



Commission on People with Disabilities
September 12th, 2018

Welcome and Approval of June 2018 Meeting Summary Minutes:

Trish Gallalee, Vice-Chair, convened the meeting. The approval of the June 2018 Meeting Summary Minutes was tabled until the next meeting.

Discussion on Accessible Taxi Service – Michael Pollard, Program Manager, Taxicab Operations, Montgomery County Department of Transportation (DOT), and Fred Lees, Chief, Management Services, DOT

Michael Pollard, Program Manager, Taxicab Operations, DOT, supervises a staff of five people – two program specialists, two code enforcement officers, and one intake clerk. The primary duties of the Taxicab Operations office is to create and enforce taxi regulations that govern taxi vehicles and drivers that operate in the county. The office issues, suspends, revokes and denies licenses and taxi ID cards to individuals. The office operates under the Office of the Director.

The taxi cab industry is going through a tumultuous period due to transportation network companies, such as Lyft and Uber, and old dispatching applications. The industry can survive if it changes its business model and finds a niche to serve. Michael believes that niche is to provide services to people with disabilities, older adults, and low-income individuals. He also believes that on-demand accessible service is the future of the taxicab industry in Montgomery County. Michael noted that baby boomers are turning 65 at the rate of 10,000 per day across the country. These individuals will need transportation to and from emergency medical appointments. County programs including Call-n-Ride, Same Day Service, and Medicaid Transportation provide up to 16,500 trips per month and enrollment for these programs is increasing monthly. Taxicab companies, with the right business model, can play an integral role in meeting the unmet need for taxi services.

Fred Lees, Chief, Management Services, DOT, explained how the Transportation Services Improvement Fund (TSIF) began. The state of Maryland charges and collects a 25 cent per ride surcharge for all transportation network company rides (Uber, Lyft). These funds are then dispersed to the jurisdictions that regulate taxis. Montgomery County is receiving funds from the state on a quarterly basis. DOT created a regulation and program in response to County code to offset the higher cost of operating accessible vehicles. An accessible van gets about 16 miles to the gallon. DOT is offering 10 cents per mile to the driver of an accessible vehicle to offset the cost of gas. Drivers also receive a \$10.00 subsidy per trip in an accessible vehicle to offset the lost time for pick-up and drop-off. DOT offers a subsidy to offset the costs of converting a vehicle to an accessible vehicle, which costs approximately \$15,000. All of these options were designed to offset the costs but were not designed to incentivize the drivers. DOT is currently discussing ways to provide incentives.

Michael reported there are 30 drivers and 30 accessible vehicles on the road every day. In Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18), there were 7,290 accessible trips with a total of 453,000 miles. \$8,000 was also given towards the capital investment of accessible vehicles – two operators who purchased a vehicle were given \$4,000 for the first year. They will be given another \$4,000 in the second year, \$3,000 in the third and fourth years, and \$2,000 in the fifth year for a total of \$15,000. \$126,274.90 was disbursed to drivers through the gas subsidies. So far

this year – July 1st to present - \$45,694.30 has been disbursed to drivers through the subsidies and there have been 2,738 accessible trips with a total of 183,000 miles so far.

Fred noted that when the TSIF started, the first quarter of FY16 the intake was less than \$100,000. During the last quarter of FY18, the fund received \$535,000 and is continuing to increase significantly per quarter. DOT is now trying to model their program to take advantage of the current funds.

In terms of enforcement, Michael reported that County code includes requirements regarding driver no shows and failure to have wheelchair accessible vehicles on the road. Taxicab companies must provide service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Drivers receive a \$250.00 fine if they fail to pick up a passenger and the company receives a \$100.00 fine for every time they fail to have a wheelchair accessible vehicle available. In 2016, 114 citations were issued to drivers and 117 were issued to companies. In 2017, 112 citations were issued to drivers and 76 citations were issued to companies. All complaints received by the County are tracked and handled by the Taxicab Operations office. Michael encouraged customers to call the County when they have an issue, so they are made aware of the complaint. The County's taxi hotline (via 311) accepts and mediates complaints from customers.

DOT is encouraging drivers to switch to accessible vehicles. Regency has increased the number of accessible vehicles and is also offering a sub-licensing program where drivers can sub-lease an accessible vehicle.

Current state code requires that 5% of all taxi cabs be accessible. Montgomery Code requires 8%. The County is working towards having 100% accessible by 2025, although if that number is not feasible by that date then the goal will have to be revisited.

Michael reported taxi cab drivers want to know the demand for wheelchair accessible vehicles before investing in them. Drivers do not want to purchase the vehicles because of cases like in DC where accessible vehicles are sitting in parking lots.

In 2015, the County issued 50 licenses for accessible vehicles to a driver-owned co-op named Any Time Taxi Cabs that has been working to get started. By the end of this month, six brand new accessible vehicles will be going into service. Any Time is also working with the County to convert sedans to accessible vehicles.

The floor was opened to questions.

Teri Roe, Commissioner, asked what the price per ride is for an accessible vehicle. The meter rate is the same for non-accessible and accessible vehicles - \$4.00 for pick-up and 50 cents per quarter mile.

Asha Clark, Commissioner, ask about taxi cabs not being able to cross county lines. Some Arc Montgomery County families use taxi cabs for medical appointments at Johns Hopkins and Sheppard Pratt. The taxi cabs can take them there but cannot bring them back. Michael reported he met with the Medicaid program today about that very issue. The Medicaid transportation program does not pay a waiting time, which is typically \$28.00 an hour. Under certain circumstances, a participant can request to have the same driver drive them to and from the appointment. Asha also asked about the need for individuals to have mobile applications to use Lyft and Uber services. Michael noted that while each taxi cab company does have their own mobile application, they also take reservations via phone.

Charlie Crawford, former Commissioner, asked about the average wait time for an accessible taxi cab. The code states that the waiting time should be within 20 minutes. If a cab is unavailable, the company may give you a longer wait time and it is up to the passenger to decide whether to wait. Currently, if all 30 wheelchair

accessible vehicles are in use, then the wait time may be longer than 20 minutes. Charlie noted that availability shouldn't be based on demand and there shouldn't be a difference in wait time for a person with a disability and a person with no disabilities. Michael added that last year there were 18 wheelchair accessible vehicles on the road and now there are 30 so progress is being made. Charlie is concerned that the TSIF is being used for its intended purpose of assisting those who need assistance with getting wheelchair accessible vans. Since the incoming amount per quarter equals over \$2,000,000 a year, there are a lot of funds available for this purpose.

Fred recognizes that DOT developed the formulas for disbursements before it was known how much money would be coming in per quarter and that these formulas need to be updated. The Taxicab Services Commission has created several subcommittees, one of which is tasked with looking at ways to modify the formulas to better incentivize drivers to purchase and operate accessible vehicles. One recommendation made is to front load the capital money, but a system needs to be in place to ensure the driver keeps the accessible vehicle on the road. There was also a recommendation to increase the cost per mile to not only offset the cost of a larger vehicle, but to further incentivize drivers. They have also discussed the issue of driving to destinations such as Baltimore in a less fuel-efficient vehicle and not driving a customer back to Montgomery County. Once the subcommittee has finished making their list of recommendations, they will be shared with the full Committee as well as the Director of DOT as DOT is currently modifying the regulations to adjust the disbursements of funds. Trish asked how the Commission can assist DOT. Michael asked for input as well as data on the number of residents who need accessible vehicles.

Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison, noted that many individuals who need an accessible taxi cab do not want to use the taxi cabs due to poor service in the past. If taxi cab companies want to increase their customer base, there needs to be community outreach and education, so individuals know that services being offered are accessible as well as reliable. When Betsy was on a committee 15 years ago, it was required that 20% of all taxi cabs be accessible, but the law did not require them to be on the road. She suggested that the law be amended to make that requirement. Of the almost 550 taxi cabs that are on the road, only about 6% of the accessible taxi cabs are on the road. Betsy has heard that taxi drivers do not want to pay taxes on the subsidies they receive for having a passenger who requires an accessible vehicle. She suggested that the rent for an accessible vehicle be half the cost of the rent for a non-accessible vehicle.

Carl Prather, Commissioner, explained that he was late to the meeting due to a taxi cab company sending a regular vehicle instead of the accessible taxi cab he requested earlier in the day. The cab company stated they could not send an accessible vehicle as there were none available.

Larry Bram, Commissioner, noted that MetroAccess provides approximately 163,000 rides per month. He also noted that his daughter has tried twice to request an accessible taxi cab only to have one show up an hour and a half late and another request go unfilled due to lack of availability of accessible taxi cabs. She now refuses to use a taxi cab service.

Kathy Mann Koepke, Commissioner, noted that two taxi drivers she has spoken with indicated they do not receive the subsidy from their company for picking up a passenger with a disability. Michael explained that the driver would submit their manifest to the County and he signs the voucher that is directly deposited into that driver's account. Kathy also explained she has had issues with drivers of non-accessible taxi cabs when she wants to fold her wheelchair down and stow it in the trunk. The drivers have argued that they cannot accept her as a passenger. Kathy suggested that taxi cab companies offer a way to rate the drivers as well as the service. Perhaps by doing so drivers will be held more accountable and will pay attention to those ratings to retain more clients. Kathy added that she knows of individuals who use service animals that have had difficulty using taxi cabs. Accessibility needs to be for all individuals with disabilities, not just individuals who use wheelchairs. Taxi cab drivers also need to be prepared to provide services to all people who have a disability.

Anne Peyer, Commissioner, suggested taxi cab companies advertise on their website that they offer accessible taxi cabs as well as how many of these vehicles are on the road to create accountability for those companies.

Shawn Brennan, Mobility Manager, Aging and Disability Services (ADS), stated that is unusual in government to have a funding source such as the TSIF that is increasing every quarter. This provides a wonderful opportunity to really solve the issue of accessible taxi cabs.

Betsy noted that when the ADA was first passed the same question was asked how many people will need certain services or access. It is a civil rights issues and it does not matter if only one person needs access – it must be provided. It was not until the ADA did busses need to be accessible. It used to be you had to call in advance to have an accessible bus on your route on any given day.

Fred explained that the cab industry is in a very tumultuous time currently and there is no guarantee that the cab industry will exist in a few years. Five years ago, 800 cab licenses were in use. Today, only 550 licenses are in use and there are not enough drivers available to operate them. It is likely that the cab industry will continue to shrink due to competition. Any decisions by DOT will have to be weighed against how fragility of the taxi cab industry.

Charlie Crawford added that service for individuals with disabilities should be no different than for those without disabilities. Business must be conducted within the context of equal opportunity and access for all. It is important to ensure the TSIF is being used for improving transportation and supporting a model for taxi cab companies to become fully accessible and available to everyone all the time.

Further comments and suggestions can be shared with Betsy or sent directly to Michael at michael.pollard@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Chair and Vice-Chair Report:

Trish Gallalee, Vice-Chair, reported Jay Kenney, Chief, Aging and Disabilities, retired at the end of August. He is now working as the Chief Operating Officer at Jewish Social Services Agency (JSSA). The Commission will be meeting with the director of DOT and the Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Traffic Safety Advisory Committee on September 24th to discuss the bikes lanes that are being implemented throughout the County. The bike lanes are painted green, which are undetectable to those who have low vision or those who are blind. The bike lanes are also placed between the sidewalk and street parking causing drivers and passengers to exit into traffic. Trish asked Commissioners to arrive on time for meetings, so we can start with a quorum. She also reported that there is no Steering Committee this month.

Ex-Officio and Member Updates:

Larry Bram, Commissioner, reported Easter Seals has been awarded a “Getting Ready to Innovate” grant from the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC). The grant is being used to a convene a group of MetroAccess users, both people with disabilities and older adults, to design a prioritized list of suggestions for a MetroAccess mobile application. Supervisors and staff from the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) will be in joining the group. While WMATA is not committing to creating the application, they will be involved in the planning process. Larry is seeking volunteers to participate. Meetings will be held via conference call once a month. If interested in joining, please e-mail Larry at lbram@eseal.org.

Asha Clark, Commissioner, reported the Arc Montgomery County was awarded a small grant for transition planning for youth ages 14 to 26 with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Funds may be used for goods and services that are directly linked to transition planning and implementation, such as youth development services,

tools for transition, and support services including career-related courses, therapeutic equipment, college tuition, business attire, and computer and equipment. Funds must be used by early November. For more information, please contact Carolina Harp at 301-984-5777 x 1262. The Arc is offering a Sibshops support group for kids ages 8 to 13 who have a sibling with special health or developmental needs. Asha reported a Transitioning Youth Resource Fair will be held on Saturday, October 13th from 10am to 1pm at Montgomery College Rockville Campus. The fair will feature state agencies, non-profits and service providers. Attendees can learn about job coaching, benefits, recreation and greater independence.

Susan Smith, Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC), reported in June HOC applied for a Notice of Funding Announcement for vouchers for younger individuals with disabilities. Last week, [HOC was notified they were awarded 99 vouchers worth \\$960,891](#) in subsidies per year. HOC received the highest number of vouchers in Maryland. The vouchers are provided through the HUD's Section 811 Mainstream Housing Choice Voucher Program which provides funding to housing agencies to assist non-elderly ages 18-62 persons with disabilities who are transitioning out of institutional or other separated settings; at serious risk of institutionalization; homeless; or at risk of becoming homeless. Betsy noted she assisted with the application and wrote the services provided by Aging and Disability Services in simple language. She will share with Commissioners.

Angela Dizelos, Chief, Division on Central Services Department of General Services, reported ADA renovations, including additional parking, have been completed at Damascus Library. ADA renovations at the Marilyn J. Praisner Library in Burtonsville are almost completed. The Executive Office Building terrace level restrooms will begin ADA renovations later this month.

Charlie Butler, Therapeutic Recreation, Department of Recreation, shared the new [fall 2018 recreation guide](#). He also shared a flyer for a Therapeutic Recreation expo to be held on Saturday, September 15th from 1pm to 3pm at the Holiday Park Senior Center, 3950 Ferrara Drive, Wheaton.

Announcements:

Shawn Brennan, Mobility Manager, ADS, reported Christiaan Blake, Director of ADA Policy and Planning for WMATA, will speak about progress with Abilities Ride (the taxi alternative to Metro Access), WMATA's efforts to improve safety for Metro passengers with visual impairment, and more on September 18th from 1pm to 3pm at Holiday Park Senior Center.

Next Full Commission Meeting: Wednesday, October 10th, 2018 from 6pm to 7:30pm at Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, Lobby Auditorium, Rockville, MD 20850

Steering Committee Meeting: ** CANCELED ****** Wednesday, October 17th, 2018 from 5:30pm to 7pm at Health & Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, Conference Rooms 1A/1B, Rockville, MD 20850

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I
Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager