MARTA ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

Meeting Summary

**Date: May 12, 2020**

**Time: 10:00 am – 11:30 am**

**Location: Virtual via WebEx**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Jorge Urrea – Chairperson: Called the meeting to order on May 12, 2020, at 10:10 am with Member and Staff introductions. He thanked everyone for being on the conference call today and expressed appreciation for MARTA keeping everyone safe during the pandemic. Mr. Urrea offered Paula Nash to make any comments.

Ms. Nash thanked everyone for being on the call, and she acknowledged that as information and situations change constantly, MARTA will try to get information out to the MAC as quickly as possible, in hopes that the MAC members help get information out to the community.

**ATTENDANCE**

**Committee Members Present:**

**Paula Nash,** Executive Director MARTA Office of Diversity & Inclusion

**Jorge Urrea,** Chair

**Leonard Stinson**, Vice-Chairperson – Representing Cognitive/Developmental

**Jordan Hall,** Personal Mobility Aid/Wheelchair User - Organization

**Robert Smith,** Representing seniors

**Dr. Brad Fain,** Representing Upper/Lower Extremity - Organization

**Robert Lossie,** Representing Upper/lower extremities

**Jimmy Peterson**, Representing the deaf community - Organization

**Sandra Owen,** Representing Personal Mobility Aid/Wheelchair User

**Kay Sibetta,** Representing Seniors **-** Organization

**Leonardo Banes,** Representing Blind/Low Vision

**Lee Rogers,** Representing Blind/Low Vision – Organization

**Jeffrey Easley**, Representing Cognitive/Developmental - Organization

**Committee Members Absent:**

**Mark Gasaway**, Representing the deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf/ blind

**Staff Present:**

Denise Brown

Evelyn Richards

Adoraeu Jouett

Hakeem Mohammed

Santiago Osorio

Toni Thornton

LaHoya Blunt

Roosevelt Stripling

Catrina Jones

Peter Bruno

Eric Knowles

Jonathan Weaver

**COVID-19 Initiatives – Santiago Osorio –** Deputy Chief of Bus Operations for MARTA

Thanked the Committee and acknowledged that this was his first MAC committee meeting. He looks forward to eventually get to meet everyone personally as we move closer hopefully to some form or fashion of the new normal, as we call it. Mr. Osorio gave a little bit of his background. He's been with MARTA for about ‑‑ three months. He has a background in transportation, for nearly 27 years. He started his career in Los Angeles County Metro and later on moved on to Houston Metro, where he just recently relocated from and happy to be here.

**Mr. Osorio gave the following updates:**

I want to highlight some of the great things we've done for not only our customers, employees but every one that is touched by our services. As the pandemic started and became a reality for us and we engaged ourselves in excessive efforts of cleaning the buses and our equipment and providing ways to try to keep our customers in a very safe situation with the fixed-route services as well as for Mobility.

We incurred some issues; honestly, there were quite some supply changes as we moved through the dynamic. We were kind of late in getting some items, but we managed to provide necessities and things that we needed to provide a safe, reliable service.

We looked at our systems, we talked to different agencies and tried to figure out what the different practices were and what everybody was doing and figuring out how to tackle this emergency.

We initiated a mandatory cleaning. Typically, our cleaning on our buses is done every 2 to 3 days. So we implemented a mandatory deep cleaning on all our buses and vehicles every day, and every time the vehicles go out, that included all our handrails and all the areas where people can perhaps make contact with their hands. An Essential Service Plan was put in place, and we were able to touch even more buses out on the streets in a more frequent manner.

We provided equipment to our employees, and we gave them gloves, masks, and equipment to clean.

MARTA began rear door entry on buses to help keep operators and passengers safe. There were some incidents where people were told to board through the rear of the bus. However, they were entitled to board through the front door. As those complaints came in, we adjusted and retrained operators and put out live communication on our service.

MARTA made changes in our facilities and the way we do business. To keep people safe, we implemented a social distancing protocol and sectioned off the priority seating.

MARTA analyzed the areas that the service needed to go. And as a result, routes were reduced from 110 to 41 Routes that provide services to about 17 hospitals, over 22 urgent cares, over 85 grocery stores, 15 adult centers around the service area. This Plan allowed for social distancing. The remainder of the buses are used for the busiest routes; if you had bus service that ran every 20 minutes now, it runs every 10 minutes, or if there was service that ran every 10 minutes, it now runs every 5 minutes to create space to prevent overcrowding.

We were able to partner with our friends at Delta Airlines, and then they were able to guide us through a contact to secure electrostatic sprays. These sprayers are allowing the person to go through the bus and clean the bus very effectively within I would say 2 to 3 minutes. Mobility was also provided some of our equipment so they can do the same thing on their buses. Trains also use this process.

A question was asked: if patrons must wear masks? Santiago Osorio stated that it is not mandatory at this time, but it is encouraged that all patrons wear masks. We will continue to monitor the situation.

A question was asked about MARTA planning for the future with this new standard. Santiago Osorio stated that MARTA continues to evaluate the Essential Service Plan, and discussions are continuously going on behind the scenes.

Robert Smith, asked when MARTA decided to eliminate the routes, was the public informed in time so that they could make adjustments? Santiago Osorio stated that to the best of his knowledge, there was communication via press releases, six platforms, our apps, signs, and at bus stops alerting people. Unfortunately, some individuals did not check that information. Many patrons contacted the Customer Care Center, which had extended hours during that time. Mobility provided 40 mobility vans for approximately 4–5 days and provided rides to the bus stop or train station for patrons who didn't get the notification and called customer service inquiring about their bus.

Jorge Urrea, asked if some of the current practices will be permanent and will MARTA looked at best practices at other agencies across the country? Santiago Osorio stated that's something that we do weekly. I am part of the bus operations committee for the International and the American Public Transit Association, where we discuss and go through processes that other agencies are doing. The best practices for our Essential Service Plan was also implemented in cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Dallas, and other major metropolitan areas. Additionally, MARTA teams met virtually at 7 o'clock every night to discuss the Plan and any other issues with service during this crisis. MARTA met weekly on the international level with over 100 agencies on webinars, and we discuss things that other people are doing that's working better for them and things others are doing and that they felt it was trial and error, and it didn't work. And now, these discussions are going weekly, and it is sometimes twice a week to make sure that we are serving the community in the best way possible even during the crisis and despite this reality that we have.

Paula Nash added that the pandemic hit the U.S. all at one time and all transit agencies, and this made all the transit agencies reach out to other agencies and organizations that support agencies. The American Public Transit Association and other transit agencies immediately jumped into action and started having webinars almost daily at first.

Right now, we are operating as if things are temporary. If we decide to go into a permanent state, there are procedures put into place by the Federal Transit Agency, FTA. Those procedures will require us to do public hearings and such for changes in our bus routes or our bus service if things are looking like they need to become permanent. We have obligations to do equality analysis and public hearings for permanent changes. We don't have to do those procedures for emergency changes.

Peter Bruno, Acting Director Mobility Services: briefly went over some of the customer focus measures that we've employed and discussed some of the employee focus safety measures briefly and then give an update on four key performance measures.

Customer Focus measures: In March, we suspended the practice of door to door service. That was good to ensure safe distancing between the operators and the customers. We have been monitoring complaints and so forth, and I have not heard any push back from that, and we felt that from a safety standpoint, that was a smart move.

We also suspended the in-person interview requirement for functional assessments for the new and the recertifying Mobility applicants. Anyone who needed a new certification or recertification, we automatically suspended the requirement for six months. We figured that was probably a reasonable period and granted presumptive eligibility.

We also limited the number of passengers on‑board the van to two people, which is maximum. And we felt like the first wheelchair position and the last wheelchair position where the last seat was enough of a social distance, with the reduction in trips, we have enough equipment to do that two passengers per vehicle maximum. Our partners with MV and GTS have been doing a great job helping us out with that, and that's been going very well.

The COVID‑19 cleaning protocol: Jonathan Weaver, of our maintenance and oversight team, created an FA suite, which is our work order tracking system. a COVID‑19 cleaning protocol within the FA suite system that would automatically flag when those things are needed on the specified frequency for our MV and GTS partners. This process helps keep our maintenance team on track with the cleaning to make sure that the cleaning is done timely.

Employee Focus measures: reservation agents here at Brady were have the opportunity, and all of them took it ‑‑ to work from home. MARTA IT supplied them with the cellphones, the laptop, and so our reservation center employees are taking calls from home. As you can see, our self-quarantined employees are doing an excellent job at that and will continue. Today we are at six seconds in the queue and have not seen any downturn in productivity.

Across bus operations and for that manner, all of the management team here at MARTA and Mobility adopted it here as well, which is a red and green team. We divided into red and green groups, and what that means is people who have similar functions now work alternate days on-site and at home. This plan will reduce the number of people in the buildings at one time.

It is mandatory for all employees working on all MARTA property, and that went into effect on April 20, and that includes our contracted partners at MV and GTS.

March and April key performance indicators: Key performance average trips per day; in March, we averaged about fourteen ninety-six, and that is1496 in March trips per day. April 591 and that represented a decrease of 61 percent and though that's quite a significant decrease.

On-time performance: March, we had 93 percent and 97 percent in April. So we're up about four percent, and I think we can all agree that the reduction in traffic and so forth has created a spike benefit, and as folks sheltered in place, it has allowed us to make that on-time performance for those who continue to use Mobility.

On the complaint side, March; 118 complaints, about 30 complaints in April, and that's a 74 percent reduction. I think again, you know we're doing a great job, and we want to be proud of the service that we're doing, and we did have fewer people riding that could be the cause of it, but our complaints are down.

And one thing I would say was the most dramatic KPI is passenger counts. March passenger counts were 46,246 and 23,000 in April. That's a 50 percent reduction in the number of passengers. But I think the mobility customers heeded Governor Kemp's advice order to shelter in place as evidenced by the 50 percent reduction in the number of passengers riding. We expect that to go up somewhat slowly and so we're continuing to monitor that.

Robert Smith asked if the suspension of the door‑to‑door service will continue in the future and how that is working? Peter Bruno stated that this practice would continue as long as there's a question about COVID‑19 transmission and health/safety. So the availability of a vaccine is kind of that threshold.

Jimmy Petersen asked a question: I am deaf and speaking for the deaf and hard of hearing community. The one concern that the deaf community, the deaf, and the blind customers have and that they have often expressed concerns because they can not see the van or hear. Mr. Peterson described an incident in which patrons were riding the mobility van and got dropped off. The mobility van was supposed to pick them up in the afternoon, but by 3 o'clock, the van never showed up, and they never got in contact with them to notify them that the pickup was canceled. He was working to help out our blind and deaf consumers, and so I am wondering how to handle a situation like that and how we can provide effective service to the deaf and the blind considering they can't see the van?

Peter Bruno responded that with any policy put in place, there are exceptions. Some individuals, particularly the deaf and blind community that continue to need that level of assistance; we'll work hard to make sure that the manifest is reflective of that mobility customer's needs. And to be sure that the operator can safely leave the vehicle to alert that individual while the operators are still wearing their PPE but so they're covered. That's an exception we will have to consider for a mobility customer to get the service that they paid for and that they deserve, and we will do that.

Robert Smith suggested that recertification documentation not be sent out to patrons since the process was suspended for six months. This will avoid the patron going out and getting the medical certification portion and making copies. Mr. Smith's concern was that not every patron will understand that they don't have to do anything right now. It will be unnecessary exposure to getting the documentation. Roosevelt Stripling stated that the suggestion would be taken under advisement

The meeting was adjourned 11:30 am. The next meeting will be July 14, 2020.