

Minutes

Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee



Meeting Date: September 06, 2023

Time: 12:30 PM

Location: 390 Robert Street

Members Present:

- Chair David Fenley, at-large
- Sam Jasmine, Precinct A
- Christopher Bates, Precinct B
- Patsy Murphy, Precinct C
- Ken Rodgers, Precinct D
- Jeffrey Dains, Precinct E
- Darrell Paulsen, Precinct F
- Kari Sheldon, Precinct G
- Rachel Garaghty, Precinct H

- Trevor Turner, MCD
- Erik Henriksen, MCD
- Diane Graham-Raff, MAAA
- Patty Thorsen, MAAA
- Heidi Myhre, M CCD
- Claudia Fuglie, M CCD
- Richard Rowen, AARP MN

Ex-Officio:

- Phillip Sterner, Council Member Liaison
- Andy Streasick, Metro Mobility
- Douglas Cook, Metro Transit Advocate
- = present, E = excused

Attending from Home

Sam Jasmine, Christopher Bates,
Phillip Sterner, Douglas Cook

Excused

Ken Rodgers

Other Council Employees

Christine Kuennen
Kimberly Malone

Absent

None

Public

None

Call to Order

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Fenley called the regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee to order at 12:34 p.m. followed by a roll call.

Chair Fenley introduced Rhoda Chaffe, Temporary Admin. Assistant who will compile meeting minutes for a while as Alison Coleman retired on September 1.

Chair Fenley announced there would be a lighter agenda with discussions focused primarily on the 2024 TAAC Work Plan, a month-by-month report of higher-level initiatives starting in January and running through December. Vice Chair Paulsen would be leading the discussion as he would be taking notes. Committee members were encouraged to share their ideas on things they have worked on in the past or plan to do in the future as well as things that happen every year. Vice Chair Paulsen was thanked for getting the 2024 TAAC Work Plan on the September meeting agenda.

Agenda Approved

It was moved by Murphy, seconded by Thorsen to approve the agenda of the September 06, 2023, regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee. **Motion carried.**

Approval of Minutes

It was moved by Dains, seconded by Thorsen to approve the minutes of the August 02, 2023, regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee. **Motion carried.**

TAAC 8-02-23 Minutes Discussion - Metro Mobility Vehicle Update

Jasmine requested an update on the TAAC Minutes 8-02-23 Metro Mobility Vehicle Update pertaining to accessibility for service animals and questioned if seat adjustments, due to heater placements, would affect service animal accessibility and the overall capacity of the buses. Chair Fenley proposed continuing the discussion during Member Comment. Vice Chair Paulsen pointed out that a discussion relative to Jasmine's concern occurred during the bus tour. There would be the possibility of more leg room up front with heater placement at the back and on the side of the bus. Giving up the potential third seat up front would provide more leg room to accommodate service dogs.

Myhre called for further discussion as Jasmine was not present for the in-person new fleet tour that occurred during the 8-02-23 TAAC meeting. Chair Fenley suggested continuing the discussion via a phone chat with the presenter (new fleet vendor rep), Streasick, Colton, and Jasmine to provide an opportunity for a more in-depth discussion. Chair Fenley requested a response and received Jasmine's approval. Myhre emphasized that Jasmine's "voice" should be heard as Jasmine knows the guide dog point of view the best; Chair Fenley voiced agreement.

Fuglie requested an official follow-through update from Colton (who is working on the design) to the committee at the 10-04-23 TAAC meeting and reiterated, one seat would be removed leaving one row with two seats.

The committee requested and received clarification on the new fleet vendor's location, a Canadian company.

Business & Information Items

1. TAAC Work Plan - TAAC Chair Fenley and Vice Chair Paulsen

Vice Chair Paulsen prefaced this discussion with an overview of the work plan stating it will be a 12-month calendar to look at issues the committee is dealing with, how often they occur and where they "sit". It was noted that the committee did not receive an end of year Legislative update last year. There are things to be looked at earlier in the year and more often (e.g., issues at the State Fair).

The floor was opened to recommendations of focus areas to be included in the TAAC Work Plan. Committee members identified over thirty focus areas and shared personal accessibility challenges, identified gaps and potential areas of improvement, and engaged in correlating discussions.

Focus Area Recommendations and Discussions:

- **MN State Fair Accessibility Update** (to include internal ADA barriers) – **Metro Transit**
Myhre proposed scheduling the update earlier than later in the year and requested attention placed on having the appropriate employees provide the presentations. Chair Fenley added, Metro Transit would likely not be ready to present in March.
- **Bus Stops Accessibility Metro-Wide**
This focus area was proposed by Fuglie. Bates recommended an update from one of the providers on a quarterly basis at the discretion of the TAAC Chair. Thorsen suggested looking at how bus stops are being evaluated - units versus round trips. Are they looking at how riders are

using the system as it relates to accessibility improvements.

Jasmine recommended bringing in Metro Mobility more than once a year due to various changes in the system. Streasick responded that bringing in one provider per quarter would probably suffice. It would be appropriate for Metro Mobility service to report more frequently, a few times a year; historically, the Metro Mobility Committee reported to TAAC too frequently. Streasick suggested adding TNCs and premium On Demand contractors, in addition to the three core providers, to the list of provider updates.

Henricksen proposed looking at the ADA Transition Plan, checking up yearly on it to make sure it's moving forward, and suggested holding reviews in April to learn what was done the previous year, what is planned for the current year and to track progress.

- **Provider Reporting**

Jasmine questioned if Metro Mobility has been reporting once a year. Kuennen verified the meetings have been held annually but could be done on a quarterly basis. Thorsen emphasized the importance of the committee knowing how providers are evaluating improvements for starting and ending points, versus by station. Providers should report back on how riders are using the system. Streasick responded, Metro Mobility could report more often than annually, however reiterated that the Metro Mobility Committee reported too frequently in prior years. Vice Chair Paulsen recommended quarterly reporting to the committee.

Streasick announced the agency service will likely be moving to a waiver-based program for those receiving Medicaid waivers due to growth in community living. More information will be provided to the committee once the program is up and running. Vice Chair Paulsen questioned if there is a known timeline and what it might look like. Streasick requested clarification from Kuennen on the start date of the program. Kuennen stated 2023 will be the last year of the agency contract; the Medicaid waiver will be effective in January 2024. Streasick clarified the agency service will be gone at the end of 2023. The Medicaid waiver program will be the exclusive agency program in 2024.

Chair Fenley requested clarification on whether the Medicaid waiver program will be out of the Council's jurisdiction. Streasick responded, the program is a metropolitan service under the purview of the Met Council and clarified that it's an agency service that will serve waiver recipients and Medicaid-eligible riders. The taxi district will be included. There will be more expansive service hours in the program model. Streasick emphasized that the purpose of the discussion is to get the word out. Chair Fenley proposed scheduling the next provider report for January, February, or March of 2024. Myhre expressed concern regarding presenter qualifications as there will be a lot of questions.

- **On-Demand Service**

Chair Fenley suggested on-demand service as a potential focus area for consideration. Vice Chair Paulsen shared personal, positive accessibility experiences with Transportation Plus.

- **Free Ride Pilot Program**

Vice Chair Paulsen recommended getting the Free Ride Pilot Program numbers related to loss of revenue at least twice a year as well as the Metro Mobility Free Ride Pilot Program numbers.

- **Metro Transit Fixed Route Changes**

Fuglie recommended this potential focus area stating that route changes are made due to changes in ridership, but without consulting persons with disabilities or older folks. Vice Chair Paulsen shared based on personal experience in BRT planning and community projects that community discussions are held in areas where routes are located close to parks and trails.



Fuglie added concerns are coming from areas where there are not a lot of transit options. The condensing of routes has left some riders with no convenient route. Rowan responded that Metro Transit plans to do more for people who are underserved. Chair Fenley reiterated, Metro Transit plans to increase options for underserved communities.

- **Operator/Reservationist Recognition**

Henricksen proposed bringing back this program to recognize those who “make the wheels turn”; it should be held at the end of the year. Vice Chair Paulsen concurred. Chair Fenley stated it will be added to the work plan for discussion in November.

- **Road Construction Temporary ADA Access for Transit Stops**

Myhre shared challenging experiences in navigating bus stops close to road construction concluding there are safety issues concerning drivers and riders with disabilities to be addressed. Chair Fenley clarified the naming of this work plan item.

- **Training – Contracted Staff and Riders**

Turner suggested a focus area of training for contracted staff citing a situation where a transit employee did not know of a well-known location within the metropolitan transit area. Vice Chair Paulsen shared other examples of reservationists not able to find destinations. Streasick summarized that this focus area should include training in what is expected of contracted staff, how they should do it and what knowledge is expected of riders. Riders must provide a destination address. This training should include how staff are trained and why. Vice Chair Paulsen added, driver/operator training was approved in the recent Transportation Bill; it should apply to Metro Mobility.

- **Outreach to TAAC in Other States**

Henricksen recommended looking into transit organizations locally and nationally as to how they operate, what could be learned from them and then sharing out information. A coalition could be formed. The outreach findings might benefit the cause of TAAC. Myhre responded this has been done in the past. Chair Fenley stated there are “TAAC” groups in other states. Henricksen added there might be an opportunity to provide education to other organizations that have not evolved into a TAAC. Vice Chair Paulsen pointed out that a grant might be necessary. Streasick clarified that most transit organizations have some sort of an advocacy board on the paratransit side; however, it would be good to learn what others are doing at the advisory level and what other fixed route providers are doing. A TAAC member could provide the findings to Streasick and/Doug for further research and to potentially bring to the committee. Myhre thanked Streasick for sharing this information and considering the voices of the committee.

- **Legislative Session Priorities**

Dains recommended this potential focus area prefacing that legislative session priorities are sent ahead of the legislative session so constituents can talk with their representative ahead of the session. The legislature is often not educated about what TAAC is doing, and this process often gets lost in the calendar. Vice Chair recommended scheduling this item for November. Dains concurred. Chair Fenley summarized the timeline for updates to the committee: January through May, June end of session, and a session primer in December, but could be done in November. Vice Chair stated a preference for November.

Myhre recommended making ADA compliance during road construction a priority focus area in the TAAC Work Plan. Chair Fenley responded the item will be added.

- **Day on the Hill**



Streasick informed the committee that Disability Day is new this year to the Day on the Hill Program. This will be an opportunity for TAAC to formally support Disability Day at the Capitol. It will be up to the committee to decide whether they will have a formal presence on Disability Day.

- **OEEO – Accessibility**

Streasick pointed out, the Council is prioritizing equity so might be a good opportunity to get accessibility in front of the Council. Capital programs to its own provision and no longer under Metro Transit, so an opportunity to discuss accessibility in capital improvement projects with Nick Thompson and team.

- **Transit Link**

Transit Link has minimal airtime, however Streasick suggested having providers discuss the program followed by the contractors and noted that First Transit has changed to Trans Dev Now which has a big American presence.

- **Sub-Committee Reports by Transit Line**

In recognizing there has been little time on TAAC agendas for sub-committee reports, Streasick recommended bringing in representatives from each transit line to report back to the committee. Chair Fenley requested the naming of each transit line to be listed as separate line items on the work plan. Streasick responded, Gold Line, Purple Line, Green Line, and Blue Line.

- **Agenda Reviews**

Streasick recommended having agenda planning meeting reviews included in the work plan.

- **Pilot Programs**

Chair Fenley suggested transit pilot programs such as Aria and On Demand in NE Minneapolis as a focus area. The committee was encouraged to provide additional names of pilot programs. Vice Chair Paulsen mentioned Taxi on Demand. The Lift Pilot Program was also mentioned; Myhre commented that people are not happy with it. Chair Fenley added this service does not provide lift-equipped vehicles. Based on personal ridership experience, Vice Chair Paulsen shared that Transportation Plus is receptive to the wheelchair passenger.

The committee engaged in conversations on mal-functioning card readers and demands for cash payments. Jasmine stated the application provides the Metro Mobility cost and explained that when making a ride reservation, the reservationist should always provide the cost of the ride. Streasick explained that there is super limited power to influence cab drivers. TNC interrupted Taxis on Demand service due to customer service and historic cab driver issues. In addition to Jasmine's suggestion, the payment method can be put into the app to avoid submitting a card to the driver and to know the total cost of the ride.

Myhre requested a presentation on the upcoming changes to the Taxi On Demand service. Streasick added that a cab provider should present ASAP or Council staff should discuss the POD program at the next TAAC meeting. Myhre questioned whether cab drivers should be rated on the app. Streasick responded that riders should rate their drivers on the app. Vice Chair Paulsen concurred as ratings would prove driver morale and customer service between driver and customer.

Myhre questioned if texts can be part of Metro Mobility rider communication. Streasick responded, imminent rider calls/cancellations were extremely cost prohibitive. The work around is the capability of cell carriers converting e-mails to text. E-mail notifications can be entered as a cell phone number. Myhre reminded the committee that not all riders have immediate access to e-mail.



- **Priority Seating**

Streasick stated that this longer-term topic that TAAC has been passionate about should be included in the work plan to track progress.

Chair Fenley announced that thirty-one line items have been listed as potential focus areas in the TAAC Work Plan and opened the floor for additional items:

Vice Chair Paulsen suggested that restrooms should be part of safety and security. Chair Fenley responded, safety and security and maintenance in the areas of lighting, bathrooms, elevators, would be added to the work plan. The benefit of using QR codes was mentioned by Vice Chair Paulsen. Way Finding was suggested and defined, an app that provides information to assist in getting someone where they want to go. Chair Fenley noted snow removal should be added.

Henricksen suggested adding community engagement as a focus area to provide an opportunity for the community to share their rider experiences (e.g., pass-by/pass-up) which could aid how the committee focuses on work plan items. Vice Chair Paulsen added the committee should look at how the committee sees itself as transit representatives and advocates to the Council. Chair Fenley agreed to adding public engagement to work on getting a greater community presence at TAAC meetings and to learn why community members might not be attending.

Chair Fenley opened the floor to a discussion on TAAC recruitment referencing On Demand as an example of who should be part of the committee.

Myhre shared that very little information was provided to her when she joined the committee. Streasick responded that onboarding has improved; it has been updated. Information is shared based on how a committee member is appointed. Myhre requested an opportunity to learn more about how each organization is sharing information. Vice Chair Paulsen offered to provide onboarding information.

Chair Fenley proposed creating a one-page information sheet that explains who TAAC is and the expectations of TAAC members, time commitments, etc. The contents of the TAAC information sheet would be applicable to anyone interested in the committee and could be utilized by the Council for TAAC recruitment and onboarding. A work group or task force assigned to ongoing public engagement, recruiting and onboarding could be assigned to generating the document. Vice Chair Paulsen agreed with the work group but shared concern about getting issues solved in a timely manner and stated that work groups would need to be evaluated.

In closing the TAAC Work Plan discussion, Streasick questioned if committee members have been comfortable with the Metro Mobility online trip booking process. Vice Chair Paulsen mentioned there is no box to enter a destination name. Streasick explained that there are no open fields due to the potential risk of no-shows in the system. Myhre requested further discussion on how to make the on-line app better for participants.

Reports

Subcommittee

1. Blue Line – Ken Rodgers
This item was not presented.
2. Green Line – Christopher Bates

This item was not presented.

Gold Line – Darrell Paulsen

The project is “plugging away” amid construction.

3. Purple Line – Darrell Paulsen

An update was provided last month.

Bus Priority Seating TAAC Work Group

There was no discussion.

Chair

There was no Chair Reports discussion.

Public Invitation

There were no scheduled presentations.

Member Comment

Henricksen announced that all TAAC members absent from this meeting will be provided the opportunity to add items to the TAAC Work Plan. Chair Fenley announced that the TAAC Work Plan Excel spreadsheet would be sent out to the committee. Any suggestions should be sent to Chair Fenley by e-mail and he will update it. The TAAC Work Plan discussion was concluded with Chair Fenley sharing that although five or six committee members were absent, the committee came up with a lot of great information.

Murphy requested status on the Bus Priority Seating Work Group. Chair Fenley responded that a campaign was set up and information was put out on the buses; however, there was no update to report as things came to a halt.

Murphy shared a personal State Fair bus priority seating experience which lead to discussions concerning whether to say something or not say something when priority seating is seemingly misused. Chair Fenley directed the committee to be mindful that it is not known if a person is disabled unless they tell you so. Vice Chair Paulsen added, the right use of priority seating has improved. It has an impact on the system, and it’s ever-changing.

Chair Fenley summarized that priority seating will never be at 100% compliance and suggested the addition of more information on buses and reminders to bus operators of what they should be doing. Sheldon proposed adding a sensitivity training focus area to the TAAC Work Plan. The committee was in general agreement on the addition of disability sensitivity training to bus operator training. Myhre emphasized the importance of the right language and trainers to be included in this training.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 2:29 p.m.

Certification

I hereby certify that the foregoing narrative and exhibits constitute a true and accurate record of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting of September 06, 2023.

Approved this 20th day of September 2023.

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