

# Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, August 5, 2020

**Committee Members Present:** Chair David Fenley, Vice Chair Darrell Paulsen, Patsy Murphy, Ken Rodgers, Jeffrey Dains, Kari Sheldon, John Clark, Heidi Myhre, Claudia Fuglie, Patty Thorsen, Diane Graham-Raff, Kody Olson and Richard Rowan.

**Committee Members Absent:** None

**Committee Members Excused:** Sam Jasmine, Christopher Bates and Erik Henricksen.

**Council Staff Present:** Doug Cook, Robin Kaufman, Met Council Member Wendy Wulff, Christine Kuennen, Andy Streasick and Alison Coleman.

**Public Present:** Nathan Ellis

## CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Fenley called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:33 p.m. on Wednesday, August 5, 2020.

## APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

It was moved by Vice Chair Paulsen, seconded by Dains to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Dains, seconded by Murphy to approve the minutes of the June 3, 2020 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

## BUSINESS & INFORMATION

### 1. Metro Transit Update

Robin Kaufman spoke to the TAAC committee. I am the Director of Administration for Metro Transit. I have two agenda items today. I am going to be providing some information on activities at Metro Transit and then I would like to spend the majority of the time on talking a little bit about our engagement plan that we just started this past week. So the first thing I will update is about face coverings.

On July 22, Governor Walz issued an executive order to require people to wear face masks or face coverings. That includes public transportation. So with that, we are asking all passengers to wear face masks. We are also asking our operators to wear face masks when they are on board and there are passengers on board. There are a few exceptions to this rule. Children under two do not have to wear face masks and people with any health issues such as asthma or other lung issues. They are not required to wear face masks. If you are unable to put on a face mask or face covering, you are not required to wear one.

Right now, we are requiring it and focusing our efforts on educating our riders on the health benefits of wearing face masks both to themselves and others. The primary way we are encouraging this is we are distributing masks at a lot of our busy transit stations and transit stops and transit centers. So far, we have actually distributed over 50,000 of these face masks to individuals that need them.

The only other exception when operators don't need to wear face masks is we have just installed some temporary protective barriers similar to what you will see when you go to the store. The checkout counter has plexiglass barriers between the customers and the sales people. We have done a similar thing on our buses where we have put in temporary shields that separate people as they board from our operators. So if they are behind that or if they are a light rail driver inside their cab they do not need to wear a face mask.

The second update I was going to mention is that we just completed installation of that barrier on all of our buses. With that, last Saturday, we started allowing passengers to board through the front door again. I know this is great news, to many of you. I know we spent a great deal of talking about this issue at our last meeting. So, starting this last Saturday, people can board the bus at the front door and they are able to pay as they board. What we are asking is that if people are able we are asking that people board at the front and when they get off, exit at the back door of the bus to minimize the contact with people when boarding and alighting to allow social distancing.

The last update is that we are continuing to limit the amount of passengers on buses at this time. We are monitoring routes. As we see buses that are overloaded, we would add more buses to those routes to add capacity. We do have signs that say if the bus is full take the next bus please when the bus is at capacity. We have also instructed our operators that if they see someone with a disability at a stop. They do actually stop and contact our Control Center and find out when the next bus is arriving and stop and verbally notify the customer that they are full and when the next bus is arriving.

Myhre said I would like to know if we could do some training on Covid-19. I don't know if I am standing on the right spot or door because of my forearm crutch. You have some drivers that truly want me to use the back. I never know how the bus is going to be set up or how I am going to be dropped off. How do you deal with a hidden disability? I called Customer Relations about this.

Caufman said I am glad you called Customer Relations about this. One of the things we are doing is that as we get those calls, we are tracking them. We are looking to see if there are any trends for what bus routes and what operators may be receiving complaints so that we can address that one on one. Hopefully, going forward, as of last Saturday, you should be able to board the bus in the front door. So hopefully, you shouldn't continue to experience that.

Vice Chair Paulsen said I've taken the bus during Covid-19. A lot of the drivers want to comply. Then I see some drivers not complying at all. They even make comments throughout their ride about why they don't want to wear masks. Then I see a combination of things. If you have the barrier free glass, they will put it between themselves and whoever is behind the yellow line. But if the bus is full, that brings me to the second one. During the Covid times, only 10 people are supposed to be on the 40-foot bus and up to 15 people on the 60 foot, correct? If that is the case, then up until the 31<sup>st</sup>, I rode several buses and they were packed. That was before you implemented the payment fare. Those buses were completely full. I don't know if they were supposed to adhere to the social distancing and still do the 10 or 15 ratio on the 40-foot and then the 60-foot. I would assume that they would still have those in place, but it was apparent Friday that the drivers weren't adhering to any of that.

Maybe it was due to protest because I could hear some of the drivers say that once you implemented the front door boarding again, then some of the drivers were going to take some time off. Because they felt that it was unsafe for you to do so.

Caufman said were there specific routes that you experienced this on that I can pass along?

Vice Chair Paulsen said yes, the 54, the 64, some of the downtown routes as well. I saw the 21 was packed. The 94 was packed. I don't know if it was just this weekend leading up to the first. But it seemed to be every other bus was not adhering to any of the 10 – 15 ratio.

Caufman said I can pass that along because we do try to monitor the buses as we see routes, but it fluctuates by day. There were some repairs on the Green Line this Friday and Saturday. That could have been the results too.

Dains said just to follow up on Darrell's comments. What is the current ratio because I talked to a lot of our residents that represents my district and they are afraid to ride the bus because they see these buses being full or close to being full. So it is hard to tell people because this is the process, this is the procedure. This is the limitation because of social distancing. So I don't know what it is right now. Is it 10, 15, what is it?

Caufman said 10 for a regular 40-foot bus and 15 for an articulated bus.

Chair Fenley said Robin, do you want folks to call in whenever they see the numbers being exceeded. Is that something that Metro Transit wants to know about?

Caufman said absolutely. That really does help us to monitor where the bus drivers are at with the numbers. It does really help us know what those numbers are. You can call into Customer Relations. We just put up new forms on our Contacts page that has a brand new short form. It is two or three lines long and has a place for the route number. I can send you a link to where the new form is. We just loaded it and it is a lot shorter and easier to fill out. If you have your smart phone on you, you can fill it out and submit it.

Sheldon said I wanted to bring up an issue that a driver would not strap down my chair and he would drive slowly. I called and turned him in.

Myhre said are the disabled folks going to be able to keep their spots? Kari is in a wheelchair and she doesn't have a lot of choices on where she can sit. Some of us with disabilities don't have choices because of how the buses are set up. Are we making room for the people who are truly in need of it? There are people sitting in the handicapped seats.

Caufman said I can take that back with me to the communications staff. We are constantly reminding people of the code of conduct and expectations.

Vice Chair Paulsen said lately, when I am on the bus and the driver comes across another person at a stop in a wheelchair, the driver asks me if I mind if he picks up this person in a wheelchair. I say I don't mind because I don't want them to not pick me up when somebody else is in that next spot. We need to identify those two seats as needed seats and what the policies are around those two spots.

## **2. Listening & Learning Through Crisis, What's Changed**

Robin Caufman spoke to the TAAC committee. We know that things have changed a lot over the last four or five months. There has been a lot of impact. There has been a lot of crisis to our communities that we serve and provide a lot of transit to. So we are starting a five or six week outreach process we are calling "Listening & Learning Through Crisis, What's Changed. Basically, we are trying to do a variety of outreach to our community and our regular riders and our regular core routes. Really understanding how everything has changed or what our needs and expectations have changed.

We are doing some surveys. We have got surveys online. We have already received 400 responses from that. We just posted it this last week. So we have received 400 responses on our online form. We are talking to bus riders. We are literally going to stops and talking to folks as they are waiting for a transfer or getting off a bus. We have already surveyed 100 people in person. Then we are holding virtual meetings like this. This is actually our first one. So thank you for being the first one. We want to meet with community organizations and have this group dialogue so that we really understand what some of the impacts are.

The purpose for this. How we are going to use this information. We want to inform our near-term decisions as we are continuing to evolve through Covid-19. Things are changing and we are trying to be dynamic and see where the priorities lie so we can make good decisions.

We are also looking for long-term plans. We are working on our network next 2040 Plan. We want to understand community engagement because we know that people are not comfortable doing in-person meetings and doing in-person activities. And people are just exhausted. So we have these surveys. We can send an email to David, who can send it to the group of where you can take the survey online. I can send you the page to the Survey Monkey Survey.

But what I wanted to do today is just take maybe five minutes per question and try to understand. First of all how transit has changed. It sounds like some of you are continuing to take transit. It would be good to know what your experiences have been and get notes on that.

The second question would be how have your priorities changed as far as transit? We surveyed folks back in 2018 and we found that folks wanted fast, on time, reliable, safe and clean and comfortable were qualities. Are those still the priorities?

The third question we can talk about is what is the best way to communicate? Are you getting the information you need as things are changing?

Can we focus on the first question about experiences people have had?

Myhre said I have noticed with my experience is that my ride will take a little bit longer. If I want to be somewhere, I have to give it more time to get there. We don't know how this is going to be played out. Winter is coming. I hope we can work on Covid-19. It is hard for me to use the back door of the bus.

Vice Chair Paulsen said my experience has been that most of the drivers have been accommodating. I am concerned about the frequency of the bus. We have to look at changing our plans and our priorities when we go out. I got used to the frequency of every 15 minutes and getting home within the next hour or so. But with Covid-19, I plan at least another hour or so because those of us who ride the bus on a regular basis verses those of us who use the bus less frequently. How do we bridge the gap and connect the two to make it fun for both groups?

Myhre said the bus driver tells me to go to the back of the bus without realizing I have a disability. You can look normal and still have a disability. Before Covid-19, I could still get on the bus. The signage needs to be fixed. That swing bar on the bus needs to be fixed.

Clark said I just wanted to note that I am one of the ones who are not using the bus or Metro Mobility because of a lung condition. I feel that my only issue at this point is safety.

Murphy said I used to ride at least once a week. With Covid, two things have come along. One is obviously, I am not going to the Capitol weekly. But also, just for the safety and whatever for myself, I only use Metro Mobility. I am not allowed to use regular buses. So, I have stayed home and have not use the transportation. So I cannot comment on any of the new stuff and how it is going. I am looking forward on getting back.

Fuglie said I have been taking the bus a lot since they opened it up. I've had no trouble. The drivers have been really good. You deal with the passengers once in awhile for them to move. But it has been really a good experience.

Caufman said we can go to the second question, which is: Have the priorities changed? I have heard a little bit about frequency is important. The previous findings were that people prioritized being on time, fast and reliable and safe and clean. Are those still priorities or are there different priorities or a different order of priorities?

Vice Chair Paulsen said I think those are our general priorities. It should stay in the forefront of our messaging. As far as frequency and our priorities. As long as you display on the signage: "Essential Trips Only". I think that really does cut down on the frequency of trips just going to the park or down the street to see a friend or just going a couple of blocks because you don't want to walk up the hill. As long as we continue to have that signage, we continue to say: "Essential Trips Only". That cuts down on trips we usually see in the summertime and during warm weather months.

Myhre said our disability groups asked what is considered: "Essential Trips Only?" Do you have any examples of this? Going grocery shopping, going to the doctor, going to work? So you can tell the public what it is in a couple of different languages. You have to have your mask, your money. You can't bring a lot of stuff on the bus. So people in wheelchairs, walkers and scooters can be distanced. So we can all share the bus.

Caufman said those priorities are not in order. In the last five or six minutes we can talk about communication and what is the best way for you to communicate to us for any issues and what is the best way for us to communicate with you? Through this time have you been able to get the information you need as we have changed schedules and things like that?

Myhre said while I was doing my project for the self advocacy group for transportation because they wanted to learn about it. I called the station to get the information. The person who tells you the route. There could be more education on that side with good answers. When I called to make a complaint, I had a very nice gentleman who said I was pretty much on the dot. If you have people working who actually use the system, they may see something I didn't before, they could help you clean up the system. If you have good people who care about this, it will work.

Vice Chair Paulsen said I see a lot of social media. It tends to be right on. If you have a similar program like Hustle. Young people tend to communicate, respond and react to attacks verses anything else they are looking at. So if there is anything you want to communicate to them like a down line or the light rail is down for a temporary issue. As long as you can shoot that out through a text, do it multiple times throughout the first couple of hours. I think you are right on with the way most people communicate in these times.

Myhre said the disability community wants to be a part of this information. They were starting to see some not so good information. I told them I would try to get them some more information.

Caufman said when I send out the survey or when David sends out the survey link, feel free to share that with your community groups, family, friends and email lists. We are trying to get the survey out as far as we can and have as many people as possible complete it.

The survey will be active until August 27. It is going to take a few weeks to compile all the data. I don't know if we will have it by the September meeting. Maybe for the October meeting. I will be happy to come back and share the outcomes of the survey.

### **3. Metro Mobility Special Programs Update**

Andy Streasick spoke to the TAAC committee. Running through our special programs in response to the pandemic. We have 1,070 grocery rides. The grocery and essential goods service is the service through which the drivers themselves function as a store to door service or a meals on wheels service. They go and pick up somebody's groceries from an app and a credit card at the store. It is not just groceries. It is also any household essentials. One important note. We had been allowing restaurant food pickup through that service. Executive management decided that that was beyond the scope of the service. They discontinued restaurant services through that. But other food and household essentials we are still doing.

All of these numbers are through the end of last month. So we had 1,070 of those rides so far to date. We have had 4,541 bookings for the curbside program. Which is again, us stopping and dropping someone off at their destination and waiting for 20 minutes or less with the same bus. Allowing them to either pick up a prescription or use an ATM or whatever the case might be. You can place an order at a restaurant and run in and pick stuff up with the curbside program. In that you are going alone. You can use the same bus but pay for one fare each way.

Our food shelf program has been very heavily utilized. That is a relationship we have established directly with the food shelf. So customers aren't booking those. It doesn't need to be a Metro Mobility customer. It is anybody who is serviced by the food shelf. We have done over 16,642 of those food shelf rides to Transit Link as our capacity has continued to tighten. DT&H's begin to operate in some modified capacities and people start to go back to work. We are recognizing from a capacity standpoint that it makes sense to move those to Transit Link. We are in the process of doing that now.

Health care worker rides are our most heavily utilized special program. We have had 61,361 health care bookings to date. Those people may or may not be Metro Mobility certified. That program is site based. So it is rides just for work. Back and forth to a facility where everyone is receiving clinical treatment

The AWARE program. That one is smaller but important. That is a special taxi ride that is established for folks that we can't serve right now because they have either tested positive or they are having symptoms of Covid. We have a special cab service where there is a barrier in place. There is PPE that the drivers and customers have and there is a rigorous cleaning of the vehicle. These rides are just for medical services essentially. They are a very heavily subsidized program. Hence the small number of just 36 rides so far.

The Essential Worker program is the last one I will talk about. That is broader than the health care worker one. Anyone who is an essential worker. That is now a Transit Link program. But during the civil unrest was at its height, we took it on a bit. We did about 1,146 of those bookings at that time. That includes another 1,942 done by Transit Link.

The other thing that I wanted to mention is that we did follow Metro Transit's lead and have started accepting cash fares again as of August and we have started telling drivers that they can and should assist people in tagging GoTo cards as needed. If people need that assistance. They are using hand sanitizer between transactions. Then also we do have a Metro Mobility service person on site and printing cards again. So for the first time since the pandemic really ramped up, we are able to print, refill and place GoTo cards through the MMSC.

Myhre said there has been a problem with hand sanitizers that were not safe. Are you looking into that?

Streasick said yes. We did a review of what we are using. It is not on the list that came back bad. In addition to that there are other new ones that are there. So yes, we are keeping an eye on that and we are in good shape there.

It is business as usual with the amount of people on the Metro Mobility bus. We are trying when possible to keep it just to one person with their guests and PCA's when possible. We sometimes need to go to more than

one customer. But when that is happening, we are limiting it to what we can to keep the six feet of distancing on the bus. The passenger should be six feet from the driver other than escort and tie down. Then six feet from any other passengers. We are keeping that in place. We are going to try whenever we can to keep it to one unique customer on the bus, but we recognize that this is not always possible.

Vice Chair Paulsen said could we get those numbers every month?

Streasick said I am compiling those numbers so I can shoot those numbers over to everybody in an email format. That is not a problem.

My staff has been working weekends sometimes and notifying people who have been exposed to the virus.

Myhre said I have not been taken all the way to my apartment by the Metro Mobility driver. He said this was appropriate. What is the distance for that? I need help going up the stairs.

Streasick said if the person is stable and able to self-propel, the drivers can maintain six feet of distancing during the escort. You are the arbitrator of that. Or you are the boss of that. If you are not comfortable with that, you can tell the driver that you need them closer and that they need to respond to that. I will bring that back to drivers' supervisors with all of our three providers. You are the boss of whether you need an escort. It is not up to the driver to declare that he is done. The driver can say I am going to stay back if that is O.K. but if you say I am going to need some help with those steps, I need you to come with me to keep me stable, it is still part of the driver's job if it is necessary for the driver to escort you.

Myhre said what is the reason it takes so much longer when there is only one person on the bus?

Streasick said the ride times themselves are actually much shorter now by a lot. In terms of how long someone is on the bus. But where people get picked up in the window is further into the window sometimes now. That is simply because from a productivity standpoint, we went from having sometimes two or three or four customers on the bus. Sometimes more than that to trying to do whatever we can to just have one person on the bus. If two people are getting picked up from the same apartment building, going over to the same Walgreens, at the same time. We are sending two buses. What that means is that rather than saying we will be there right at noon, we are going to send one bus right at noon and then send the other bus at 12:25. We lose a little bit of flexibility to be able to nail that negotiated time when we are looking at keeping just one person on the bus at a time.

Clark said how are you doing with compliance of bus and light rail drivers wearing masks?

Streasick said pretty well overall. The drivers are recognizing the importance of it and were before the governor's order. I don't think we had a huge problem with customers before hand. I think the governor's order and help with the problems we were having. The unfortunate reality is that as ridiculous as it is, it has been politicized. You have close to half of mainstream position is that masks are not necessary, and science be darned. There is a little bit of frustration from some folks that feel like this is big bad government infringing on our freedom. But for the most part, even people who might have a problem with it for political reasons, have don a really good job of complying.

Clark said there have been situations where there is evidence of transmission from Metro Mobility and the vans.

Streasick said we are not aware of any. When our staff had to notify customers because we had a driver that tested positive, we are contacting those customers. I am tracking whether or not they are symptomatic. We have also had the contact tracing line contact us to let us know that customers have been positive and have gone back and looked and tried to help tracing that way. We are not aware of any instances where we found out that somebody that we contacted were testing positive or were symptomatic.

Chair Fenley said I have a few questions for you, Andy. Have drivers, either Metro Mobility or bus tested positive at the same rate as the general public?

Streasick said my perception is that the drivers have tested positive at a higher rate. That is not official, but we have had a number of drivers test positive. I think possibly as with any front line worker who cannot telework and still having a job and going to work every day and out in the public. You are acting with people over and over again. That will obviously put you at a higher risk.

Chair Fenley said have you had any overly contentious situations where you wouldn't let someone on a bus who was not wearing a mask after they claimed they were not wearing a mask because they had a disability?

Streasick said no, if somebody claims that they have a medical condition, then they are getting on the bus without a mask. It is an important thing to mention. Particularly for the disability community. We are not just talking about respiratory conditions here. Some folks with physical disabilities can't physically put on or take off a mask. Or someone with mental disabilities can't effectively put on or take off a mask. Those folks and people who work with those folks or support those folks don't think they should have to wear a mask because of that, there is room in our policy and room in the governor's order to qualify for not wearing a mask.

Vice Chair Paulsen said I am a regular rider and the drivers have seen me on a bus. Some days I can put on the mask and some days I can't. How do you deal with those kind of situations? What if you don't feel like or don't want to wear a mask?

Streasick said well, don't want to is an issue. The order doesn't have a lot of room for that. But definitely, disabilities fluctuate. Every one of the examples I can think of that allows somebody not to wear a mask. There are situations where they could wear one, but they choose not to. But you are never required to. But if you sometimes wear a mask but your disability prohibits you from doing it sometimes, that is just fine. I know we have talked about it with our staff. I don't know if it has been specifically communicated with our drivers. What has been communicated is don't push back. If somebody says they have a medical condition or disability related condition that prevents them from wearing a mask, that is the end of the conversation. But I will specify that that includes somebody that you have seen wearing a mask before.

Murphy said if Darrell forgets to wear a mask and when asked he says I forgot. What does the driver do?

Streasick said if you are saying at this point that I don't want to wear one. Or I forgot. That is a different issue. That is going to be a policy violation. That would be a violation of the governor's order. But if you are saying I can't wear one because of my disability or because of my health condition, O.K. thank you very much.

Fuglie said what do you do with the drivers when you see that they don't have a mask? They say that they don't have one and yet you find out that the providers have masks on hand and they just didn't go and get one.

Streasick said that thankfully hasn't been much of an issue. That would be subject to discipline for all the providers.

Fuglie said so you would call the provider?

Streasick said as with any policy issue, please call the Service Center. We want to make sure we can track that. Because if we have a driver who is not wearing a mask, the Met Council wants to know about that. We will notify the provider.

Christine had an important caveat about masks that I didn't mention. Much like the city buses distributing masks, so are we. We have them on the bus. So if someone does forget one, or decided they were not going to wear one, we can offer them a mask. They are on the Metro Mobility buses.

Clark said anything about drivers getting regular Covid-19 tests?

Streasick said we are not doing required routing testing. What we have done is made them available for free to all drivers with no out of pocket costs. We have allowed them to utilize the Met Council vehicle to go to the drive through testing sites to be tested. So we are boosting the availability that way. Drivers are screened for symptoms at the start of every shift.

Since we don't employ drivers, I don't have the numbers of how many drivers have taken the tests. We are offering them to all the contractors to take the test.

## **SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **1. Blue Line**

Ken Rodgers said the reason the Blue Line Extension has not met recently is because there has been a barrier with the BNSF railroad has not wanted to engage in conversation with the Met Council. Part of the alignment for the Blue Line uses part of the BNSF railroad right-of-way. So without their cooperation, we have been stuck. The Met Council just yesterday announced publicly that the decision has been made to realign the Blue Line Extension to avoid the use of having to use the BNSF right-of-way. So the meetings will probably be starting

to open up soon. So I will be able to report with some updated information. The realignment of the route is going to be a big issue. So stay tuned. There will be more coming.

## **2. Green Line**

This item was not presented.

## **3. Gold Line**

Vice Chair Paulsen said we met last month. We talked a little bit about station design and platform esthetics, materials we would be looking at and utilizing like some warm tones and warm tone wood colors. I will have a better update next month.

## **4. Rush Line**

Vice Chair Paulsen said they meet at the end of the month. I will have an update next month.

## **CHAIRS REPORT**

Chair Fenley said if you have items you want to see on the agenda, please let me know.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

## **MEMBER COMMENT**

Vice Chair Paulsen said I have looked at all of the materials over the last couple of months. We have a letter that was supposed to be on the docket. That we were supposed to approve and send it up to management. I believe we should have done that already. But because of Covid and the fact that we haven't met, we have not seen that letter yet. I hope that letter did get done by you, Chair Fenley. I hope we can submit that letter to the Chair's office and to the Met Council members. I know the Chair was eager to talk about some of those things. We were also talking about that ambassador program. I think that this whole piece of designated seating would fit together in that regard or at least it would give them an opportunity to look at when he is looking at the ambassador program together. The ambassador program does work with larger buses and over the road buses. I am interested to see how it is going to work with our buses.

I know how it works with light rail and BRT vehicles because I have seen it work in other parts of the country. I am just interested in how the culture of Minnesota nice and all of those things and how it is going to play out in reference to the ambassador program and what they are supposed to carry out.

I hope the letter is on its way and will be a top priority for next month.

Myhre said is this letter about the strollers?

Vice Chair Paulsen said yes.

Myhre said how are we going to approach this with the situation of Covid-19? It is still an issue.

Vice Chair Paulsen said it is still a problem. We just haven't been addressing it because of Covid-19. It is still there. It is still a problem.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Alison Coleman  
Recording Secretary