

**Highlights from the
ANNUAL PUBLIC TRANSIT FORUM**

May 24, 2011, 11:00 a.m.

Place: COG Training Center

Private Providers Task Force: Robert Werth (Chair)

ATTENDEES:

Carrie Anderson-Watters, Frederick
TransIT

Melissa Barlow, FTA

Mark Baskin, MTA MARC Train and
Commuter Bus

Howard Benn, Montgomery Country

Robyn Bernady, MTM Transportation

Samuel Bland, Barwood Taxi

Rhett Buer, Alexandria Yellow Cab

Dennis Cannon, Synergy ADA
Transportation

Tina Clarkson, Battle's Transportation

Lyn Erickson, MDOT Office of Planning
and Capital Programming

Harold Foster, M-NCPPC, Prince George's
County Planning Department

Robert Fulk, City of Alexandria

Tom Harrington, WMATA

Dan Koenig, FTA

Stan Laughter, Brightbill Bus

Regina Lee, Access For All (AFA)
Committee

Jeffrey Lehmann, WMATC

Kelley MacKinnon, Arlington County

Eric Marx, PRTC

Jim Maslanka, City of Alexandria Transit
Services

Curt Mason, VPG Autos

Sandy Modell, Alexandria Transit
Company

Raymond Mui, Alexandria Transit
Company

David Mohebbi, Regency Cab

Hal Morgan, Taxicab, Limousine &
Paratransit Association

Bill Orleans, hack

Von Pelot, Red Top Cab

KJ Reynolds, FleetPro

James Ryan, Montgomery County DOT

Jeff Schaeffer, Liberty Cab

Scott Schell, MV Transportation

Peter Schenckman, Ride-Away Handicap
Equipment Corporation

Heather Strassberger, Baltimore
Metropolitan Council

Blake Thomas, Alexandria Yellow Cab

Kevin Thornton, Prince George's County
DPW&T

Alexis Verzosa, City of Fairfax

Robbie Werth, Diamond Transportation

Randall White, Fairfax County DOT

Steve Yaffe, Arlington County

COG Staff:

Ron Kirby

Rich Roisman

Wendy Klancher

Eric Randall

1. Welcome and Introductions

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

2. Mobility Devices and Vehicle Requirements: Challenges for Transit, Taxi and Charter Operators)

Mr. Dennis Cannon gave the keynote address for the forum, providing an overview of the development of new guidelines for vehicle accommodation of mobility devices. Mr. Cannon served as key staff to the US Access Board from 1981 to 2010 and developed accessibility guidelines for vehicles, the public right-of-way, and electronic and information technology standards. In his address, Mr. Cannon emphasized that the guidelines can only apply to vehicles and what type of mobility devices they should make allowances for, not to design of the mobility devices themselves. Accordingly, the original guidelines are out of date given current mobility device size, weight, number of wheels, turning radius, and other factors. The new proposed rule-making will no longer define a common wheelchair, which has been used to exclude some mobility devices even when they could be accommodated by the vehicle. He discusses several examples of issues that have come up recently regarding mobility devices, such as whether Segways are eligible (yes, they are). The standards to be proposed by the Access Board have been delayed but should soon be published, they will then move through DOT enroute to becoming standards.

Questions included:

- Is there any certification process for “public-transit friendly” wheelchairs?
- The Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA) developed WC19 standards, WC19-compliant or transportation ready wheelchairs have design features that reduce user error in securing four-point, strap-type tiedowns. The WC-19 standards these are not well known. Efforts are in progress to get the VA and Medicaid to fund devices compliant with the standards.
- Securement is a challenge. Yes, especially with new devices that have wheel cowlings or single posts. Easter Seals Project Action has good resources on a range of disability-related issues. The possibility of people in wheelchairs backing into the wheelchair-space of a vehicle is under study. TRB has a research project that is examining the issue of the growing size of mobility devices in paratransit vehicles and buses.
- Minivans should have a separate classification standard from buses. The proposed guidelines call for vehicles to have a minimum 34 inch pathway for a wheelchair. Minivans do not have that pathway. The official comment period on the proposed guidelines has closed but comments can still be sent in to the Access Board and may be considered.
- Are there any flatness requirements? No, only for gaps and cracks. No specification on angles. Sometimes humps in the vehicle for axles can cause balancing issues.
- What about service animal space? There is no requirement as present, but this is a consideration in the Access Board deliberations. Usually such room becomes naturally available once the mobility device has turned into the securement space. There will not be room for baskets or bags though.

3. Update on TPB Human Service Transportation Activities and the JARC and New Freedom Programs

Ms. Wendy Klancher provided an update on the activities of the TPB Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force and an overview of the types of projects selected for funding by the TPB under the FTA's Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom programs. TPB is conducting a study to evaluate the effectiveness of past projects, which will inform future efforts. Ms. Klancher highlighted the DC Accessible Taxi Project, which has placed twenty accessible cabs on the streets of DC in the last few months. A dedication event was held on May 12th, and the taxis are proving quite popular. She also reviewed the reach-a-ride website, which should soon become available to assist mobility-needs travelers in planning trips.

Questions included:

- Are local transit agencies participating in the regional travel training program? The travel training program is being implemented by WMATA, and probably includes training on the local transit systems as well as Metro. WMATA should be contacted for details.
- Can JARC and New Freedom be used to fund fixed-route services?
- Yes, but note that JARC and New Freedom projects represent a small percent of annual regional funding for specialized transit services and are intended to fund pilot projects, not ongoing projects.
- Has there been an analysis of side-entry vs. rear-entry vehicles? Both have advantages and disadvantages. A mixed fleet seems to offer the best solution.
- Can private providers be listed on Reach-a-Ride? Yes providers with wheelchair accessible vehicles can be listed, and many already are. Contact COG for more info.
- Is COG checking to see if providers listed on the site have licenses or certifications? Yes, participants are checked with WMATC, and the list will be updated periodically. However, there is a liability disclaimer.

4. Transit Plans and Prospects

Arlington County

Mr. Yaffe reported that Forsythe Transportation, contract operator of ART, has won the 2011 American Public Transit Association (APTA) Gold Bus Safety Award.

City of Alexandria

Mr. Fulk noted that several RFPs will be coming out soon, for the DOT service. These include paratransit, non-ambulatory transportation, and a call center. Single task or comprehensive bids would be considered.

Ms. Modell reported on DASH's plans, with 10 new buses on order, including DASH's first 40-footers for service on Duke Street, and five trolleys for the King Street trolley service. This will help support transit to the BRAC-133 site. A real estate tax will be introduced, which should raise about ten million a year for transportation projects in the city.

The District of Columbia

A representative from the District was unable to attend the forum.

City of Fairfax

Mr. Verzosa reported that the contracted shuttle service for George Mason University, which serves the campus and connects it with the City of Fairfax and the Metro station, has been very popular.

Prince George's County

Mr. Thornton reviewed the expansion of TheBus from its origin in 1992 with two routes to today's 26 routes. He noted that a study of the South Side of the Beltway will be assessing transit options, including over the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. Prince George's County is also looking at TLC community projects and at Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) proposals. Services such as Call-a-Bus, Call-a-Cab, and senior services transportation represent private sector opportunities.

Loudoun County

A representative from Loudoun County was unable to attend the forum.

Maryland Transit Authority (MTA)

Mr. Baskin reported on the bus route plan for the Intercounty Connector (ICC), which will expand from 2 routes to 5 once the second phase of the highway opens. He also described MTA's efforts at building Park & Ride lots in the outer counties (Calvert, St. Mary's) and commuter bus into the city. MTA will also be building a transit center at Takoma-Langley.

Frederick County

Ms. Anderson-Watters reported that the county's TransIT service has been reduced, but is carrying more riders than ever before.

Montgomery County

Mr. Benn reported that Ride-On is now using the Trapeze scheduling system, which is identifying efficiencies in scheduling. The bus fleet is down, but half of the buses are now 40-feet. Ridership has gone down the past two years, and this may be affected by the farebox system in use. Automated Passenger Counter systems are being used to verify ridership data. Buses are also now equipped with GPS, and customers can now access real-time information for service at Ride-On's 4800 bus stops. Speaking to taxis originally the plan was to make SmarTrip cards usable on taxis, but that project is now dead. Instead Montgomery County is looking at magnetic fare media or allowing customers to pay & display with cell phones.

Mr. Ryan spoke to taxi efforts in Montgomery County, noting that numbers have climbed over the past two years from 580 to 770 cabs. Two new companies are now offering services in the county. Between 15 and 30 drivers are in training, and 50% pass the test the first time through. Customer complaints are down sharply across the county. Montgomery County uses a mystery shopper firm for surveys of both bus and taxis. Most problems though have been with dispatch and the limited number of cabs available. Montgomery County is trying to regulate the number of cabs so that enough are available but that competition does not affect service or firm stability.

Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission

Mr. Marx stated that PRTC has been experiencing overcrowding of their commuter bus lines due to fuel prices and the continuation of SmartBenefits, but has some buses on order. In addition,

plans for a new western facility to relieve the pressure on their single crowded garage are in progress. The issue of commuter bus stops and a layover area in the downtown is critical for PRTC, and he would like to see this addressed soon. Finally, he also mentioned that Virginia has a contract going forward for state-wide procurement of buses that other agencies may be able to join in on.

Northern Virginia Transit Commission

A representative from NVTC was unable to attend the forum.

Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit

On behalf of DRPT, Mr. Werth mentioned that the agency is looking at ways to use Section 5310 funding to procure transport services rather than using funds to purchase capital equipment.

Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (WMAA)

A representative from MWAA was unable to attend the forum.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Commission (WMATC)

Mr. Morrow noted that WMATC has shifted to an electronic filing process.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Mr. Harrington from WMATA provided an overview of WMATA's activities, including the recent extension of MV's contract for two years to provide Metro Access. Metro will be getting public and industry feedback about the structure of the next MetroAccess contract. WMATA is working with DDOT on a bus lane pairing on H and I Streets Northwest. WMATA is also considering how the light rail and street car projects being constructed or planned for implementation will interface with bus and other transportation modes.

Federal Transit Administration

Ms. Barlow noted that FTA is pleased to work with providers, and that the TPB's JARC and New Freedom process is considered very successful. Once the surface transportation bill is reauthorized, there may be more opportunities of this nature.

Taxicab, Limousine & Paratransit Association

Mr. Morgan described the new interactive on-line driver training program now available from TLPA. Five of ten modules have been released and are available to anyone for a nominal fee on the TLPA website. He encouraged all private providers to consider making this training part of their requirements for drivers.