

**Arlington Transit Advisory Committee
Meeting Notes
September 12, 2023
7:00 PM
Microsoft Teams Meeting**

YouTube Meeting Video Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xp9WLVVd2Bo>

TAC Members Present:

John Carten	James Davenport	Ronald Decker
Mariela Garcia-Colbert	Patrick Thompson	Laura MacNeil
Alexander Cumana	Harvey Berlin	Alexa Mavroidis
Andrew McAllister	David Sisson	

Attendees Present:

Michelle Cowan (staff)	Hui Wang (staff)	Lynn Rivers (staff)
Pierre Holloman (staff)	Robin McElhenny (staff)	Kirk Dand (staff)
Lauren Breyer (staff)	Clinton Edwards (staff)	David Frye (staff)
Paul Mounier (staff)	Joshua Drucker (staff)	Rocco Visconti (staff)
Steven Frazier (staff)	Andre Stafford (WMATA)	Kent Keyser
Doris Ray	Sue Gutierrez	Maria Martinez
Alex (last name not provided)		

Call to Order

- John Carten opened the meeting at 7:06 pm.

Introductions

- John Carten led roll call of TAC members present, Arlington staff, and others present.

Public Comment

- John Carten provided the following comment, "I just like to comment briefly and you know if we have comments from others about the transit projects tour that we took in July, which to me is always a fascinating meeting where we get out there first hand and see what's going on in the field, see the projects, you know that we've heard about, read about, if we know about, but it's seen firsthand and see the magnitude see the challenges and you know the connectivity, everything else that's involved though that's always a great opportunity. So, I want to thank the staff again for putting that together and doing such a great job, you know."

Approval of Minutes from the May 9, 2023, Meeting

- The amended meeting notes were approved unanimously.

Arlington Transit Real Time Challenges Update

- Joshua Drucker introduced himself as Arlington Transit's (ART) new Transit Technology Manager and provided an overview of challenges which ART has experienced with its real time transit information system. It was noted there were three parts which make up the backbone of ART's real time information: Vehicle Positions, Trip Updates, and Alerts. With vehicle positions, the GPS location of the buses gets published to 3rd party applications; moreover, if you see a bus tracking on a map, it is accurate. ART also has the following webpage to track buses: <https://realtime.arlingtontransit.com/home>. With Trip Updates, there are delays, cancellations, and changes to routes that will be published to 3rd party applications. However, this currently is not being done which is resulting in some of the challenges with passengers using ART's real time system. Moreover, when there is a change or disruption, that information is not showing up on 3rd party applications. Currently ART is developing software that will publish this information to 3rd party applications, and this is slated to be completed by the end of the year. With Alerts, messages from the operations team are pushed describing a disruption on the transit network. ART currently has an alert system for this purpose (sign up on ART's website), the alert system sends out texts and emails to customers to note a service disruption.
- The TAC inquired about positioning of buses and how that information is relayed. It was noted that each ART bus has GPS hardware devices. The GPS hardware devices send a signal to from the bus to a server and that information gets published online every 30 seconds. The TAC also inquired if passengers can "tune" into a particular bus via <https://realtime.arlingtontransit.com/home>. It was noted that yes, passengers can tune into a bus via the site. Mr. Drucker provided a demonstration of how to utilize the tune in feature and other features on <https://realtime.arlingtontransit.com/home>. The TAC asked what currently shows up on 3rd party apps when there is a delay, cancellation, or changes to routes. It was mentioned that the schedule time will show or a bus will show; however, a bus with the real time logo won't show (the real time logo looks like a Wi-Fi system). Moreover, the bus without the real time logo would appear and then disappear as the bus passes a stop as the 3rd party applications are basing information on scheduled time rather than real time.

Arlington Transit's Strategic Plan and Comments from Public Engagement

- Clinton Edwards provided an overview of public engagement events which took place over the summer of 2023 related to Arlington Transit's Strategic Plan focused on how ART reached people and what did staff hear from the public. Staff collected feedback on proposed route changes via a public meeting held on June 21, 2023, an online feedback form and 18 pop-up in-person events. Staff received over 1,800 comments and 1,213 individuals completed the online feedback survey. With this public engagement, information was provided in six different languages with 35% of responses being in Spanish. Key themes from the public engagement include frequency, service span/hours of operation, connectivity, reliability, accessibility, communication (real time information), customer service, quality of buses, safety, and free service. As a result of this feedback, the plan was revised to focus on these items. As a result, several routes were reconfigured, and new routes were added for improved connectivity.
- The revisions to the plan also included increase frequency and service hours across most routes with 48.8% increase in total service hours, 41.8% on Weekdays, 69.8% on Saturdays, and 104.0% on Sundays. With the proposed changes, ART's number of buses in maximum service would increase from 55 today to 61 if this plan is implemented and such service is funded.

- Paul Mounier, Project Manager for Arlington Transit's Strategic Plan, noted that this is a 10-year plan; so, everything is not going to be implemented day one and provided an overview of the recommendations for each route including existing routes with modifications, new routes, and the elimination of some existing routes. With this proposed network, ART would be able to provide service all day to meet the needs of passengers and to accommodate for the shifts in trends in using ART service as there has been more demand and growth during off-peak hours (mid-day and evenings) as well as on weekends.
- Lynn Rivers, Transit Chief, provided some context to the financial piece of the proposed network and mentioned that implementing the noted changes would depend on how much funding is available. It was noted that the Arlington County Board would vote to adopt this plan at their October or November meeting.
- The TAC inquired if the proposed network fits with areas where students attending Arlington County Public Schools (APS) are coming from and connecting to where they go to school. It was noted that the only school within the proposed network that does not have a direct connection is Swanson Middle School; however, Swanson Middle School is reachable by Metrobus (2A). Staff noted that the Strategic Plan looked at APS locations and attempted to link connections close to school. It was also noted that Lauren Breyer of Arlington Transit has been shepherding the Arlington Student fare free program and this program also helped to provide data on where students were coming from and going to. The TAC inquired about bus operator turnover and if ART's contractor, Transdev, has had any issue with keeping bus operators. It was noted that Transdev has done a really good job in keeping bus operators considering some turnover. The TAC also inquired about the near term, mid-term, and long-term plan to align the Strategic Plan with the Zero Emissions Bus transition plan. It was stated that the Zero Emission Bus plan has not been completed; however, ART has ordered four battery electric buses which will be piloted and looking at other emerging technology in the transit industry such as hydrogen fuel cell electric buses. The TAC asked if free fares are off the table. Staff noted that free fares are not off the table and a fare study is being planned to determine next steps.

Arlington Transit & STAR Performance Metrics

- Clinton Edwards gave an overview of Arlington Transit's and STAR's performance in fiscal year 2023. Some highlights include Arlington Transit's systemwide ridership trending higher in FY2023 as compared to FY2022, in June 2023 ART had 177,799 riders compared to 163,379 riders in June 2022. In FY2023, Arlington Transit's on-time performance was 79% compared to 76% in FY2022. STAR also saw ridership increases in FY2023 compared to FY2022. In June 2023, STAR had 4,249 riders compared to 3,696 riders in June 2022. Also, the STAR Call Center saw an improvement in responsiveness in FY2023 as the Call Center now has an average wait time of 9 seconds to answer STAR calls.
- The TAC inquired what was Arlington Transit's on-time performance goal and what have been the biggest problems in terms of meeting this goal? It was noted that Arlington Transit's on-time performance goal was 95%. It was also stated that mechanical items as well as varying traffic conditions, and changes/detours due to construction have been the biggest challenges to meet the on-time performance goal. Staff also noted that the way on-time performance was historically tracked changed in December 2022 as Arlington Transit updated to a new vendor and placed new GPS hardware and software on buses which provide more accurate data than the prior hardware and software.

WMATA Budget Shortfall Update

- Kirk Dand presented an update on WMATA's (Metro) FY2025 budget shortfall. As part of the FY2024 budget, WMATA expended prior Federal Covid funds and at the June 22, 2023, WMATA Board Meeting, the WMATA CFO noted that WMATA expects a deficit of approximately \$750 million in FY2025 which is driven by 3 items:
- Jurisdiction Subsidy Credit: At the onset of the pandemic, Metro provided support to jurisdictions in the form of a subsidy reduction and forgone three percent increases. Had Metro not provided this support, the jurisdictional subsidy would be \$196 million higher in FY2025.
- Decreased revenue since the pandemic: Overall ridership is forecasted to be approximately 25 percent below pre-pandemic levels in FY2025. In addition, shorter distance and weekend trips, which result in less revenue than long-distance weekday trips, have seen the fastest recovery. These changes and related impacts to parking and advertising revenues are expected to continue to keep revenue below pre-pandemic levels in the short and medium term. FY2025 total revenue is expected to be approximately \$288 million below pre-pandemic levels.
- Inflation and collective bargaining agreements: Historic inflation caused by the pandemic and related supply chain impacts made everything more expensive, raising Metro's personnel and non-personnel costs. The vast majority of Metro's workforce which operates and maintains the system participates in collective bargaining. Metro must comply with mandated annual increases under the terms of the respective collective bargaining agreements, which indexes compensation levels to inflation. This cost growth is responsible for \$266 million.
- Mr. Dand noted there is also a capital funding deficit approaching as dedicated capital funding borrowing capacity is projected to be exhausted in FY2029. Moreover, new capital funding will be needed to address ongoing system safety, renewal, and modernization needs. Regarding the FY2025 deficit, the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) has created a WMATA Operating Funding and Reform working group to identify possible funding sources to generate transit monies for Virginia's share of the deficit. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) has stated that DRPT does not anticipate that a large, new, dedicated revenue source will be addressed in the upcoming General Assembly session, and local jurisdictions should plan accordingly. DRPT strongly encourages NVTC to fully develop a "bridge" scenario to address the FY25 and FY26 deficits and believes a permanent solution may take at least two years to implement. NVTC is currently working on "bridge scenarios" at the suggestion of DRPT. At the September 28th WMATA Board meeting, there is anticipated to be an informational presentation on "Budgetary Matters", which is slated to be presented by the CFO, the Executive Vice President of Strategy, Planning and Program Management, and the Vice President of Government Relations.

Report from the Accessibly Subcommittee

- Alexa Mavroidis noted the Accessibility Subcommittee did meet before the TAC meeting with several members of the public providing comments. It was noted that people who provided public comment were concerned about the survey where people can give feedback about STAR as some thought the process was not clear. Other concerns expressed include that people are confused by how staff will utilize the survey results and not being able to provide comment on policy proposals as there is confusion on what is being proposed. It was noted that several STAR

users did not want to see the same proposals which were provided in the fall of 2022. It was stated this should be a time to rethink things and for staff to work closely with STAR users so that there won't be pain points.

- Staff noted that the online survey was part of a public engagement process which has been brought up at Accessibility Subcommittee meetings. The attempt is to find out what have been the experiences and needs of STAR users, how trips are made, how often is STAR being used, and this information will feed into a next phase of public engagement focused on how those needs can be addressed. It was stated that 1,400 postcards were sent out to STAR users based on addresses listed in the STAR database.

Additional Items from Committee Members and Staff

- No additional comments.

Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 8:31 pm.

Next Meeting

- The next meeting will be online on Tuesday, November 14, 2023.