

**Arlington Transit Advisory Committee  
Meeting Notes  
November 14, 2023  
7:00 PM  
Microsoft Teams Meeting**

**YouTube Meeting Video Link:**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctD3VzfdtLc&list=PLg2Yc0utvhQ8DUeoNQCfCbyibKh3jMpXb&index=2>**

**TAC Members Present:**

John Carten	Francis Krol	David Sisson
James Davenport	Ronald Decker	Hershel Kanter
Erika Chiang	Harvey Berlin	Andrew McAllister
Alexa Mavroidis		

**Attendees Present:**

Lynn Rivers (staff)	Pierre Holloman (staff)	Robin McElhenny (staff)
Clinton Edwards (staff)	Kirk Dand (staff)	Diana Isaza (staff)
Rocco Visconti (staff)	Lauren Breyer (staff)	Paul Mounier (staff)
Steven Frazier (staff)	Joshua Drucker (staff)	Andre Stafford (WMATA)
Jiaxin Tong	Kent Keyser	Doris Ray
Unknown Dial-In		

**Call to Order**

- John Carten opened the meeting at 7:03 pm.

**Introductions**

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

**Public Comment**

- There were no public comments provided.

**Approval of Minutes from the September 12, 2023, Meeting**

- The amended meeting notes were approved unanimously.

**Review and Approval of the 2024 TAC Meeting Calendar**

- John Carten noted the proposed TAC 2024 meeting dates of January 16, March 12, May 14, July 16, September 10, and November 12. The TAC inquired if the July 16, 2024, date will be the date

of the annual Transit Capital Projects Tour and if there are any conflicts with the Transportation Research Board Conference for the January 16, 2024, TAC meeting. Pierre Holloman confirmed that July 16, 2024, will be the date of the annual tour and confirmed that the January 16, 2024, TAC meeting does not conflict with the Transportation Research Board Conference. A motion was made to approve the 2024 TAC Meeting Calendar, this motion was approved unanimously.

### **Chair Report on Vision Zero**

- John Carten noted that he is serving as the TAC's representative on Arlington's Vision Zero program as Arlington's Vision Zero team has been trying to get many Committees and organizations involved in the process. With the Vision Zero effort, Arlington is trying to reduce the number of serious accidents, injuries, and fatalities to zero. This effort has been ongoing for about three years. It was noted that during the October 19, 2023, meeting, there were a series of presentations which highlighted the work of the Vision Zero team including but not limited to projects around schools, reducing speed limits, and improved signage. One recent example noted were the improvements around Clarendon Circle which includes making travel safer for pedestrians, persons who use scooters, bikes, and mobility devices, transit users and others. During the October 19, 2023, it was noted that the safest mode in Arlington is public transit, which did not come as a surprise. Mr. Carten noted that individuals can report transportation safety problems and issues online: <https://arlingtonva.gscend.com/311/request/add>. It was noted that in reviews of site plans, Vision Zero is part of that process to make sure areas around buildings are safe to travel for all users.

### **STAR Public Outreach Efforts and RFP Update**

- Clinton Edwards provided an overview of the feedback received on STAR which took place between August 2023 and October 15, 2023. This opportunity allowed STAR users to share feedback and their thoughts on how STAR currently works for them. To reach all 1482 registered STAR users, staff sent emails and mailed postcards to each individual. In the mid-September, STAR drivers handed out post cards to STAR users while they were making trips to remind users to complete the feedback form. There was also the opportunity to provide feedback online.
- One hundred responses were received online, 59 were received via the STAR Customer Call Center, and 53 open-ended comments were received. Satisfaction was highest with the courteous and professional behavior of call center staff, the value of STAR for what you pay, and the travel time relative to trip distance. All service areas rated highly for satisfaction, with over 80% of rider respondents indicating they are satisfied or very satisfied. Within these high ratings, service areas with the potential to improve include the cleanliness and maintenance of STAR vehicles, payment methods available, on-time destination arrival, and day-of trip communication. It was also noted that STAR users have had a wonderful experience utilizing the call center to book their trips. Mr. Edwards provided kudos to the STAR Call Center staff for their great work to provide customer service and meet the needs of STAR users.
- Several repeated open-ended comments received from STAR users included improving wait times as that has been a challenge to some users, scheduling and payment issues, having a cashless payment option and various payment options other than having to go to the commuter store to buy coupons, the want to schedule same day, unplanned, and last-minute trips, seeing the location of a STAR vehicle electronically on a smartphone, and the smell and condition of some STAR vehicles being unpleasant.
- It was noted that this feedback is the first step in staff's public engagement process. This was an attempt to get a sense on how STAR is working and understand the challenges and issues of

STAR users. The next step of public engagement will involve looking to have in-person feedback sessions on STAR in the winter of 2024. These public engagement opportunities will help to build the Request for Proposals (RFP) as the current STAR operations contract is coming to an end.

- The TAC inquired about the status of the RFP for STAR operations. It was noted that STAR has two contracts, one for a Call Center and another which provides vehicles and vehicle operators. Moreover, the RFP for STAR operations will be focused on a turnkey solution where a vendor would provide vehicles and drivers/operators to service STAR users. It was noted the RFP for STAR operations is slated to go out in calendar year 2024. The TAC also inquired on how STAR differs from MetroAccess. It was stated that both STAR and MetroAccess service provide the same service, and both cover the entire Washington, DC Metropolitan region where Metrorail and Metrobus provide service. STAR is specifically for Arlington residents. Alexa Mavroidis noted that based on feedback received from the Accessibility Subcommittee, people prefer to use STAR over MetroAccess.

### **Report from the Accessibly Subcommittee**

- Alexa Mavroidis stated that the Accessibility Subcommittee received a lot of feedback regarding the want for the recreation of a STAR user group that used to exist. There was also feedback received regarding individuals being part of the process in terms of the feedback system with the County Manager and staff. It was noted that Pierre Holloman informed the Accessibility Subcommittee that membership of the Subcommittee does not have to be made up of TAC members. Moreover, it was mentioned that the Accessibility Subcommittee would need to find out who would be interested in serving on the Subcommittee. The size in terms of membership of the Subcommittee was noted to be an issue; moreover, it was noted that Pierre Holloman suggested that the Chair of the Accessibility Subcommittee as well as the Chair and Vice Chair of the TAC meet to go over business rules for the Accessibility Subcommittee.
- John Carten noted that based on the feedback received as part of the STAR public outreach efforts, it seems like the public is satisfied with the service that STAR provides and that a small group has expressed concerns. It was noted that the Accessibility Subcommittee is getting feedback regarding some dissatisfaction with STAR.
- Doris Ray noted that some of the discontent was related to how the outreach and public feedback survey was done as it did not ask questions about if STAR is meeting ADA paratransit, no questions on performance standards so that there is an understanding on how rides have been and how many times an incident happen, the feeling that the survey was more open ended, and there needs to be broader outreach.

### **Update on Arlington Transit's Student Fare Program**

- Lauren Breyer provided an update on a program to offer free fares for K-12 students who reside in Arlington. This is a partnership between Arlington Transit and Arlington Public Schools. Approximately 5,221 iRide cards have been distributed since the start of the project with 800+ cards being distributed since the start of the 2023-2024 school year. iRide cards are distributed via Transportation Coordinators at Arlington Public Schools and at Commuter Store locations which are located at several transit stations within Arlington. In the 2022-2023 school year, ART had 112,110 student riders, which was a 67% growth compared to the prior school year. In terms of trends, student ridership has increased on weekends and has held strong during the summer months; moreover, students are using ART when they are not in school to travel to jobs, activities, and other events.

- It was noted that staff is working on improving the program by ensuring there is a better process in place for managing and hot-listing iRide cards which have been lost as well as ensuring students who graduate from the 12<sup>th</sup> grade are removed from the free ride program. Staff is also working on streamlining the registration process for students and business rules to expand the free ride program to WMATA's Metrobus service.
- The TAC inquired about who would cover the free ride of students on WMATA's Metrobus service. It was noted that Arlington would cover such cost. The TAC also asked if this covers K-12 students who live in Arlington but attend private schools. Staff confirmed that this program is for all K-12 students who live in Arlington no matter if they attend a public or private school.

### **Overview of Arlington Transit's Fare Free Rush Promotion**

- Paul Mounier noted that the overview of the program is based on only one month of data; moreover, this is a very preliminary analysis. Several of the routes within the Fare Free Rush promotion is being funded by the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) I-66 Commuter Choice program. This program only funds trips in the peak direction (eastbound in the morning rush and westbound in the evening rush – this is based on the tolling direction of I-66 inside the Beltway). Within Arlington, the eastbound and westbound directions in terms of peaks are a bit convoluted due to people traveling in both as well as travel changes as a result of individuals having flexible schedules. There were also routes which did not fall within NVTC's parameters which Arlington has funded to expand this program. Since the start of the program on October 2, 2023, overall ridership has increased 27.9% and during the peak periods, ridership has increased approximately 39.6% compared to October 2022. Staff originally projected only an 11.7% increase in ridership during the peak periods. Overall, initially, the program has been a success.
- The TAC inquired about the process of knowing which buses offer free fares as at times it has been confusing to riders and how does a bus operator count passengers getting on. It was noted that bus operators will cover fareboxes for routes which operate fare free and bus operators then keys in the number of people getting on through a button on their driver control unit.

### **Additional Items from Committee Members and Staff**

- John Carten asked Pierre Holloman to provide an overview of the joint meeting between the TAC, Transportation Commission, C2E2, and the Energy Committee on the ART Zero Emissions Bus (ZEBs) Study. Pierre Holloman noted that Kimley Horn was the lead consultant on the study provided an overview of the different types of bus technologies from Battery-Electric Buses (BEBs) and Hydrogen Fuel Cell Electric Buses (FCEBs). The Study also touched based on Renewable Natural Gas (RNG) as an interim step ART should consider prior to going all in with ZEBs. It was noted that the Study is in a final draft form and would be published online to the public some time in December. The TAC expressed some concern about moving too fast to ZEBs as the technology is emerging and changing rapidly. Pierre Holloman mentioned that by going through piloting stages with ZEBs, ART will be able to gather data to see what works well and what does not work as such would allow ART to make a better determination on its future. Andre Stafford noted that WMATA is piloting BEBs, currently WMATA has 2 sixty-foot articulated BEBs which are assigned to the W4 route and there are 10 other BEBs on order from two different manufacturers. Five of those 10 BEBs are slated to arrive in January while the other five are slated to arrive later in 2024. WMATA's BEBs are being housed at WMATA's Shepherd Parkway Division in the District and WMATA received a \$104M grant to convert their Cinder Bed Division for BEBs.

- TAC Member Erika Chiang noted that she recently saw an ART bus which displayed an emergency message on the bus's LCD screen. It was not clear if this was an actual emergency or just an error as dispatch was called but noted that there was nothing to worry. It was noted that this could have a technical error, an error caused by an operator pushing the wrong buses, or it could have been an emergency. This system is only used in an emergency, for this particular time, it is possible that the operator did not realize that the emergency display was on the bus. There is a process in place by which the 911 operators will communicate to bus operators to check to see if there is a real emergency. Staff will look into this and ensure that operators are trained on such emergency procedures.

### **Adjournment**

- The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 pm.

### **Next Meeting**

- The next meeting will be online on Tuesday, January 16, 2024.