

**Highlights from the
ANNUAL PUBLIC TRANSIT FORUM**

May 29, 2013, 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Place: COG Board Room

Private Providers Task Force: Robert Werth, Diamond Transportation (Chair)

ATTENDEES:

Jessica Alvarez, Central Maryland
Regional Transit

Carrie Anderson-Watters, TransIT Services
of Frederick County

Michael Artson, Fairfax County

Jeff Barnett, Charles County

Tammy Beard, Yellow Cab of Prince
William

Howard Benn, Montgomery County DOT

Robyn Bernady, MTM

Chris Blake, WMATA

George Clark, Tri-County Council for
Southern Maryland

Tim Collins, Veolia Transportation

Joann Dugan, Yellow Cab of Prince
William

Lyn Erickson, MDOT Office of Planning
and Capital Programming

Mariela Garcia-Colberg, NVTC

Julie Hershorn, WMATA

Brian Houck, Barwood Transportation

Pierre Holloman, City of Alexandria
Transit Services

Christian Kent, WMATA/ACCS

Al Koroma, Human Services
Transportation/Fastran

Jeffrey Lehmann, WMATC

Kelley MacKinnon, Arlington County

Eric Marx, PRTC

Bill Orleans, hack

Jonathan Parker, WMATA

Jim Perez, Central Maryland Regional
Transit

Terry Prevost, WMATA/ACCS

Glenn Saffran, Maryland Transit
Administration

Joe Sanchez, National Express

Jack Weiner, Red Top Cab

Danielle Wesolok, WMATA

Steve Yaffe, Arlington County

John Zarbo, Red Top Cab

TPB Staff:

Ron Kirby

Jerry Miller

Wendy Klancher

Eric Randall

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Werth welcomed the participants and asked them to introduce themselves.

2. A Briefing on the WMATA MetroAccess Contract

Christian Kent, Assistant General Manager for Access Services at WMATA, gave an overview of the history of the MetroAccess paratransit service and its evolving contractual organization. He opened his remarks by noting that one of the first activities he undertook upon moving to the Washington region was to attend a session of the annual transit forum, when he worked for First Transit on the Fastran system, in coordination with Steve Yaffe (*in the audience*). After eighteen years in the private sector, Christian joined WMATA in 2005 at an important transition point.

First started in 1994, MetroAccess had grown from 15,000 trips per month to close to 200,000 trips per month. The original mode, of contracting out the entire responsibilities for the paratransit system, was not holding up, and changes needed to be made. Christian felt that a different model of public and private roles and responsibilities could make the service better and improve its quality of service to customers.

The original contractual model for MetroAccess included responsibility for both screening potential customers for eligibility and providing transportation service. This dual responsibility created an incentive to increase eligible paratransit customers, which led to more trips on the service, each of which required additional subsidy from WMATA and its funding jurisdictions. The result was an explosive growth in MetroAccess service, by twenty to thirty percent a year. At the same time, there were increasing customer complaints regarding the quality of the service provided, over which WMATA had little oversight.

Subsequently, in the 2006 MetroAccess contract, WMATA decided to re-align the paratransit service roles and responsibilities. Computer-assisted dispatch was required, replacing the previous paper system of tracking reservations and trips; eligibility screening was taken back into WMATA as a function; and bidding criteria were established so that the service provider would be a well-established firm with the ability and resources to rapidly adjust capacity as needed. MV Transportation won the contract and provided good service. Unfortunately the six-week transition period was over-hasty and led to some major faults in customer service; it took WMATA two years to win back the trust of its customers, for which as the public agency overseeing MetroAccess they were ultimately responsible. Nevertheless, service improved; with the Trapeze scheduling software, an improved call center was able to introduce night before and day of trip confirmation calls, which increased service utilization rates and customer confidence in the paratransit service. Other changes also took place; for instance whereas previously MTM, the DC Medicaid broker, was sending trips to MetroAccess, an innovative agreement was reached by which the offer of options like travel training provided clients more travel independence by increasing their ability to use bus and rail services.

MetroAccess is now the fourth largest paratransit service in the country in terms of daily riders, with about 6,500 trips per day. Christian cautioned that the baby boom bubble is still to come, and that the need for MetroAccess service will grow. As the overseeing public agency, WMATA needs to do the right thing and ensure service quality, while also leveraging the innovative capabilities of the private sector. Accordingly, WMATA has invested in the vehicle fleet, getting average age down to two years, and in other supporting functions for the service. Nonetheless, the expense for operating MetroAccess is considerable, requiring an operating subsidy close to that of the Metrorail system with its 800,000 daily trips. WMATA therefore undertook another restructuring of the paratransit service in preparing for the 2013 contract.

The new MetroAccess contractual organization will bring some responsibilities within WMATA, including scheduling, ownership of much of the vehicle fleet, and eventually some of the facility support. This will enable improved consistency of service and provide WMATA more control and accountability for the quality of service provided. The call center function was contracted out separately; this removes any incentive for the call center operator to steer customer trips to any specific transportation service. This is important as the provision of transportation service was contracted out to three operators; one with responsibility for service in Virginia (where

much paratransit service is provided by local operators such as Fastran) and two operators with responsibility for overlapping service areas in DC and Maryland. There is also a quality assurance contractor to monitor the overall provision of service to the customers by all parties, which will use scoreboard metrics such as on-time performance and safety.

WMATA believes this hybrid paratransit service model will provide best value within the available budget, and Christian noted they are half-way through the seven-week transition period preparing for a July 1 takeover. He also assured the taxi operators attending the forum that there would be opportunities for taxi services to carry MetroAccess eligible customers, leveraging the resources they offer. However, taxi trips will be limited to 10% of all paratransit customer trips in order to maintain quality of service and WMATA's oversight of the service being provided.

Questions and discussion included:

- Clarifications of MetroAccess as a door to door service (yes) and of the service area, which is set at the ADA definition of within ¾ mile of a WMATA bus or rail stop.
- Agreement that service across jurisdictional boundaries and particularly to outer counties in the region needs to be improved.
- WMATA works with MWCOG and the TPB's Human Service Transportation Committee to discuss unmet needs and how to best coordinate to meet those needs.
- Regarding the geographic split of the new MetroAccess contracts, Christian noted that MetroAccess has fewer customers in Virginia, so it made sense to split off service in the state as one contract. For the MD-DC service, there are not geographic boundaries; instead each of the two contract providers can compete for trips. The bidders were required to offer resources and propose various options, which gave WMATA more alternatives to choose among. However, WMATA expects to restrict any one of the provider to no more than 50% of the trips provided.
- A question was asked about the changes in the standing order policy for MetroAccess customers. Christian agreed that the policy has become more restrictive due to the many changed appointments or cancellations that were being made by customers. With the policy changes, there will be fewer costly service changes required of MetroAccess.

3. Alternative Fuel Infrastructure in the Washington Region

<http://www.mwcog.org/uploads/committee-documents/Z11bV19W20130529085539.pdf>

Ms. Joan Rohlf, Environmental Resources Program Director at MWCOG, made a presentation on alternative fuel infrastructure in the metropolitan Washington Region. She opened her remarks with a review of MWCOG's goals to reduce emissions, both toxic pollutants and carbon. Alternative fuels programs, including the activities of the Greater Washington Regional Clean Cities Coalition (GWRCCC) and of the Electric Vehicle Forum, the latter hosted by MWCOG, provide potential solutions to meeting these emissions reduction goals.

In the PowerPoint presentation, Joan reviewed the number of alternative fueled vehicles and of infrastructure locations in the region, and provided websites where more information can be found. She also reviewed the alternative fuel activities and programs in each state, including possible sources of grant funding and opportunities for group vehicle purchases.

4. Briefing on the Implementation of the New Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility Program under MAP-21 in the Washington Region

Ms. Wendy Klancher, Department of Transportation Planning at MWCOG, briefed the attendees on the changes to the Section 5310 grant program included in the federal surface transportation reauthorization act. Under MAP-21, the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) grant program has been discontinued as a stand-alone program, while the new 5310 grant program combines elements of the previous 5310 program and New Freedom program. After discussion among the two states and the District, MWCOG will be the direct recipient of 5310 funds from the Federal Transit Administration, for a sum of about \$2.6 million a year. The TPB will conduct a competitive grant application process for 5310 grant funding.

Eligible projects for new 5310 grants will be the same as under the previous programs, including travel training, taxi vouchers, door-to-door services, and accessible vehicle purchases. The TPB's plan for conducting the 5310 grant program will be proposed in September with the goal of review and approval by the end of the year, and the first solicitation for grant applications is planned for early 2014. At this time, it is still not yet determined if private providers can be grant subrecipients directly, or if they have to partner with a public agency.

The finally JARC and New Freedom grant solicitation was held earlier this year, and the selected grant sub-recipients will be announced at the June meeting of the TPB.

5. Transit Plans and Prospects

City of Alexandria

Mr. Holloman stated that the City is preparing an invitation to bid for bus stop design. The design adopted last year and installed at four locations has proven vulnerable to vandalism, so the City wants a new design. The big news is that the US-1 (Potomac Yard) Transitway will open next spring, bringing the region its first dedicated bus-rapid transit type lanes. A contract was awarded in the past year for the DOT paratransit service.

Arlington County

Ms. MacKinnon described recent investments by the County in the ART bus system, including the arrival of nine new CNG buses and an order for four more. The ART fleet is now entirely CNG fueled and ridership continues to grow. She also mentioned that a new operations center opened in February.

Mr. Yaffe then added that a public hearing is to be held on June 1 for the annual transit development plan. The focus will be on hearing customer requests for more or revised bus service, whether that be greater frequency on existing routes, longer service spans or more routes across the county. This will help the County program service improvements. The County also looks forward to the opening of the Crystal City Potomac Yard Transitway, which will feature dedicated Metrobus service connecting Pentagon City, Crystal City, Potomac Yard, and Braddock Road. Arlington recently extended the contracts for two providers of Specialized Transit for Arlington Residents (STAR) paratransit rides, which will run through October 31. For subsequent operation, RFPs will be issued for bidders to consider. STAR service is provided roughly 50%/50% by taxis and by a dedicated paratransit fleet.

Charles County

Mr. Barnett stated that Charles County signed a contract last year for transportation services. They received five proposals and the bidding was very competitive, which led to a considerable savings for the County. The contract has a three-year base and three two-year option clauses, so could cover service for nine years. Charles County continues to work with Prince George's County and the counties to the south on connecting services, for example to the recent development mushrooming around Brandywine Crossing. They have an MTA grant and are developing an MOU to connect the two services and provide transportation from Waldorf to Brandywine.

District of Columbia

No representative from the District of Columbia was able to attend the forum.

Fairfax County

Mr. Artson attended the meeting but had to leave before the roundtable discussion.

City of Fairfax

No representative from the City of Fairfax was able to attend the forum.

The following update was provided following the forum for inclusion in these highlights.

The City of Fairfax is about to start advertising on buses and shelters, the first time this has been done. The City is riding the Fairfax Connector contract for this.

Frederick County

Ms. Anderson-Watters reported that TransIT is working to establish a taxi voucher program to supplement human services transportation, to be administered by a vendor. This voucher program is currently proposed to be available for the same hours of operation, which is eight to four, Monday through Friday. However, the County Commissioners are discussing making the voucher program available at other hours/times, such as 24/7. This might be done with an MTA grant, which could make it possible as of July 1, 2014. In other news, the County Commissioners have approved Frederick County's request to order an electric bus. Also the County issued an RFP for bus shelter maintenance and advertising, but did not receive any bids so they will re-evaluate the RFP and reissue it.

Loudoun County

No representative from Loudoun County was able to attend the forum.

Montgomery County

Mr. Benn reported that Ride-On has added some service this fiscal year, but no expansion is funded for the coming year. Reported ridership is down slightly, which is also being observed by other local bus systems and may be linked to some farebox issues with handling the new type of SmarTrip card. WMATA has done a great job of tackling these issues, but there are still anomalies. The County is preparing to advertise for a multi-year contract to update maps and timetables, as well as carry advertising on buses. He noted that City of Rockville's request for bids last year for such services on shelters also did not attract any bids, just like what Frederick County reported experiencing.

Mr. Benn also noted that Ride-On has its own real time passenger information system and does not use NextBus. A new third party app just became available that integrates the Ride-On Real Time system with other transit info. He also noted that the County transferred the Transit Info function from within Ride On to the County's 311 system a few years ago. Finally, as discussed at the April meeting of the TPB Regional Bus Subcommittee, Ride-On is preparing to conduct a bus procurement, and as FTA is becoming stricter in option clauses, while there is an opportunity for which other jurisdictions may want to add option clauses they need to get detailed information to Montgomery County soon.

Mr. Benn then spoke to paratransit service in the County. The old Call-n-Ride service system for the elderly, disabled, and low-income was open to abuse with its paper coupons. The County had hoped WMATA would move to SmarTrip card use on MetroAccess, and the County would then do likewise for Call-n-Ride, but this was not done by WMATA. As an alternative to SmarTrip, the County has implemented an electronic payment and GPS system similar to that of Baltimore. In April this magnetic swipe system was implemented, for which riders swipe both getting on and getting off, but there were some transition issues that the County is still dealing with. In particular, some riders preferred having one specific driver provide service to them, which is no longer the case; service is now centrally dispatched.

Mr. Benn moved on to discuss taxi cab service in the County. The County has traditionally issued 10% more licenses every other year since 2006, but there was not an issuance in 2012 and 2014 is still unknown. However, since the award of additional licenses began in 2006, in addition to some of the current operators getting new licenses, two new taxi operators were given permission to operate in the County: Suncab (operated by Veolia/Baltimore Yellow Cab) and Orange Cab (operated by RMA Limo). These new services have 90 days to get fully connected. He also noted that the County will host an industry-wide meeting for Montgomery County taxi operators on the new ridesharing applications, such as Uber, Sidecar, and Lift, as soon as a State of Maryland/PSC decision, which is pending on regulation of these services, is released to the public.

Prince George's County

No representative from Prince George's County was able to attend the forum.

Maryland Transit Authority (MTA)

Mr. Saffran gave an overview of commuter bus concerns and other transit plans in the state. MTA has five RFPs on the street for commuter bus operations, each for five years of service. The total value of the contracts will be between forty and fifty million dollars. In particular, service from Southern Maryland and Charles County is being split up from one big contract, so that more competition is possible. The MTA has also separated the District into segments for destinations in order to better coordinate service into each major area. Some of the current large routes may therefore be broken up in the new contracts.

In other news, the MTA contracted with Commuter Direct to provide ticket vending services, both by mail and mobile. Several bus routes using the ICC are proposed for elimination due to under performance, which will go to public hearing next week. This would enable those resources to be reallocated to overcrowded routes. MARC will begin weekend service on the Penn Line, conceivably even by the end of the year.

The question was asked about commuter bus fare integration with WMATA services. Mr. Saffran noted that the TLC ticket is very popular, which provides both the commuter bus ticket and unlimited rides on Metrorail. This is in evidence on the Frederick to Shady Grove service, which has approximately half of the about 650 or so monthly MAT Commuter Bus TLC ticket purchasers.

Northern Virginia Transit Commission

Ms. Garcia-Colberg reported that NVTC has a new executive director, Ms. Kelley Coiner. She noted that an RFP is out with proposals due June 7, for National Transit Database data collection for vanpool services. She also noted that the FTA-funded Alternatives Analysis of transit options along the VA-7 (Leesburg Pike) corridor continues, with public outreach to begin this fall.

Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission

Mr. Marx reported that the current ten year contract for operation of PRTC's services ends on June 30, but that the operator chosen through bids for the next up to ten-year contract would remain First Transit, who won out of a field of six proposers. Service-wise, PRTC has added some trips on I-95 to alleviate overcrowded conditions, which is funded by a mitigation line item for the construction going on there. A new Park and Ride lot open will open in July near I-66 and the 234 bypass; the I-66 and Cushing Street Lot (433 spaces). At that time PRTC will add the lot to the Gainesville route. In the fall, PRTC will add new direct service from Gainesville into DC. The Silver Line opening will also affect two routes, which will be changed from serving West Falls Church Metro to the new Tysons Corner station. PRTC may also be starting its first Metro feeder bus service on Saturday (to aid with mitigating work on the HOV lanes being transformed into HOT Lanes). This will operate between Prince William County and the Franconia Springfield Metrorail station on approximately 90 minute headways, to match local bus timed-transfers.

Mr. Marx noted that while state funding for PRTC is expected to increase, Federal funding is down, so there are no other service increases planned for FY14. PRTC contracted with MTM to provide travel training for one year. PRTC is also working with on a Wheels to Wellness program, funded through a grant from Sentara Health. Debit cards serve as electronic vouchers with service provided by Yellow Cab of Prince William and Manassas Cab. The program fills in gaps where there is not any public transportation service currently available for low income residents needing medical-related services.

PRTC will be working with COG and others on a DRPT supported and Virginia funded study of commuter bus staging options in/around the downtown area. PRTC's CAD/AVL project funded through the TPB's TIGER Grant should also be complete next year. PRTC is also working on regional vanpool NTD data collection program; with the aid of a DRPT grant to the region will begin to receive vanpool-generated NTD funds, fulfilling a twelve year goal.

Finally, Mr. Marx mentioned the success PRTC has had with its bus overhaul program and the fuel savings realized through implementing the EMP mini-hybrid system. Based on Fairfax Connector's positive experience, PRTC now equips its new Gillig buses with the system. PRTC also successfully conducted pilot tests of the EMP system on two MCI buses and now includes

the system on buses rebuilt by ABC of Orlando, Florida, which has done an excellent job. Fuel savings of approximately 15% are being realized. PRTC will also be constructing a second, western facility near I-66 and 234 Bypass, with a move-in anticipated in 2017.

In response to questions, Mr. Marx noted, incorrectly, that there will not be data collection on vanpools coming from Maryland into Fort Belvoir. Following the meeting, Mr. Marx confirmed that, in fact, any vanpool traveling from, to, or through the UZA can participate.

Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit

No representative from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit was able to attend the forum.

Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA)

No representative from MWAA was able to attend the forum.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Commission (WMATC)

Mr. Lehmann reported that WMATC has put the regional licensing system online, and the website now lists every operator authorized to operate in the region. This led to a record number of applicants, especially limo and sedan operators. He noted that new technologies are leading to a lot of small, one or two driver companies, as new technology has made brokering possible and more effective for small companies. However, WMATC does not register brokers, only actual service providers.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)

Ms. Hershorn provided an overview of surface transportation activities by the Authority. Improvements on the Metrobus Priority Corridor Network (PCN) continue, focusing on increased off-peak and weekend service, as there is not fleet available for peak hour expansions. WMATA is looking to the Crystal City Potomac Yard Transitway opening as the first example of a BRT system in the region. Public outreach is taking place for the bus state of good operations service changes, which is a cost-neutral package of adjustments. Proposals include a deviation of the B30 line to Arundel Mills and proposed bus service connecting Alexandria and National Harbor.

The opening of the Silver Line will bring a lot of bus route changes, for both Metrobus and Fairfax Connector. Ms. Hershorn also noted that WMATA will complete the PCN studies for the top 24 lines in FY 14 and then the focus on bus priority planning will shift to emerging corridors with increasing ridership. New bus stop signs are starting to be put out at Metrobus stops. She also noted that the various technological systems on buses are now being combined into one integrated package with one vendor providing the system, this project is called COABE.

The question was asked why Metrobuses are sometimes seen in Waldorf: is there any plan to provide service there? Mr. Hershorn responded that the buses are there for driver Commercial Driver's License (CDL) testing; there are not any new service plans for that area and Charles County is not part of the WMATA compact service area.

Mr. Parker continued the discussion of WMATA projects, highlighting the Momentum strategic plan for 2025. If funded at the itemized \$6 billion, WMATA would be able to have 100% 8-car

trains, the Priority Corridor Network improvements would all be made, and other projects such as an interline connection at Rosslyn and more pocket tracks would be funded, as well as a modern communications and information system. The WMATA board will approve priority goals in June.

Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland

Mr. Clark referred to MTA's plans to split up route 991, which is a major commuter bus route. He noted that significant gaps exist in connecting places like Charles and Calvert Counties, and that Tri-County is working to get grants and projects funded.

Fastran (Fairfax County)

Mr. Koroma reported that the Demand Response service has been re-designed and is replacing Dial-a-Ride effective July 1. They will be re-certifying all customers for the taxi voucher program. Four taxis are certified to carry paratransit customers, and customers can call these cabs directly. Costs are up slightly for customers, though the coupon program offers a good deal. Mid-day routes will go away.

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