

Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, October 2, 2019

Committee Members Present: Chair David Fenley, Patsy Murphy, Ken Rodgers, Jeffry Dins, Kari Sheldon, Heidi Myhre, Claudia Fuglie, Patty Thorsen, Kody Olson and Erik Henriksen.

Committee Members Absent: Diane Graham-Raff

Committee Members Excused: Sam Jasmine, Christopher Bates, Darrell Paulsen, John Clark and Richard Rowan.

Council Staff Present: Councilmember Judy Johnson, Doug Cook from Metro Transit, Heidi Schallberg, Sara Maaske, Richard Koop, Bonnie Kollodge, Andy Streasick, Christine Kuennen, Gerri Sutton and Alison Coleman.

Public Present: Breanna Colaianni and Alan Farnham who were ASL translators for Kody Olson.

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Fenley called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:37 p.m. on Wednesday, October 2, 2019.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

It was moved by Henriksen, seconded by Fuglie to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

There was a change in the minutes. Kari Sheldon was listed as absent. She was excused.

It was moved by Rodgers, seconded by Thorsen to approve the minutes of the September 4, 2019 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

BUSINESS & INFORMATION

1. Public Transit & Human Services Transportation Plan

Heidi Schallberg, Senior Planner in MTS, spoke to the TAAC committee. I was here a few months ago, maybe in May, to give you a brief overview of the plan we are updating. Our Public Transit and Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan is a federally required plan. The purpose of this is to help us improve transportation services for older adults and people with disabilities within the seven county Twin Cities region. And to help increase coordination among those services. So we are updating the plan that was originally done in 2013. One of the primary purposes of this plan is to help us guide federal funding investments that are made in projects to improve mobility for these two population groups.

This process is run through MnDOT. Through a state-wide process. You might hear references to Section 5310 funding. That is this section of the legislation for mobility services for older adults and people with disabilities. That is used as sort of a shorthand. The funds can be used for different types of projects. A lot of times this includes purchases of vehicles to provide service and include nonprofit shuttle services. One of the lesser used applications in the region can be used for improved accessibility infrastructure such as sidewalks or accessible pedestrian signals. We have used it for some accessible pedestrian signals in the past. It can also be used for mobility management which is something the region has been doing a little bit more of in the past few years. That is why they generally have a staff person or people who are designated to help coordinate these different services and work out issues that are behind the scenes like billing or software work.

As I mentioned, we are working on updating those plans here. We have a steering committee. About 18 people we are working with to help inform and guide this plan update. They met once and were part of the workshop that we had in August. They will be meeting again a week from today.

We had a stakeholder workshop that had more people who tried to get a wide range of viewpoints from across the region to help us identify what the current needs are in the region. Needs are barriers that people face that still need to be addressed and what strategies the region should be using to help meet those needs. So we held that workshop in August. I know some of you were able to devote some of your time. It was a three-hour block of time. That is not an insignificant amount of time.

Thank you to those who were able to come and participate. But we also heard from many of you who were able to participate but wanted to hear more about what happened at that workshop. That is part of why I am here today. I will also be back at the November meeting as well to report on that.

We are aiming to have a draft of the plan out for public review in November. We are working to finalize that based on the workshop and the other information this month. At the workshop we had 26 people in attendance. We had representation from all counties except Anoka, who had a conflict that day. We did follow up with Anoka County staff to get their input on the same questions that we had asked the workshop attendees. We are able to make sure that we at least had input from all of the counties.

Again, the main work at that was helping to identify current needs and strategies. We are using the current plan as a starting point. We are not starting from a blank slate. Here is what we heard in the past. What is current and what might need to change. In addition to those of you who were able to attend, we had attendees representing a wide range of groups including the Minnesota Board on Aging, service providers, the ARC, Minnesota Council Health Plans, MnDOT and some other senior groups.

The categories: both of the needs and strategies represent three buckets. The first one is work that needs to be done to coordinate and consolidate either services or resources. The second one of course is mobility. Providing services that people need to get around. To live our lives. The third one is community training and organizational support. That could take a lot of different forms.

We use the starting list of needs that we have in the current plan as a starting point to identify. Each participant in the workshop has those at their place. We are able to work through which ones were priorities. Which ones might need to stay, be edited? Changed in some way to reflect current conditions. Were there any that might not be current today and could be deleted from the plan? We had everyone working in some small groups. I think we had three small groups. Then reported out from the group to as far as what the priority needs were from each in the group.

We ended up having seven main needs. There are some additional needs too that I have in a later slide show. This is not all encompassing of everything that was identified in the plan. But the common agreement about what some of the highest priority needs were that continued to be needed to be addressed.

Our new surprise, funding. While demand is increasing. That is an ongoing challenge for our providers to be able to do. Lower service levels or in some cases, no service. This may vary at times too. Where evenings and weekends, there is often less service. There are some areas that have more gaps than others in the region. At one point it was also brought up in the workshop too is noting that the ADA is paratransit service in areas that are tied to fixed route service. So if you don't have fixed route service in an area, you don't have a guarantee for Metro Mobility service. I am just highlighting that connection of how service levels impact people in different ways.

Limited Same Day Service especially. Services that are accessible for people continues to be an ongoing need. Service fragmentation, and this also includes a lot of regulatory issues that providers may deal with. Sometimes it is insurance issues or existing regulations that might prevent organizations from coordinating with each other. We have also heard issues about volunteer driver programs. There are regulatory issues there.

Challenges of using fixed route transit is a broad need. Like you can capture a lot of different things. This can range from unfamiliar things in using it and using some training in how it works. But also, some very real fears and concerns about what happens if somebody has health concerns and having resources that they need. So we hear a wide range of challenges associated with that.

Limited awareness is a broad one that encompasses a lot of different needs. It is awareness in a lot of different ways. One of them is awareness of what the transportation options are. That are available both by potential

riders, people who might use them. But also, service agencies that might be working with people. Making sure that those agencies are aware of the full range of options that might be available to somebody. One of the things that we heard that we haven't seen in the plan in the past too is just the understanding of having awareness among elected officials too. And making sure that they really understand and prioritize the needs that are identified in this plan. Because they are in the position to be able to help address a lot of these through policy and legislation.

And also, it is just an ongoing challenge of linking information resources so that there is more consistent information available and easier to get the information that is actually relevant to someone as well.

Then the last priority that involves training and this takes a lot of different forms. This can be training for drivers. Making sure that they are aware of different ADA issues. Using service animals. Overall customer service. Training. This could also take the form of travel training too for riders. To be able to learn how to use fixed route transit. And then other programs too like the Bus Buddies Program that some organizations have where somebody might ride with you. So, it augments travel training in that way.

Those are the main needs that encompass the wide range of issues. So as I have mentioned, each attendee had a list of these. And we asked the small groups to get back to us as a group. We did collect the written information from attendees. People wrote their own comments and suggestions for changes. We did have a column to ask if we should keep or delete the needs.

There were a couple of people who reviewed that information had some conflicting information. I would like to check with this group to see if we could get some insight. We are not limited on the number of needs. There is no limit to the number of needs we need to identify. So if these are relevant, they need to stay in. We can certainly do that.

We had some conflicting feedback on the forms. I thought that this would be a useful thing to check with this group. There were just two of them where we had a range of yes this is it. But there were comments that this could be deleted if they are not current needs. One that we have identified in the past were vehicle issues. So this might be that some vehicles might be uncomfortable for some riders. Just as far as the mechanics of it. It is a bumpier ride. There is also some discussion at the workshop that some vehicles are undesirable, whether there is a stigma with a certain type of vehicle arriving to pick you up or not.

This is one thing I just wanted to check in since we did have that divergence of opinion. Is there something that you think sounds like it is still a current need or concern for people? So we will keep it in? I wanted to check that one with the group. The need that we had identified. I wanted to know if it is still an issue for people. That are some vehicles uncomfortable to ride in and is that a challenge for people?

It is any type of vehicle. This can be a range of services. People may use volunteer driver programs. It is not just Metro Mobility. Although that is certainly one of the key providers in the range of services. We have also heard the concern about accessible vehicles from Uber and Lyft.

Dains said I was just going to make a comment on the information about working with elected officials. All elected officials say they are supportive of this. Without some actual interaction with someone, whoever that might be, going to city council meetings or county board meetings, nothing ever happens. I work with plenty of elected people. I am an elected person and telling people, my own city council that I am on this committee. They look at me like I am from another planet. They don't really know about Metro Mobility. They don't really know about the bus routes in their area. That is a significant problem. That they don't have that information. What the Met Council does is great but the communication piece and moving forward on this. It needs to be put together pretty closely. There really has to be a strategy about that. What that is I don't know. I could give you some information. I could talk about that. You need to put a lot of thought about what the steering committee does. It is not a priority among elected people. A lot of the constituents depend on these services. But the attention hasn't been there.

Myhre said they want to learn. They don't know how to talk about it. You have MA and Metro Mobility. They are completely separate entities.

Murphy said when I was towards the end of the last session, I was asked to come up and speak to the conference committee. When I was speaking to them the one thing that I was explaining about Metro Mobility and the difficulties with it and how we needed increased funding to them. I explained a lot of different things. Then I commented about the zone. I ended my whole discussion by saying to them that I leave home at 6:30 and am taken into the zone. It takes a couple of hours to get to where you are going. I am at the Capitol for

three hours. By the time I get home it is 5:30 in the afternoon. They say really? Why? They don't realize that somebody like me takes 11 hours from my home to be there at the Capitol for three hours. That goes right along with communication and how they want to know. But how do we inform all of them?

Fuglie said something has to be done about the city buses. What is the accessible seating for? The passengers are supposed to be responsible to know what the accessible seats are for. They should be off those seats when someone with a disability or a senior shows up. This is a discrimination thing with both the seniors and the people with disabilities. I don't want to wait for three buses before I can get on one.

Schallberg said I think that fits in with the range of what we are seeing of limited awareness. It extends to a lot of different areas. And so one of the suggestions that came up as a potential strategy would be to have a transit ambassador program. Because there are a lot of other concerns that were brought up at the workshop. What is courteous behavior? It would include issues like that. How do we create a culture that is supportive? That fits in with some of the potential strategies we have.

Sheldon said it is for the trains and the buses. What does service fragmentation mean?

Schallberg said if there aren't clear abilities to transfer between services. Maybe a volunteer service for one. Or if you are using dial-a-ride and needed to make connections. Sometimes it could be duplicating services.

I wanted to touch on one other one. This is an issue with a comfort vehicle. Maybe I think some of the other issues are how the vehicles are used by riders. Making sure that space is available. Is there an issue with comfort with different types of vehicles? Something that should be kept in the plan to be identified. If that doesn't really resonate with people?

Chair Fenley said this came out of the larger work group? The comfort of vehicles.

Schallberg said this was in the current plan. We were checking what we had identified as current needs. Not everybody wrote comments on it or every need on their sheets. But there were some people who identified these as one that could potentially be deleted. That they didn't think they were current.

Chair Fenley said on that specific question. The comfort of vehicles. Has that improved from the past now? That is the question we are asking Heidi.

Myhre said no. Because Metro Mobility still has some of the old fleets. I have seen some really uncomfortable vehicles. It was the style at the time, but it is not the style now. It is the same with the city buses or any of the transit. The train could be a little more comfortable. I use the train a lot. If you could get a group of people with different disabilities together to discuss this like we did with the wheelchair hookup, maybe we could come up with something that could be in the budget.

Streasick said it is important for us to understand specifically what the feedback is for. If this is about new changes, I think we have come a long way on Metro Mobility. But if this is about earmarking needs that are ongoing, I still get a tremendous amount of feedback. Thanking us for going with the Kelderman add on for the airlift suspension system. It does a significant amount based on the feedback that I get. To help alleviate some of the discomfort that is inherent to a low floor vehicle. Metro Mobility vehicles have to be. So if we are talking about changes, there might not be anything per se beyond Heidi's general comments. But if we are talking about protecting and preserving what is there, it continues to be a priority for the constituency from which I hear to continue on with the Kelderman and protect that add on.

Schallberg said I just have one other point that I wanted to check in with you. We didn't have a lot of feedback on some individual worksheets that people turned in. Some people had said that they didn't think that this was as current a need. Basically, if you are using a dial-a-ride service and you need to make a transfer and change to fixed route service. In the past, they didn't have great places to do that. We had some comments that a lot of work had been done on this with Transit Link. Making connections to the fixed route system. We did have some comments that they thought some might be able to be deleted. But it could also be an issue in certain smaller areas. So I just wanted to check in. is this something that still needs to be identified as a need? Are there challenges if you have to change from Transit Link to a fixed route bus route or train?

Chair Fenley said this would go along with service fragmentation. If it is not a smooth ride, then it would be fragmented. I would imagine that inadequate transfer facilities could contribute to that. Does anybody have experience where this still exists? Or could this come out of the old plan and not be in the new plan?

Dains said since I am legally blind, the message that comes across sometimes is very garbled. I use it quite a bit. So a lot of times I have to ask people if it is the Blue Line or Green Line. They could do a better job of communication to the communication system. The auditory system.

Schallberg said I just wanted to run through some of the other needs. I had the priority needs but there is a whole range of needs that have been identified both in the current plan we have but there are some others that have come up during the workshop as well. Or some additional detail around that. Some of the other things that will, in the current plan at the workshop about needs for accessible pathways and bus stops. Being able to access fixed route service consistently. This is a critical need in Minnesota. With winter and snow clearance is really important. Somebody made the suggestion about having autonomous snow plowing at the workshop. Which I love.

We had a contest at the Winter Carnival with autonomous snowplows. I keep wondering every winter where those are. That is a dial-a-ride capacity of course. It continues to be an issue for people that fills quickly. One thing we have mentioned in the previous plan that was nestled into or buried into another need is the need for language support services. Metro Transit certainly does work on this but looking at the whole range of services that people might use. It is not just Metro Transit. Coming up with some ideas for how to address this for people who speak languages other than English. Also, with the provider's side, there are workforce issues. We definitely see this with Metro Transit with the ongoing driver shortage. This is something that a lot of different providers experience. Being able to hire and retain qualified drivers. Issues with pay and driver training that had been previously identified.

I mentioned regulatory issues for providers. These are more issues that prevent them from working more closely together or some challenges they have providing their programs. Trip length has come up in a couple of different ways. If you are in an outlying area. Just the geographic distance. It also gets to that comfort and experience of the rider. It can be difficult to be on a vehicle for two hours. There are other needs that come up with the ability to stop and use the restroom while the vehicle is making other stops.

The last two referred that seem to be ongoing needs of limited options for low or no cost transportation services. This is something that Metro Transit has introduced a transit assistance program to provide lower fares for low income riders. This is more like a need for the range of the system. Not just fixed route service. Then the need for more availability of door through door service for those that need that assistance.

I just want to see if talking through needs I identified that you thought you would hear that I didn't mention. That I should make sure to include. That would be something I would like to hear. Otherwise, this captures the main concerns that is helpful to know.

Myhre talked about different ways people communicate.

Fuglie said one of the suggestions I would like to see is people who are seniors and folks with disabilities, especially with a speech impediment, help with the training. Beyond city buses and Metro Mobility. Get them involved in learning how to work with the drivers and management. And let them know how to work with passengers.

Schallberg said there are 18 members of the steering committee. Chair Fenley is a member of that group. They will meet a week from today. They will be reviewing some of the additional conformation from the workshop. We haven't gone through some of the strategies with them. So you know this. When I talked about the workshop to address those needs. So that is some work that we need to do with that smaller group. It will be included in the draft plan.

Assuming we can get time on your November agenda, I would like to come back next month as well. So we are hoping to have a draft plan ready for public comment and review so you can see it then. We will have a comment period. That will include more of the strategy so I can talk a little bit more about things that are identified in the plan and work that needs to be done to help address these barriers.

If we stick to the original timeframe, we can take comments through mid-December. And then based on what we hear from the comments. If there are things that we can address in that timeline. Then we would go back for approval from the Council in January, to have the plan finalized. If we need to address that are due to comments we received.

That is all I have today. I really appreciate your input. This really helps provide a lot of detail to make these real and make this something that reflects the wide-range of experience that you will have.

Chair Fenley said I have some general questions about the authority of this plan. Who is required to do it? How are they required to rely on this plan to drive the decisions that they make? I know that this plan is federally mandated but what keeps it from sitting on the shelf gathering dust?

Schallberg said the immediate application is when agencies apply for the federal funding from MnDOT. So this might be something from purchasing vehicles to having staff to help work on some of this coordination. As part of their application process they have to be addressing something that is identified in the plan. That is the most immediate application of it. I think there is value in having some of the needs when we are looking to coordinate too while we are updating our overall Transportation Policy Plan, for example. We will do that again in a few years. This is something we can look to to reference and pull that information in to help elevate those issues. So it is included in a broader range of work as well.

Chair Fenley said how often is this plan redone?

Schallberg said this current plan was done in 2013 and the Metro's plan update schedule was a little off cycle from the rest of the state. I think the rest of the state updated theirs in 2017. We were updating our overall Transportation Policy Plan. We were concerned about trying to do both at the same time. It would generally be on a similar cycle. So it would probably be in the next four years. I think it would be a good opportunity to look for ways to combine that with our broader Transportation Policy Plan. It is more integrated into that. That would be an opportunity I would be looking for as well.

Myhre said who does the follow up to make sure that they are even doing what they said on paper?

Schallberg said as I mentioned, the funding that is most directly tied to this plan is that is a process tied to MnDOT. I don't know the details. I do know they require reporting of grant recipients. I am trying to get some of that data to use in the plan update. So they do have ongoing reporting from grant recipients to be able to report on results like the number of rides that would be tied to what the project was that they applied for. We can try to find some information on that process.

2. Leave Behind Stats

Chair Fenley said an initial agenda item was sent out about a week ago. We were going to do all Metro Transit stats. But the staff member was not able to make the meeting. So we dialed that back to just leave behind stats. I think we can still have a discussion about the attachment email that I sent out. To the agenda email last time. Last week. Where we can talk about what we want to see from Metro Transit, and I will take notes. Because we will have that. We will have the Metro Transit staff back to talk about that some more. We will start with leave behind stats. Then I will discuss general Metro Transit statistics that we might want to talk about. Lift deployment was one thing that came up a lot.

Doug Cook, Customer Advocate at Metro Transit, spoke to the TAAC committee. I want to start with going over the term "Leave Behind". So everybody is clear on what that means. We are not leaving anybody behind. It has to do with overloads. When a driver has an overloaded bus, he would call that in to our Transit Control Center. If he has a person in a wheelchair or a mobility device or anybody with a disability or a senior, he would report that to the Transit Control Center at any time.

The procedure is that they would call the Transit Control Center. He would remain there and report that back to the person that is outside the bus, waiting to get on. They would remain there until the Transit Control Center allows them to leave. So that means either that they communicated that there is another bus coming or they are going to send a transit supervisor out there or transit police to assist them. Because of whatever situation is going on with the bus. It really should be called when someone is not able to board because of overloads instead of leave behinds.

When I was gone, Yumi had taken over. She was the other advocate at Metro Transit. She reported from January to May on the stats as far as for overload buses and overloads with people with mobility devices. So I am going to give you stats starting with June, July and August. September wasn't done yet.

For June, the total overload was 114, with 100 mobility devices total.

In July it was 240, with 122 unable to board person with a mobility device.

In August it was 303 total. With 149 unable to board a person with a mobility device.

That is where we are at. For the year total, we are at 1,309 overloads. They can happen for any type of reasons. With an overload total in terms of mobility devices that we could not board them was 631. So that is where we are at.

Chair Fenley said so the wheelchair number is out of the first number? There was 114. Out of those 114, 100 of those overload calls were wheelchairs or mobility devices?

Cook said yes.

Chair Fenley said do you have the year to date from last year? Can you say if it has gone up or down?

Cook said from last year. I don't have last year's stats. From looking at them it appears to have gone up a bit. Maybe because of our driver shortage. There are less buses on the road and they are packing people in.

Myhre asked if he does this for trains as well.

Cook said if you are ever in a situation where it could cause physical harm or an emergency of some kind, if it is really cold out or really hot out or whatever, there are emergency buttons at the stations. You could talk to our Transit Control Center. If it is not an emergency, in some events, we put extra trains on specifically for those events. If you just happen to be in the wrong place or time.

Chair Fenley said so there is not a statistic available for trains?

Cook said no.

Chair Fenley said so what is the official term?

Cook said transit control calls them leave behinds. But there is no official term for that.

Kuennen said it is called an overload.

Rodgers said you mentioned one of the contributing factors might be the shortage of bus drivers. So there is sometimes a shortage of buses on a route. I have personally experienced several times, especially over the summer, where buses are skipping over each other. Or getting out of the lane and going around the other buses that are taking longer. I personally missed my bus because it went around a waiting bus. In particular it is bad right around the light rail station. Because of the increased number of trains at peak times and with the number of buses. Some buses don't want to wait.

I am told that is not Metro Transit policy. Their policy is to wait and pull up to the front space where I typically stand. Or others who can't see would be waiting there for our bus. I am thinking that also has to contribute to not enough room for people to board, whether they are in mobility devices or not. I have experienced that where buses have bypassed us. There are several people waiting to board that bus. We have to wait for the next one. And then there are twice as many people trying to get on that bus that would not normally be. It is extremely crowded. Is that part of your analysis as well?

Cook said I have talked to our Transit Control Center about a solution for this problem. We are discussing it at the moment. I don't have any numbers for that. I don't know if they do. I talked to them about generating some numbers. One thing that can be done is that you would call our number. Our transit information or customer relations. If you have an issue, like a bus passing you up. They can alert that bus that there is a person at the stop waiting with a cane or whatever mobility device. That would be one way of doing that. We are trying to find a better solution.

Rodgers said so, in some instances, I have called and reported, and they get my information. Then the next bus is specifically looking for me. That is helpful. So when people do call that number and report it, the next driver will definitely be looking for you. That is oftentimes helpful. But the problem I have encountered, is again, during rush hour, you call the customer service line, or the help line, you may be on hold for 20 to 25 minutes. By that time, the next bus has come. You don't want to wait on hold after the next bus came. That has been my experience. Calling customer service quite a bit over the summer. I just hang up. I don't have the patience to stay on hold. So it never gets reported. I realize that this is an issue. We also need to respond if we are having wait times on customer service lines. I am sure you can track that. If the wait times are exceedingly long, what are we doing to address that? So that we can address this overcrowding position.

Cook said especially this summer, for some reason, while I was gone to a different position, they had some staffing issues where a lot of people left. They have gone down to reduced hours because of that. Part of the conversation that I am having with our transit control and others is maybe a text option. That would go to the

TCC. That would be a faster response than waiting on the phone line. That is just one idea. I am not sure if it is going to go forward or not. If you have other ideas, we will take them. It is definitely on my radar. I have your email on my desk to remind me.

Chair Fenley said we can tell folks to call in but if they can't get through and they just give up, that responsibility is not on us anymore if we don't have a method to report it anymore. If they are on hold for 20 or 30 minutes, it defeats the purpose to call in and have the data collected.

Dietrich said I just want to say that drivers are instructed that whenever they pass up anybody in a wheelchair, they are to call and report it. Not waiting for you to call. They are to call the Transit Control Center and tell them I am leaving this person here and I want you to know. Normally, then they get information that someone will be there shortly. They don't have to rely on you. The driver is to call in and report every time they pass up somebody in a wheelchair.

Chair Fenley said yes, that is a policy. A procedure that we would like to see practiced 100 percent of the time. We know for a fact, from experience, by committee members here, that it doesn't happen. They are not supposed to pass each other, but they do on a regular basis. Just because it is a policy, doesn't mean it will always happen. Doug, where did you get these numbers?

Cook said they came from the Transit Control Center. The ones that the drivers called in. They called in the overload. We don't know how many were not reported. The issue of the hopping of the buses. When you hop the bus, you are not going to see the person in a wheelchair or one with a cane. That is the real issue here. The phone number should be used for "Hey, I need attention here." And alert somebody. Like David mentioned. Still send that email. Because that gets into the system. So if you are on hold for 10 minutes or more and hang up. Send us an email. Then it is at least getting into the system. The text option is where I think we should go.

Ken's issue is "I need help". He gets frustrated because he has to sit on the phone for a long time. You could also call back tomorrow or early in the morning. A different time than rush hour. You can call some other time and explain it to us. That way we can ask you clarifying questions right away. You can find the phone number on the website.

Fuglie said I take the bus non rush hour. I have been passed up three times in a day. Every time I go up the ramp, there are five people sitting in the accessible seats. There is furniture, grocery carts, dog kennels, laundry, anything you can think of is in those spots. So I back down the ramp and wait for the next bus. Again, baby strollers, laundry, grocery carts, instruments. It never fails. Something has got to be done about what are the accessible seats for? I have an appointment and I plan being on time. There has to be something to bring it out to the public to get off those seats. The drivers are not babysitters. There should be another option for these people to get what they need to get to where they are going to go.

Chair Fenley said Claudia makes a good point. Is the rest of the bus full?

Fuglie said no. There is maybe 10 people at the most at non rush hour.

Chair Fenley said it makes sense that people with a big item would go to the area of the bus that has the most space. That is the accessible seating. I can't stress this enough. This is not about pitting those folks or parents or people who need to haul big items because they don't have other means to do it on the bus verses folks with disabilities. That cannot be the discussion here. Everybody needs to use the bus service. And the bus service needs to be useable by everybody. And those needs need to be addressed by the people who are running the bus service. Not by folks with disabilities fighting with people who have instruments. That is not the battle that needs to happen.

In an instance like that, how do you know that did the bus driver waited until there was a guaranteed next ride for you before leaving?

Fuglie said no.

Chair Fenley said that leads me to believe that the bus driver did not report this as an overload leave behind pass up. When is the last time they did this to you?

Fuglie said last week. Downtown Minneapolis at 11:00 in the morning.

Chair Fenley said do you call it in right when it happens?

Fuglie said I am like Ken. You stay on the phone forever. Then you give up. I remember when there was a policy that said people had to fold up their strollers and hold the baby in their seat. What happened to that policy?

Cook said the policy changed.

Rodgers said we got notified of that change.

Chair Fenley said I know that we don't have direct proof that the change in the stroller policy has increased these pass up overloads. But it is looking to be the case.

Rodgers said I just want to make one point. I think you are hearing a lot of frustration from especially individuals that had been denied rides because people are misusing that space. I know there is an interest for Metro Transit to have good customer service in general. I think that was the rationale that was provided to us why the wheelchair policy was changed. Now wheelchairs are being encouraged to come on and use those spaces. Basically, it has become a first come first served.

The issue I have with all of that is I like that policy as being more customer friendly as possible for everybody. But the fact remains that our buses, our services and activities of an organization, Metro Transit. By law, must be accessible for people that live with disabilities. We don't have a law that says: "You must provide accommodations for wheelchairs and babies." We don't have a law that says: You must provide space for people with large objects." There is a law for people with disabilities. Somehow that is getting lost somewhere along the way that people make these policy changes for other reasons. These are good reasons. But they don't necessarily have a law that requires them.

So, in my mind, I think every time a person is denied a ride because of overcrowding, or not having access to the disability seating, that is a violation of the ADA. They have a right to file a complaint to the EEOC or to the Human Rights Department. In my mind, I think every time a person is denied a ride because of overcrowding, or not having access to the disability seating, that is a violation of the ADA and they have a right to file a complaint to the EEOC or the Human Rights Department. That is a direct violation of the law. Maybe we need to start doing that. So that the concept gets addressed. But I think we would like to avoid that. And get everybody the rides that they need. If you have any potential of raising this up the chain. I know this is a bigger issue and is not your decision. You are just the messenger. It just seems to me that who needs to hear that this is a law that we need to abide by? Everything else is extra.

Cook said when it comes to issues like that, it really hits me personally because I work with people with disabilities. I really want to see something done. I am your advocate. It is in my title. I will keep the talking points to whoever would listen who is above me. I have been taking a little bit of a different role now. As far as in my position, I have a little more sway. We will see how that works. I have been dealing with a lot of trouble issues out there more than normal. The Mall of America being one. I think something needs to be done. We need a creative solution and it might mean a different bus type.

In Vegas, they have four seatings and the seatings are all on the sides. That might alleviate the problem. That is one of the things I have as a suggestion. There are a lot of issues out there. We have to keep hammering at them until they get done.

Murphy said I have been away from using the standard bussing system for 28 years. I used to ride it all the time. I can agree with what Ken is saying about the buses passing each other. I used to see that a lot. I would actually want to get on a particular bus number, and they would pass each other. I would have to wait another 15 minutes for that bus to come again. I now ride mainly the train because I have to be with somebody. I can not be on the buses or train alone. I can go into a fog and not know where I am or why I am here. I have ridden the train more than the bus. People are very good at getting on to that train and sitting down in front even though there are those signs. Due to my head injury, I have problems with vertigo. With the train speeding up and slowing down, for me to try to stand, is not a good idea. As anybody who rides the train knows, as soon as people get on, it takes off. If you have vertigo and try to walk to that seat, it is not very good. I have actually fallen on people's laps. I have tried to talk to people and ask them. They get harsh back. Because I look normal. You don't see the traumatic brain injury, so people think that I am just someone who wants to sit in the front. How can that be taken care of? That is one reason that I try to avoid using public transit. Because when I ride Metro Mobility, they wait until I get seated and seat belted in. Then I give them my fare card.

Chair Fenley said that raises a fantastic point. Who is to say that you are not the person holding the instrument in the disability seating? That you deserve to be there. I want to give a hypothetical situation to Doug.

Say someone who uses a wheelchair gets on the bus. The back of the bus is basically empty. All of the disability seating is taken. That person who uses a wheelchair is going to make a stand and refuse to get off the bus and be overloaded. What happens next?

Dietrich said the very first thing the law required drivers to ask is for the person to move. That is the thing to always call and complain. If you ask a driver to have people who have strollers or whatever they are moving. You need that seat. You have priority. Our signs say priority seating for disabled and seniors. It doesn't mean no one else can sit there. But it means you have priority. If you want to sit there and it is being taken, under the law, the drivers have to ask them to move. They cannot require them to move. Which is a good law.

Some people just don't ask the driver. Maybe they are intimidated. Maybe they don't even know that they can. Other times I have had complaints where the drivers say things like: "You go ask them." Or they just ignore. Those are complaints that should get called in. Those are violations of the law. Not just policy. That would be the very first thing that should happen.

If you want to board and the seats are full, you have to ask the driver to ask them to move. The driver does and they don't move, the driver has complied with the law. You can call in the complaint. But the driver did nothing wrong.

Kuennen said I have a history overseeing operations and also training. My last position before coming to Metro Mobility was overseeing the instruction center for Metro Transit. The policy and training supports what Jan is saying. To your question, Mr. Chair, you asked what would happen if the situation were that a customer in a wheelchair was not able to be strapped down and refused to leave. I think the guidance to the driver would be after complying and asking. If there was a verbal standoff on board, the first thing a driver should do is contact the control center for support. Not try to handle it all on his own. While they are trained in conflict resolution techniques, we also don't want to put drivers in a position of having something escalate with their emotions. We know there is safety concerns for our drivers and assaults as well. That is a real thing.

What I would do in that situation is dispatch supervision support. Because it seems that it shouldn't escalate to anything disorderly or anything disruptive. It is just giving the driver some support in resolving the conflict. But things escalate quickly. Emotions can escalate a verbal confrontation quickly. Sometimes police are called to remove passengers who are being disorderly. It depends on the situation at hand. Why there is that kind of standoff. I have not heard of a situation of a standoff like that. Because typically, the driver would know whether there is space before that customer is boarding. Because they have to deploy the lift or kneel the bus.

Fuglie said the drivers are doing their jobs. It is the passengers who won't move. The passengers do not understand the situation. It was not the driver that was giving me trouble. It was a passenger. I was told that I did not belong in that seat. Because their child in a baby stroller needed that more than I did.

Cook said to Fuglie that she should call in because they need that information. They would pull the video and get that retraining for that driver. If you don't do that, then the problem continues.

Streasick said it is important that everyone is clear. Everybody does have a right to access public transit. An able-bodied person does not have the right necessarily to get on a full bus. A person who uses disability seating doesn't necessarily have the right to get on a full bus. Drivers are legally required to ask people to move. People are not necessarily required to move. If they don't, the legal requirement, and it is back on the Met Council to provide an alternative. That alternative, if the next bus is coming, might be to make sure that the next bus has available disability seating. If they can't do that, then they need to dispatch another vehicle. I don't want to have people leaving here being under the impression that they have a legal right to any particular seat on the first bus that they try to get on. That is not the case and can only potentially lead to more conflict.

Chair Fenley asked Cook if he had the January through May numbers.

Cook said I will go to overloads. Then I will go to overload with wheelchairs. In January, there were 65. February 226. March 151. April 117. May 93.

Then with wheelchairs. January 19. February 17. March 38. April 89. May 100.

Kuennen said it is not unsurprising to see an uptick in overload numbers in the summertime because a lot of regular overloads, not passenger in a wheelchair capacity. But the overall numbers because of events.

Anytime there is an overload, regardless of the situation, it has to get called in. So, if there are events and a lot of customers, like the Uptown Art Fair or concerts, etc. any time a bus is full. So, summertime events like the State Fair you show upticks in overloads. Extreme weather events. February of this year there is a lot of service disruption. Instead of two buses coming in a period of time, you have one. You still have the same number of people needing the bus. You are going to get an overload. February just had a lot of days like that. There were snowstorms and ice storms.

Chair Fenley said I am curious, in terms of getting the full breath of the statistics, maybe take it back to the stroller policy and then previous and then look to see if there was any change post stroller policy. Just the numbers. I can do the analysis.

Thorsen said I moved to a new senior community in Minnetonka. It was just opened in April. The GPS system doesn't understand where it is. How often is the GPS system updated as we serve new people? I have called in and added to the comment field in my record where I live. The south side verses the north side of the frontage road. This affects service. Is there another strategy that can be used in those types of situations?

Streasick said yes, we try now quarterly to update the maps on the Ranger. There is no guarantee that what we are updating with is going to continue with the new facility. It might be longer than quarterly and then something might be outdated. Call into the service center and we can Geocode something out in the middle of nowhere on a map to at least get drivers within a close distance. You did things the way it should have been done there. As of right now, that is as good as it gets.

We are looking at a few different improvements as possibilities. One is to potentially replace Rangers with tablet style devices. It would use Garmin or Tomtom style mapping where that is their primary job, which is to do mapping and navigating. That would have improvements that came with it.

Another thing. The Council is looking for the first time since I have been here. It is non-Trapeze vendors. There is some question of whether Trapeze at all would be what we use going forward. If we were to use something else. It would move in a different direction that is more modern from a technological standpoint.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Blue line

This item was not presented.

2. Green Line

This item was not presented.

3. Gold Line

4. This item was not presented

5. Rush Line

This item was not presented

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

MEMBER COMMENT

Thorsen said that program that we started where those of us who were certified riders could call in and schedule a ride. Then a confirmation was sent to our email. Then a reminder phone call is sent to us. Is that available to other riders at this point? We call in to customer service to get that if there is someone that is interested in that?

Streasick said yes, but not for standing order rides. We don't currently have the bandwidth to do that for standing order rides. But we do that for all demand bookings for everybody upon request.

Chair Fenley said there is an exhibit in the Securian Center, right next to here. That is in celebration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which is October. It is on the first floor.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:32p.m.

Alison Coleman
Recording Secretary