30, 2006 Meeting
Draft
January 24, 2007**

- I. What are the continuing barriers limited-English speakers face in using the bus and Metrorail system?
- a) Limited English speakers are unaware of bus and Metrorail services and aren't sure how to use the system because educational materials for how to use transit are neither widely available nor available in a variety of languages. Limited English speakers have no way of knowing that the information they need is available in their language even when it IS available.
 - b) Bus stops and rail stations do not feel safe to many limited English speakers because of the lack of lighting, the parking lot facilities, and the lack of information or customer- friendly help at the station.
 - c) Metro and local transit agencies do not provide enough information in useful formats (i.e. bus schedules, fare card machines, phone number to call for information, how to file a complaint). Information needs to be more visually based (pictures and symbols)
 - d) Educational materials for how to use Metrorail and Metrobus are not widely available nor are the materials available in a variety of languages. LEP individuals have no way of knowing that the information they need is available in their language even when it IS available.
 - e) Front-line transit employees many times lack customer service skills and cultural sensitivity (station managers, bus drivers, Metro transit police)
 - f) Metro lacks effective communication and coordination between its different departments and lacks an emphasis on Limited English Proficiency (LEP) needs (for example, Metro does not have a language access plan yet and no one department or person is charged with responding to LEP needs).

WMATA Response: Effective January 18, WMATA's new office of Customer Access Programs, serves as the single point of contact and coordination for LEP issues, especially for implementation and monitoring. Additionally, we have established a Title VI Implementation Team, initiated of a transit equity study, and created the Functional Spanish for Front Line Staff initiative. Part of the mandate for the Title VI Implementation Team is the creation of a Language Access Plan. This plan will be created in accordance with DOT Title VI guidance which calls for an individualized assessment of four factors – number of LEP persons eligible; the frequency of contact with WMATA services, the nature and importance of the service provided, and the resources available to WMATA and costs.

COMMENTS FROM WMATA

- g) WMATA's fare structure and transfer policy is confusing and the information is not easily understandable.
- h) Metrorail stations have very little information outside the stations, such as where the train goes and when the next train is coming.

II. Recommendations

- a) WMATA and local transit agencies should focus on providing permanent, not periodic, materials and efforts to improve language access. Implementation of LEP recommendations should be timelier.

WMATA Response: The language access plan will provide both short and long-term goals along with a detailed implementation plan.

- b) WMATA should work with non-governmental organizations (NGO's) to educate the limited English speaking community about access to services. These NGOs can outreach to this community (LEP) and facilitate the meetings in which WMATA can disseminate this information.
- c) WMATA should install video kiosks at station entrances with rider training in multiple languages; the kiosks could show the instructional videos, provide access to the website, describe nearby bus routes and transfer locations, provide interactive tools for learning all aspects of using the bus and rail systems, etc.
- d) WMATA should provide the online trip planner in languages other than English.
- e) WMATA should establish a *Hot Spots* program, targeting Limited English information and services at three specific locations:
 - a. Columbia Heights in the District of Columbia;
 - b. Langley Park in Maryland; and
 - c. Bailey's Crossroads in Virginia.
- f) WMATA should incorporate successful strategies from the *Hot Spots* program system-wide.
- g) WMATA and local transit agencies should actively recruit bilingual front-line employees (station managers and bus drivers).

WMATA Response: Union seniority rights limit our ability to place bi-lingual employees in specific locations.

- h) WMATA and local transit agencies should stress customer service and provide cultural sensitivity training to front-line employees.

COMMENTS FROM WMATA

- i) Bus drivers and station managers should be knowledgeable about how to navigate the bus and rail system (for example, bus drivers should be able to suggest to customers what bus to take to get to a certain location).
- j) WMATA should post instructional videos online and widely distribute the video to community- and faith-based organizations.
- k) WMATA should have one point of contact for LEP services and information for customers, local governments and for community organizations.

WMATA Response: The new office of Customer Access Programs will coordinate LEP services and information.

- l) WMATA should ensure that MetroAccess users who don't speak English can get information about the service, apply, and speak with reservationists.
- m) WMATA should provide a draft of the language access plan to the AFA for review by May 2007.

WMATA Response: The draft Language Access Plan will be available in the Fall 2007, based upon our Title VI implementation plan schedule.

COMMENTS FROM WMATA

III. Hot Spot Recommendations

1. Bailey's Crossroads in Virginia

- a) The Fairfax Connector should create and provide bus information in languages other than English and distribute it widely in Bailey's Crossroads.
- b) Fairfax County and WMATA should examine where current transit information is distributed, and expand or change the distribution strategy as needed.
- c) WMATA and Fairfax Connector should distribute materials in different languages to community-based and faith-based organizations enabling these organizations to provide training on the bus and rail system. (i.e. Skills source center, Families Resource Center, Boat People SOS, Business Development Assistance Group, Tenants and Workers United, etc...)
- d) WMATA and Fairfax Connector should provide a brochure or other information clarifying how bus and rail transfers at the East and West Falls Church Metro stations. Many limited-English speakers pay more than they should because they don't understand transfer policies.
- e) WMATA and Fairfax Connector should make an effort to hire and schedule bi-lingual employees on bus routes in Bailey's Crossroads and at the East Falls Church station, recruiting from the communities to be served.

WMATA Response: Union seniority rights limit our ability to place bi-lingual employees in specific locations.

- f) A pilot map that uses symbols and/or landmarks to distinguish stations and destinations should be developed for several bus stops in the Bailey's Crossroads area. The maps provided in bus shelters in downtown D.C. provide a good example.
- g) WMATA and Fairfax County should use language/ethnic media (print, radio, TV) as education/outreach tools to publicize the availability of transit services and translated information.
- h) Install multi-media kiosks with transit information in public locations, at Fairfax County Government buildings and the Woodrow Wilson Library.
- i) In the Bailey's Crossroad area around bus stops, Fairfax County should install better signage on pedestrian safety.
- j) WMATA should add signage or announcements in Spanish and Vietnamese at bus shelters and on buses in the Bailey Crossroads area reminding riders to get a transfer and cross the street safely.

COMMENTS FROM WMATA

2. Columbia Heights in the District of Columbia

- a) At the Columbia Heights Metro station, WMATA should:
 - a. Develop easy-to-understand instructions for at least one farecard machine. The instructions need to be easier to use for non-English speakers and include the four steps in symbols or in Spanish.
 - b. Provide more comprehensive information closer to the entrance of the station or outside of the station.
 - c. Use Spanish speaking station managers.
 - d. Install a multi-media kiosk with Metrorail and Metrobus information.
 - e. Provide information in Spanish on how to apply for senior discount fare cards without having to make a trip to the Metro Center sales office.
 - f. Better signs indicating from inside the station which exit to use to take what bus in which direction.
 - g. Install welcome and thank you signage at the entrance/exit of the station in Spanish, and perhaps all major languages in DC (Amharic, Vietnamese, Korean, Traditional Chinese)
 - h. Provide better visual-based information at the fare gates as to how to insert the fare cards.
 - i. Provide mirrors (to see around corners) and better lighting in the station.
- b) WMATA should provide targeted educational transit information to community based organizations, retail stores and restaurants in Columbia Heights. The information should use visual guides and symbols rather than text.
- c) WMATA and D.C. should use language/ethnic media (print, radio, TV) as education/outreach tools to publicize the availability of transit services and translated information.
- d) WMATA should ensure that every bus shelter has a full time schedule for every bus line.
- e) Hire Spanish-speaking bus drivers for routes that traverse Columbia Heights, including the 42, 50s, 70s, S-lines and H-lines.

WMATA Response: Union seniority rights limit our ability to place bi-lingual employees in specific locations.

- f) WMATA should add signage or announcements in Spanish at bus shelters and on buses in the Columbia Heights area reminding riders to get a transfer and that Spanish translators are available through the Metro information number.
- g) WMATA and D.C. should enhance southward (inbound) bus service from Columbia Heights during their afternoon rush hour around 5 PM, and service back around 10 PM.

COMMENTS FROM WMATA

3. Langley Park in Maryland

- a) WMATA and Ride-On should improve bus stop signage with better information about routes, pricing, and transfers, such as the spinning poles used at bus stops in Columbia Pike.
- b) WMATA and Ride-On should provide better information about bus routes and transfers in multiple languages on board. The Metro information line should be advertised as having translation services.
- c) WMATA and Ride-On should ensure bus drivers announce stops on-board.
- d) WMATA and Ride-On should ensure bus drivers traversing the Langley Park area have a minimum command of the Spanish, French and Vietnamese languages. Bilingual bus drivers should be given bonuses or compensated fairly.
- e) WMATA and Ride-On should provide focused customer service and diversity training for bus drivers on routes in the Langley Park area.
- f) WMATA should distribute the videos on how to use the transit system to local non-profits in the Langley Park area.
- g) WMATA and Ride-On should make use of local non-profits for translation services and ensuring translation accuracy. Perhaps WMATA could pay non-profits for translation services by providing fare cards.
- h) WMATA and Montgomery County should install transportation information kiosks in 10 locations in the neighborhood, use private parking inc., gas stations, grocery stores, small immigrant businesses.
- i) WMATA and Ride-On should try a pilot of assigning a bilingual customer service representative to ride highly-used routes and be available at high-traffic crossroads.

WMATA Response: Union seniority rights limit our ability to place bi-lingual employees in specific locations.

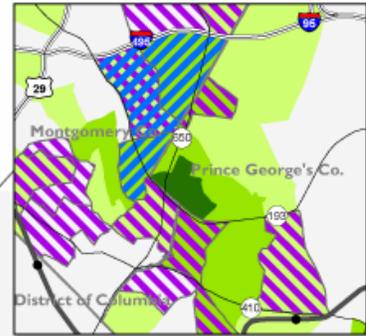
- j) WMATA and Montgomery County should install pedestrian safety signage in symbols and multiple languages at high accident areas around Langley Park.
- k) WMATA and local transit agencies should simplify the fare structure, transfer policy and unify communications among the different bus systems.

COMMENTS FROM WMATA

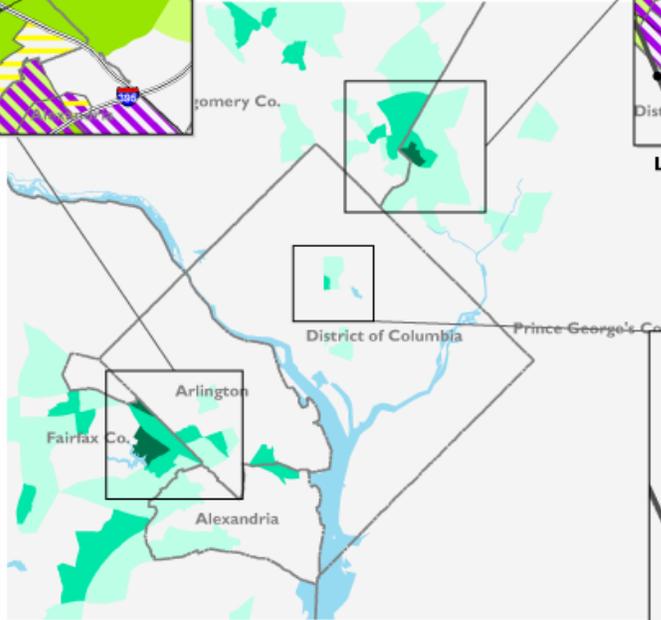
Potential Limited-English Hot Spots

Data Source: 2000 US Census SF3, "Language Spoken at Home" data.

Bailly's Crossroads, VA



Langley Park, MD



Columbia Heights, DC

