

Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, July 2, 2014

Committee Members Present: Chair Ron Biss, Rozanne Severence, Kjensmo Walker, Margot Imdieke Cross, Bob Anderson, Robert Platz, Heidi Myhre, Darrell Paulsen, Mark Hoisser, John Lund, Chad McGuire, Nichole Villavicencio and Patty Thorsen.

Committee Members Absent: None.

Committee Members Excused: James Williams

Council Staff Present: Gary Nyberg, Charles Carlson, Anna Potter, Katie Roth, Christina Morrison and Pam Steffen from Metro Transit, Clare Schleichert from OEO, Andrew Krueger and Alison Coleman.

Public Present: Rosalind Sampson from MIAH, and Kari Sheldon.

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Biss called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:28 p.m. on Wednesday, July 2, 2014.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

It was moved by Lund, seconded by Thorsen to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Anderson, seconded by Villavicencio to approve the minutes of the June 4, 2014 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

INFORMATION & BUSINESS

1. Metro Transit Internal & External Bus Announcement Project

Gary Nyberg spoke to the TAAC committee. He is the Manager of Technology Systems for Bus Operations at Metro Transit. Announcements are currently implemented on Routes 10, 17, 18 and the Red Line BRT. Six hundred and sixty four of the 960 buses will be announcement ready by the end of 2014. The entire fleet will be announcement ready by 2017 as new bus procurement occurs. The project involves maintaining 15,000 announcement phrases. They can only send new announcement information to buses about every 1-4 weeks.

Every time the bus opens the door an external announcement is made. It would say "Welcome aboard, then the route number, the branch, the direction and the destinations. It is mimicking what is on the onboard display. There will be a repeat of the announcement so that those at the end of the line boarding the bus will hear the announcement. Between 8:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. the announcements will not be as loud as they are in the day time. There will be 1,200 external phrases on each bus.

The related ADA guidelines 49 CFR § 37.167: "Where vehicles or other conveyances for more than one route serve the same stop, the entity shall provide a means by which an individual with a visual impairment or other disability can identify the proper vehicle to enter or be identified to the vehicle operator as a person seeking a ride on a particular route."

The internal announcements are made on the bus when the bus enters the designated bus stop zones. They are GPS activated. All of the buses have GPS technology. The bus itself knows the schedule and knows where it is supposed to be. The announcement content will scroll on the "Stop Request" LED sign and match the announcement.

The internal announcements are made at all bus stop locations. There are approximately 200 landmarks that will be announced. They are selected by the Transit Information Center department. Approximately 8,700 individual transfers will be announced. Transfers will not be announced in the Downtown Fare Zone, which accounts for 80,000 transfers. Instead it will say something like "This is a major transfer point". Announcements will not be made when the bus is in "off route" condition that may be caused by inaccurate bus stop interval settings and short-term detours. The operators will be asked to make the announcements when it is not working.

Related ADA Guidelines 49 CFR § 37.167 include announcing the transfer points with other fixed routes. They will announce signalized and major intersections (stop signs, traffic lights), major destination points, intervals (points along a route to help people be oriented to their location) and other stops upon request of an individual with a disability.

Each bus stop has an announcement zone. It is a virtual zone based on GPS. The default setting is set at about 600 feet (long city block is 660 feet, short city block 330 feet). They will continually be revising this. Revisions will be ongoing. The actual zone identifies itself. It won't announce the next stop until it leaves the current stop. Zones will overlap. Depart zones will be used to mitigate premature announcements.

For quality assurance they will review feedback from customers and operators. They will develop SOP's for monitoring vehicle hardware. They are managing content for 15,000 announcement phrases. They are planning to use text to speech software. The announcement phrases will be converted to audio files and then sent to the buses. Phrases will be updated on a weekly basis. The software will help ensure stable voice talent. There is no studio coordination. It can be used for other purposes.

Every bus that is equipped with the hardware and the software can run on any route. Every bus is sent out these files. Each bus will be able to announce on any route in the system. It uses the GPS to know where it is at.

There are potential future phases. They are looking at improving way-finding announcements such as ADA Interval requirements. There will be announcements for service changes, announcements for marketing initiatives, announcements in other languages and improved route transfer content. They are trying to purchase the software that has the potential for other languages. That will not be part of the initial phase.

The estimated timeline is;

October 2014 – 11 Hi-Frequency Routes

November 2014 – 53 Urban Local Routes

November 2014 – 5 Suburban Local Routes

December 2014 – 72 Express Routes

Early 2015 - MTS Contracted Routes, 6 Express, 21 Suburban Local and 2 Urban Local

Imdieke Cross said that she was informed that the high ranges in a voice are the first to go when someone is losing their hearing. Announcements in a man's voice can be heard better.

2. Arterial BRT Project Vehicle Discussion

Charles Carlson spoke to the TAAC committee. He will be visiting the bus manufacturer next month to advise on the new BRT vehicles. The BRT vehicles will be a special subset of buses that only run on the BRT routes. They won't run the regular buses on these routes. They are primarily the same bus. It is the Gillig bus vehicle that Metro Transit has hundreds of. There are a few differences. The back door is wider than the buses you see today. Unlike the regular bus, you pay ahead of time. There are ticket machines and a rail system validator. Because people pay ahead of time, they board on both doors on the bus. The front door will have the ramp. There won't be a farebox on the bus. There is a brighter overhead sign, with white letters instead of yellow. It is the same sign that is used on the Red Line. It will have a special paint scheme. It is primarily a blue color instead of a white color and a different use of the red and yellow. It is mostly white along the bottom.

The vehicle layout on the inside will be a little bit different. The main difference is there is a wider rear door so that people can get on and off at the same time and speed boarding. There are no changes expected from the current buses in front of the partition space. The wheelchair area is the same as it is today. The rear bus doors will open at all stops, like on the LRT. The driver will open the rear door.

The technology features will have an on board scrolling sign and automated announcements. The announcements will be voice recorded. The bus windows will be like LRT vehicles. The windows don't open. There is a push tape instead of a pull chord to signify a stop. Buses will not automatically stop at each station on every trip. They stop upon request or if somebody is waiting to board.

Wheelchair securement devices are regulated by state law and accompanying rules (law 299A.12). BRT buses will include two forward-facing wheelchair positions using current Metro Transit specifications. They are exploring something that is being used in other areas. It is the increased use of rear-facing positions. You don't need to do a tie-down to secure the device. The wheelchair backs up to a padded board. Then you set the brake and there is no more securement. To implement this it may require a state law change. There is a padded board about five feet tall that is facing the back of the bus. It extends out a bit so the user can back into the board. In one case there is an integrated stanchion/pole that provides securement for side to side movement. The intent of this device is to keep the wheelchair in place. This is being used in the Pacific Northwest. It has been very well received by users today. The positions are right behind the wheels and the driver. There is one front facing space and one rear facing space on each side of the bus. Only one device at a time can be used on each side. On another bus there is a fold down arm rest instead of a pole. Some of the rear facing spaces have an optional seat belt.

He showed another device that hugs the wheels on the side of the wheelchair to hold it in place. Severence was concerned that this device would damage the scooters and wheelchairs. Some TAAC members said it would be hard to maintain the arms. The less mechanics involved the better. Biss is not in favor of the vertical pole.

There is a state law that governs restraint devices. State Law 299A.12 says a wheelchair securement device shall prevent any forward, backward, or lateral movement of an occupied wheelchair when the device is engaged and the vehicle is in motion, accelerating or braking and shall attach to the frame of the wheelchair without damaging it.

Rule 7450.0500 – Testing requirements, etc. Law changes or device approval will be required to introduce rear-facing passive systems.

Katie Roth added that in the 40 foot buses they have not seen the poles. They have just seen the arm on these buses. They have seen the poles on the articulated buses.

They may need a change in the law regarding the rear facing wheelchair position. Paulsen said he would like to see the seatbelt option in the rear facing wheelchair position.

There would be a scrolling sign in the back facing part of the bus so that those in the rear facing wheelchair position would be able to see the sign.

The maximum seating capacity on a 40 foot bus is generally between 33 and 36 seats plus standing room for another dozen people. The bicycle racks are on the exterior of the bus in the front. The A Line buses will not have fareboxes. This is only for the BRT service. This will create more room to maneuver the wheelchairs and scooters.

Walker made a motion for TAAC to support pursuing rear facing passive restraints in a BRT vehicle as an additional option to the forward facing tie down. Villavicencio seconded the motion. **The motion carried.**

Severence had issues with the nine inch curb and how it relates to the lift. McGuire said that the sound made when kneeling the bus and operating the lift should not be so loud.

3. Metro Transit Update

Pam Steffen spoke to the TAAC committee. This coming Friday is July 4th. The buses will be running on a holiday schedule. She is doing individual testimonials in video today after the meeting for a Customer Service Wellness Video that they are rolling out to the operators. She invited the TAAC members to participate.

MEMBER COMMENT

About two weeks ago McGuire met with staff from Metro Transit who are making improvements to the website so that it is more accessible to screen readers. The new text is darker than before. There are some behind the scenes changes that will be helpful to screen readers.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Kari Sheldon spoke to the TAAC committee about the stroller situation on the buses and light rail. People are supposed to take the baby out of the stroller and fold the stroller. They are not doing this. Some of the strollers are too large.

Steffen said that there are interior cards on the buses that say to fold up strollers and hold the baby. The Metro Transit policy is for the operator to ask the passenger to fold up the stroller. They don't mandate that they do it. She will talk to the managers and ask them to issue another bulletin.

Paulsen suggested the enunciators state that the passengers should fold up the strollers.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:27 p.m.

Alison Coleman
Recording Secretary