



Integrating Accessibility

Marketing & Transit Information Equity Initiative
2021-2022 TAAC Work Group Sessions Summary

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Overview

The Metro Transit Marketing and Transit Information division has been working on a project to improve accessibility integration and ensure that the work of the division serves customers who have physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities.

A work group consisting of three members of the Metropolitan Council TAAC (Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee) was formed to provide feedback about their interaction and experiences with Metro Transit's Marketing and Transit Information division's tools and services. Facilitated sessions were held in September and October 2021 to gain further insight and comments from group members (some additional comments were also captured during introductory meetings with group members in summer 2021). Feedback was used to determine where accessibility gaps or pain points exist and help formulate recommendations and goals for future improvement. The group reconvened in January 2022 to prioritize the recommendations.

General Takeaways from Sessions

Through these sessions, we have learned that we must continue to provide information in a variety of ways (electronic, printed materials, human assistance) as it makes it more widely accessible. We have also identified the following gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility in our division's work.

Communication methods and tactics

- Some marketing messages have not been targeted to customers with disabilities (such as for \$1 Rides promotion in September-October).
- Representation of the disability community in marketing materials is significantly lacking.
- Transit tools are not intuitive for users with differing abilities and are not well-known as options to help their trip.

Accessibility on vehicles and at stops

- Customers often rely on audio announcements to know when to exit a bus/train – but these are not consistent and could use enhancements.
- Accessibility at stops is critical for customers with disabilities and encounter situations where it can be improved; but customers do not have a quick and easy way to report these issues.
- Navigating to alternate stops when an unexpected closure occurs is challenging.

Recommendations

From the above takeaways, we have outlined the following recommendations our division can take action on to help close some of those gaps we have identified.

Communication methods and tactics

- Create communication guidelines/template for marketing and communication plans
 - Incorporate the different audiences' needs when creating content; ensure that information can be accessed in multiple formats and is easy to understand
 - Ensure that the way in which customers with disabilities use our system is considered when crafting marketing messages
 - Include community organizations as outlets to reach with messaging
 - Consider how the disability community could be more represented in our materials (social media posts, photo shoots, rider profiles)
- Partner with community organizations that advocate for customers with disabilities
 - Have people with disabilities provide a regular audit on materials, and ensure they are compensated for their time
 - Establish an ongoing relationship
- Recruit individuals with disabilities to be in Riders Club
- Create trainings, tutorials and videos for individuals and organizations on how to use the transit tools we offer
- Create a dark mode or high contrast mode for the website and mobile app

Accessibility on vehicles and at stops

- Explore how to improve transit information accessibility
 - Ensure consistency with audio announcements
 - Enhance on-vehicle audio announcements to include next stop
 - Seek out how to provide a visual confirmation of location while riding
 - Survey inconsistencies with how transit information is displayed at shelters and stops
 - Incorporate guidelines for better directions, wayfinding, accessibility at alternate stops when there are unexpected closures
- Consider ways to allow for better/easier reporting/tracking when there are issues at stops

Priorities

The workgroup prioritized general recommendations in this order:

1. Consider ways to allow for better/easier customer reporting and status tracking when there are issues at stops
2. Explore how to improve transit information accessibility (with a particular focus on improving on-vehicle real-time location information through audio announcement enhancements and visual displays)
3. Create trainings, tutorials and videos for individuals and organizations on how to use the transit tools we offer
4. Create a communication guidelines/template for marketing and communication plans
5. Create a dark mode or high contrast mode for the website and mobile app
6. Partner with community organizations that advocate for customers with disabilities
7. Recruit individuals to be in Riders Club (a group of customers that is regularly engaged to provide feedback on Metro Transit initiatives through surveys, interviews, and other formats)

Next Steps

Quarter 1 2022

- These recommendations and priorities will be presented to the Director of Marketing & Transit Information for input on potential resource availability, allocation and timelines for projects.
- The recommendations and anticipated timelines/next steps will be presented to the TAAC.

While many of these recommendations will take some time to be addressed, these can all be discussed within the various departments as potential projects to work on in 2022 and beyond. The division will provide updates twice a year to TAAC as projects move forward.

Appendix A: Session #1 Questions and Feedback

First work group session was centered around the pre-Metro Transit journey and learning about Metro Transit and planning transit use. Session took place on September 29, 2021. Work group members were given pre-session assignments:

- Learn about our \$1 rides in September & October
- Plan a Metro Transit trip to a destination you've never been to before

Session Questions

Learning about Metro Transit promotions and service – talking through information available and challenges with getting needed information as well as positive experiences.

\$1 rides promotion

Questions

- Were you able to get information about our \$1 rides promotion? Where did you get your information?
- Was the information provided in a useful way?

Feedback

- Several received information about the promotion at a TAAC meeting or through a promotional email – all were aware of the promotion in general
- Most did not notice any ads on buses or shelters, though one group member noted seeing the messaging on the bus overhead signs
- One group member noted potentially having noticed the promotion on social media
- All noted that even though they were aware of the \$1 promotion, they had not received information about the disability fare being 50 cents
- One group member noted that, while the information was presented in a useful way to her, all non-electronic marketing for the promotion seemed to be visual and would not have been accessible to visually impaired customers

Planning a Metro Transit trip to a new destination

Questions

- What tools did you use to plan your trip?
- What did you like or dislike about those tools?
- Have you tried using other Metro Transit tools/services in the past to plan trips? Are there reasons you don't use them currently?

Feedback

- Tools used: Some group members prefer electronic tools, while some prefer printed materials

- Google Maps preferred for planning trips. Our app was not preferred because it redirects people to the Safari browser and our website, rather than having a trip planning option integrated within the app.
- One group member noted that they really like NexTrip via text for updates at stops (another group member was interested in this but was unfamiliar with how to use it, said a tutorial/clear instruction could be helpful)
- A few group members call TIC periodically for assistance. One noted that landmarks are helpful for finding stops; she was not familiar with using stop ID numbers. Clear instructions for navigating to stops are important; could be helpful to have a class on how to use the trip planner or other tools
- One group member primarily uses a printed system map and/or pocket schedules, though she noted she is not always aware of where she can find new copies (has tried going to the Service Center office and it was closed). Sometimes she will talk to other customers to get help if she is taking an unfamiliar trip/route
- One group member gets rider alert emails, though she has to parse out if they pertain to her (sometimes they have a lot of info, she has processing challenges so it can be difficult at times)

Additional comments

Feedback

- Concerns were expressed about lack of consistency of heights for signs/schedule posters (West 7th Street in St. Paul was cited as an example)
- It would be helpful to have an easy way to report stops that have issues (sign knocked over, snow build-up, etc.). One idea was to expand the definition of “safety” in relation to Text for Safety so that issues with stops can be reported (lack of accessibility is a safety concern)
- One group member uses a wheelchair and noted that sometimes bus stops are very close to intersections/traffic signals, and people waiting there block curb cuts that she uses. Issues with access can also occur when a stop is too close to a shelter (can’t navigate easily)

Appendix B: Session #2 Questions and Feedback

Second work group session was centered around Metro Transit journey experiences. Session took place on October 20, 2021. Work group members were given a pre-session assignment:

- Give some thought to your recent transit trips, as well as your worst and best experiences in the past

Session Questions

Talking through a transit journey—we'll be talking through elements of a transit trip and asking questions about potential challenges or positives during past experiences.

1 . Before starting your journey

Assume you have already planned your transit trip in advance. Before leaving home, do you use any tools to check the status of your trip?

Question 1:

Do you check NexTrip or Show My Bus to determine if your bus/train is predicted to be on time?

Feedback

- One group member uses pocket schedules and writes down times, but doesn't typically use other tools to check the trip status
- One group member often uses mobile tools – likes Apple shortcuts so he can save specific stop IDs to send texts automatically for NexTrip updates (wishes the Metro Transit app had features for saving favorite stops)
- One group member gets rider alerts and has been receiving many trip cancellation alerts (particularly Route 54) – makes her nervous to try to make certain trips; often will call TIC to try to get status updates

Question 2:

Do you check online to determine if there are rider alerts that may impact your trip?

Feedback

- Two group members do not typically check rider alerts:
 - One group member noted he relies most on NexTrip via text to inform him of departure times; he has low vision, and the Metro Transit website screen is very white - too bright for his vision issues, not accessible. He uses dark mode
 - One group member uses electronic devices in a limited capacity; she typically finds out about major events or construction that could impact her travel through local news
- One group member receives rider alert emails and is interested in getting texts but needs more specific step-by-step instructions for how to sign up/manage subscriptions

Questions 3-4:

Do you call Metro Transit to check on your trip (NexTrip by phone, or talk to a Transit Information Center representative)?

What do you like or dislike about these tools/services?

Feedback

- Need more tutorials/assistance for learning what's available and how to use various tools
- App is not useful for those with a mobility card. Having "my favorite routes", "my favorite stops", "my tickets" would be more useful for those who use go-to cards. Integrating NexTrip into the app rather than redirecting to Safari would be beneficial

2. Starting the journey – getting to your bus stop or rail station

Questions

When starting your journey to get to your stop or station, are there examples of accessibility challenges you have experienced?

When starting your journey, have you experienced wayfinding challenges getting to a stop or station you don't often use?

What have you done when these challenges occurred?

Feedback

- When traffic signals are out near stops, there are safety concerns – for a customer with cognitive challenges, trying to determine when to cross safely can be difficult
- Some buses have older ramps and are difficult to use in a wheelchair. It's challenging to get up without help. Situations when there are no sidewalks, or the sidewalks are not big enough are also challenging
- At stops with shelters, with low vision it can be challenging at times to know when the bus is coming and when to go to the stop so the operator sees you (having a way to inform operator you are in the shelter would be beneficial)

3. At the stop/station

Question 1:

When getting to a stop or station, how do you typically know it is the correct stop (particularly at locations with multiple stops or stops that are in the middle of a block, etc.)?

Feedback

- One group member primarily relies on bus overhead sign or asks a driver
- Large signs in locations like Nicollet Mall or Uptown Transit Center are helpful
- Sometimes locations with multiple stops serving different routes are challenging (example: 8th Street downtown – navigated to the intersection using Google but went to incorrect stop)

- Wayfinding is challenging at some locations like the Mall of America
- One group member noted they had an experience in the past where a sign was missing route numbers, that made it challenging to be confident that it was the correct stop to be at

Question 2:

What type of information do you find helpful at stops/stations?

Feedback

- Timetable and map signs on bus stop signs can be difficult to figure out and are sometimes at a height that makes it difficult to view (shelter signage tends to be more helpful when available)
- Larger maps in general with a lot of route info (such as at Uptown Transit Center) can also be challenging to figure out
- Triptych at transit stations has helpful information; schedule times are useful

Question 3:

While waiting for the bus or train, have you noticed any recent ads? (visual examples of posters were provided and included ads/info for: COVID-19 info, 50% off Metropass promo, Stay Aware/Stay Alive rail safety kiosk posters, Text for Safety, Mask requirement, Guaranteed Ride Home, Transit Assistance Program)

Feedback

- Generally, group members noted they tend to notice/pay attention to ads that look new and those that have information about events or activities
- COVID-19 poster impressions
 - Noticed it, though mostly focused on bus arrival
- Metropass & Stay Aware/Stay Alive rail safety poster impressions:
 - Generally most had noticed them (a few noted in St. Paul in particular), messages seemed straightforward
- Text for Safety & Masks requirement poster impressions:
 - All noted they have seen these all over the system, messages seemed straightforward
- Guaranteed Ride Home poster impressions:
 - Some had seen this, some had not
 - One group member noted he had seen it, but was not fully aware of what the program offers/is about (was interested in it once it was explained in the meeting)
- TAP poster impressions:
 - One group member noted that she is aware of the program, but hadn't seen posters
 - One group member noted he liked that the poster included messaging in alternate languages

4. Encountering a disruption

Question

If you get to a stop and discover that it is closed/buses or trains aren't stopping there due to something like construction, what do you do? (Tools you use to assist you in this situation? Biggest challenges?)

Feedback

- Several noted that they have encountered this a number of times and figuring out where to go can be confusing – clear directions are helpful (sometimes they ask fellow customers as well)
- Being directed to another location that is accessible is important
- One group member noted that he would likely end up getting a ride via Uber or Lyft if needed

5. On the bus or train

Question 1:

What type of information do you tend to notice/pay attention to inside the bus/train? (examples: pocket schedules, audio announcements, etc.)

Feedback

- Audio announcements was the primary information group members pay attention to. One noted that it would be helpful if, in addition to the current upcoming stop, the following/next stop was also announced

Question 2:

While on the bus or train, have you noticed recent ads? (Group members were shown bus interior cards with information for: Mobile app, Two Ways to Pay, Look Both Ways, Rider Alerts, How to Provide Comments to Metro Transit)

Feedback

- One group member noted he doesn't often look up at interior cards, had not noticed them
- A few group members stated they sometimes notice the interior cards (particularly if they seem new/different). One noted that the How to Comment interior card was helpful, and she did make note of that information

6. Transferring to another route

Questions

When you get off a bus or train to transfer during an unfamiliar trip, how do you know which way to go to get to your next stop, or when you have reached it?

How do you typically know when the next train or bus is coming or if it has just left?

Are there any other challenges you have experienced when transferring to another route, or information provided by Metro Transit that was helpful with this?

[Note: this section was skipped due to limited time]

7. Getting to your destination

Question

How do you typically know when you have reached the stop you want to exit at?

[Note: this section was skipped due to limited time]

8. Any additional comments? Challenges along your typical journey, or things you particularly find helpful/beneficial?

Feedback

- Good bus stop sign maintenance/location/height/consistency is a priority
- Wayfinding during construction is a challenge; would maybe be helpful to review whether additional wayfinding signage would be helpful or confusing