

**Arlington Transit Advisory Committee  
Accessibility Subcommittee  
Meeting Minutes  
June 15, 2017  
7:00 p.m.  
2100 Clarendon Boulevard  
Conference Room 311**

**Attendees:**

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

**Staff:** Steve Yaffe, Andy Wexler

**Contractors:** Tom Furlong, Tyrone Barksdale, John Sawyer, Phil Hodson, Sabrina Brown, Eunice Copeland, Mary Blyther

**Public:** RaeCarole Tekeste, Kathy Murray, Mazen Basrawi

**Introductions**

Attendees introduced themselves.

**Approval of Minutes**

Staff is currently working on the May minutes. The May and June minutes will be considered at the July meeting.

**Explanation of New ART and STAR Fares Effective June 25, 2017**

Mr. Yaffe summarized the new fares structure and the County's efforts to publicize them. Additional 50-cent STAR coupons are being printed and will be available through the STAR Call Center. STAR coupons are currently worth 50 cents, \$4, or \$5, and the County may add more denominations. Different cuts, colors, and punched holes will make them easier for visually impaired riders to use.

*Update July 12, 2017: a mockup for a new \$5.50 STAR coupon with brown ink on white has been developed. Staff is discussing with the print shop three alternatives to make these discernable by blind riders from other STAR coupon denominations:*

- 1. a punch-hole in the middle,*
- 2. a punch-hole on a border, or*
- 3. glossy paper*

**Options for Alternative Fare Payment Methods**

The new STAR Call Center contract may include use of a new payment option for STAR. Options include swipe card payment for Diamond and Red Top in which value is stored on individual cards using magnetic stripe or chip technology; a card-less debit system similar

to MetroAccess where fares are pre-paid from an account and debited each time a ride is booked; or purchasing passes or individual rides through mobile apps. Any of these options would replace STAR Coupons, may be able to replace the Super Senior Taxi coupons as well, and potentially could replace payments of cash to the drivers.

## **Vehicle Choice and Reasonable Accommodations**

The practice of accommodating vehicle requests began several years ago in response to one passenger with very specific physical needs. However, vehicle choice is not considered a reasonable accommodation under ADA; providers are simply required to meet scheduling needs efficiently. Rides on specific vehicle types are very hard to schedule efficiently, and the new Call Center software will not accommodate such requests. The County would like to change STAR policy to remove several non-required accommodations it currently offers, including vehicle choice.

Subcommittee members and public attendees acknowledged the difficulty of the issue, but expressed concerns about overriding doctors' medical advice for their patients, as well as the difficulty of explaining the issue to riders accustomed to STAR's enhanced level of service. They also asked whether STAR could keep accommodating vehicle requests with the understanding that wait times for specific vehicles will be considerably longer.

The Subcommittee agreed to continue the discussion at its next meeting in July.

## **Reading of Written Comments**

Mr. Kent Keyser emailed the following comment:

*I write to request that you formally ask the Arlington County Board to delay implementation of the recently approved excessive STAR fare increases because I understand that three members of the County's Disability Advisory Commission submitted views objecting to the excessive increases, yet, at least, Vice Chair Cristol may not have been aware of the opposition nor was she told about it when she asked specifically asked about views from your Subcommittee at the Board meeting before issue 37, the excessive fare increases, were voted on. The Board discussion on issue 37 can be seen / heard at the following link, starting at 04.05.27: [http://arlington.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=2&clip\\_id=3365](http://arlington.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=3365). Can each of you please let me know if you supported the fare increases and what your justification for your support was? The only justification I have been given is that it has been past practice to double STAR fares increases when ART fares are increased.*

*Additionally, you should request a delay because the legally questionable action of the Board approving the excessive STAR increase in its budget and only then seeking public comment on a fait accompli, by its nature not only chilled public input nor did it provide sufficient time for adequate notice to be provided to the public in order to comment. In fact, I recall that there was no opportunity to make comment to your subcommittee listed*

*on the STAR webpage. I recall only opportunities to comment to the Transit Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Transportation Commission. Do you not find that somewhat ironic?*

*Further, Vice Chair Cristol asked about means testing to inquire about the economically disadvantaged being able to use STAR. Further discussion implied that there is a smorgasbord of public assistance to support riders who are economically disadvantaged. Does the Subcommittee have any hard data to demonstrate that adequate public assistance is available for Arlington residents who qualify for such assistance to use STAR?*

*And do you have any data from riders of other income levels that indicates the impact of the STAR fares on their ability to travel?*

*Surely, a more thoughtful process and justifiable support for future proposed STAR fares should be developed. It seems to me that your Subcommittee should be the genesis of that effort?*

*Board members deserve to be provided accurate program information to make informed decisions. I am sure you agree?*

*I commend you for sending out a hard copy notice of your meeting tonight which I received about 48 hours ago. I would suggest that future meeting notices and proposed STAR fare increases be noticed within the same time frame and volume that I receive my Arlington County tax bill (in all media forms imaginable), MONTHS and several times before they are due, which coincidentally were due and paid today.*

*Why does Arlington County so meticulously advance notice everything except when the STAR program is involved?*

*At any rate, I can't be with you tonight but I could be if your meetings were more accessible. Would you please consider allowing the public to dial in to the meetings? Could you do them on the web? Through Group Skype? Surely, the technology exists for you to broadcast your meetings electronically and provide accessible participation from all?*

*Sadly, no meeting notes of the Subcommittee's discussions in 2017 are posted online. Even if you could provide a CART transcript of your discussions, it would be most welcome. I know I do not have to tell you that your body should be setting the accessibility example for all of the County's public meetings.*

*To comment on your proposed agenda tonight, I applaud the effort to look at digital fare payment portals, but I have to ask, have you even considered what the request for*

*proposal for a call center that the County staff has been developing since last year contains in any detail, and when pray tell does the public get a chance to see it much less comment on it?*

*As to my preference of a specific STAR vehicle type, I strongly prefer one with appropriate seat belts, one in which I do not have to ride sideways instead of facing forward, which I believe is a federal safety regulation no-no (anyway at least that's what a Diamond Transportation driver was told by a federal safety inspector) and it would be really nice to have a vehicle that had adequate shocks on it to prevent me from being tossed up to the vehicle ceiling compressing my already broken spinal cord.*

*I again request that you establish a STAR users group to be composed of STAR riders, providers management and drivers, County staff and call center management and staff. I believe there is more than adequate interest to form such a group without your leadership or involvement but I think that avenue would not reflect your mission nor your dedication to our community. Please let me know of your interest in joining a group of active and concerned STAR riders at your earliest convenience.*

*Please make my comments part of the meeting record. Thank you for your consideration and your public service.*

## **Public Comment Open Forum and Discussion**

Mr. Basrawi called the STAR fare increase a “fait accompli” and expressed his displeasure with the Subcommittee for voting unanimously in favor of it.

The Subcommittee affirmed its support for the STAR fare increase. They acknowledged that fare increases burden the disability community disproportionately, but recognized the need to offset rising costs.

The Subcommittee disagreed with Mr. Keyser’s contention that STAR and Subcommittee activities are not well-advertised, and asked what other forms of information the public wants. Ms. Mavroidis invited the public to share their concerns with her directly as Subcommittee chair.

The County issued the following response to Mr. Keyser’s comments:

1. The Arlington County Board has consistently increased STAR fares by twice the corresponding increase in ART fares. STAR Zone 1 fares consistently have been set at double the ART fare. If STAR were the ADA paratransit service for Arlington, rather than MetroAccess, then FTA would limit STAR fares to double the ART fares.
2. The Board could have chosen to raise fares by a lesser amount than recommended by staff, or not raise them at all.

3. STAR has no income data on STAR riders. DHS may or may not have data on who receives SSI, SSDI or any other income support, and may or may not know which of their clients are STAR riders.
4. The 2011 survey of STAR riders collected household income data from those who responded to that question.
5. The Accessibility Subcommittee has requested a staff presentation and perhaps a graphic or two showing ART, Metrobus & STAR fare hikes over the years, % of costs covered by fares, # of people in the STAR database and STAR ridership trends.  
*Note: This presentation will be on the agenda for the September subcommittee meeting.*
6. Mr. Keyser receives STAR Alerts and STAR emails. He was fully aware of the public outreach and meetings prior to the public hearing on the fare increase, and he submitted comments which were reflected in the Board report. Therefore, his contention about inadequate public notice are mistaken.
7. Call-in access to public meetings is not possible. A former subcommittee member broached this subject a few years ago, which was rejected by the County Attorney's office. It is not required by the Virginia Public Meetings Act and is not County practice.
8. The Transit Bureau does need to improve on posting approved minutes. The Bureau will adopt the practice of posting minutes, after committee approval, within a week after committee approval. Meeting dates are posted on the County website for the TAC, and the ART/STAR website has a link to that page. "CART" stands for Communication Access Real-Time Translation (speech to text). It requires dedicated equipment and a trained CART operator, which is expensive.
9. RFPs are not for public consumption and are not germane to the fare issue. The County has extensively vetted the STAR service policy changes which will go into effect with the new STAR Call Center contract and technology. The decision to broaden the pickup window is not up for reconsideration.
10. Mr. Keyser has already stated his vehicle preferences via the STAR customer comments system.
11. The Accessibility Subcommittee includes STAR users and performs the function of a STAR users group, so a separate group is unnecessary.

## **Adjournment**

**Next Meeting Date: Thursday, July 20, 2017 – Azalea Conference Room**