

## **Metra ADA Advisory Committee**

### **Meeting Minutes**

**August 7, 2018, 2:00 PM**

547 W Jackson Blvd  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Training Room  
Chicago, IL 60661

Attendance: Committee Members

J. Forte (Chairman)  
J. Panko Reis  
S. Dalton  
S. Figved  
S. Hastalis  
D. Bogus  
J. Mueller  
L. Gerlach (via telephone)  
K. Erickson (via telephone)

D. A. Rubino, Metra  
K. Schultz, Metra  
F. Mascarenhas, Metra  
C. Gallardo-Jerbis, Metra  
J. Ferneborg, Metra  
S. Blair  
G. Armstrong  
H. Armstrong  
J. Powell  
M. Sullivan  
D. Shaw  
B. Panther  
K. Hall, Sign Language Interpreter  
R. Payne, Sign Language Interpreter  
P. Cosentino, CART Operator

At 2:05, Chairman Forte brought the meeting to order. After a general welcome, he asked the assembled to identify themselves and who they represented. The first order of business was the approval of the minutes of the May 1 meeting. Mr. Ferneborg added that he had provided electronic copies of these minutes to Committee members and that he had provided hard copies if anyone needed further review. Chairman Forte called for a motion to approve. S. Hastalis brought the motion and S. Figved seconded. The minutes of the May 1, 2018 meeting were approved.

The next item on the agenda was a report from David Rubino, Metra's Director of Station Services. He told the Committee that he was reporting on an issue that had come up at the May meeting. This involved the marketing agreement that Metra had signed with Uber. It had been reported by Committee members that Uber seemed only to provide accessible vehicles within the city limits. Outside the Chicago city limits and on into the suburbs, a person in a mobility device could not get an accessible Uber vehicle. This meant that, for people with disabilities the "first and last mile" concept did not work for them. Mr. Rubino reported that he had gone to the acting Marketing Director and had brought this issue to him. Sam Smith is Metra's Senior Manager of Government Affairs and he indicated to Mr. Rubino that he would take this to Metra's lobbyist in Springfield to determine what could be done. Mr. Rubino assured the Committee that he would report back to them when some word was forthcoming from the Government Affairs area. Mr. Rubino told the Committee that he fully understood their concerns and would continue to pursue the matter. S. Hastalis told the group that Uber had settled with the National Federation of the Blind with regard to carrying customers who had service animals. J. Panko Reis added that, reflecting on all the progress that Metra had made over the years with accessibility, it would be a shame to have their reputation marred by a relationship with

another entity that did not hold to these standards. S. Figved told the Committee that he had yet to find any central number to contact Uber regarding this problem.

Mr. Rubino and Mr. Ferneborg updated the Committee on the ongoing dialogue with Amtrak regarding the new Passenger Information Display System (PIDS) that will be installed as a result of Amtrak's commitment to make Chicago Union Station (CUS) fully accessible. CUS is undergoing a complete renovation and a new PIDS system is an integral part of this. The current PIDS system is Metra's own system, and was designed some 20 years ago with the audio component to assist blind and visually impaired customers access departure monitors as well as track gate boards. This system has been very popular with Metra's blind and visually impaired customers. Unfortunately, it has not shared the same level of favor with the local Amtrak management. For several years, it has been a bit of a struggle to maintain the level of audio that our customers enjoy. Mr. Rubino and Mr. Ferneborg were happy to report major progress in this dialogue with Amtrak. Ray Campbell, who is an officer with the American Council of the Blind had spoken with Mr. Ferneborg about the CUS situation and he had contacted one of the national ACB officers whose name is Tony Stephens. In turn, Mr. Stephens had contacted Amtrak in Washington. The result of all of this was a meeting at CUS on August 6. The chair of this meeting was David Nelson who is Amtrak's top ADA officer. He brought with him technical people from Washington. His purpose was to meet, not only with Metra but with the blind community who use CUS and had a stake in how changes would be made to any information systems. Present at this meeting were Mr. Rubino and Mr. Ferneborg from Metra, R. Campbell and T. Stephens as well as S. Hastalis and J. Powell from the National Federation of the Blind. Amtrak was represented by D. Nelson and his technical staff as well as the local Amtrak management. The meeting lasted nearly all day and it included a tour of the facility. Mr. Ferneborg made the main case for Metra and its blind and visually impaired customers. The meeting was lively and comprehensive. When the meeting ended, Mr. Nelson assured Mr. Ferneborg of some important items.

- Blind and visually impaired customers who used CUS would not lose any audio.
- It had been made very clear that the continuous audio feed served as a valuable way-finding tool for these customers.
- Blind and visually impaired individuals would be brought into the planning and testing phase of the PIDS renovation.

Both Mr. Rubino and Mr. Ferneborg told the Committee that they were convinced of Amtrak's commitment to preserve and even enhance the audio access for Metra customers. The Committee would be kept up to date regarding all future developments.

There were some questions raised about the new PIDS and access for deaf/hard of hearing customers. Mr. Rubino told the Committee that he felt very confident about Amtrak's commitment here, because David Nelson is a deaf person. Issues regarding these passengers are not foreign to him. In the new system, there will be visual scrolling signs that will combine with audio messaging. Whether the system would be speech to text, he could not say. Due to the involvement of Mr. Nelson, he was very confident of a favorable outcome.

At previous meetings, concerns had arisen regarding the coordination of Voice of Metra announcements and the Visual Information Signs at our extant locations. The concern was that there was a delay between the two that put deaf/hard of hearing passengers at a disadvantage, if Metra riders had to change tracks. In order to put a focus on this situation, Corinna Gallardo-Jerbis, Metra's GPS Manager made a presentation to the Committee. First, she dealt with what happens when there are track changes at outlying stations. When a dispatcher finds out that a train will be stopping on a

different track at a station or a series of stations, GPS is notified. The GPS Operator will create a text message and the text will convert to speech. The GPS Operator will then make a live announcement. Hopefully, this information is conveyed in enough time so that customers can move to another platform with plenty of time to spare. So, what you have is a text message that appears on the visual display at the station along with an audio announcement. This is then followed by an additional live announcement. At this point, Mr. Rubino wanted to interject a question on behalf of Committee member S. A. Rangle. In previous meetings, she had voiced a concern about deaf/hard of hearing customers who could not hear the audio announcements, while other customers would begin to move across the tracks while no visual message appeared. What, asked Mr. Rubino, have we put in place to assist these passengers. Ms. Gallardo-Jervis told the Committee that there are situations when the notice from dispatch does not come in time for the GPS Operator to put up a text message, but simply has to get the live audio announcement out. The GPS Operator will inform the dispatcher that they will not have time to send the text message. At this point, the dispatcher can radio the engineer and have the train wait for customers to cross safely and the GPS Operator can then put out the visual message. It is not perfect, since we are not able to do speech to text, but we do everything in our power to ensure that all customers are informed and allowed to cross safely to another platform. Also, the GPS Operator will know if the text message that he or she is sending is not getting through and not appearing on the VIS Sign. The Operator will notify the supervisor who will then notify Metra's Communications area so that the problem can be addressed immediately. GPS will also put out service alerts that will appear on Metra's web site or smart phone alert to let customers know that there is a problem at a particular station. Mr. Rubino added that we do not yet have speech to text capability, but short of that we do everything humanly and technologically to provide information and to create a safe environment for all of our customers.

The next order of business was a report from Francis Mascarenhas of Metra's Mechanical Dept. He brought the Committee up to date regarding the renovation project taking place at the 49<sup>th</sup> Street Yard of the 302 Nippon Sharyo ADA railcars. A new feature has been added to the scope of improvements. Exterior speakers are being installed on either side of these cars and are part of the Passenger Emergency Intercom System (PEI). This will mean that when the PEI is activated, the communication will be heard outside the car on the platform. This is now added to the other features, such as sensitive edges on side loading doors, LED scrolling signs, electrical outlets on the main floor of the car and new wheelchair lifts. He told the Committee that there was nothing new to report regarding the new car procurement. The process was closed down by the Metra Board because of a lack of bids that would have made pricing less than competitive. The Mechanical Department is now looking to other car designs that, hopefully attract a larger number of manufacturers. S. Figved brought up the point that Pace vehicles are able to accommodate mobility devices that exceed 600 lbs. Mr. Mascarenhas told the assembled that at present, Metra railcar lifts have a tolerance up to 600 lbs. However, the new specs call for lifts that can go to 800 lbs. Currently, because the combined weight of both he and his chair exceed the 600-pound tolerance, he has to get out of his chair and he and his chair have to be loaded separately. He also brought up the idea of having an emergency button in the vestibule so that an individual in a chair would not have to go back into the car to activate the PEI. J. Panko Reis agreed that this procedure is cumbersome and a hardship on people who use wheelchairs or scooters. It also increases the fear on the part of these customers that they will be left on the train. Mr. Mascarenhas said that this could be looked into with the specs for new car procurement.

The next item on the agenda was a report on station construction projects and ADA modifications from Kenneth Schultz of Metra's Engineering Department.

- At the LaSalle Street station on the RID, there is a large project underway to replace old pre-cast plaza pavers with new granite pavers. This project is 90% complete. Throughout the project, ADA access to the elevator at 440 S. Financial has been maintained.
- At the Hazel Crest station on the MED there is a project to rebuild both entrances and to add an elevator at the north end. This has always been a non-accessible station. When complete, this station will be fully accessible.
- At the Healy station on the MDN, construction is on-going to rebuild shelters, platforms and ramps. It is estimated that the project is 80% complete. When completed, this station will be fully accessible with ramps on both sides of the station.

At present, there is new concrete being poured for the inbound ramp. To follow will be new guardrails and handrails.

- At the Maywood and Melrose Park stations on the UPW, there will be new platforms and warming shelters that will be built in conjunction with the third main that will be coming in along the north side. During construction, access routes will be maintained. At present, both stations are partially accessible. When complete, both Maywood and Melrose Park will be deemed fully accessible.
- We are putting in new pavers at the Winfield station on the UPW to adjust to the new elevation of the new platforms that were built last year. There are new access routes and this station will remain accessible while under construction.
- At the Grayland station on the MDN, a project is on-going to replace platforms, add ADA parking and put in compliant stairs and handrails. At present, this station is not accessible.
- Also on the MDN, the North Glenview station will have new platform surfaces. During this project, the station will remain accessible.
- New platform surfaces are also being added to the Grayslake, Washington Street station on the NCS. Throughout the construction, this station will remain accessible.
- At the 111<sup>th</sup> St station on the RID, the platforms are being re-surfaced.
- At the Lake Forest station on the MDN, there is a project to replace brick pavers and tactile strips.
- Platform renovation will be underway this summer at both the Mokena Hickory Creek station on the RID and the Vernon Hills station on the NCS. During construction, both of these stations will remain accessible.
- A project that has been going on for some time is the Ravenswood station on the UPN. Because of track and bridge realignment, this has taken a considerable amount of time and redesign. It is scheduled to be completed in 2020. When complete, it will be fully accessible with ramps on the east and west sides of the station. When complete, this station will be fully accessible.
- At the Cary station on the UPNW, there is a project to rebuild the inbound platform along with the warming shelter. There will also be an ADA ramp from the south end to the parking area. This station will remain accessible throughout construction.
- Also, at the Cumberland station on the UPNW, we are rebuilding the warming house on the inbound platform. There will also be a ramp from the outbound platform to the street level. This station will go from non-accessible to fully accessible when complete.
- At Prairie Crossing on the MDN, a new warming shelter is being built. During construction, this station will remain accessible.
- At the Libertyville station on the MDN, a project will soon begin to make renovations to the warming shelter and the depot building. As above, this station will remain accessible for the duration of the project.

At this point, Mr. Ferneborg brought the Committee up to date on the progress of the new Braille Stations Guide. At a previous meeting, he had proposed a document in braille that would match the new ADA System Map. He had asked for volunteers to form a sub-committee for this purpose. This sub-committee was made up of S. Hastalis, P. Byrne, K. Erickson and J. Ferneborg. It was decided that the current Rider's Guide & Stations Guide for Customers with Disabilities in braille should be re-born as a stations guide and the Rider's Guide portion should remain on the Metra web site and updated when needed. The sub-committee members had reviewed the material and had sent their revisions and ideas back to Mr. Ferneborg. He was hopeful that before the end of the year a new document in braille could be finalized.

Mr. Ferneborg next brought up an important piece of Committee business. Chairman Forte and Vice Chairman Panko Reis were reaching the end of their four years of service. This means that there would have to be an election to choose new officers. The election would take place at the end of the November meeting. The new officers would take their positions for the February 2019 meeting. Chairman Forte told the assembled that the August meeting would be his last, due to the fact that he would be traveling at the time of the November 13 meeting. Vice Chairman Panko Reis was unsure as to whether she would be able to attend the November meeting. At this time, Mr. Ferneborg, on behalf of Metra, thanked both Mr. Forte and Ms. Panko Reis for their service. The rest of the Committee was in full accord with this. In order to fill these positions, Mr. Ferneborg asked all interested Committee members to submit their names for nomination to him by October 1. From these requests, he would create a ballot for the November election. He also mentioned that Committee members who were unable to attend could send their votes to him by e-mail and he would enter these at the time of the election.

The proceedings had reached that point where public comments were heard.

- B. Panther drew attention to the complexities with regard to different trains and platforms at the River Grove station. He asked if there could be a better way, using technology to notify customers with disabilities to identify and board their trains.
- J. Powell told the assembled that he could see both sides of the discussion surrounding Metra and their marketing relationship with Uber. He hoped that there could be an equitable way of resolving these questions.
- S. Figved brought up a concern about the Irving Park station. He said that there was a partial crosswalk that did not go to all platforms but seemed to cut off. He was concerned that this could confuse passengers and be potentially dangerous.
- G. Armstrong voiced his concern about individuals putting themselves in unsafe circumstances when crossing tracks.
- M. Sullivan was concerned about continuing access to the Ravenswood station.

The final order of business was the adjournment of the meeting. Chairman Forte called for a motion. S. Hastalis brought the motion and S. Dalton seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 pm.