



Access Advisory Committee to the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

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AACT Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

NOTABLES

- The AACT has a page on the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organizations' website at www.bostonmpo.org. Links can be found there for the following items: agendas, upcoming meetings, past meeting minutes, the Memorandum of Understanding between the MBTA and the AACT, and the AACT Bylaws, the AACT Brochure in accessible format, and ADA Regulations. There are also links to the MPO's newsletter, *TRANSREPORT*, the MBTA's Office for Transportation Access, and the AACT Coordinator.
- Comments and questions concerning AACT should be directed to the Chairman.
- Chairman Haynes recommends that AACT members needing information or wanting to inquire about MBTA services, do so through the Customer Support Services Center at 617-222-3200 or the MBTA website at www.mbta.com/customer_support/feedback/
- The AACT Coordinator is Ms. Janie Guion; she can be reached at (617-973-7507 and AACT@ctps.org).
- 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 would be appreciated.

ATTENDANCE

Ben Haynes, Lillian Haynes, Don Summerfield, Philip Beaulieu, Paul Barresi, John Kane, Bill McCarthy, Marilyn MacNab, John Marshall, Rev. Ellen Frith, Kathryn Piccard, Reggie Clark, Beverly Rock, Henrietta Banfield, John Kneeland, and Linda Blair

MBTA Representatives

Joe Pesaturo, Alex Murkinson, Frank Oglesby, Mike Festa, Paul Strobis, Michael Hulak, Philip Balcom, Carol Joyce-Harrington, and Kathy Cox

Vendor Representatives

Joint Venture of Thompson Transit Inc. and YCN – JoAnne Thompson, Richard Armour and Victor Herrere

Greater Lynn Senior Services, Inc. – Jackie Dunlop

Veterans Transportation LLC – John Tuttle

Other Attendees

Architects: David Bois, AIA (American Institute of Architects), Associate Principal, ARROWSTREET

Kyle Davis, Project Manager, AECOM

Massachusetts Office on Disability: Kathy Roach

Boston Globe Reporter: Noah Bierman

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)/ Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS)

Walter Bennett and Janie Guion

Chairman Haynes called the meeting to order at 1:10PM

- Members, friends and guests introduced themselves.
- Newly appointed board member Philip Beaulieu read the agenda.

Chairman's Report *(No written report submitted)*

He reported the following highlights.

- THE RIDE had its Triennial Review, which is done every three years by the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA), and it has been finalized.

- According to reports, THE RIDE Program is described as the best paratransit program in the United States and Canada. The program has some deficiencies according to the FTA. The Chairman is opposed to the recommended changes and will challenge the FTA ruling. It appears that the FTA has submitted their request or has ordered the changes. As he believes the changes are not useful, he has contacted the FTA Regional Director, Mr. Richard Doyle, and Ms. Peggy Griffin, Civil Rights Officer, with his opposition to this change. Members will be updated on progress of the situation.
- He investigated the reported delays in making THE RIDE reservations that was presented at the January 27 meeting. These complaints have been found to be factual. The Office for Transportation Access (OTA) has promised it will be addressing this issue.
- THE RIDE vendors have been very helpful to their Haitian employees and he applauds them for their generosity during their time of need.
- The Chair has been asked by the Secretary of Haiti to volunteer and his expertise regarding issues of transportation for persons with disabilities to help setup a paratransit program in Haiti, such as THE RIDE
- The Chair invites family members and others who assist AACT members to attend our meetings to ask questions and share their concerns. This way they can be aware of the program's guidelines.
- The Executive Board has decided to invite knowledgeable persons to speak on issues of special needs regarding transportation and parking issues.
- A reminder to all, THE RIDE vehicles are not allowed to block bus stops. Any paratransit or other vehicles violating bus stops will be ticketed and towed. Members and friends were asked to report any and all vehicles that they see that are impeding the safe travel of persons with disabilities

He then asked for questions.

D. Summerfield: I would like to suggest Michael Muehe, the Disability Commissioner for Cambridge, as a speaker.

Chairman Haynes: Yes, I am familiar with Michael.

M. MacNab: Would you share that FTA report with the membership? We may accept the changes and they should be discussed with us.

Chairman Haynes: I will make arrangements with OTA and see if we can get it to everyone.

K. Piccard: Will you be open to feedback?

Chairman Haynes: Yes.

M. MacNab: AACT is an advisory group to the MBTA.

Chairman Haynes: The AACT Committee works with all the cities and towns within THE RIDE area.

Frank Oglesby, MBTA Deputy Director of Paratransit Operations – The Office Of Transportation Access (OTA), THE RIDE (report and letter attached)

He reported the following:

- In January 2010, THE RIDE had the highest January ridership ever.
- Daniel MacInnis, retired founder and chief executive officer of Veterans Transportation Services has died. A letter was written to Mrs. MacInnis in memory of her husband. Mr. MacInnis worked with the MBTA's Office for Transportation Access for more than 20 years delivering THE RIDE service to the MBTA paratransit customers. Acting-General Manager and Rail Administrator William Mitchell signed the letter with contributions from OTA. On March 3, 2010, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation Board of Directors will recognize Mr. MacInnis.

He then asked for questions.

D. Summerfield: First I want to offer my condolences to the MacInnis family. Also, I continue to see THE RIDE vehicles parking in bus stops. Would you pass this on to the proper people?

P. Beaulieu: As one of my new assignments on the AACT Board, I am responsible for reviewing the complaint summary sheets. Why are responses to complaints taking longer to be processed?

F. Olgesby: We are taking up this issue with the vendors.

E. Frith: Thank you so much for that beautiful letter. I too have been observing THE RIDE vehicles parking in bus stops. Should I send information on this to your office?

F. Oglesby: Yes. There should be re-instruction to vendor drivers.

M. MacNab: It has been very well publicized that this is a state law; vehicles cannot park in bus stops; it is a \$100.00 fine. I have been monitoring drivers who park and go have lunch. These bus stops are not marked for THE RIDE vehicles.

F. Oglesby: Yes, thanks for your comments.

J. Marshall: Have you considered bringing this issue to the proper decision-makers in order to get a designated parking spot for THE RIDE vehicles? This is probably the only answer to the problem. If there are no designated spaces in front of major drop-off locations, transfer point locations, or MBTA stations the driver pulls into the curb or double parks at the bus stop. The disabled community and THE RIDE deserve designated pull-in locations. This has been discussed briefly in the past. Is the current administration of THE RIDE looking into designated parking spaces?

F. Oglesby: Jim Folk, my Director, has been in discussion with the City of Boston on this issue. I do not know where the discussion is at this point on alleviating the problem.

J. Marshall: Will you report on your findings?

F. Oglesby: Yes, I will.

M. MacNab: I do not think that any city or town should take an existing parking space and change it to designated parking.

Chairman Haynes: Mr. Oglesby, at last month's meeting, you stated that you would report to us on why consumers are put on hold for extended periods of time while waiting to make reservations.

F. Oglesby/P. Strobis: We have found no systemic problem with the number of calls to their call centers who are put on hold for extended periods. Two and half percent of calls take under two minutes from being answered to completion. The vendors are within the limits of the contract performance and could not be fined.

Chairman Haynes: Customers have stated that if they were in queue, they would be forced out before they were responded to at the 4 PM cut-off time.

J. Thompson: Calls that are in the reservation queue prior to 4 PM remain in the queue until they are responded to. We did a test to monitor the system. They were not forced out. The system works.

Chairman Haynes: Can someone in queue be manually disconnected while in queue by dispatch or reservation staff?

J. Thompson: No, I don't think so. Once you are in queue you are in. Once the phone is answered and if someone hangs up you will be disconnected, but once you are in, you are in.

K. Piccard: When I call Veterans to speak with dispatch I am routed through to reservations. I don't need to speak with reservations and I have to wait awhile. Can that be changed?

J. Tuttle: We need to pre-screen the calls. Based on prior experience it has been determined that it is best to have all calls go through reservations first. They make the determination whether the call goes to dispatch. It is not an effective use of the dispatcher's time to be responding to calls that are not dealing with the current day of service.

K. Piccard: What about giving the caller a choice if the caller has a question for dispatch?

J. Tuttle: I will present your suggestion to the appropriate people. But again, it is best to let each department do the jobs that they are trained to do; most times dispatch will be involved in checking on the current status of a passenger's pickup.

D. Summerfield: I am an educated consumer and would like to make my own choice, after hours the calls should go straight to dispatch.

J. Tuttle: Over the years it has worked better to have the reservationists handle the initial call. No disrespect to the educated consumer but we found calls coming into dispatch that were not relevant to that day of service – resulting in longer call waits for passengers who actually need dispatch's help. At night reservations are closed, the call volume diminishes significantly and dispatch is staffed with enough people to handle both current service issues and any other passenger questions.

K. Roach: Can the reservationist help?

J. Tuttle: The short answer is yes. Technically, it only takes several clicks of the mouse button to check a driver's current location. But, the question is, "Are the reservationists trained to understand the information presented? Will they be able to understand what they are seeing?" They are not trained nor are they expected to provide such information. Dispatchers are trained to understand the relationship between the current location information and the passenger's trip location. They also have a radio to speak with drivers. Much more often than not, when a passenger calls to check on the status of their ride it will

require dispatcher interaction. It is best not to waste the passenger's or the reservationist's time by duplicating efforts.

M. MacNab: I would like to see the vendors have 800 numbers plus direct numbers. When you call a vendor you are put on hold and often cell phone minutes are wasted. This would help the consumers who use their cell phones get a free call.

V. Herrera: Yes, we do have a direct number for consumers: It is 617-979-6700.

Kathy Cox, Manager for MBTA System-Wide Accessibility (SWA) (report attached)

She reported the following:

- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act made the purchase of 25 buses possible. The first has arrived and is undergoing final testing. All buses are due to be received and inspected by the end of June 2010.
- The perseverance of a mother to get the Wedgemere Station on the Lowell Commuter Rail Line accessible for her five-year old son paid off big. The project is largely the result of a collaborative effort by many people, the late Senator Kennedy's office, the Massachusetts Transportation Secretary, and the chairperson of Winchester Disability Access Commission.
- MBTA Police continue their efforts to hand out tickets for parking violators and are monitoring compliance with the state law that bans smoking on MBTA property.
- SWA staff met with a delegation of Russian officials at the request of the Federal Transportation Administration, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, and the Office of Research Management. They were seeking information on MBTA accessibility.
- MBTA Bus Operator Recertification Training continues monthly with classes held at the Charlestown Bus Garage for operators and other bus personnel.

She then asked for questions.

D. Summerfield: The station accessibility work is really important for all. Thank you.

E. Frith: I have been calling in about bus stop signs that have been removed. I have found that they are still missing.

K. Cox: The MBTA has some 16,000 bus stop signs; your call is just one of perhaps many. It takes about two to three months for sign replacement. Replacement is done in the order of the request. I can do some research.

Chairman: Ms. Cox will you report on the list and the timeframe for the replacement of each bus stop sign?

K. Cox: Yes.

D. Summerfield: Why are most of the buses not providing priority seating as required by law? Requirements specify that front facing seating on buses be for persons with disabilities and the elderly.

K. Cox: I will need to do research.

E. Frith: Is it true that operators have the option to report blocked buses by a “transit master button” for illegally parked cars?

K. Cox: Yes, they are to report cars, furniture, or newspaper boxes that are blocking bus stops. There is a monthly report that is generated and sent to the MBTA police who then will monitor the area.

Orient Heights Presentation by Kyle Davis, Project Manager, AECOM

Mr. Davis gave an overview of the existing Orient Heights Station, the redevelopment project goals, and key project highlights.

He noted the following; please see the attached material for complete details:

- The Oriented Heights Station is located on the Blue Line and has been in service since 1952.
- The station is in deteriorated condition and is not Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant
- The renovations will begin from the foundation up
- The renovations and modifications will be made to comply with ADA regulations to provide accessibility to all passengers
- The following components will be new and or improved: the station access, the pedestrian bridge, the elevators, the added fare gates, and the pedestrian flow

- The modifications will accommodate six-car trains

He then asked for questions.

K. Piccard: How will you accommodate someone if one particular elevator is out of order?

K. Davis: We will have the service gate attendant assist you to another elevator.

D. Summerfield: What will happen if no one is at the station to assist you?

K. Cox: If there is an elevator outage someone will be there or the gate would be left open.

E. Frith: Will there be escalators going up and down?

K. Davis: Each platform will have one escalator; typically we design them to go in the up direction since that is the most difficult way to travel. We do have two elevators. I know that the MBTA escalators are designed to be bi-directional so they can go up and down. This is being done because of both space constraints and budget; there is not enough room to have two escalators on each platform.

Chairman Haynes: In regard to the escalator designs going in one direction, is it your perception or the MBTA's acceptance that people with mobility devices will only be going in one direction as opposed to up and down, especially if a wheelchair is occupying the elevator? I suppose our comments regarding what you have presented will be a confrontation with the MBTA. I do not believe the ADA permits that.

K. Davis: No, I don't expect that people will only be traveling in one direction; there is a benefit to having escalators run in the up and down position. After talking with the MBTA I was informed that the escalators could be switched to accommodate the rush hour or peak time of travel. We have a certain criteria to make this station accessible by providing two elevators on each platform. One is a redundant elevator in the event that one breaks down. This was deemed acceptable by the MBTA.

R. Clark: One escalator going in one direction will be a problem. I understood the ADA requires that one escalator go up and one go down.

K. Cox: The ADA does not require escalators at all; we are meeting ADA by having elevators. We will put an escalator in when we have the space.

Chairman Haynes: One of the issues that was raised earlier is the development of a report regarding comparable service that I am challenging. One escalator going in one direction is not a comparable service to accommodate persons with disabilities.

K. Piccard: How many wheelchairs will each elevator accommodate at once?

K. Davis: I do not know that exact answer.

D. Summerfield: It is my understanding that the ADA would require comparable path-of-travel up and down. I think it is against best practices to not have two escalators.

Chairman Haynes: I am concerned about safety. If you have the one escalator going up and the two elevators occupied and there are persons with mobility devices upstairs wanting to come down, and there is only the stairs, as opposed to a second escalator, this is an issue.

E. Frith: I have traveled to other towns that have a transit system and they provided escalators going in both directions. I do not understand why it cannot be provided here. We have talked about the one escalator at Charles Street. There have been numerous complaints. Having only one escalator interferes with my independence.

Chairman Haynes: Mr. Davis, thank you for time.

South Garage at Wonderland Station Presentation by David A. Bois, AIA, Associate Principal, ARROWSTREET

Mr. Bois gave an overview of the existing Wonderland Station, details of the current parking area, and an overview of the proposed South Garage at Wonderland Station. (*see the attached drawing for complete details*)

He noted the following:

- The Wonderland Station is the last stop on the Blue Line
- The current structure is an open-air parking area
- The accessible path-of-travel and drop-off area will be protected
- The proposed new multi-modal parking facility will accommodate 1,963 parking spaces. There will be accessible parking for 30 vehicles including six vans and 24 passenger vehicles

- The elevators will be sized to meet or exceed the intent of the Boston Center for Independent Living Consent Decree and incorporate safety and visibility features (glazing).

He then asked for questions.

K. Piccard: Will the existing ramps during construction and after completion allow two wheelchairs to pass each other going in opposite directions simultaneously?

D. Bois: There is adequate space. The landings on the ramp are 10 feet wide and six feet deep at the turns. I cannot speak to the clearances on the existing ramp on the east side of the track.

K. Piccard: Are you saying there will be no change on the east side? Are you suggesting that only on the landings can two wheelchairs going in opposite directions can pass each other?

D. Bois: Only for the time being. A future construction phase will incorporate additional work on the east side of the station. The ramps were not designed at minimal dimensions. They are five feet wide.

K. Piccard: Are you saying that two wheelchairs can pass?

D. Bois: Yes.

E. Frith: It looks as though there are only stairs in the drawings. Are there any escalators?

D. Bois: There are no escalators in this project; it was discussed with the MBTA and they requested only elevators.

D. Summerfield: In newly designed stations, such as the new proposed Assembly Square station, the path-of-travel for the elderly and persons with mobility devices are in the forefront. Why not in this project?

D. Bois: The issue with this site is that it is in a flood plane and the station needs to be elevated four feet above the ground plane. Anywhere that the ground plane is touched there are environmental concerns.

K. Piccard: Is there a plan to incorporate a dedicated drop-off area for THE RIDE? There should be at least one, preferably undercover, and as near the station as possible.

D. Bois: We have not been asked. There are non-revenue spaces that can be used.

J. Marshall: Is the MBTA Kiss-and-Ride area the same as for THE RIDE passenger drop-offs? Is THE RIDE staff consulted on a designated parking area? THE RIDE staff should be consulted on the design of any new station's community designated parking and signage. A drop-off site should be designated for THE RIDE.

Chairman Haynes: How many parking spaces are at this station? How many are accessible? There is a requirement by the ADA that there be a certain number, or a percentage of spaces be accessible.

D. Bois: There are 1,963 parking spaces in the new garage, 30 are designated accessible; six vans and 24 cars. There are currently 1,273 MBTA parking spaces in three surface lots. The surface lots will also have designated accessible spaces.

M. Festa: The ADA requirements is for one accessible parking space for each 100 spaces over 1,000. I think the regulations are for five percent of spaces under 1,000. I'll do research and get answers to the group at the next meeting.

Chairman Haynes: Ms. Cox, I would like answers to our questions at our next meeting.

K. Cox: Yes.

K. Piccard: Has design attention been given to drainage issues such as curb cuts that often fill with water and ice?

D. Bois: Yes, we did consider these issues; all the curb cuts are undercover.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:15 PM.