



## **Access Paratransit Advisory Committee 2023 Report**

### ***August 2023***

The Access Paratransit Advisory Committee (APAC) considers it important to develop and submit an annual report to the King County Council. APAC is a King County commission created by King County [Ordinance 18838](#) in November of 2018.

The Access Paratransit Advisory Committee (APAC) enhances Metro's Access paratransit program by advising the agency on priorities and areas of mutual concern while developing a vision for ongoing improvements.

The committee is appointed by the King County Executive and approved by the King County Council for two-year appointments. Membership is comprised of Access riders, including those living with disabilities from across the spectrum, as well as family members of Access riders and representatives of organizations that provide services to Access riders.

### **Background and Context**

The slate of eleven candidates were appointed as full voting members on November 16, 2020. APAC's inaugural membership held its first meeting on December 14, 2020. APAC meetings are held the second Monday of every month. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all APAC meetings, subcommittees, and trainings have been held virtually but Commission members have expressed strong willingness to resume at least some in-person meetings.

2023 membership has been smaller than the minimum membership specified in the ordinance. A number of members became frustrated with various concerns and left. Staff turnover at Metro resulted both in a continual training treadmill as new staff learn what is needed and in several delays about recruiting new members. Three of four committee members will become term limited between 12/31/2023 and 12/31/2024. Current members hope that the Commission will soon be back to its full strength and better positioned to more completely fulfill its advisory role.

APAC has met 10 times since the 2022 report was drafted. This report is compiled after reviewing the 2022 report, meeting agendas, and minutes. For more detail about specific minutes, please consult the Access team.

APAC is specifically charged with:

- Providing advice and counsel on Access paratransit service and identifying opportunities for continued improvement

- Aiding in the development of long-range planning efforts
- Providing advice and counsel on Access paratransit service and identifying opportunities for continued improvement
- Developing and delivering an annual report each August, beginning in August 2021

## **Follow up on APAC 2022 Responses and Recommendations**

In accordance with King County Ordinance 18838, we as APAC members are responding to the following areas as outlined in the ordinance:

### **(a) A review of and comment on the Metro transit department's annual performance metrics and trends relevant to Access paratransit.**

#### APAC Response

- It would be useful to have data about what percentage of rides are booked by phone vs online.
- We note incremental progress about raw numbers of calls handled in languages other than English.
- It would be useful to see KPI data pre Covid to allow for a more well-rounded picture of actual data. Ridership data is still picking up compared to pandemic levels.
  - On time performance has suffered greatly because of the great difficulty of hiring Access drivers. Access is experiencing the same labor issues as other transportation agencies nationwide.
  - ACCESS services were impacted by a potential labor action by drivers contracted through Solid Ground. A very important issue is that MV was not passing along pandemic-related increases in compensation to Solid Ground drivers. The situation was resolved. The Commission strongly prefers contracting that treats all subcontractors fairly going forward.
  - Year over year comparisons is still not possible because of shifting public health requirements, customer demands and continued labor shortages. The APAC has reviewed data related to penalties MV is facing due to the drop in performance criteria. A concern was raised regarding the fairness and the possible need to renegotiate the contract.
  - APAC has started receiving quarterly summary counts of complaints by category. Members note that we hear many consistent complaints but that the number of complaints reported is probably fewer than the total number of situations that would fall into one of the complaint categories.
- The APAC has spent considerable time hearing presentations on different topics and should consider whether going forward we want to ask specifically for more time to consider various data and to make specific data requests, for example, about language access and barriers at the qualification stage or for people using the new online booking. (See above)

- APAC would like to make additional data requests to understand what Access practices might drive customer satisfaction and to consider additional questions in the Access customer survey to understand the rider's experience.
- There is strong interest in options for same day booking. As a result, Access has made movement toward starting a pilot program for same day booking. There was a small pilot before COVID hit.
- Rider recertification processes were discussed and will be reviewed. The current process is not customer friendly and needs to be streamlined.
- Concern has been expressed about possible service cutbacks due to budget and MV Transit performance penalties.

**(b) One (1) review of and comment on information from customer surveys distributed by the Metro transit department relevant to Access paratransit.  
PENDING**

APAC Response

Recommendations:

- Continue to include questions about satisfaction with online booking and breakdowns of how many people responded to the survey online vs phone vs on paper.
- Increase data collection on languages spoken by Access riders including data on the language the rider booked their trip in.
- Include the percentage of caregivers who responded to the survey.
- For future surveys, provide disaggregated data for riders:
  - With intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities and/or their caregivers
  - Riders with limited English proficiency

**(c) A summary of areas of strength, deficiency, or priorities for improvement in the provision of Access paratransit services.**

APAC Response

Recommendations in the following areas for improvement:

- Marketing and information about Next Gen ORCA and use on Access as payment for rides.
- There is strong customer interest in uniform payment options and recommend that Next Gen ORCA consider technology options usable for different categories of customers, including Access riders, and to make those available when rolling out a new product or technology.
- Increase marketing of Access and support for students, youth, and young adults, in order to help increase independence.

- Provide current count of accessible vehicles available to Access riders including Access vans, contracted taxis, and other Metro flexible services.
- As Access is partnering with taxis, there needs to be an increase in accessible taxi vehicles across King County.
- To monitor and review that disabled riders have the same level of service with respect to service hours and areas covered.
- Increase Access service hours so that schedules for those who work traditional and non-traditional hours including early morning, late night, and overnight shifts.
- Increase comfort of Access bus seats – uncomfortable, can be jarring, and seats feel worn out.
- Provide information for transportation patterns that include Access and that happen outside metro areas.
- Add more accessible data visually that is screen reader ready and less reliant on tables. Make sure that information provided to the public works well with assistive devices prior to launching.
- Convene a subcommittee with APAC members to identify options and recommendations for Access Paratransit continuous improvement and program optimization.
- Consider partnering with agencies serving different communities to recruit more participants in the Mystery Rider program.

#### Recommendations for Metro Customer Information and Access Paratransit Comment Process:

- Provide the online comment form in different languages – at least the top 8 languages represented in King County and report what percentage of complaints and comments come in via the various channels.
- Improve comment forms access for smart phones/tablets.
- Vet all online forms with screen readers and publicly note which screen reader platforms and speech-to-text software were used to vet the forms.
- Provide context on why Access customer comment forms are separated out from fixed route service.
- Provide an opportunity for a caregiver to provide contact information for follow-up (if needed) if they are making the customer comment on behalf of the Access rider.

APAC members received a presentation on policy updates for Metro’s strategic plan, Metro Connects, and Service Guidelines and were provided an opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations.

Recommendations for Metro policy updates for the Metro’s Strategic Plan, Metro Connects, and Service Guidelines”

- Increase efforts in low-income areas for priority transit opportunities including Access.
- Increase transparency on how equity is determined/defined.
- Identify how is Metro working with jurisdictions to address areas that are not walkable/rollable, such as on a busy street.

**(d) An overall assessment of Access paratransit service for the prior year.**

APAC Response

- ACCESS provides valuable service when everything works right. However, there are a number of categories of complaints:
  - Ride timing, offered rides too early, extensive travel time and long countywide tourism routing between pickup and dropoff, late pickup, difficulty adjusting rides for the rider's convenience.
  - Labor shortage is certainly one factor, but there are many complaints about customer service being inflexible.
  - KPI information reflects financial stresses in addition to the service quality points mentioned above.
- APAC did not have time to adequately make an assessment and report on it.

## **Summary of APAC activities October 2022 – August 2023**

### October 2022 (Commission did not meet but comments regarding recruitment process)

- The APAC recruitment application was finalized with input from Commission. Response was uneven with a need for more applicants from outside Seattle. Also, the ordinance specifies a minimum number of members. However, there is considerable learning curve and if there are more applicants than necessarily needed, staff should consider moving forward with appointments to help ensure that the commission remains full if a member needs to drop out. Commission also had opportunity to participate in interviews for one position.
- The APAC team went through the recommendations and response that were documented in the 2021 APAC report. Metro will look into options for providing surveys via an app that is compatible with a smartphone instead of a computer.
- Commission members note continuing concerns about the availability of Metro and contracted vehicles able to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers.

### November 2022

- Due to staffing and low numbers of members of commission, APAC Executive committee meetings cancelled for the rest of the year.
- At this meeting, the Commission had its first chance to look at graphs to present counts of complaint data. It would be worthwhile to experiment about how to present these numbers in a size and format that allows easier review.

### December 2022

- The commission reviewed customer complaint counts.
- The Commission would like to see more granular detail.
- The commission would like a flow chart of where complaints come from and how they are handled.
- Currently, it's hard to collect all the strands of complaint data. This may become easier when Salesforce comes on line.

### January 2022

- Metro Access Same Day Service Pilot presentation was given
- Access Optimization recommendations were shared, and APAC provided guidance
- APAC recruitment status update was given
- Proposed to adjust monthly meeting start time

### February 2023

- January meeting minutes approval
- KPI Review
- Recruitment Updates  
Overview of staff responses to 2022 report and
- December 2022 meeting report

## August 2023

- Access Team Updates/Workplan

## March 2023

- February meeting minutes approval
- Discussion of business cards: design will include generic Position number and options to contact ACCESS.

## April 2023 (April 24)

- March meeting minutes approval
- Recruitment Update
- Same-day Service pilot
- Problem Statement
- Metro Flex

## May 2023

- KPI and dashboard review
- Quarterly complaints review
- Year-End Report
- Recruitment

## June 2023

- **Housekeeping and Reoccurring updates**
- Recruitment Status Update
- KPI and dashboard review
- ADA Transition Plan Presentation and feedback
- Year-End Report: brief outline of proposed approach and commission member feedback.
- Business Cards available.

## July 2023

- TBD
- Review of 2023 Annual report

## August 2023

- Anticipated Submittal of 2023 Annual report
- Notified of upcoming Access Paratransit Service Update Report

## **Materials Reviewed by APAC**

- Monthly Key Performance Indicators dashboards
- Access Paratransit Service Update Report 2021 Crosswalk to APAC Recommendations

## **Closing**

It is important to note that APAC includes members who have a number of different disabilities and part of the commission's work has been about continuing to develop meeting practices and work processes that meet a variety of accessibility needs such as shifting from Zoom to Teams, automated captioning, live CART/captioning, making documents to be screen shared available to screen reader users for whom video conferencing screen share is inaccessible and measures to support collaborative editing of this document and required use of the King County email system and the commission' info portal among other measures.

This year we have begun working with more charts. One set of charts shows how current ridership numbers compare to previous years. We have also begun reviewing a bar chart showing different categories of complaints month by month. We may consider options to see how complaint numbers relate to ridership numbers. These presentations work for the vision status of current members; if members with less vision join, it will be appropriate to consider how to present the chart information in ways useful to people with more severe visual impairments.

This report is being respectfully submitted by the APAC 2022–2023 members:

### Executive Committee Members

- Kristina Sawyckyj, Chair, District 1
- Deborah Artis, Vice Chair, District 4

### At Large Members

- Dorene Cornwell, District 2
- Steven Field, District 7