

**Arlington Transit Advisory Committee  
Accessibility Subcommittee  
Meeting Minutes  
October 18, 2018  
7:00 p.m.  
2100 Clarendon Boulevard  
Conference Room 311**

**Attendees:**

**Members:** Alexa Mavroidis, Laura MacNeil, William Staderman, Herschel Kanter

**County Staff:** Lynn Rivers, William Jones, Andy Wexler

**Contractors:**

- Diamond Transportation – Tyrone Barksdale
- Red Top Cab – John Sawyer, David Berg
- STAR Call Center – Sabrina Brown, Mary Blyther

**Public:** Roseann Ashby, Cathryn Bonnette, Joseph DePhillips, Scherrone Dunhamn, Phil Maggio, Katherine Murray, Doris Ray, Quincy Springs, RaeCarole Tekeste, Emily Zhang, Yu Zhang

Public attendee sign-in

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**Introductions**

Attendees introduced themselves.

**Approval of Minutes**

The August minutes were approved unanimously, and will be posted at <https://commissions.arlingtonva.us/transit-advisory-committee/>.

## Staff Updates

County staff provided a brief update related to service reliability concerns with Red Top Cab. Staff indicated they are continuing to work with Call Center Staff to ensure all trips are met (particularly when the Call Center is not open). County Staff are evaluating all options in addition to passenger feedback to address the concerns. Any proposed solutions to address the concerns that require changes to STAR's policies will require some level of County approval prior to the change. County Staff encouraged attendees to continue to use the Call Center for all their trip booking needs. Staff also reminded attendees that book trips with STAR to call prior to 6:30pm on Friday and 5:00pm on Saturday to confirm the service provider responsible for their trip on the next day.

## Reading of Written Comments

*The following written comment was submitted by Mr. Kent Keyser. Ms. Mavroidis read a summary of it aloud during the meeting.*

I would like to request that the Subcommittee make the following recommendations to the Transit Accessibility Committee about three pressing issues facing STAR Riders, our health and safety, the supposed renegotiation of STAR vendor contracts and the County's and STAR's transparency. Please make my comments part of tonight's meeting record.

Health and safety concerns. Fellow STAR Riders have contacted me about a large increase in problems with Red Top rides since the company was sold.

I understand from the STAR Rider network, that the County gave Red Top \$9,000.00 to help it hire more drivers to solve problems like has been described by others to me and that I have experienced myself, not showing up and being late, etc. I suspect it is true because I have been experiencing a slew of new drivers.

However, Red Top has exacerbated the situation supposedly by hiring people from in-house who weren't cab drivers for \$15.00 an hour. This too comports with my experience of an inadequately trained driver (see my six-week old unanswered complaint below). And just last week, for example, I had a new driver, who had no idea where we were going, and he couldn't back his cab up to a corner curb after 7 tries! At least he was courteous.

Unfortunately for STAR Riders' health and safety, some of these drivers look at their GPS devices more than they watch the real road and traffic. For me the lack of training for new RED Top "drivers" is paramount to my health and safety. Everything from not being able to put a seatbelt on me and not watching the road to not properly guiding me out of the cab endangers my health and safety.

Please recommend the following:

1. The County establish a STAR driver safety education program that all would have to complete before they could drive any STAR Rider.

2. The County establish a Ride Sharing Vehicle safety certification program in which all commercial vehicles that provide access for wheelchairs would be annually inspected to make certain on board wheelchair restraints and wheelchair user restraints were in good working order.

STAR Vendor Contract Renegotiations. For several years, County Staff have been promising STAR Riders that with each new increase in our co-payment, the County was going to insure we received better service with the shiniest new imaginable. Board Member Cristol was even promised this to be completed by the end of 2017. Still we wait.

And now by new staff, we are still being told the same story, that a new day of service is right around the corner. Yet STAR are given no opportunity to provide guidance, suggestions or anything else of value in the process.

The entire process is darkly shrouded under a thick veil labeled proprietary information. Of course, some proprietary information will be involved with costs, tech, etc., but there is no reason that service, safety and training standards cannot be transparently discussed.

It has been several years (2011?) since a STAR Rider survey has been done and the results published. How can one craft a contract without knowing program deficits and current riders' need? The survey results need to be made public and discussed at a series of meetings. We need to restart the STAR Riders Users Group. As taxpayers, we deserve to know what penalties will be imposed when the County doesn't receive the services it is paying for.

Donuts even get me started on the application of what are now OLD technologies that clearly should be engaged to improve service and cut costs. But the STAR Call Center can't even get a timely reservation system to work on its webpage, which given the fact that their clocks are wrong as well is not surprising. So sad!

All these things, aren't complaints, they are simple basic tools any good management would employ to deliver service and save the taxpayer money.

Please recommend the following in conjunction with new STAR vendor contracts:

1. Establish a STAR Users Group that would be composed of riders,
2. representatives from the vendors, STAR personnel AND drivers to make suggestions on how to improve the program. Evidently, there was such a group that had worked well in the past.

3. If you don't employ new technologies, have drivers call riders and provide an estimated time of arrival. Any privacy concerns about phone numbers could be resolved by signing waivers. This would save both call center and vendor dispatch time.
4. Have driver call riders when they arrive at the pickup point rather than go through two additional layers of bureaucracy which costs valuable time and of certainly money.
5. The call center should hire a seasoned driver familiar with the DC Metro Area, especially of course Arlington County. This knowledge base of routes and traffic flow would yield more opportunities for reasonable and efficient shared rides and curtail glaringly idiotic computer generated shared rides that cost the program and riders time and money.
6. Vendors should have the ability to review the STAR call center trip manifests and make suggested changes to shared trips that could be made more efficient.
7. Improve the STAR website scheduling process (at least so we can make a next day trip - currently can only make one for two days in advance) and add incentives for using it. If you book 20 round trips online, you get a pass for a round trip with no copay. This would free up call center time to devote to constructing more share rides.
8. Conduct a comprehensive STAR Rider survey every two years and publish the results. Include ample open ended opportunity for Rider input.
9. Hold town halls which are also available to participate in online for Riders and taxpayers to review contract requests for proposals and to provide input.

I hope this helps and welcome your feedback to make certain I am not off base. Thanks for connecting with me and let me know if i can support you in any other way.

County and STAR transparency. Once again, I have taken time to try to be helpful, to save Riders grief and taxpayers money, but I have no idea what has happened with my comments I have made in the past. Are they even discussed, my recommendations voted on or does the County Manager even get any recommendation from the Subcommittee through the Transit Advisory Committee (TAC)? Of all the bodies of County government, this Subcommittee owes the disability community greater transparency and greater access to participation.

Please adopt the following recommendations and perhaps the TAC will also:

1. Live stream and archive subcommittee meetings.
2. Consistently and timely post comprehensive and substantive minutes online. And include roll call votes. April is the last ones online currently.
3. Provide at least 30 days' notice of the next meeting's full agenda. No agenda for this meeting was posted until yesterday.
4. Provide all recommendations and/or comments to the TAC online.
5. Provide an annual report of accomplishments online.

Thank you for this opportunity. As always, I am grateful for STAR, Sabrina Brown and her team.

## Public Comment Open Forum and Discussion

- Maggio
  - 1-year resident of Arlington
  - Very happy with STAR so far
  - Weekend late trips to Herndon (2+)
    - Could not find a driver
    - Used Uber Black, which was expensive
  - Idea: arrange return trips with driver directly
  - Sometimes will not schedule trips because he lacks confidence in RTC
- Bonnette
  - Working people with disabilities believe STAR is the best paratransit in the U.S. because it feeds into the District
  - Very disappointed in new RTC ownership
  - Often late to work, causes trouble with her employer
    - 3x last week
    - Can't leave earlier
    - Gets up at 4:00am
  - Can't strand riders – almost got locked out
    - Callbacks are very important for visually impaired customers
- Ashby
  - Likes STAR, wants to make it better
  - Transparency
    - Put meeting schedules, agendas, and minutes online
    - Doesn't know where to find them
  - Communications
    - Wants texts when vehicles are dispatched and when they arrive at the pickup location
    - When inside, she doesn't know when the vehicle is there
      - Especially Diamond shared rides
  - RTC
    - Drivers are dispatched too early, get annoyed when she isn't ready
    - Afraid of getting stranded – will not book trips sometimes
  - Wheelchair tie-downs are a concern
  - Calling drivers through STAR Call Center
    - Can reach RTC drives 80% of the time
    - Diamond – never
    - Drivers say they've been told not to call customers directly
- DePhillips
  - STAR works well overall
  - “Heard but not listened to”
  - Called Eunice last week regarding meeting schedule
  - No updates from County
    - “Appeased at every meeting” (since May 2018)
  - Situation is upsetting to him as a disabled person
  - Saturday PM trips
- Murray
  - Doesn't want to get no-showed

- Likes having STAR available
- Used to get automated calls from STAR Call Center, but not anymore. Would like to have them back.
- Dunhamm
  - STAR in the last year
    - Real downturn under new RTC ownership
  - Monday night – standing order
    - To/from church in Vienna
    - 9pm return trip is always a problem
    - Area is desolate after others leave
    - Friends sometimes stay with her, but not always
  - Dinner/medical – not standing order
    - Books outgoing and return trips
    - Gets stranded on return trips
    - 60, 90, 120 minute waits
    - Never happened before this year
- Springs
  - Good relationship with Call Center
  - Ok to arrive at work early, but cannot stay late
  - Call Center has been helpful
  - Ongoing issues are frustrating
  - Diamond is good
  - RTC transition has been difficult
  - Calls the day before and morning of to confirm
  - Appreciates sincere, transparent efforts to help
- Tekeste
  - All the complaints made tonight have been made before
  - Should not be forced to use RTC if service is so bad
  - What has to happen before someone will listen?
  - Sunday standing order
    - RTC hardly ever available, especially for return trips
  - Contract drivers? No excuse.
- Staderman
  - STAR has become very unpredictable
    - Don't know who is picking him up
  - Wants return to consistency
    - Calls, texts
    - Gets confused over vehicles
      - Not the same van
- Ray
  - 40% of ECVN clients are Arlington residents
  - Concerned that STAR is not abiding by federal rules for complimentary ADA paratransit
  - The Accessibility Subcommittee formed as a result of FTA community outreach
  - Lack of “straight info” about provider contracts
    - Performance standards, incentives
    - Telephone reservation services
  - Issues are ongoing

- Wants reports from staff now
- Contract changes in 2013
  - Supposed to have call center available
- RTC is operating like a TNC, not a taxi service
- TAC-AS should ask for statement of work, performance requirements
  - Say what they want and advocate for it
- STAR saves the County money over MetroAccess, so it “owes citizens”

### *Discussion*

Following the initial comment period, the Subcommittee and public attendees engaged in a discussion with Transit Bureau staff. The following topics were raised:

- Does the Transit Bureau have any responses to the issues that have been raised?
- What concrete steps is the Transit Bureau taking to address them?
- When will systemic issues be addressed? What does it take to convince the Transit Bureau that an issue is systemic?
- If a vehicle doesn't show up for a standing order ride, what process should the customer follow? Who should they call? Can the Transit Bureau provide clear guidance on this?
  - STAR Call Center staff recommended contacting the Call Center in advance to confirm which provider will handle the ride. On the day of the ride, call the provider directly.
- Those in attendance sincerely want to help the County improve STAR.

Transit Bureau staff informed the group that the purpose of this session is to gather input and investigate. The Bureau will respond individually to attendees who identified themselves on the sign-in sheet. Within the next two weeks the Bureau will send a memo addressing the situation to all STAR riders; the memo will be posted on the STAR web site.

### **Adjournment 8:55 PM**

**Next Meeting Date:           Thursday, December 20, 2018, 5:00pm**  
**Courthouse Plaza, Azalea Conference Room**

## **BUREAU REPORT**

### **Current Service Reliability Concerns with Red Top Cab**

Transit Bureau staff continues to work with the STAR Call Center Staff to review rider comments and complaints associated with STAR Trips provided by Red Top Cab. The STAR Call Center and Transit Bureau staff investigate all service related concerns. Investigations include; compliance with STAR policies, review of driver manifests, recordings of call center and dispatch phone calls, review of trip scheduling, driver interviews, condition of vehicles, etc.

Since receiving and seeing the increase in concerns earlier this year, the Transit Bureau has held several meetings with Red Top and the Call Center staff. At the Transit Bureau's request, Red Top developed a corrective action plan to address issues voiced by the riders and both the Bureau and Call Center staffs monitor progress of the action plan. The plan included the following; customer service training for drivers, dispatch and call taker training regarding service policies, user needs and vehicle assignments (such as accessible vehicles), and more importantly, familiarity with the service area. The call center staff notes some improvement in communication with and performance of Red Top performance over the past 6 months; however, Transit Bureau staff remain concerned about complaints regarding untimely passenger pick-ups, particularly outside of call center hours. The Transit Bureau has engaged the County's procurement and legal staffs to determine the extent of the Bureau's ability to take corrective actions.

The Transit Bureau is deeply concerned that some users of STAR consider current issues involving our service provider to be systemic. We acknowledge the increased number of complaints this year and are committed to getting those numbers down and service reliability up. We will share our progress with you by posting key performance indicators. Please see below a preview of the FY18 service evaluation of the STAR program. Performance indicators will present a true picture of how STAR is doing and areas which we need to focus and improve. We look forward to your feedback regarding the indicators and in a future review of the full metrics, share with you how this information helps us manage and deliver the program.

### **STAR Call Center Future**

Bureau staff are working with County's purchasing staff to prepare a solicitation for a new Call Center contract. The current contract is nearing its end and requires services to be competitively bid. The timeline of starting a new contract is targeted for Spring 2019. The solicitation requirements will reflect recommendations approved by the Accessibility Subcommittee in 2015-2016 and address current conditions of the STAR program.

## STAR Service Evaluation

County staff continues to work on the larger release of an annual service evaluation report. It will be designed to provide a comprehensive view of how STAR is operating and how that information can help shape STAR's future. Below is a summary of STAR's performance from Fiscal Year 2018.

Service Evaluation for the Period of July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018 (FY 2018)

STAR PERFORMANCE MEASURES	FY 2018 Totals
Passengers	95,075
Revenue Miles	499,001
Revenue Hours	47,010
Trips	76,936
<b>Service Effectiveness</b>	
Passengers per hour	2.0
Passengers per Trip	1.2
Cost per Hour	\$59.17
Cost per Passenger	\$29.25
Revenue Per Passenger	\$5.17
Subsidy per Passenger	\$24.08
Cost Recovery Ratio %	21.5%
<b>Customer Service</b>	
General	4
Red Top	181
Diamond	32
STAR Call Center	19
TOTAL	236
Complaints per 1,000 passengers	2.48

In review of information from the STAR Call Center, there was an increase in complaints from Red Top Cab in comparison to FY 2017.

Additional information will be provided as part of the larger document anticipated to be presented in Winter 2018/19.