

Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, September 4, 2013

Committee Members Present: Ron Biss, Kjensmo Walker, Margot Imdieke Cross, Darrell Paulsen, Chad McGuire, Nichole Villavicencio and Patty Thorsen.

Committee Members Absent: John Schatzlein and Jerolyn Pofahl.

Committee Members Excused: Heidi Myhre and John Lund.

Council Staff Present: Pam Steffen, Rick Carey, John Siqveland, from Metro Transit. Erin Ellison and Clare Schleichert, from the Office of Equal Opportunity. Robin Kaufman from CCPO, David Russell and Alison Coleman.

Public Present: Donna Azarian from Eden Prairie.

TOUR OF LIGHT RAIL VEHICLES

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Biss called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 1:23 P.M. p.m. on Wednesday, September 4, 2013.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

It was moved by Paulsen, seconded by Imdieke Cross to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Thorsen, seconded by Walker to approve the minutes of the August 7, 2013 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

INFORMATION & BUSINESS

1. Discussion on Light Rail Vehicles

Imdieke-Cross listed issues with the generation two rail cars:

The first generation vehicle provided a number of accessible features that the second generation vehicles did not. The first generation vehicles provided dedicated seating for wheelchair users, provided companion seating up to two seats in the same seating area that could be shared and provided backup seating with the bike racks which are 50 inches in width and 24 inches deep. It would accommodate somebody in a chair if they were traveling sideways. In the second generation vehicle the dedicated seating was eliminated. The companion seating was eliminated and the bike rack width was reduced from 50 inches in width to about 20 inches in width. There were two flip-up seats in the front of the vehicle and two flip-up seats in the back of the vehicle. The seats were to be shared with the general public, which made it difficult if there were people occupying those seats because we would have to ask them to move and to vacate seats. It is critical that the companion seats were eliminated primarily for parents who use chairs or parents who have kids in chairs or people who are medically fragile who have caregivers that travel with them. Those individuals need to be in close proximity to each other. The way the seating arrangement is in the second generation vehicles if the bench is occupied on one side with pedestrians walking then the travel companions or caregivers have to sit on the other side of the entrance and exit, which makes it difficult to keep an eye on your travel companion. It is critical that this design be revisited. The vehicles need to be more accessible and more considerate of the needs of people with disabilities.

This entire decision was made without our input. The vehicles were ordered in 2010. Not once did Metro Transit staff come to us and ask our opinion of the change of design. I approached Mark Fuhrman and was told no substantive changes were being made. These are safety changes that impact me as a rider and I think that they are to the detriment of the disability community and clearly need to be changed for the future designs. I think we need to make changes in the design like eliminating one of the bench seats to provide for some dedicated seating. The companion seating is gone. We have to do what we can to fix the existing second generation vehicles. We need to come to an agreement that these vehicles will not be ordered in the future.

Chair Biss spoke to the TAAC committee. The Met Council will probably respond to our concerns at the October meeting. I don't agree with everything Imdieke-Cross said.

Paulsen prefers the first generation vehicle. There is no way a person in a chair with a baby can fit into the second generation vehicle wheelchair spot especially with a car seat attached to the chair.

Rick Carey said that 59 vehicles have been ordered. Twenty-seven are on site today. The vehicles that are currently on order cannot be changed. There are 27 first generation vehicles on site. On the second generation vehicle the flip up seats automatically revert to the up position. They are spring loaded with shocks. If they start to fail and are reported they will be corrected.

Imdieke-Cross said that the wheelchair spaces will probably be occupied and it will be up to the wheelchair user to ask them to move. The recommendation for a solution is to add companion seating to the wheelchair seating area. Remove one bench seat on either end and if you need to do it on either side that would be fine. People could still stand and hold on to the straps. Change the sign to say relinquish seats to wheelchair passengers when needed.

John Siqueland said they could supply an inventory of various disability seating stickers used on Metro Transit buses.

It says "Please allow elderly persons and persons with special needs to use these seats". Imdieke-Cross said she would like stronger wording like "Must". There are four bike racks now. The ones in the first generation are double use. In the second generation they are single use. She would like to eliminate one and put a single seat there to allow for one companion seat for somebody who has to sit in close proximity to the wheelchair user.

Chair Biss inquired if they could use the articulated area as a bike rack area and take the bike rack portion on the accessible seating area and have them with flip up seats also. That would give ambulatory seating when there are no wheelchairs. You could have the wheelchair area where the flip up seats are and have the companion seating facing where the wheelchair would be seated.

David Russell said that they could put a wheelchair logo by the designated seating with floor tape to make it more recognizable.

Rick Carey said that technology wise the Siemens vehicle is more advanced than the Bombardier vehicle. They proposed the same 10-year old vehicle but we would have had to pay more for the same components. They used less quality manufacturers for their proposal. They were the highest bidder. Siemens was the lowest bidder. But the Siemens car was much more advanced as far as keeping up with the times. The computers were more upgraded. It is a superior vehicle as far as maintenance wise, reliability and technology. They both handle the curves the same.

Walker said that on the new car if you want level seating the most chance of finding level seating is to use the middle doors because the C section is all level boarding. On the ends is where you have the step up. The two doors in a row of the end and beginning of the vehicle are going to be accessible for wheelchairs but not if you want level entrance and level seating. The best chance of finding open seating is to use the middle doors. On the ends is where you have the step up. Because the two cars are connected the two doors in a row with the ending and beginning of the vehicle are accessible for the wheelchairs but not if you want a level entrance for a seat.

Siqueland said that there are elevated sections on the front and the back of each light rail vehicle. The boarding via the doors is always going to be level and then as passenger flow goes to the ends of the vehicles there is an incline in both the first and second generation vehicles.

Carey said there are the same number of seats on the high floor sections in both the type one and type two. If you board the type one there is a dedicated spot as you walk in one of the doors that there is no seating for you if you have a cane or a walker. Regardless of which door you enter in you may have to move to a different section of the low floor car to find a seat. So it is about the same. What is provided in the type two is two flip down seats. So there are six seats there. But on the type one there is only three in those same areas because one is gone.

Paulsen made a motion that the TAAC dictate a letter to the Met Council stating what our concerns are and addressing the issues of the companion seating and no designated seating. We like the new straps and the emergency call button. Better signage and tape on the floor. A continuation of the announcements. A strongly worded statement regarding our involvement in future issues of this nature should be brought to the TAAC so that they can come back to us in October with some concrete information. **Villavicencio will write the letter.**

McGuire suggested that the letter match the minutes. He suggested that the letter not include the matters of human nature.

Imdieke-Cross stated that the biggest contention is that people may not vacate the seats.

Chair Biss suggested that on the walls when you come in the doorway, there should be a sign indicating priority seating for people with disabilities and wheelchairs.

Imdieke-Cross seconded the motion.

Walker said no.

Chair Biss abstained.

The motion carried.

MEMBER COMMENT

None.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:25 p.m.

Alison Coleman
Recording Secretary