

Arlington Transit Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

November 12, 2019

7:00 p.m.

Ellen M. Bozman Government Center

2100 Clarendon Boulevard

“Cherry” and “Dogwood” Conference Room

TAC Members Present:

John Carten
Erika Chiang
Herschel Kanter
Richard Price
Laura MacNeil
Takis Karantonis
Alexa Mavroidis
Deidre Gant
Harvey Berlin
Andrew McAllister

Attendees Present:

Lynn Rivers (staff)
Pierre Holloman (staff)
William Jones (staff)
Tim Roseboom (staff)
Ralign Wells (First Transit)
Tasha Arreza (Mobility Lab)
Dr. Lama Bou Mjahed (Mobility Lab)
Antoine Buie (WMATA)

Call to Order

- John Carten opened the meeting at 7:01 pm.

Introductions

- John Carten led roll call of TAC members present, Arlington staff, and others present within the room.

Public Comment

- No public comments submitted, no speakers from the public.

Approval of Meeting Notes from September 10, 2019

- The meeting notes were approved unanimously.

WMATA Update

- Tim Roseboom noted that the WMATA General Manager's (GM) proposed FY2021 budget grows by 2% compared to the adopted FY2020 budget. The GM's proposed FY2021 budget totals \$3.8B, including \$2.0B of operating expenses and \$1.8B of capital program investments. The GM's proposed budget includes additional fare options including a full transfer discount between Metrobus and Metrorail, flat fare on

the weekends proposed at \$2, and some increases to the price of pass products as well as an increase in peak fares. It was noted that the proposed FY2021 budget also includes a \$0.25 surcharge for using cash on Metrobus. Arlington's possible subsidy for FY2021 is unknown at this time. Mr. Roseboom stated that the GM's proposed FY2021 budget also includes an increase in service hours which would restore about 50% of the hours which were cut in 2016. The increase in service hours include extending to midnight Monday – Thursday and to 2AM on Friday and Saturday nights. There are no proposed service hour changes for Sunday; however, it is proposed that Sunday rail service to be increased to match Saturday service (12-minute headways from terminal stations). On the bus side, the GM's proposed FY2021 budget includes quite a number of cuts to Metrobus service though ridership on Metrobus has started to stabilize.

- Public hearings on the proposed FY2021 budget are slated to take place at the end of January or early February 2020. More information will be sent to the TAC when the public meeting dates are confirmed and set. It is expected that the proposed FY2021 budget will be adopted by the WMATA Board in April 2020.
- The TAC requested the links to Mr. Roseboom's presentation. The TAC also inquired about how has Metrorail and Metrobus ridership recovered. Mr. Roseboom noted that Metrorail ridership has been on the upswing and Metrobus ridership has seen about a 2% to 3% increase in Northern Virginia (NOVA). The TAC also inquired about the opening of the Silver Line Phase II project. Mr. Roseboom stated that MWAA is still slated to have the project completed by the summer of calendar year 2020 and the GM's proposed budget anticipates that service on Silver Line Phase II will start sometime in FY2021.

Recent Research on Transit in Arlington (ART Satisfaction Study, Real Time Study, Senior Citizens Transportation Study) – Dr. Lama Bou Mjahed & Tasha Arreza

- Dr. Lama Bou Mjahed provided an overview of Mobility Lab and stated that Mobility Lab is a research center and communication source for transportation behavior, policy, and transportation demand management. Mobility Lab is a division of Arlington's Commuter Services and funded by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation. Mobility Lab works with the Arlington Transit Bureau on research projects.
- The ART Satisfaction Study was created to address a decrease in Arlington Transit (ART) and transit ridership throughout the U.S. over the last several years. The study examined with do Arlingtonians use or don't use ART and how can individuals be encouraged to use ART more. Four focus groups were developed including one with Spanish-speaking residents, one with current ART riders, and two with non-ART riders. Onboard surveys were conducted on 9 routes and a total of 993 surveys were completed in person; and, 399 surveys were completed online. Key takeaways included:
 - Individuals enjoy utilizing a buffet of transportation options and don't consider themselves as being 100% loyal to just ART
 - Barriers on using ART including lack of awareness/information and limited payment options
 - Some Spanish-speaking participants felt discrimination by bus operators
 - ART is convenient, affordable, takes people where they want to go, and easy to use
 - 86% noted that they were satisfied with ART while 78% noted that they are likely to recommend other to use ART, and 78% noted that they are likely to use ART in the future

- Noted ways to increase ridership include: promoting the senior citizen discount, focusing more on non-commute travel as only 60% use ART for commuting.
 - Things which would encourage more people to ride include more frequent bus service, serving more areas, reduced fares, free transfers between modes, free rides to try out new routes, and free WiFi.
- Key suggestions include investing in improving ART including but not limited to on-time arrivals, service frequency, average coverage, and provide bus shelters. Innovative ways to stay competitive include new alternative models of payment, including drivers in an effort to promote the user experience, and appoint ambassadors for promotion.
 - Tasha Arreza provided a presentation on the Real Time Study which included 14 focus groups and 346 responses to an online survey of ART riders and non-ART riders. The focus groups were least positive on using phone-call technologies for receiving real time information and more positive on dynamic message boards. The study showed that real time information affects travelers' mood and mode choice. Key takeaways of the study include:
 - Travelers often use real time information before they make a trip
 - Travelers want information on cost, time, and convenience
 - Travelers value the ease of getting the information and its accuracy
 - Travelers prefer one-stop-shop apps
 - Awareness is the most cited barrier against using ART real time
 - Key suggestions include reevaluating the phone-call technology and implement highly customizable or on-demand text message options, modernize the existing bus finder technology, continue to provide more real time information through the ART website and LED displays, cater to tech-savvy riders, and diversify the locations of dynamic message boards.
 - Ms. Arreza provided an overview of the Senior Citizens Transportation Study. The study aimed to examine access to transportation options and understanding how to use them to allow senior citizens to stay connected to family/friends, pursue activities, and maintain quality of life. Six focus groups made up of individuals from 65 to 80 in age were developed. Half of the participants used public transit in the past week and one third noted that they were still working full- or part-time. Key takeaways include:
 - Seniors are fairly tech-savvy travelers:
 - Go online or use apps to get information about schedules and routes.
 - Some still prefer traditional methods of getting information: calling on the telephone, picking up a paper schedule, asking a friend/bus driver/station manager.
 - Seniors unaware of the full use of SmarTrip cards including senior fare discount.
 - Perception barriers for flexible transit options or complements:
 - Seniors do not see paratransit options as feasible once they can no longer drive.
 - Subsidized Uber/Lyft might be a good option to supplement transit, but there are concerns over cost, technology barriers or their safety level, not being ADA accessible.
 - The TAC inquired about the various payment options which people in the ART Satisfaction would prefer over the existing model. It was noted that survey participants would like to have the ability to use debit/credit cards, and Google and Apple pay/smartphones/smartwatches. The TAC also noted that LED displays around the County and region are not standardized and differ depending on location. The TAC also asked if ART's real time GTFS information is free and available to the public; William Jones noted yes to this inquiry. The TAC inquired about improving outreach to senior citizens using ambassadors to inform them of transit options.

ART Operations and Maintenance Contract Update – William Jones

- William Jones noted that the Transit Bureau recently completed a procurement for the operations and maintenance of contractor. Through this process the County selected First Transit. Mr. Jones noted that First Transit will start service on Sunday, December 29, 2019, and First Transit is currently working on transitioning activities with the existing contractor, National Express. First Transit is also in the process of recruiting and training staff and will hold a career fair the week of November 18, 2019. Mr. Jones introduced Mr. Ralign Wells of First Transit and noted that Mr. Wells will be the General Manager of ART starting December 29, 2019. Mr. Wells provided an overview of his career in the transit industry highlighting his career from bus operator to the CEO of the Maryland Transit Administration. Mr. Wells noted that service reliability, service quality, and customers will all be items which are of great importance to him as well as to the future of ART. Items such as performance data to improve on time performance as well as using data to drive cost down were also noted. Mr. Wells stated that on December 29, 2019, people will see some difference in service including but not limited to uniform changes, new buses purchased by the County will be in service, and additional changes which will increase confidence of those riding ART and those who are willing to give ART a try. Mr. Jones note that the cost of this new contract is more than the last as the annual cost have increased from about \$12M to \$17.6M.
- The TAC inquired about operators being paid better under this new contract with First Transit. Mr. Jones noted that the contract increases the pay of operators. The TAC asked if there would be any fare increases as a result of the new contract. Mr. Jones noted that ART's fares are inline with Metrobus fares; moreover, ART's fares may increase if fares on Metrobus increase. The TAC noted that ART has grown significantly over the last 10 years and asked if under the new contract, will ART have better monitoring of operators and service. Mr. Jones stated yes to both items as the contract increases the level of supervisory staff to ensure service meets and goes beyond expectations.

ART & STAR Service and Performance Update – William Jones

- Mr. Jones noted that the remaining Arboc small buses in ART's fleet will no longer be in service by the end of calendar year 2019. The Arboc buses are being replaced with 14 new buses. Regarding ridership, ART's ridership for the first quarter of FY2020 increased 6% compared to the first quarter of FY2019. STAR's ridership decreased 5% during the first quarter of FY2020 as compared to the first quarter of FY2019. Mr. Jones mentioned that STAR trips booked on Red Top have decreased. Red Top currently has less taxi drivers than several years ago as several have left to drive for the likes of Uber and Lyft while others have become bus operators. The TAC inquired on why STAR ridership is going down. Mr. Jones noted that individuals have more options such as Uber/Lyft, MetroAccess, bus stop improvements which allows for more people to use ART and Metrobus and with such there have been decreases in STAR.

Report from Accessibility Subcommittee - Alexa Mavroidis

- Alexa Mavroidis noted that the County has responded to concerns from those have complained about STAR. Data was requested on the number of late trips from Red Top and Diamond as well as times where either provider failed to pick up passengers. It was noted that Red Top's on time performance was below the County's threshold of 95% and that 8.8% of Red Top trips were considered late and 0.4% were considered missed. Mr. Jones noted that a cure notice has been issued to Red Top, and Red Top has 90 days to find a fix/remedy their issues. The TAC asked if individuals using STAR can change or reschedule trips on the same day. Mr. Jones noted that STAR clients need to schedule

trips in advance. The TAC requested the County look into technology which would allow for Uber/Lyft type of service/pickups for STAR in the future if this is possible.

Additional Items from Committee Members and Staff

- John Carten noted that Richard Price will be the TAC's rep on the County's Vision Zero Taskforce.
- Lynn Rivers mentioned the Transit Bureau has hired a new service planner, Paul Mounier; and, the County is currently interviewing/recruiting for a new Transit Capital Program Manager as well as for a Senior Planner.
- Tim Roseboom announced that he has accepted a job with his former employer, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, and he will be leaving the County in December 2019.
- John Carten requested that Pierre Holloman send out a poll to the TAC for the January 2020 meeting.

Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 pm.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January (TBD), 2020.