

## MINUTES

### MEETING OF THE SAN DIEGO METROPOLITAN TRANSIT SYSTEM ACCESSIBLE SERVICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ASAC)

March 10, 2022

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Sotelo-Solis called the Accessible Services Advisory Committee meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. A roll call sheet listing the Accessible Services Advisory Committee member attendance is attached.

2. Approval of the September 16, 2021 and December 16, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Chair Sotelo-Solis welcomed the newest members of the Accessible Services Advisory Committee and wished former MTS employee and ASAC member, Tom Doogan, a warm farewell on his retirement before entertaining a motion to approve the September 16, 2021 and December 16, 2021 meeting minutes. Ms. Betsy Knight moved to approve the minutes. Chair Sotelo-Solis seconded the motion, and the vote was 16 to 0 in favor with Ms. Sharlene Ornelas not present at time of vote.

3. Public Comments

There were no Public Comments.

4. Social Equity Listening Tour (Mark Olsen)

Mr. Mark Olson, MTS Director of Marketing, presented on the Social Equity Listening Tour. He provided details on the public engagement effort to: Understand community narratives around equity, public transit and MTS; Identify areas of concern for MTS spectators as it relates to equity at-large including housing, food access, medical care, etc.; Identify top transportation system priorities for communities within MTS 's service areas. Mr. Olson also explained the project concept plan, procurement process, Pueblo Planning and the next steps to take which include: plan development, conducting community outreach, creating reports, reporting out findings and recommendations to staff and Board of Directors, MTS staff to work with department directors and staff on proposed budgets and timelines, and presenting proposed CIP project list to the Board of Directors for approval.

Chair Sotelo-Solis commented that it was great having the discussion at the Board of Director's meeting about how the Pueblo Project ascended. She also mentioned how the project was very detailed and included different perspectives from the community on various levels including surveys and other areas of input.

#### COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Jana Schwartz, ASAC committee member and Transportation Equity and Livable Community Specialist at County of San Diego AIS, inquired if there are any anticipated recommendations that fit within the \$3 million budget and if there are any predictions as to whether or not it is easy to implement serving a much larger population or a higher

budgeted project. Ms. Schwartz also inquired more guidance when looking into the MTS service area and the distribution of engagement in regards to looking equally into rural areas, urban communities, and trolley services. Mr. Olson stated that large and small projects will come to light in the process of outreach and with the help of MTS staff bringing this information to the Board for over-all decision making and prioritization. Mr. Olson also stated that the projects may include converting bus stops to have more shelters and lighting in order for the community to feel safer and connected, but will need more research to be done with the help of the communities' input. Mr. Olson noted that the \$3 million budget is not a final number and may occur within multiple years, but MTS staff has used this amount as a placeholder for the time being of what staff would like to allocate towards the next round of the Capital Improvement Program budget. Mr. Olson also noted that staff will work with Pueblo in order to develop a strategy for the distribution of engagement in rural and urban areas exceeding the minimum 400 participant response total.

Chair Sotelo-Solis noted that one of the areas where she was impressed with the Pueblo Project was the validation of information and data research that each of the CBO partners share and the potential stipend for people who help within the CBO to provide outreach. Chair Sotelo-Solis stated that she highly recommends for ASAC members to continue the engagement with MTS staff to have the voices needed at the table to bring all ADA requirements and restroom accessibility to discussion for the larger projects. Chair Sotelo-Solis asked staff for the best direction if ASAC members wanted to engage as one of the formal CBO partners of the Pueblo Project and what requirements they would need. Mr. Olson stated what's best is to keep in touch with ASAC member and MTS staff Jay Washburn and himself as direct points of contact for this item in order to get the appropriate information sent out to anyone that is interested and questions will also be sent to staff that are directly working with Pueblo Planning.

#### Action Taken

No action taken. Informational item only

#### 5. EZ Access Mobile App Update (Jay Washburn)

Mr. Jay Washburn, Manager of Paratransit and Minibus, provided an update on the EZ Access mobile app for MTS Access. Mr. Washburn provided a step-by-step overview of the way the app is displayed and its functionalities including: client login screen, English and Spanish language options, drop down menus to select the desired function, booking and changing trips, history of recently booked trips and upcoming trips, and imminent arrival notifications. Mr. Washburn noted that clients will be able to track their scheduled rides on a virtual map displayed within the app once a vehicle has been assigned to the rider's pickup giving the clients a real-time ability to see where their ride is located. Mr. Washburn stated that this will be a great feature for clients with disabilities who are waiting for their rides at a medical facility or any other location where they may not have access to a computer, but will be able to easily access this information from their phone and provide flexibility in regards with being able to make any changes to their trips. Mr. Washburn also noted that clients will be able to set up their personal information within the app at any time including phone numbers, addresses and emails. He also mentioned that the app will be available 24/7 to book trips at the client's convenience and without having to go through the hassle of calling in to the Reservations line for their trips. Mr. Washburn stated that staff is hopeful for a successful program and mentioned since the

launch of the web version in January, the first two months data showed over 420 users signed up for the program and approximately 2,500 trips have been booked through the web, showing how clients have taken advantage of the new program. Mr. Washburn noted that the app will be compatible with any iOS or Android mobile device and will be made available starting April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 with hopes that riders will find this new program very useful and helpful.

Chair Sotelo-Solis stated that it is great to hear of all the improvements that have been made within MTS Access and the feedback that has been received throughout the process that has now been incorporated to the launch of the new program.

#### COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Elsa Caballero, ASAC committee member and Orientation and Mobility Specialist at the San Diego Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired, commented her concerns regarding accessibility options for people who are visually impaired and questioned if whether staff has looked into having voice over options embedded into the system and the addition of some contrasting for clients who have low vision. Mr. Jay Washburn noted that the font on the app will adjust to the product and staff working on the program have done their best in regards to configuring the colors seen within the app to have the highest contrast possible and also stated that the voice over feature is not currently available but has been in discussion with the developers to incorporate it in a future version. Chair Sotelo-Solis asked Mr. Washburn when to expect to see results for the voice over feature. Mr. Washburn stated that there is no specific timeline since it is still in discussion for future versions but can provide an update when a timeline has been set. Chair Sotelo-Solis commented that it is essential to have this feature incorporated into the app for people who have visual impairments and asked for a specific timeline and update to be provided at a future meeting as a recommended action item. Mr. Washburn stated that he will provide an update at the next quarterly meeting and welcomed committee members to download the app once it is made available in order to help their clients utilize and test it and later provide feedback for any suggested changes.

Jorge Rivas, ASAC committee member and fixed-route consumer, commented if the developer for the EZ Wallet app follows the rules for Apple on application development, then it should automatically be voice over accessible. Mr. Rivas also noted that JAWS could also be accessible when using the app on a computer but may contain some configuration glitches so testing would have to be done. Mr. Washburn thanked Mr. Rivas for his feedback and stated that input is always needed when developing a new product that will be put out for the community to use. Chair Sotelo-Solis asked Mr. Washburn if there is any promotional products available from the Mid Coast tour to possibly give out to anyone who has participated in providing any feedback regarding the EZ Wallet app. Mr. Washburn noted that he is unsure but will reach out to Mr. Olson and the marketing team to see if they have any leftover promotional products to give out as an incentive. Chair Sotelo-Solis challenged members to gather people to participate in a friendly competition as an opportunity to provide feedback and voice their concerns.

#### Action Taken

No action taken. Informational item only.

6. ADA Paratransit Reports

MTS Access and MTM monthly reports attached.

Action Taken

No action taken. Informational item only.

7. Fixed-Route Reports

Fixed route monthly reports attached.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Mr. Jorge Rivas stated that he believes there are other ways to possibly increase ridership more specifically in areas within the Sweetwater School District that have expressed concerns when riding on fixed-route. Mr. Rivas stated that in the past, during the Omicron surge in January, there were a few routes that were not being serviced due to lack of drivers which then caused passengers to be stuck without transportation to their schools. Mr. Rivas also stated that he has been getting feedback from other riders including himself in regards to security on the trolley that has not been safe. He also expressed the concerns he had as to whether MTS will be addressing the safety issue, especially for people who are visually impaired and have cognitive issues that cannot see or comprehend what is going on around them at the trolley stations and bus stops. Mr. Washburn stated that during the month of January, MTS had an increase in cancelled services due to a driver shortage relative to positive and exposed COVID cases amongst drivers and overall staff. Mr. Washburn added that there were no available drivers to bring in to fill any missed services, but MTS staff had done everything in their power to get those routes serviced. Mr. Washburn also mentioned that staffing levels have gotten much better and cancellations have dramatically decreased since then. Mr. Rivas also asked if in the future, can a general announcement be sent to riders regarding status updates on their bus or trolley. Mr. Washburn stated that all cancellations are always posted onto the MTS website and rider alerts are sent out as quickly as possible so the information is made available to the general public in several forms. Mr. Washburn noted that riders can also call in to the MTS Customer Service department to inquire the status of their ride and welcomed any feedback regarding this area of concern. Mr. Rivas stated that there are a lot of riders who typically do not check the MTS website for cancellations but mainly rely on the schedules that are posted at the bus stops. Mr. Washburn stated that regarding Mr. Rivas' concerns for security, it is a very difficult situation and MTS Security department is protecting the safety of passengers and others by their best ability. Mr. Washburn also noted that the Board has done their best in providing their time and effort in re-shaping safety policies and procedures regarding how we handle security and the safety of the public. Chair Sotelo-Solis noted that emergency alerts regarding natural disasters and any other possible delays should also be sent out through MTS alerts for emergency preparedness.

Action Taken

No action taken. Informational item only.

8. Committee Member Communications/Comments

Ms. Ashley Wiley mentioned the grant programs administered through SANDAG, the Specialized Transportation Grant Program or STGP, and provided a brief description detailing the grant information and how the grant funds are distributed. Ms. Wiley also stated that she will have the information sent over to members of the committee once the meeting has ended. Mr. Washburn highly encouraged members to look into the grant opportunities to possibly create programs or initiatives that may not have been completed or available before.

Mr. Washburn stated that staff is currently in phase three of the EZ Access program, which is the online payment portal. Mr. Washburn mentioned that they have recently received updates from a software vendor who have worked out all details and are hopeful to launch the online payment option for Access clients in the second quarter. Mr. Washburn also noted that they have added another functionality to the IVR system for EZ Access regarding imminent arrival notifications that are sent out to clients.

Mr. Washburn provided an update on the new mask mandate that was due to expire on March 18, 2022, but noted the FTA had extended the mandate until April 18, 2022.

Ms. Jana Schwartz mentioned the County of San Diego had just released an RFP for free transportation for older adults who live in health equity regions. Ms. Schwartz stated that this program came out on March 2 and will be due on March 31 as an active period to submit any proposals.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

*James R.*- a peer support liaison for RI International announced that there will be a county wide meeting held on March 29 that will have two presenters providing information on services that will be available throughout the county and training for peer support technicians to get state certified. He also mentioned if any members had any questions, to direct them to ASAC member and RI International employee Robert Labelle.

11. Next Meeting Date

The next Accessible Services Advisory Committee meeting schedule is scheduled for September 15, 2022 at 1:00 p.m.

12. Adjourn

Chair Sotelo-Solis adjourned the meeting at 2:09 pm.

/s/ Alejandra Sotelo-Solis  
Chairperson  
San Diego Metropolitan Transit System

/s/ Carla Perez  
Committee Clerk  
San Diego Metropolitan Transit System