

Minutes

Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee



Meeting date: April 03, 2024

Time: 12:30 PM

Location: 390 Robert Street

Members present:

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

Absent

Anjuli Cameron

Michele Severson, MCD

- Erik Henriksen, MCD
- Diane Graham-Raff, MAAA
- Patty Thorsen, MAAA
- Heidi Myhre, MCCD
- Claudia Fuglie, MCCD
- Richard Rowen, AARP MN

Excused

Sam Jasmine,
Christopher Bates, Ken Rodgers,
Erik Henriksen, Claudia Fuglie

Ex-officio:

- Andy Streasick, Metro Mobility
- Cheryl Schmidt, Metro Mobility Service Center (interim)
- Douglas Cook, Metro Transit Customer Advocate
- Anjuli Cameron, Metropolitan Council

= present, E = excused

Public

Tim Marino

Call to order

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Fenley called the regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee to order at 12:33 p.m.

Agenda approved

It was moved by Member Jeffrey Dains, seconded by Member Patty Thorsen to approve the agenda. Committee members did not have any comments or changes to the agenda. **Motion carried.**

Approval of minutes

It was moved by Member Patsy Murphy, seconded by Vice Chair Darrell Paulsen to approve the minutes of the March 6, 2024, regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee. **Motion carried.**

Business and information items

1. **A Light Rail Transit Service Update** was presented by Brian Funk, Deputy General Manager and Chief Operations Office, Metro Transit as outlined in the LRT Consist Size Update TAAC April 2024.pptx document to the committee and meeting attendees. Following an introduction and expressed appreciation for time with the committee, Presenter Funk provided an overview of the presentation consisting of updates to light rail transit service plans and consist size and emphasizing the goal of the pilot program is to obtain feedback on how it is working. Program highlights noted included the right sizing of light rail vehicles for service will yield savings in miles, parts, and labor to be used toward future overhaul programs and provide more frequent service to riders. The eventual goal is to restore a ten-minute service frequency through the hiring of more operators, technicians, and helpers. Communication accessibility will be obtainable through online

resources and audio-visual announcements and signage at all train stations scheduled to be implemented by April 13. It was noted that the signage is in the development stage and might not be ready by April 13. The committee was encouraged to provide feedback on their accessibility experiences.

Service Changes Start Dates (Saturdays):

- **April 13:** Two-car trains utilized on Saturday and Sunday service days and Three-car trains for Twins and Minnesota United weekend games
- **June 15:** Two-car trains will be utilized on non-event service days.
- **August 17:** 12-minute frequency goal for most service and Continued use of two-car trains on all non-event service days.

Chair Fenley opened discussions questioning whether the current state of trains was a factor or if the changes were mainly based on maintenance issues. Presenter Funk responded that the decision was primarily based on maintenance issues but the Safety and Security Action Plan yielded data relative to customer service emphasizing that two-car trains will provide the opportunity for more efficient train car cleanings between trips, speed will increase thereby shortening trips, and there will be fewer delays due to the reduced number of doors that can be held open.

Member Graham-Raff expressed concerns about seating capacity on special event days acknowledging this would be difficult to gage. Funk explained that meetings are held weekly to look at upcoming events to determine if additional staff and frequency of trips will be needed. Member Streasick questioned if there will be a set time when the switch would be made from a 2-car to a 3-car train during events, signage customized for individuals with disabilities, and whether the Network Now initiative will look at last trip times. Funk responded that 3-car service would run the entire day of an event, and preparations will be made the night before the event service day. The audio and visual announcements and physical demarcation on the platforms will be very intentional, and the goal is to have the announcement system and signage installed by April 13. Late-night service frequency is being reviewed as part of the Safety and Security Action Plan to provide additional access.

Member Myhre asked whether a specific committee member would need training on how to use the 2-car system. Fenley echoed Myhre's concern stating this committee member has requested an audio announcement to provide an alert if no third train car is available. Funk clarified that last cars will be aligned with the signage when they pull up to the decks. The committee member mentioned was invited to participate in future light rail transit consist size meetings to provide valuable input and perspective. All committee members were encouraged to provide ongoing feedback.

2. A **Legislative Update** was provided by Hannah Pallmeyer, Government Affairs Liaison, Metropolitan Council. Following an introduction, Pallmeyer announced the legislative session is at the halfway point with an end date of May 20. First and second deadlines for policy bills were met on March 22 and both the House and Senate put together small Transportation omnibus bills by the deadline noting the compressed 2024 legislative session due to the late start in February. The House bill required the state Agriculture Society to develop a Minnesota State Fair Transportation Plan for the 2024 fair; the vote will be held on the house floor on April 4. Any amendments impacting the Council will be discussed at the May committee meeting.

The financial policy deadline is April 19 for omnibus spending bills; House and Senate versions are currently unknown. Joint supplemental budget targets of new spending for 2024 and the next state biennium were reviewed. The transportation budget target for this year will be two million dollars with no additional spending outside of committed funds for the next fiscal year. It was noted that supplemental budget proposals specific to the Council are under review and will be known in late April. The Transportation 2024 Bonding/Capital Investment bill is thirty-seven million dollars to be allocated to bus rapid transit, likely the H



Line, and remaining funds could be used for other bus rapid transit lines identified in 2025. The status of the bonding bill will probably not be known until June. Further information will be provided at the May committee meeting.

Chair Fenley opened discussions requesting clarification on whether only one bill has made it into omnibus. Pallmeyer stated the transportation policy bill was the only transportation-related policy bill directly relating to the Council. Vice Chair Paulsen requested the bill number for the State Fair Transportation Plan policy; Pallmeyer will provide the bill number. Fenley clarified it is the House Omnibus Transportation Bill; Pallmeyer added house file number 3436 or 3634. Myhre asked how the dollars for the State Fair Transportation Plan policy would be allocated. Pallmeyer clarified that the House Omnibus Transportation Bill is a policy bill which develops a multi-module transportation plan, so it does not involve state general funding.

Member Dains requested more information on the bus rapid transit program approved for allocation of the thirty-seven million dollars and questioned whether state bonding dollars have been approved. Pallmeyer provided an overview of the H Line bus rapid transit route noting state bonding dollars are being requested for construction. Dains was deferred to Metro Transit to provide information on whether state bonding dollars have been approved for bus rapid transit programs. Pallmeyer added that bus rapid transit was approved for additional lines in the 2023 bonding bill.

- Ernest Morales III, Chief of Police Metro Transit and Lesley Kandaras, General Manager, Metro Transit presented a **Safety and Security Action Plan Update** as outlined in the 04-03-24 TAAC Public Safety Presentation.pptx to the committee and meeting attendees. Following an introduction and an expression of gratitude for the opportunity to meet with the committee, Presenter Kandaras initiated the presentation highlighting the main presentation topics: Safety and Security Action Plan implementation overview, a Metro Transit Police Department update by Chief Morales III, and time for questions, answers, and feedback.

The committee was provided a brief history of the Safety and Security Action Plan. The plan was developed and endorsed by the Council in June of 2022 from a multi-year process that began in June 2020 (following the murder of George Floyd) at which time the Chair of the Council requested a police review of the Metro Transit Police Department noting the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee was involved at various times. The plan is comprised of forty-three action items to improve public safety on transit in within three areas of work: improving conditions on the system, training and supporting employees, and engaging customers and partners to learn what safety means to them over three phases. The first phase, feedback from customers and peer partners identified the need to have a multi-faceted approach to improve safety on transit to include more safety personnel at stations, well-maintained facilities, and reliable service (shortening wait times). The police work group was formed during the second phase. The development of the Safety and Security Action Plan began during the third phase. The three areas of work were formed to find out where more work needed to be done and more resources allocated through engaging customers and partners to identify underlying causes to ensure safety and accessibility for all riders.

Over the last year, key component, layers of official (responsibility) presence were developed: Metro Transit Police Officers, Community Service Officers have been on staff but are now able to inspect fares and there are more of them throughout the system. Transit Rider Investment Program (TRIP) Agents started at the end of February, supplemental Security Officers with funding from the last legislative session Transportation Omnibus bill signed into law in 2023 and the Transit Rider Investment Program provided administrative citation authority. Transit Service Intervention Project (TSIP) Partners and their primary responsibilities were reviewed. The Take Pride in Your Ride Campaign: Your Role as a Rider program was implemented to communicate conduct expected of riders as



well as ways for riders to report issues. Noted: call Metro Transit Customer Relations at 612-343-3333 for non-emergency issues, text 612-900-0144 for suspicious or threatening behavior, and dial 911 for emergencies.

An overview of the Metro Transit Police department was provided by presenter Chief Morales III noting a shortage of full-time officers and supplemental community officers. Quarter one through quarter four crime data for the eight-county area was reviewed underscoring the twenty-five percent decrease in the overall crime rate in 2023 despite being up thirty-two percent from 2022. Other safety improvements noted were a thirteen percent reduction in the top seven crimes and an increase of forty-five percent in officer-initiated crimes meaning the officers were more proactive on the system.

Chair Fenley initiated discussions questioning if there have been any noticeable changes in terms of interactions and correlations due to the decrease in overall crime in 2023. Presenter Chief Morales III responded there have been positive changes as seen in the increase of both police presence and ridership. The Metro Transit Police Department is focused on areas to improve and providing extra support. Vice Chair Paulsen shared a personal encounter with crime on transit and questioned if Transit Rider Investment Program Agents receive cultural and disability-focused training underscoring that riders with disabilities also ride outside of peak times. Paulsen also expressed that training around mental health issues is also needed and the code of conduct should be enforced. Presenter Kandaras responded that the criminal experience on transit was not acceptable but appreciated learning of it. Kandaras explained that trip agents are trained on specific topics based on state law; however, she will find out whether disability training is being done. Fenley added that persons in the disability community are victims of crimes at a higher rate than non-disabled riders so an understanding with the Community Service Officers and police officers is important.

Myhre brought up the issues of safety and non-payment by riders on transit – bus and trains. Chief Morales III verified that Community Service Officers are currently on the trains and have been deployed to BRT lines to help citizens get access to reduced fares and to check for fare payments, noting a shortage in the workforce. It was noted that Community Service Officers will be utilized on non-BRT bus routes as soon as they are available. Fenley verified that the funding is available just not qualified candidates. Member Rowan questioned progress on staffing levels and what types of situations TSIPs engage in. Chief Morales III explained there are pathways to training and funding for qualified candidates and those with prior police experience. The community service officer program has been reorganized with a Pathways program for high school graduates and college students. They are investing in CFOs to avoid taking officers from other agencies and to build from inside Metro Transit to ensure familiarity with procedures and protocols. Fenley requested meeting materials on the Pathways program from Chief Morales III. Kandaras provided an overview of the TSIP program noting it can vary by organization and they are learning how interactions lead to impacts.

Having heard from riders who have experienced theft on buses, Dains questioned what the resolution is when riders call in and whether any reported crimes are solved. Chief Morales III explained that rider reports are investigated individually and there is follow up to re-claim property. Situation awareness is critical so a public service announcement reminding riders to watch their property has been implemented to deter crimes of opportunity and to enhance and encourage situational awareness. Kandaras added that camera feeds are reviewed, and footage has been used underscoring the importance of reporting crimes. Chief Morales III also added that there is a real-time intelligence center with analysts who monitor live feed on transit, so they are proactively monitoring the entire transit system. Fenley reiterated the importance of reporting crimes as it is important in tracking crime statistics.

Graham-Raff shared how utilizing the Text to Safety number during a criminal incident resulted in a quick response by Metro Transit safety personnel but questioned what is in



place given lower staffing levels. Chief Morales, III shared how officers are given a supportive work environment and he spends time out on the system to improve the overall health of the department. Paulsen shared that the Text to Safety program did not work well during a personal criminal experience as the response took too long. Chief Morales III, responded emphasizing that 911 must be contacted when a rider is experiencing a crime to ensure the message also gets to the Metro Transit Police for prioritization. It was noted that Text to Safety is a delayed response.

Streasick asked if there has been increased conflict during fare collection and the issuing of citations by Community Service Officers and questioned if Community Service Officers have multi-lingual skill sets stressing the importance of including this skill set in training. Chief Morales III shared that the Community Service Officers have reported positive experiences; passengers have been cooperative. Community Service Officers have received multilingual training due to the importance of being able to communicate with all riders. Member Thorsen mentioned hidden disabilities should be included in Community Safety Officer training. Myhre stated mental health care should be included in officer resources for their wellbeing on the job. Chief Morales III responded that Sand Creek offers help for officers dealing with post-incident trauma. Member Murphy shared a personal experience where an officer mis-handled a medical situation echoing Thorsen's suggestion of hidden disabilities training for Community Safety Officers.

Streasick requested an update on police hiring trends. Chief Morales III announced the launch of in and out-of-state commercials, three social media platforms, MetroTransitPD on both Facebook and Instagram, MTPDMN on X, formerly Twitter that will provide updates on hiring efforts made daily and that a competitive compensation contract has been settled. It was noted that a Metro Transit Police Officer's job is a call for service with empathy, professionalism and most importantly, integrity to the qualified individual.

Paulsen shared a personal experience with safety on transit and knowledge of a bus driver who has experienced numerous crimes which has resulted in 'courtesy rides'/ free rides. Kandaras affirmed that assaults on transit drivers should never happen, but they are tracked and clarified that Operators are trained to be fare informers, not enforcers. The Community Safety Officials have a fare enforcement role.

Reports

Subcommittee

1. Blue Line – Ken Rodgers
None.
2. Green Line – Christopher Bates
None.
3. Gold Line – Darrell Paulsen
None.
4. Purple Line – Darrell Paulsen
None.

Bus Priority Seating TAAC Work Group

Chair

None.

Public invitation

None.

Member comment

Member Sheldon suggested some disabled transit riders might want to switch to Metro Mobility service due to construction issues and requested a construction update at a future committee meeting. Myhre expressed agreement that construction has caused travel challenges and committee discussions would be helpful. Thorsen added that the discussion should be focused on routes and how the disability community is affected.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 2:39 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 April 03, 2024.

Approved this 24th day of April 2024.

Council contact:

Rhoda Chaffe, TAAC Recording Secretary
rhoda.chaffe@metc.state.mn.us
651-602-1701

David Fenley, TAAC Chair
david.fenley@state.mn.us
651-361-7809

Darrell Paulsen, TAAC Vice Chair
darrellpaulsen@yahoo.com
651-455-3013

