



**Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities  
Developmental Disabilities Advisory Committee  
Meeting Summary – October 16th, 2017**

**Sue Hartung, Co-Chair • Larry Bram, Co-Chair**

**Present**

**Parents:** Susan Hartung (Co-Chair); Claire Funkhouser; Susan Goodman; Reda Sheinberg; John Barbee; Penny Dash

**Organizations:** Karen Morgret – Treatment & Learning Center; Eldora Taylor – CSN; Kim Mayo, CSN; David Cross – retired MCPS; Rosemary DiPietro – CSN; Shawn Lattanzio, Local Behavioral Health Authority; Susan Smith, HOC; Daniel Hammond, MCPS; Seth Morgan, Commission on People with Disabilities; Sara O’Neill, MMARS; Penny Veerhoff – Down Syndrome Network; John Whittle – Service Coordination, Inc.; Shawn Brennan, HHS

**Staff:** Betsy Luecking

**Welcome and Introductions**

Minutes from past meetings can be found online at:

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/CPWD/CPWDIndex.html>, under the tab Developmental Disability Advisory Committee.

**WMATA’s Abilities-Ride – Christiaan Blake, Metro ADA Policy & Planning Director, WMATA**

The Abilities-Ride program offers conditionally eligible MetroAccess customers the opportunity to use on-demand taxi services – without sharing a ride – at a discounted rate. MetroAccess offers subsidized rides in partnership with Regency Taxi of Montgomery County and Silver Cab of Prince George’s County. Riders can request rides through these providers for any trip that begins and ends within the MetroAccess service area in Maryland. Riders can request their trip in advance by calling the taxi company directly, or through their respective websites or smartphone apps. Riders must provide their MetroAccess ID number when scheduling their trip request.

MetroAccess customers will pay as little as \$5.00 per trip to use Abilities-Ride. An estimated fare will be provided to the customer before taking a trip. Customers pay the first \$5.00 with Metro funding up to the next \$15.00 in fare. Any remaining fare over \$20.00 will be paid by the customer. The two designated taxi providers will offer wheelchair-accessible vehicles and accommodate customers traveling with a personal care assistant (PCA) and/or a service animal at no additional charge.

Customers will be able to take a maximum of four (4) taxi trips per day. Reservations are encouraged, but not required. The program is currently only available to MetroAccess customers in Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties. This is a curb-to-curb service and MetroAccess is a door-to-door service.

For more information on the Abilities-Ride program, please call 202-962-1100 (V) or visit [www.abilities-ride.com](http://www.abilities-ride.com).

Regency Taxi – “ARMON” (Montgomery County)

301-990-9100 (V)

[www.regencytaxi.com](http://www.regencytaxi.com)

Accepts reservations via phone, online and Regency Taxi mobile app for iOS and Android. Regency Taxi offers a \$5.00 flat fare for all trips up to 9 miles.

Silver Cab (Prince George’s County)

301-277-6000 (V)

[www.coachtransportation.com](http://www.coachtransportation.com)

Accepts reservations via phone, online and CoachTM mobile app for iOS and Android. Silver Cab offers a variable fare with \$5.00 covering trips up to 7 miles.

Christiaan reported that WMATA's number one goal is for bus and rail to be the first option for transportation as it is the most flexible and most available. Customers should not be reliant on a transportation program that requires 24-hour advance notification. More alternative transportation options to MetroAccess need to be made available.

WMATA started a program several years ago called Transport DC that provides transportation to people with disabilities to the same locations as MetroAccess within the District of Columbia for a flat \$5.00 fare. Within the first month, 400 trips were taken. By July 2016, the trips had increased to 20,000 per month.

Abilities Ride is currently only available in Maryland, but they hope to expand it to the entire region.

A solicitation for providers was made available in September 2016. Providers went through a lengthy review process to ensure that those chosen met certain requirements including: providing wheelchair accessible vehicles; following state laws that require driver background checks and demonstrating the companies were compliant security measures; sensitivity in transporting individuals with disabilities; and ability to report data. Two companies were selected - Regency in Montgomery County and Silver Cab in Prince George's County. Regency has a partnership with Yellow Cab in Prince George's and Silver Cab has a partnership with a cab company in Montgomery County. WMATA would like to add more cab companies to the program as long as they meet the required standards and principles.

Abilities Ride service began on September 18, 2017 and within the first 10 days approximately 180 trips were taken. Christiaan will be doing site visits with both cab companies within the next week to discuss issues with dispatchers and engage with drivers on how to serve persons with disabilities.

Christiaan advised that while advance booking is not a requirement of the program, it is always best to reserve the trip ahead of time to ensure cab availability. Customers are also encouraged to schedule their rides via the cab company's mobile applications as sometimes information could be misheard via the phone. For longer trips where taking a cab would not be feasible, MetroAccess should be the safety net.

The floor was opened for questions.

**Are there income eligibility requirements?** The only requirement is that the individual be eligible for MetroAccess.

**Do the taxicab drivers receive at least as much training as MetroAccess drivers?** The level of training for paratransit drivers is much greater than that required of State and local laws and regulations of cab drivers. Since WMATA is subsidizing an existing service that already has established training, background checks, and other requirements from the State of Maryland and local jurisdictions, they are only providing supplemental training and educate the drivers on sensitivity and providing good customer service to persons with disabilities.

Drivers are not required, but are highly encouraged, to help individuals who are blind or have low vision in and out of their vehicles. Individuals are encouraged to make a note with their reservation if they have a disability that requires assistance getting in and out of the taxicab.

**Can the rider use existing MetroAccess account to pay for services?** MetroAccess EZ-Pay accounts cannot be used for this program. If Abilities-Ride is a viable option for a customer, they can reduce the amount in their EZ-Pay account and use the other funds towards Abilities-Ride.

**Will the taxicab drivers be able to assist a person who uses an electric wheelchair?** There was concern from a parent that several MetroAccess drivers have refused to assist their son because he uses an electric wheelchair, even though the drivers have been informed that the wheelchair has been turned off and can be pushed. They have been told it is against MetroAccess policy to provide assistance to anyone who uses an electric wheelchair. Christiaan will take this question back to his office.

Christiaan noted that the taxicab companies that are part of Abilities-Ride are required to have wheelchair accessible vehicles. Regency owns 25, Yellow Cab owns 24, and there are 16 owner-operated vehicles in Montgomery County that are part of the network in case demand gets to that level. WMATA is incentivizing the availability of wheelchair

accessible vehicles by paying the taxicab company an extra \$10.00 for every wheelchair requested trip. The \$10.00 is then passed on to the driver.

**Is there a way for individuals to set up accounts with taxicab companies so they do not have to enter information in every time for a ride request?** WMATA is working with taxicab companies to discuss the possibility for customers to set up subscription trips in the future.

**Can the Abilities-Ride program adopt the payment system that the County's Call-n-Ride program uses?** The EZ-Pay system is a contractor service that was contracted specifically for payments of MetroAccess trips. There is no way at this moment for those funds to go to a third-party account. Regency is still working on how the driver only charges a portion of the fare to the customer and WMATA is assisting them on technical issues. This is not an issue if the customer is paying in cash. WMATA is also working with and encouraging Regency's technical staff to develop a mobile application similar to Uber and Lyft that would help facilitate the split-fare payment. Shawn Brennan, Mobility Transportation Manager, added that Call-n-Ride is researching how they can interact with Abilities-Ride so Montgomery County residents can use their Call-n-Ride accounts to pay for Abilities-Ride services.

**Does Abilities-Ride only provide trips that originate in Montgomery and Prince George's County?** All trips with Abilities-Ride must begin and end in Maryland. At some point, Abilities-Ride becomes cost prohibitive and MetroAccess is the better choice. Abilities-Ride is designed for shorter trips. The maximum MetroAccess fare is \$6.50. MetroAccess has an 1,800-square mile service that serves the furthest point in Virginia to the furthest point in Prince George's County. MetroAccess service is available as long as fixed route is operating at the same time. Of the 1,000,000 MetroAccess trips that have begun or ended in Maryland, approximately 600,000 trips were 10 miles or less. Christiaan's goal is to have dozens of different companies, options, and alternatives available for customers that they only have to use MetroAccess as a last resort.

Christiaan has been working to develop a replacement for the MetroAccess card, temporarily referred to as the Access All card. The new card will be a branded Visa or Mastercard type of card that will detail a customer's MetroAccess eligibility and the expiration date with correspond with the MetroAccess eligibility date. Cards will be issued by a credit card company and will feature a SmarTrip chip in it so users can ride bus and rail for free. WMATA would like to add a feature in the future that customers can use that same card for MetroAccess and Abilities-Ride. Currently, WMATA holds a customer's funds in an EZ-Pay account that is specifically for MetroAccess. With the new card, customers will be in control of their own accounts further empowering the customer and making their independence of travel that much stronger.

**Does Abilities-Ride allow Personal Care Assistant's (PCA) to travel with their client?** Every passenger can bring one additional passenger without any additional charge.

**What is the difference between the white and blue Metro cards?** The white Metro Disability ID card is different from the blue MetroAccess card. Any customer with a blue MetroAccess card that would like to try bus and rail can call Christiaan's office to receive a SmarTrip card that will allow them to use those public transit services for free. PCA's can ride for free as long as they tap their card after their client's card. To use Abilities-Ride, no new ID is required. Customers just show their MetroAccess ID. Individuals still must go to WMATA's Headquarters to determine eligibility for the MetroAccess program.

**How many Transport-DC users have a developmental disability and what have those taxicab companies done in terms of sensitivity of providing service to people with developmental disabilities?** DC has approximately 14,000 eligible customers and an average of 3,000 are using the program. Christiaan does not think the DD population has been using Transport-DC as often as DC has a rather robust HSA program separate from MetroAccess and many of those customers and their caretakers are using those resources instead.

**What are the consequences for no shows or cancelled trips for Abilities-Ride?** WMATA will review customers who have multiple no shows or cancelled trips and will contact those customers and/or their family to determine the issue. WMATA is working to educate customers that they should cancel their trip if they need to and that they should reserve their trip when they are ready to go.

**Will WMATA be discontinuing certifying customers as MetroAccess only?** That is the direction Christiaan would like to go as those current customers cannot ride free on bus and rail. When the new cards are issued, everyone will have the same card. Determination for eligibility is simple – does your disability prevent you from using bus and rail for at least some trips. Even if there is just one trip that you cannot take, then you could be conditionally eligible for paratransit.

For any comments, complaints, questions and support about Abilities-ride, please call my office 202-962-1100.

**Update on Coordination of Community Services / Challenges – Representatives from Total Care, MMARS, Montgomery County HHS Community Support Network:**

Tabled due to time constraints.

**Update – Autism Waiver (TY) – Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS):** Tabled due to time constraints.

**Total Care:** Tabled due to time constraints.

**MMARS:** Tabled due to time constraints.

**Montgomery County DHHS Update - Coordination of Community Services (CCS):** Tabled due to time constraints.

**Co-Chair Update:**

Susan reported that she attended Councilmember George Leventhal's town hall meeting at Montgomery College in Rockville to discuss issues impacting people with developmental differences. Several parents that attended spoke about their children who were not receiving any services. Susan noted that while services may be available, parents have a hard time navigating the system as it is so complex and struggle to connect to services. There is the additional obstacle if English is not the parent's first language. Once the child turns 14, at least the Transition Services Unit within Montgomery County Public Schools is available to assist with coordination and resources. YouTube video compilation from the town hall meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6e93KRNUK4&feature=youtu.be>.

Shawn Lattanzio noted that DDA will now be required to attend the meetings of the Maryland State Interagency Coordinating Council. Local Care Teams will also be invited to attend and provide an opportunity for them to discuss children with intensive needs.

Susan suggested that Kim Mayo present at a future meeting about the services and resources the County provides versus the services the State provides.

Susan noted that parent-to-parent connections are important for assisting each other to connect with services and resources. Daniel Hammond asked for suggestions on how to create a parent group within the Autism Waiver. Parents had indicated interest in creating one, but he has received no responses from the parents about joining a community list. Susan suggested compiling a list of parent organizations, such as McTrans, Autism Society, and Down Syndrome Network, and posting the list on the Commission on People with Disabilities website.

Shawn Lattanzio reported that Family Navigation Services, through the Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, assists families in better understanding the system. It was suggested that this information be advertised to parents at MCPS.

**New Business:** Betsy will invite DDA to come to an upcoming meeting to discuss the new waivers and the transformation.

**Announcements:** Tabled due to time constraints.

**Next Meeting: **\*\*PLEASE NOTE MEETING LOCATION\*\***** Monday, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017 from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. The Committee will be meeting at the Rockville Memorial Library, 21 Maryland Avenue, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Meeting Room, Rockville, MD 20850. Library customers can get 2 hours of free parking when they park in one of the Rockville Town Square garages, which are clearly labeled Garage A (letter A in green - accessible from Maryland Avenue entrance near

Beall Avenue and from Hungerford Drive), Garage B (letter B in blue - accessible from the driveway between Gold's Gym and Pandora), and Garage C.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

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