

**Access Advisory Committee to the Massachusetts
Bay Transportation Authority (AACT)**

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Membership Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, July 26, 2017

Board of Directors:

Chairman – James F. White

Vice Chairman – Lisa Weber

Executive Board

Nadine Jones

Mary Ann Murray

Beverly Ann Rock

James Tozza

Meeting opened at 1:05 PM.

Reading of the Agenda

Introductions

Attendees: Ronda Tepfa, James White, Lisa Weber, Jim Tozza, Sylvia Mekler, Beverly Ann Rock, Marcy Segeman, Jennifer Workman-Smith, Rhonda Gibson, Nancy Houghton, Kevin Wilson, Elizabeth Crocker, Esther Minor, Thomas Gilbert, Reggie Clark, Dee Whittlesey, Janet Madorf, Debbie Weathers, Angela Manerson

Other: Patricia Mendez

Approval of Minutes

None were presented.

Chairman White's Report

He stated the following:

- He met with Laura Brelsford to discuss the new in-station MBTA Ambassadors program. The in-station pilot will begin at Chinatown Station and Massachusetts Avenue Station.
- He attended the ADA Celebration hosted by the Boston Mayor's Commission for Persons with Disabilities.
- He will be participating in a new bus operator training.
- He participated in the National Express Transit passenger assistance training class.

In-Station MBTA Ambassadors

Laura Brelsford, Assisted General Manager, System-wide Accessibility, stated the following:

- Currently, the MBTA has a combination of personnel at stations. These include customer service agents, who assist with fare collection and general requests for assistance; station officials, who oversee the inspection of stations; platform attendants, who ensure safety at the busiest platforms; and a variety of supervisors.
- Beginning on August 2, 2017, the MBTA a pilot program will introduce a new type of employee through a private vendor. Currently, they are referred to as Transit Ambassadors. Transit Ambassadors will fill in and supplement many of the functions of the customer service agents. The pilot will begin at Chinatown Station and Massachusetts Avenue Station.

Depending on initial success, the pilot will expand to several other stations by mid-fall.

- The MBTA has worked closely with the new vendor to discuss policies and training regarding appropriate accessible service. The vendor is still working on the training module.

She then began a discussion with the AACT membership about their priorities for what ambassadors should know and how the new ambassadors could act differently from current agents.

A customer stated the importance of knowing where elevators are located. *L. Brelsford* stated that ambassadors will have flipcharts containing information on the key features of the stations. The chart will also have information on how to give directions to riders and how to handle elevator shutdowns.

K. Wilson stated that ambassadors should know how to interact with deaf riders, blind riders, and deaf-blind riders. He suggested they could show the customers elevators rather than give directions, or point out station announcements. *L. Brelsford* noted that the draft training states ambassadors should be prepared to communicate with writing or by text message, and to note that most announcements are available visually; if there is an emergency or an announcement that is not present on a screen, ambassadors should ensure that the customer receives this information.

D. Whittlesey provided a comment that was inaudible on the recording.

R. Gibson asked how many ambassadors will work at each station. She noted a recent incident in which she had difficulty finding an MBTA employee at Downtown Crossing station. *L. Brelsford* stated it will depend on the station. At the beginning of the pilot, there will be one

full-time ambassador at Chinatown and Massachusetts Avenue; larger stations, both in terms of size and ridership will have more ambassadors. She added that customers should use call boxes if they cannot locate an MBTA employee.

E. Minor asked how the ambassadors will assist customers with mobility devices if an elevator shuts down. *L. Brelsford* noted that the ambassadors will not escort customers outside. However, they will inspect elevators every thirty minutes. If an elevator is not working, it will be called into Operations Control Center (OCC) immediately; OCC will then inform the elevator maintenance team. If there is another nearby elevator, the ambassadors will provide directions. If there is not a nearby elevator, OCC will arrange for a bus shuttle at the next accessible station; ambassadors will direct customers to the shuttle.

A. Manerson asked if the ambassadors will replace the inspectors, and why these employees will be called “ambassadors.” *L. Brelsford* stated there will be customer assistance agents and inspectors; assuming the pilot goes well, there will likely be ambassador supervisors. She noted the term “ambassador” creates a distinction between their role and the customer service agents, and implies a connection between the MBTA and the customers.

MBTA Office for Transportation Access (OTA) -THE RIDE Program

Mike Hulak, Manager of Paratransit Contract Operations, stated the following:

- He thanked Veterans Transportation for providing staff for the accessible shuttle to the Esplanade on the 4th of July. The shuttle transported 51 passengers.

He then asked for questions.

A. Manerson asked what address should be given to TRAC when scheduling a trip to the Hatch Shell, as they have asked for a specific address. *M. Hulak* stated that the Hatch Shell is listed as a landmark in their scheduling software.

R. Gibson asked if schedulers can coordinate trips between passengers based on their destinations. She described a trip in which she travelled from Logan Airport to Charlestown before being taken to Malden. She added that RIDE trips should not take longer than the equivalent public transportation trip. *M. Hulak* clarified that RIDE trip lengths should be the length of a public transportation trip plus twenty minutes, including transfers. Regarding scheduling, he stated that the scheduling software is done within ADA parameters; he would need to research the specific trip to provide more information.

N. Houghton described difficulties with the TRAC reservationists, particularly regarding specific addresses when travelling to shopping centers. She stated that the reservations need more training. *M. Hulak* noted that for locations such as malls, a specific address helps drivers arrive where the passengers are located. He agreed that more training is needed.

M. Siegelman stated that TRAC informed her that she could not use 1295 Boylston Street as a pickup location for Fenway Park, stating that it is not a landmark. She stated she had previously been able to use this location, and asked why this is the case. *M. Hulak* stated that if 1295 Boylston Street is open to vehicle traffic, there should not be an issue.

J. Smith-Workman She asked why some vehicles will travel south when other customers are traveling north. She noted that it is in THE RIDE manual. She described an incident in which dispatch would not

put her on a vehicle travelling north, and suggested that evening dispatch needs further training. *M. Hulak* stated that the goal is to have vehicles travelling in the general proximity of drop-off locations. This does not always occur, as the scheduling software will compensate for ridership and schedule changes. He added that depending on the proximity of locations, the issue *Ms. Smith-Workman* described may be the optimal route for a trip.

System-Wide Accessibility (SWA)

Rob Sampson, Manager for SWA, stated the following:

- The MBTA is currently uploading new software on busses that will announce the drivers' badge number. Currently, the only way to receive a badge number is through the visual display. This will assist blind and low-vision passengers.

He then asked for questions.

T. Gilbert stated that the audio system does not work on the westbound Park Street Green Line platform, noting a lack of announcements. He suggested that external speakers on Green Line trains would provide back-up if the station system fails. *R. Sampson* stated he would pass this information along to maintenance, and will request that Park Street staff provide assistance until the equipment is fixed.

R. Clark asked about shuttle service during the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge Replacement Project. *R. Sampson* stated that the Green Line B Branch will be closed between Blandford Street and Packard's Corner. Peter Pan Transportation will provide shuttle service. All coach busses are lift-equipped, and every station will have MBTA personnel on-hand to provide support. Bus route 57 will continue service. Bus routes 47 and CT2 will detour onto St. Mary's Street. On

weekends, the Worcester Commuter Rail Line will terminate at Boston Landing; a shuttle will provide transportation to Reservoir Station, where customers can transfer to the Green Line. Issues should be reported to MBTA Customer Service; he noted that tracking vehicles will be difficult, and requested that customers provide a bus number if possible.

T. Gilbert requested that Red Line training emphasize the importance of lining trains up with video monitors, stating that drivers frequently drive past it before stopping. He noted this is a safety issue. *R. Sampson* stated that these issues should be reported to the MBTA.

A. Manerson expressed appreciation of busses now announcing driver badge numbers. She asked why the Call Center will no longer allow customers to walk in with questions and concerns. *R. Sampson* stated that the MBTA Call Center is now outsourced. The new call center, operated by Global Contact Services at the same facility as TRAC, does not currently have a replacement for walk-in service. He stated he would research whether there are plans to replace this service.

Keolis Commuter Services (KCS)

Elizabeth Hickey, Manager and Title VI/ADA Enforcer, stated the following:

- She reiterated the points Mr. Sampson made regarding Worcester Line weekend service.
- Busing between Morton Street and Readville on the Fairmount Line will continue. There will be busing for the entire Fairmount Line on the weekend of August 19.
- She noted the usefulness of the MBTA shuttles on the Newburyport/Rockport. There have been some modifications to the line's schedule; the MBTA has a special website

(mbta.com/getthere) has information on the modified schedule. The shuttles will operate on weekdays through August 11 from Salem to the outlying points, and on the weekends until September 30 for all train service.

- Beginning August 5 and ending October 1, shuttles will replace weekend train service on the Lowell line; weekday service will not be affected.

She then asked for questions.

Vice Chair Weber expressed appreciation of how quickly she received a response via Twitter to her report of a malfunctioning loudspeaker on a Commuter Rail car. She asked why the Commuter Rail makes use of flag stops, in which trains do not stop at a station if no passengers are boarding or disembarking; she noted that if a train skips a station, it will arrive early at the next station. *E. Hickey* stated that several lines make use of flag stops, and are used to expedite service; the affected stations likely have lower ridership than others.

J. Tozza stated that the stairs at the Natick Commuter Rail station are in a state of disrepair. *E. Hickey* stated she would contact the Bridges and Building Department.

E. Minor expressed appreciation of double decker trains on the Lowell line. She noted an incident in which a conductor tried to board her onto a single deck train, despite her request for the double decker due to her mobility device; she needed to argue with the conductor to be boarded onto the double decker. She added that the audio and visual announcements system malfunctioned for several days; the conductors needed to announce the stops. *E. Hickey* stated that conductors are required to announce station stops when the equipment malfunctions, though she acknowledged this does not benefit those who are deaf or

hard of hearing. She will pass this information along to the appropriate department.

E. Minor asked if the platform at the Gallagher Terminal will be repaired. *E. Hickey* stated she will research the issue.

D. Whittlesey asked if there are planned improvements in Haverhill. *E. Hickey* stated she is not aware of any, but will she will alert AACT if any occur.

A. Manerson expressed difficulty locating shuttle busses, and requested that MBTA and Keolis employees identify themselves as staff when speaking with customers with visual impairments. *E. Hickey* stated she will pass the information along to Keolis passenger assistants.

Veterans Transportation

Kevin MacDonald, General Manager, announced a Passenger Sensitivity Class on August 15.

He then asked for questions. There were none.

Greater Lynn Senior Services (GLSS)

Steven Epps, Director of Transportation, announced Passenger Assistance Training (PAT) on August 11.

He then asked for questions.

K. Wilson stated that a RIDE driver informed a customer that he was not allowed to take a 12-pack of soda onto the vehicle. *S. Epps* stated there is no issue with taking a 12-pack of soda onto RIDE vehicles,

providing it is not open. *M. Hulak* added that if a similar situation occurs, customers should have the driver contact dispatch.

National Express Transit (NEXT)

Victor Herrera, General Manager, announced training classes on August 16 and August 23.

He then asked for questions.

J. Smith-Workman asked if GLSS vans could be transferred to NEXT, stating that the GLSS vans are more comfortable. *There was no audible response.*

K. Wilson stated that RIDE drivers frequently do not follow the GPS, resulting in longer trips. He added that drivers do not accept suggested routes from customers, despite knowing the area well. *V. Herrera* noted that drivers are not required to follow the GPS. He added that in the past, drivers have been given incorrect directions by customers. *M. Hulak* confirmed Mr. Herrera's points. He added that GPS in RIDE vehicles does not receive real-time updates.

D. Weathers complimented the helpfulness of NEXT drivers.

A customer asked if NEXT travels to the IKEA in Avon. *M. Hulak* stated it is beyond the service area.

E. Minor stated that pick-ups with Veterans are consistently late on Sundays. She asked if this is consistent among all RIDE vendors. *K. MacDonald* stated he would look into her trip history.

Global Contact Services (GCS)

Mike Hulak introduced Ray Croteau, the Acting General Manager of GCS.

Ray Croteau, Acting General Manager, described his experience in paratransit service. He held numerous positions at GLSS over the course of twenty years.

A customer complimented TRAC for improving its reservationist response times. She noted far more late trips with TRAC than she had previously had with GLSS. She asked how this was being addressed. *R. Croteau* stated GCS continues with training. Many problems are the result of human error and new employees. StrataGen, the company which produced TRAC's software, hosted intensive training in July; 60-65% of the employees attended. During this summer, GCS is working on customer service skills and understanding the system. *M. Hulak* noted that GLSS and NEXT are actively recruiting new drivers to prepare for the anticipated rush in September. He acknowledged delays in responses to complaints.

J. Smith-Workman stated that several drivers have expressed dissatisfaction with GCS. She asked is there any incentives for them to remain as drivers. *M. Hulak* noted that the drivers are the responsibility of THE RIDE vendors (GLSS, Veterans, and NEXT).

E. Minor noted numerous interactions with rude and disrespectful dispatchers, and asked if they receive training in courtesy. *M. Hulak* stated that Mr. Croteau is working to improve, among other issues, their "soft skills." He suggested that Mr. Croteau share a report of what GCS expects of their dispatchers and reservationists at the next AACT meetings.

D. Weathers stated that she had a trip cancelled without her knowledge, and there was excessive difficulty in trying to reschedule the trip. *R. Croteau* stated he would need to study this specific incident. He stated he would speak with Ms. Weathers after the meeting, adding that trips should only be cancelled by the customer.

K. Wilson stated that reservationists have not understood how to use video relay, resulting in reservationists disconnecting calls. He stressed the importance of training staff on video relay services. *R. Croteau* stated GCS will prioritize training staff on this issue.

Meeting adjourned at 2:56 PM.

Notables

The AACT Executive Board will meet from 10:00 AM to noon and the Membership meeting will be conducted from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM on the fourth Wednesday of the month, except when noted.

Notices of AACT meetings are posted on the website of the MBTA at http://www.mbta.com/about_the_mbta/public_meetings/. Visit the MPO's calendar page at

<http://www.bostonmpo.org/calendar/month> to find AACT agendas, meeting minutes, and past meeting minutes. For more on AACT, see the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the MBTA and AACT, the AACT Bylaws, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations at <http://www.mbta.com/aact> .

Also, find articles about topics discussed at AACT meetings in the MPO's newsletter, *TRANSREPORT*, at <http://www.bostonmpo.org/transreport>. For more information on accessibility at the MBTA, please visit www.mbta.com/accessibility.

Comments and questions concerning AACT should be directed to Chairman James White by contacting the AACT Coordinator, Ms. Janie Guion, at 857.702.3658 (voice) 617.570.9193 (TTY), AACT@ctps.org (email), or c/o CTPS, 10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150, Boston, MA 02116 (US mail).

The AACT meeting location is accessible to people with disabilities and is near public transportation. Upon request (preferably two weeks in advance of the meeting), every effort will be made to provide accommodations such as assistive listening devices, materials in accessible formats and in languages other than English, and interpreters in American Sign Language and other languages.

The MPO complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other federal and state non-discrimination statutes and regulations in all programs and activities. The MPO does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, English proficiency, income, religious creed, ancestry, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or military service. Any person who believes her or himself or any specific class of persons has been subjected to discrimination prohibited by Title VI, ADA, or other non-discrimination statute or regulations may, her or himself or via a representative, file a written complaint with the MPO. A complaint must be filed no later than 180 calendar days after the date on which the person believes the discrimination occurred. A complaint form and additional information can be obtained by contacting the MPO (see above) or at www.bostonmpo.org.

Members needing service information or wanting to inquire about

MBTA services should do so through the MBTA Marketing and Communications Department at 617.222.3200 or 800.392.6100, TTY 617.222.5146, Monday through Friday 6:30 AM to 6:00 PM. There are no weekend or evening hours. You can log on to the MBTA website at www.mbta.com/customer_support/feedback/.

Please sign in at all meetings.

Announcements are always welcome. Please be prepared to give as many details as possible: date, time, location, contact person, and phone number. A written notice is always appreciated.