

Commission on Disability Meeting
Minutes from July 15, 2014, 4:30PM
Worcester City Hall, Levi Lincoln Chamber 3rd Flr.

Attendance:

Members Present: Rachel Shannon Brown, Nancy Garr-Colzie, Herbert Cremer, Paul Keister, Elizabeth Myska, Stephen Stolberg, Susan Swanson

Members absent: Francesca Abbey, Charles Hiamah, John Nah, Lynne Towler

Staff: Jayna Turчек, Joseph Sansoucy, Chief Building Inspector, Dawn Clark

Guests: Antoinette Donovan, Owner Red Taxi Co.

Members of the Public: City Councilor Gary Rosen, David Johnson, Michael Kennedy, Robin Miller and young son, Jacob, Jackie Norton, Scott Ricker & others

Call to Order

The Chairperson welcomed guests and commission members. Each member introduced themselves. Associate member Susan Swanson was raised to member status for the meeting. The Chairperson requested that the agenda be taken out of order to begin a conversation with Ms. Donovan.

Conversation with Red Cab Owner Toni Donovan about Accessible Taxi Cab Service

The Chairperson welcomed and introduced Ms. Donovan. Red Cab owns medallions for Worcester Cab # 109 and # 110. Ms. Donovan provided ridership statistics going back to the beginning of accessible cabs in the city. Ms. Turчек explained that the Commission wanted to be updated on the accessible cab service and that there were concerns in the community that this service may not always be available.

Red Cab rehabbed two cabs for accessibility and began in December of 2005 with 9 rides. To date Red Cab has provided over 12,500 wheelchair rides. Over that time the vans have been replaced three times. Transitions have been replaced due to Worcester's hilly and difficult terrain in winter. The cabs are now painted with green so they can be seen by others.

The Commission thought that maybe there was a different service schedule for people using wheelchair. Her policy for taking people on the road is the vans won't go out if she can't get one out safely or cannot promise to get one home safely. When she takes cabs off the road for bad weather the accessible cabs come off as well. If there is a bad storm pending she will not take a rider out, because she cannot get the rider back safely. Red Cab has a Town & Country Chrysler rear entry van and a Dodge Caravan as the two accessible vehicles and have used different years models over the 9 years of operation. Some chairs are too large for these vehicles that cannot be accommodated. They are not able to secure scooters with people in the seat. If the rider is able to transfer to a seat then the rider can be transported. Sometimes the drivers get hurt trying to get the wheelchair and rider on the lift particularly in the bad weather.

There is a decline in ridership. She thinks it may be related to WRTA having reliable accessible buses and increased hours of operation on some routes. The cost for a bus is significantly less expensive than a taxi fare.

The following is information gathered from responses to questions asked by members of the Commission and public:

- Accessible taxis are available 24 hours a day. There are two vans and each van has one driver. This is because of the need to have drivers who are sensitive to disability needs and these drivers are hard to attract and keep. The drivers cannot be on duty 24 hours a day so instead they are on call. Sometimes people want to go out of town which might cause a delay in having a van immediately

available. When a van ride is needed, call the Red Cab dispatch at 508- 792-9999. This way Red Cab knows a ride is needed.

Frequent riders have developed good working relationships with the drivers and will call them directly for their rides.

- Ms. Donovan may look into a side-loading van at the suggestion of Commissioner Garr-Colzie. Cost will have to be a factor when considering such a vehicle. The smallest vans are being used for riders of wheelchairs users. They use more gas than other cabs because of the additional weight of equipment. A side –loading van would eliminate a lot of the current problems and would be able to serve people with scooters, etc.
- Ms. Donovan cannot transport people using travel chairs. These chairs are light-weight and cannot be secured safely in the van.
- If a person using a chair was willing not to have a return ride in inclement weather would a one way be given? This has not happen in her experience. Usually the rider depends on the service. If the rider asked for one way, she would be glad to do it.
- As far as better transportation for wheelchair users, they are almost always able to meet the current demand. There may be occasions when both vans are on the road and there is a wait time. Riders give drivers a “heads up” making scheduling easier. Sometimes a van goes out of town to doctors or Logan Airport, she tries to keep the other cab in the city for local rides. There are times when they don’t have a van available but not often. There is not enough ridership using wheelchairs so drivers have to fill in with other riders. This makes it very difficult to find reliable, long-term drivers for the vans.
- As far as service area, Red Cab will go anywhere.
- Red Cab is not part of the WRTA service. WRTA has para-transit with reduced fares. Red Cab is private pay with cash or credit card. They do not have any kind of subsidy.
- New riders should call dispatch 508-792-9999. Calling ahead for a ride would be helpful. Once a rider has had a ride ask the driver for his/her number so a rider can work directly with a driver.

- Red Cab has a fleet of 50 cabs. Red Cab owns some and some are privately owned. Most are on the road during the day; 11cabs run until 11PM and 2AM because there is not much business. When colleges are in session, Thursday is night out, then the business picks up. Cab owners sub-contract with Red Cab and are responsible for their own cabs.
- Red Cab has an account with all the hospital in Worcester and if a person coming home from the hospital uses a wheelchair, a cab would take the person home if the hospital paid.
- There has been no use of accessible cabs by the colleges. Red Cab goes to college fairs at the beginning of the school year to make the company known to the students.
- Fares with wheelchairs get priority. With regard to airport service, fares are very limited.

The chairperson thanked Ms. Donovan for the conversation and commended her for the great door to door service provided. Riders don't have to stand in the cold or wonder why their ride is not there.

Follow-up regarding Union Station Taxi Stand Plans

At the June meeting, the Commission received a report from Mr. John O'Dell, City of Worcester Energy and Asset Manager about moving the standing taxis to a Taxi Stand on Harding Street. Earlier this month, Commissioner Paul Keister, Jayna Turcek and Dawn Clark met with Mr. O'Dell to get a visual on the ground tour of this project. Paul reported on the site visit and indicated one of his concerns last month was that in order to get to a taxi at the new stand one would have to take a stairway. The visit helped him see that there was a ramp going up into Union Station. Part of the plan is to put new lighting into a very dark area that is under the railroad track where the ramp is.

The walkway will be painted so people with disabilities and others would clearly see the path from WRTA to the Taxi Stand. One problem

is that the middle of the pathway goes right over a sewer grate. Paul said Jayna would be given a can of orange paint and that Jayna rejected the idea that she would paint the grate, laughter ensued. One of the ideas discussed was to have the painted walkway divided and paint the grate another color. This may help a wheelchair user, but a person visually impaired may well get a cane stuck in it, as he has on many occasions. The ramp is thought to be ADA compliant, but needs to be verified.

There are push paddles for entrance into Union Station. Once inside the station there is a gradual ramp that meets a lift. Here there was confusion on how to use the lift. The written instructions on it were not clear and caused confusion. There were three buttons to use the lift that added to the confusion. The elevator company has been contacted to make changes for clearer instructions and to remove the third button. So there would be one button to go up and one button to go down. There is hope that in the future the ramp can be designed to eliminate the lift and corresponding stairs abutting the lift.

After the lift/7 stairs another slight ramp leads to the main concourse then one takes an elevator to the upper level and out the doors to a choice of a ramp or stairs to the train.

Paul reflected that when the taxis are at the front of Union Station there is a steep inclined ramp from the WRTA Hub along Shrewsbury Street into the front of Union Station. A longer ramp or stairs from WTRA Hub is used to get to the new Taxi Stand.

There will be some type of plastic netting under the train tracks to collect the debris that fall thru the screening making a cleaner weather protected area for taxis to wait for passengers. This netting will be on the ceiling over Harding Street adjacent to the landing as one enters Union Station.

The suggestion was made that the Commission has an opportunity to educate presenters who come before the Commission. Perhaps we

should provide information on “person first language”.

Scott Ricker reminded the Commission that there is an AAB regulation on grates in the middle of pathway. Paul said this was discussed, however, the grate was already in place for years and it was unclear who owned the grate: State, MBTA, etc. John is aware of the difficulties. It was a very fruitful meeting. A lot of time was spent trying to figure out solutions to the situation.

The Chairperson suggested taking the agenda out of order to assure the review of the year’s accomplishments and suggest goals for FY’ 15 before nomination of officers.

Commissioners suggestions for FY’14 Annual Report for the City Manager (Accomplishments, Recommendations and Goals for Future)

Members express appreciation to serve and work together on the Commission with a wide diversity of perspectives. There were many trainings which provided education for both the Commission and the public. An appreciation of the various tours including the WRTA Hub, DCU Center and Taxi Stand at Union Station. People were able to express their concerns to the Commission. There was recognition that the Commission is an advisory commission.

Suggested goals for FY’ 15 include:

- Update the City’s ADA Evaluation and Transition Plan;
- Develop an appropriate process for the Commission to respond to AAB notices and variances;
- Explore the possibility of becoming an Executive Commission;
- Explore increasing the Commission membership from 7 to 9;
- Continue to be educated with information and training;
- Identify areas of need to address for people with disabilities.

Nominations for Election of Officers (Elections in August)

Those who were nominated and accepted are as follows:

Chairperson – Stephen Stolberg
Elizabeth Myska

Vice Chairperson – Elizabeth Myska
Stephen Stolberg

Additional nominations for these officers and nominations for Secretary should be forwarded to the office and made at the August meeting.

Review of AAB notices and applications

Mr. Joseph Sansoucy, City of Worcester's Chief Building Inspector was introduced. He has been assigned by Commissioner John Kelly of Inspectional Services to attend on a regular basis and assist Commission on Disability when deliberating on AAB issues.

The Commission considered correspondence from the AAB about the following properties:

- 271 Franklin Street – Curb cut
- 455 Main Street – Front stairs-work is in design stage, but there is no date for completion. The Office will request a time frame for the completion of this project. It was noted that Assistant Commissioner of Parks Antonelli cited in his response to the AAB that the Commission had received a presentation about the work on the Common and plaza. Commissioner Brown expressed concern that Commissioner Antonelli had cited the Commission because we are not a regulatory Commission and are not responsible for architectural oversight.
- 14 Walnut Street - Variance request for parking and path of travel. Parking lot is on hill. Because of the time frame for responding to the AAB, the Commission requested that Mr. Sansoucy review the site and offer comment to the AAB if necessary.

- 29 Sunderland Road – Handicapped parking spaces have been appropriately delineated. The complainant reported to the Commission his appreciation and satisfaction with the appropriate realignment of Price Chopper’s handicapped parking spaces.
- 894 Grafton Street – 2nd notice accessible path of travel. There was no response to the 1st notice.

Approval of June 17, 2014 Minutes

Motion was made, seconded and approved unanimously.

Public Comment Period

Interspersed throughout meeting

Announcements:

- **WRTA Transportation Planning Advisory Meeting**
August 20th, 1-2:20pm, WRTA Building, 287 Grove St.
- **REDD (Rights, Equality, and Dignity for the Disabled)**
No meetings in the summer.
- **Audio Journal, Accent on Ability, Radio Program:** August 12th, 5-6pm, <http://www.audiojournal.net/> (replayed on August 21st, 5pm)
- Next Commission on Disability meeting: August 19th, 4:30pm.

Adjournment

Commissioner Brown made a motion for adjournment. Commissioner Swanson seconded. Motion approved unanimously.