

TPB ACCESS FOR ALL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Meeting Notes for July 27, 2006

ATTENDANCE:

Ian Beam, Maryland DODT
Deborah Burns, FTA D.C. Metro Office
Mary Cadden, Jewish Council for the Aging
Rosa Carrillo, Language Access Coalition DC
Nancy Cooper, Jewish Council for the Aging
Deborah Coram, District Department of Transportation
Cheryl Cort, Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities
Willie Epps Jr, Prince George's DPW&T
Rikki Epstein, WMATA Office of ADA Programs
Harold Foster, Americas Institute
Rev. Gloria Swieringa, Prince George's County ACORN
Elaine Lancaster, Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland
Regina Lee, TAG, Independence Now, Inc
Leonard Lewis, VDOT
Lillian Nazario, DC WIC
Dr. Nguyen Dinh Thang, Boat People SOS
Catondra Noye, D-DOT Mass Transit
Kathy Porter, Chair
Julie Ruszczyk, Virginia DOT
Phillip Strong, American Council for the Blind
Myriam Torrico, Montgomery County DHCA
Gil Williams, DDOT/Mass Transit
Steve Yaffe, WMATA Community Transportation Services

DTP Staff

Michael Eichler
Wendy Klancher
Darren Smith
John Swanson

Review the Proposed 2006 Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan and Discuss AFA Comments on the Plan

Michael Eichler, DPT Staff, presented a series of maps displaying the projects added to the CLRP in 2006, and their physical relationship to the locations of traditionally transportation-disadvantaged populations. The committee members expressed concerns about the accuracy of the source for the demographic data: The 2000 US Census. The concerns centered around the potential of the census for underreporting minorities, as well as the potential for the data to be out of date. TPB staff responded by saying that the 2000 Census is widely considered the most up to date and accurate source for demographic data. Another concern was the lack of inclusion

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in the current US Army's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) plans for the Washington Metropolitan area. The BRAC plan has not yet been incorporated into the TPB's land use and transportation models. AFA member Cheryl Cort expressed concern that the BRAC plans present a difficult challenge of serving employment sites with transit, and that she was concerned that Charles County was adding highway capacity by widening roads, which will make it difficult for that area to be served by transit. The proposed comments on the draft long-range plan will be distributed via e-mail to the committee for further review.

Report on D.C.'s Transit Future

Catondra Noye from the District DOT's Mass Transit division presented a status report on the Washington DC Transit Alternatives Analysis, commonly known as the "DC Transit Future" project. The first, test phase of this project is the Anacostia Streetcar project, currently under development. Of particular interest to the AFA committee was the new vehicle technology: low-floor streetcars that do not require wheelchair lifts or boarding platforms. Much of the committee members' comments and questions explored the difference between these new streetcars and the original DC streetcar system that was gradually replaced by diesel buses, and how it seemed we were going "back to the future." An AFA member expressed concern that the streetcar was essentially replacing a more extensive and frequent bus service which connects Anacostia and the Bowling Air Force Base. The first phase of the streetcar will run limited hours and will not cover the same geographic area as an exiting bus service that is proposed to be cut. One AFA member encouraged WMATA officials at the meeting to prioritize accessible pathways to all MetroRail stations and major bus stops. The committee also learned that for every three Metrorail riders in the District, there are five bus riders. Another member expressed a concern about the lack of reverse commute transit service on major DC bus lines, in particular the 52 bus in Columbia Heights: there is frequent outbound service, but a limited number of inbound in-service buses for transporting persons with non-traditional work schedules to downtown job destinations.

Report on WMATA Language Access Initiatives for Customers with Limited English Skills and Status of AFA Recommendations

Deborah Coram from WMATA's Office of Civil Rights presented their proposed pilot program to teach bus drivers basic ("functional") Spanish to provide better access to the growing Hispanic/Latino population with limited English skills. AFA member Kim Propeack, who chairs the Limited English Proficiency Subcommittee, stated that teaching bus drivers functional Spanish is a good first step, but that more is needed, especially in order to meet the Maryland language access laws. Ms. Propeack asked if WMATA was looking at doing more. Deborah Coram and other WMATA representatives in attendance at the meeting were not familiar with other efforts at WMATA to increase language access since they do not deal directly with that issue. AFA member Dr. Thang recommended that WMATA also teach bus drivers basic transit words in other languages besides Spanish, and that WMATA work with ethnic and social service agencies to leverage outreach to limited English speakers. Myriam Torrico suggested that after the Spanish pilot, an additional pilot could be tried in another language. Lillian Nazario reported

that about 17% or 18% of the languages other than English spoken in DC are Asian Pacific languages. One AFA member stressed the need to have any translated materials proofed by native speakers because a certain word commonly used in the context of bus transit is a “four-letter word” in some Spanish-speaking countries. The AFA committee also commented that language and culture go together, so transit employees also need cultural sensitivity and diversity training. Ms. Propeack asked that WMATA follow-up on the questions not answered at the meeting by Metro representatives, including if the Metro video in five languages has been distributed widely; if MetroAccess information and applications are available in Spanish or any other languages; and if WMATA has the required language access plan and what assessment measures are being used to determine the need for translated materials. Chair Porter expressed support for a previous AFA recommendation to use universal symbols in transit information, rather than relying on words. An AFA member expressed that Spanish is one language, not a family of languages, and that there does exist a subset of the Spanish language that is commonly understood by all Spanish speakers. An AFA member that uses MetroAccess stated that she has made numerous requests for the MetroAccess Customer Guide on tape but has never received it. The AFA will have a follow-up agenda item on these issues at the September meeting.

Status Report on AFA Activities

Kathy Porter gave a quick update on the following AFA activities:

- On June 15 the WMATA Board Adopted MetroAccess Recommendations
- On July 19 Kathy Porter and Brenda Richardson Presented to the TPB the AFA Subcommittee Report: “Transportation Issues for Low-Income Populations: Findings and Recommendations:
- AFA Involvement in the New TPB Human Services Transportation Coordination Task Force

Steve Yaffe, Chief Operating Officer for Community Transportation Services at WMATA, reported some progress made on MetroAccess. As of August 1, MetroAccess customers can cancel their trips up to 2 hours before the trip, instead of requiring customers to cancel the day before. On September 1, the MetroAccess program expects to implement the change in scheduling, allowing customers to schedule their trip up to 7 days in advance, instead of 14, which allows for better scheduling. A WMATA Request for Proposal (RFP) for a consultant to cost out some of the recommendations to improve Metro Access was posted on the Metro website.

The meeting adjourned around 2:00 p.m.

The committee will meet next on September 28, 2006.