**Meeting:** VMAAG (Valley Metro Accessibility Advisory Group) Meeting

**Meeting Date:** Thursday, April 27, 2017

**Time:** 2:30 PM to 4:30 PM

**Location:** Valley Metro

101 North 1st Avenue, Tenth Floor

Lake Powell Conference Room

Phoenix, Arizona 85003

**Meeting Summary:**

1. Welcome and Introductions

Ron Brooks, Manager, Accessible Transit Services, called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m. The following individuals were present:

VMAAG Attendees

* David Andreen
* Kathryn Chandler
* John Federico
* Katy Griffith
* Lynn Houston
* Nancy Jackson
* Megan Homrighausen
* Howard May
* Jean Moriki
* Marvin Rochelle

1. Review of February 23 Meeting Summary

Ron invited VMAAG members to comment on the February 23 VMAAG meeting summary. There were no comments or corrections requested.

1. Update on Paratransit Contract Transition – Kate Riley, General Manager, Transdev

Facility and Vehicles - Kate explained Transdev has signed a lease on a facility that meets the needs of their operation. The new facility is around 13,000 sq. ft. and located near McQueen and Guadalupe in Gilbert. Kate explained they will have 95 dedicated vehicles; for driver training they have received 5 cutaways and will receive 5 minivans May 1. They have close to 70-75 vehicles going through processing at Creative Bus Sales.

Technology - Kate explained that they were working closely with RouteMatch; we’re looking at system design, business rules to ensure reservations and information are exchanged properly, and that the customer portal, facility portal and RouteMatch app are integrated correctly and can be integrated with their taxi partner, AAA.

Recruitment - All of the Transdev senior staff has been hired including the new Operations Manager, Michael Lee. Currently, 32 drivers are going through training and approximately 18 drivers will begin training on May 1. We are reviewing resumes for call center supervisors and agents, road supervisors, trainers, mechanics and utility workers. AAA is also participating in the training. To keep new hires busy and retain their employment prior to the startup July 1, Transdev is volunteering services at various organizations.

Marvin Rochelle: Will you be hiring drivers strictly working for the company, or drivers that will be independent?

Everyone that we hire will be Transdev employees.

Marvin: Will your hours be from 5 a.m. until midnight as of July 1?

Our hours for paratransit must match the fixed route times. Transdev dedicated vehicles will run 7 days/week between 5:30 a.m. and 7-7:30 p.m., and then AAA will take over. AAA may also run during Transdev hours, if sedans are required.

Marvin: Will AAA have vehicles that are equipped for wheelchairs?

AAA has 41 accessible vehicles, vans that can take wheelchairs.

Lynn Houston: You mentioned AAA are training some of their drivers; will AAA have drivers that are specifically trained for paratransit trips?

If there are AAA drivers interested in providing this paratransit service, then they will have to be trained.

Lynn: What is the [ADA] sensitivity training for Transdev new employees?

The sensitivity training is part of the 40 hours of classroom training being done by Transdev employees. Many of these employees have worked in the accessible transit field for a long period of time and we also put all trainers through a Train-the-Trainer series.

Megan Homrighausen: Can you describe the formula you will be using to calculate how long a ride will take in comparison to riding a bus route?

The service is intended to mirror the service on public transit. A trip on paratransit should never take longer than the same trip on public transit; that is what the law requires and that is what Transdev is being held to.

Megan: How would the drivers calculate that, would they type the address into the bus system?

The current method is to use a matrix tied to distance; for example if a trip is five miles, it can take no longer than 30 minutes. These rules are built into the scheduling software so when the trip is booked, the software calculates how long the trip is allowed to take.

In the future, we plan to build the fixed route system into the scheduling software so that it will automatically map that trip and calculate how long the paratransit trip can take, based on how long the same trip would take on public transit.

Marvin: How many hours a day is your reservations Department open? Will the phone number remain the same?

The phone number will remain the same. Transdev Call Center will be open from 6 a.m.-7:30 p.m. After that the calls will transfer over to AAA.

Darrell Hilaker: What steps are taken to ensure the technology, (customer / facility portals, etc.) are accessible to customers and employees with disabilities?

What we’ve discussed is using a BETA group in order to test to ensure it is usable and acceptable.

Darrell: Does this mean you’re using someone’s point of view or has “what’s acceptable” been planned, or are you just guessing after the fact?

The contract requires that any customer-facing technology be accessible to customers with disabilities and be WCAG 2.0 compliant at level AA success criteria, the standard for section 508.

Darrell: Are there going to be apps, will they have voice-over standards?

The contract requires access by phone and online, and should provide functionality of reserving, cancelling, checking on rides, etc. For the more advanced features, those will be built in as we move forward.

Marvin: Will the DAR cards be usable on the new service?

All of the current fare media will be usable on the new service.

Emanuel Caddy: When you were talking about the matrix used for scheduling service, being that most of these are going to be scheduled the day before, and they’ll be routed to drivers, setup for routes, how are you going to modify that if a driver doesn’t show up?

We look at trip performance data, when was the customer picked up and dropped off, and on occurrences when it took longer than the allowable time, that’s considered an excessively long trip. Those are tied to a performance standard - which is tied to money.

Emanuel: There were issues that were persistent throughout the last contract, how do we know issues will be effectively addressed throughout this contract?

We have a better contract and believe we will be providing better service with technology that will help better manage that service.

Lynn: Trip time; is that from the time he picks you up at your door, or after the driver has strapped you in, tied you down and filled out his paperwork?

The general perception is travel time starts when the customer boards the vehicle because if a customer isn’t quite ready by the time the ride arrives – that really shouldn’t count. From a Federal standpoint, by definition the travel time starts at the time the trip begins.

Ron Brooks: We are in the process of recruiting people who would like to be involved in our photoshoot – actors and actresses interested should let us know so we can add you to our list.

1. Overview of Interior Layout for the new Valley Metro Light Rail and Tempe Streetcar vehicles – Ray Abraham, Chief Operations Officer, Valley Metro

Chief Operations Officer, Ray Abraham, provided an overview presentation on the development of the interior layout for new light rail and streetcar vehicles.

LRV Exterior - Ray described the exterior of the new Siemens light rail vehicle and explained the graphics and paint scheme is presently being discussed. The new LRVs will be very similar; same size and length and with level boarding.

Interior Center Section - The interior center section has a much wider aisle than our current type of light rail vehicle. The interior of the light rail vehicle has ADA seating on both sides of the aisle. Both sides will have a three passenger flip up seat for ADA accommodations.

Interior Bike Racks – There will be two, double bike racks as well as two single bike racks which will not require the customer to lift their bike up onto a shelf and conveniently located close to the doors. A double bike rack will be located just outside of each end of the center section. The location of a single bike rack next to the flip up seat between a windscreen and a barrier. The single bike racks will not be opposite of each other but instead the second single bike rack will be located at the other end of the vehicle.

Streetcar Exterior - Ray described the exterior of the new Brookville Streetcar and explained the graphics and paint scheme is presently being discussed. The new streetcars will be very similar to our LRV and with same width so we can use the same rails as the LRV.

High/Low Floor Areas – Ray described the high floor section and the seating arrangement of the streetcar vehicle and explained our streetcar will not have the fare box located in the center. The low floor area of the streetcar has four ADA spaces, two on each side of the vehicle, and will have four of the two-passenger, flip up seats. The low floor area will not a fare box or bike racks.

Lynn: What differentiates between a streetcar and a LRV?

Not many differences; the Tempe Streetcar will be smaller, a little less robust of a system and the stops will be smaller and unlike the large LRV stations.

Carol Ketcherside: What are the operating differences?

The operating environment will be different; there will be more stops, similar to bus stops, and the streetcar overall average speed will be slower. There will only be single cars, unlike LRVs that can have as many as three cars connected together to make a train.

Marvin: Will the streetcars be setup like the busses used to be where the ramp came down and then tilted?

No ramps will be used for the streetcars, there will be level boarding from the stops, just like the light rail train stations.

Ron: Is there any specific feedback you want from this group? It seems as we’ve tried to simplify the use of bike racks so that bikes won’t take up spaces where wheelchairs go, is that the primary thing we’ve tried to accomplish?

We’ve brought it to this group to provide a visual of what we’re buying; however, there is not a lot of wiggle room in terms of changes to the interior design. We could move seats, add bike racks, take out bike racks, but other than feedback regarding fatal flaws, the design has been vetted very thoroughly, and we believe it accommodates the ADA community better as well as the bike community better.

Unknown member of the public: Why are there no bike racks on the streetcars?

The thought was that it was such a short ride, only 3 miles end-to-end. Bikes will be allowed; we’re not prohibiting them, we’re just not taking up that space; a rider wouldn’t hang their bike during such a short trip.

Howard: Can you tell us the colors for those that have trouble with colors?

We haven’t decided the colors or branding as of yet. Once we decide on a color, we’ll bring that information to you.

1. Overview of the Tempe Streetcar Project – Abhishek Dayal, Manager, Capital Planning, Valley Metro

Manager of Capital Planning, Abhishek Dayal, provided a brief overview of the Tempe Streetcar design and planning.

Maps & Details – Abhi described a map depicting the 66-mile light rail/high capacity transit system planned to be complete by 2034 which also shows dates denoting opening years for various projects. Abhi also presented a map depicting the Tempe Streetcar route in greater detail which shows a 3-mile loop that starts on the northern end at Marina Heights and ending at Dorsey Lane/Apache Blvd. just south of the light rail station. The project cost will be $186 million and is planned to be completed by 2020. The route will have 14 stops, 6 vehicles and 2 light rail connections. Possible extensions to the streetcar route include going east and west on Rio Salado as well as south on Mill and east on Southern.

Why This Route – Abhi explained there were high employment, residential and student populations with community support for streetcar, that the existing streets are near capacity, and that the corridor contains the most special event facilities.

Capital & Operating Costs - Total capital cost of the project is about $186 million - $75 million is through a competitive FTA program, $19 million is through Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds and the remaining are through local and regional funds. Operating costs are completely funded by City of Tempe.

Federal Funding - Tempe Streetcar was identified in the FY17 President’s budget. Abhi explained we’re still awaiting notification of federal budget; anticipated by mid-summer and that we’re continuing to move ahead and anticipate signing a grant agreement in late 2017.

Streetcar Stops & Elements – Abhi explained there will be continuous sidewalk and bicycle lanes along the entire alignment and at curb-side stop   
locations, bike lane shifts to behind streetcar stop. Each stop would include seating, shade, trashcans, fare vending machines, landscaping, schedule and system info and public art.

Off-Wire Options/Design – Abhi explained several design concepts and goals to find opportunities for reasonable use of off-wire operation while balancing operational and operating cost risks. Abhi described the preferred off-wire design would be Mill Avenue and “Gateway” intersections and that we’re evaluating the Gammage curve.

Unknown Member of the Public: Do you not foresee any issue where the streetcars are sharing lanes with other vehicles and traffic, and other places you cannot?

We’re working with the assumption that in downtown we would share lanes with cars, and then at other places, there would be a dedicated track for the streetcar. We are in the early design process, especially in high traffic areas to allow for safer operation. We’re working with other peer agencies. Tucson successfully uses streetcars that travel directly through the university campus, for example, and we’re interested in how they handle these similar situations.

Unknown Member of the Public: If there are 14 stops and the route is sharing the road with other vehicles, how is that going to impact traffic, is this going to impede traffic?

Not all the streetcar route will share the lanes with vehicles; only in certain segments. We would conduct traffic analysis as part of the process refinement to better understand additional safety enhancements and to avoid conflicts.

Unknown Member of the Public: The total cost is $186 million; is that for 14 stops? Isn’t that over $10 million per stop?

That total amount pays for other elements as well including the cost of rails, the track work, the vehicles, etc.

Unknown Member of the Public: How much money is going to come from the ½-cent sales tax?

The ½-cent sales tax, or Prop 400, will contribute 70 million.

Unknown Member of the Public: If you had an all-day pass, would it transfer to the Tempe Streetcar?

Yes; however, the reverse may not be true. If you have a 1-way pass for the Tempe Streetcar, you may not be able to transfer. Abhi explained we’re still in discussions about whether or not a 1-way pass may be transferable for light rail and streetcars.

Early Construction – Abhi explained the plan for utility relocation includes water and sewer, and that the majority of work near ASU will occur during the summer of 2017 - when there are less students, to help maintain traffic movements for people, bikes and cars, and helps control project costs.

1. Overview of the Planned RideChoice Program Enhancements – Steve Henry, Program Coordinator, Valley Metro

Accessible Transit Services, Program Coordinator, Steve Henry, provided a brief overview of the RideChoice program’s significant enhancements.

History –The program was launched in 2007 when the Federal Government began to use grant money to incentivize agencies to explore alternative transportation for seniors and people with disabilities that did not have to be ADA certified. The program began using coupons for cabs, vouchers for dialysis, and mileage reimbursement. In 2012, the program was refined to the current model using a magnetic-striped card and discontinued the mileage reimbursements.

Current Program – Steve described the program is currently in 5 participating cities and is managed by MJM who sub-contracts to 7 taxi and van providers. He also explained the program covers $100 of cab service per month, and that the customer pays only 25-30% by loading value onto their card, and then swiping it at the start and end of each trip.

Advantages – Steve described the advantages include flexibility because it’s cab service with 24/7 availability, same-day service and no trip-sharing. He also mentioned the cost advantages for the agencies because RideChoice only costs about $10 per trip, which is only 1/3 the cost of a comparable paratransit trip.

Disadvantages – Steve described the largest drawback is that $100 / month is not a lot of money and you can go through it rather quickly. Current users tend to use Dial-a-Ride for their longer trips, and use RideChoice for spontaneous, or last-minute trips. Another disadvantage was that customers could not easily add money to their cards; however, that has been resolved as customers can now add money via the internet, mail, or by calling a toll-free number.

Unknown Member of the Public: Does the money rollover month to month?

That money will rollover up to $300; and customers that would like to take a long trip in the future will intentionally begin to load their cards with $100/month, and not use it so that it will add up to the $300 max.

Objectives – Steve described the objective is to make RideChoice is the first choice, rather than the last resort. He explained we planned to increase the amount of service, reduce the cost, and make the service easy to use. He also added the objective of managing the risk for agencies who fund the service by ensuring eligibility of all customers, by capping the agency’s cost for each trip, and by providing enough service to enable a shift away from paratransit.

New Rules – Steve stated that the rules for Chandler have not changed. [Subsequent to this meeting, the City of Chandler elected to increase its cap for service from $100/month to $240/month.] In the other cities, instead of the $100/month cap, the program has changed to cap the number of trips to 16 one-way trips per month, with more for customers going to work or having recurring medical treatments. He also explained that the customer pays $3, and then also pays all costs above $18. This ensures the agency will pay $7-$15, depending on the length of the trip.

New City – Steve explained that the City of Surprise has decided to participate in the program starting July 2017. Surprise has decided to include a $21 threshold instead of $18 to allow for longer trips because it aligns more closely with the current paratransit trip patterns.

Going Forward – Steve explained we plan to expand the program to other communities. He also explained the current contract ends in 2018 and our goals for the new contract will include new technology (smart phone, etc.) and explore new models for delivering service, (Uber, Lift, etc.)

Angela Sarhaddi: I live in Mesa and use RideChoice. I would prefer to always use it if the limits were higher, and if Uber or Lift were added, I would use RideChoice all the time. I didn’t hear if Mesa would be using the new rules.

Yes, Mesa will participate and the new program starting on July 1. So you will have no economic limit, but the limit of 16 trips; this will track not only your money, but also track the number of trips you take.

Angela: So will you load the card the same way or will new information come out describing that?

Yes, you will load the card the same way and we will be sending out information.

Angela: The Uber and Lift options won’t be available until 2018?

The agencies are looking for ways to partner with companies that provide the services that Uber and Lift provide. These services have great opportunities, but also have some challenges. So as we navigate through the new contract, we’re asking the industry for ideas of how to do this. We need to address several aspects such as the requirement of equal access. For example, accessibility for customers in wheelchairs, and service animals. We must ensure these and other issues are addressed and resolved. We also need to ensure the technology integrates with the technology we’re using.

There are systems around the country that are partnering with agencies such as Uber and Lift, so it is definitely something we’re interested in; however, it’s something we will have incorporate carefully and in light of all regulatory requirements.

Lynn: Paratransit requires door-to-door service, is that a requirement for people that do not necessarily require door-to-door service?

No, we require door-to-door here because this was a decision we made as a region; the law requires paratransit be at least curb-to-curb, but additional services required for those that need additional services, such as door-to-door. We ask our providers to provide the level of service that the customer needs; however, not to force the customer to accept a service they don’t require or want, unless it would be unsafe.

Kristy Ruiz: What are the cost savings for the City of Surprise in converting to this new model of service, and are there any other cities considering joining?

Yes, we have been approached by a couple of other communities and asked to provide cost estimates.

To answer the question specific to Surprise, their situation was that they had a specific dollar amount for transit that they could not exceed, and the new contract for paratransit starting in July is going to be more expensive. Therefore, as they had no additional money to work with, they wanted to investigate all options. Without the ability to quote exact dollar amounts, we can safely say that RideChoice trips come to approximately 1/3 of the cost of traditional paratransit trips. Also, Surprise has decided to go to a 3-way model: RideChoice for transit within Surprise, Transdev for regional transit, and will add a third model called the “Senior Bus” operating as a circulator to/from the senior center.

To answer any questions regarding why RideChoice is less expensive: the reasons really come down to the regulatory environment that paratransit operates in. Paratransit as a federally mandated service has a high level of regulation associated with how service is provided. These very specific requirements create costs for paratransit, and speaking for us as a region, the average cost per trip is almost $40.00.

RideChoice is different in that it is not a regulated environment and only has to meet the requirements that the State has mandated for taxi cab operations. Now we layer in our RideChoice contracts additional specific requirements for training and safety; however, the costs are more effective and cheaper to operate. We’re trying to develop programs that take advantage of the cheaper cost, and that allow customers able to use RideChoice, to choose the program when it meets their needs, and reserve the more costly paratransit trips for those rare occurrences when they feel it better fits their needs.

Mary Hartle: Is it possible to have a RideChoice driver wait for 10 minutes?

Yes, that’s one of the benefits of the program because as you know, traditional paratransit drivers will not wait, will not go through a drive-thru; however, this is cab service – so there may be a wait fee, typically 50 cents a minute; however, it’s more convenient.

Mary: I heard that RideChoice drivers were not allowed to wait.

Yes, that used to be the case; however, it was due to the way the program used to be paid. Now we have enhanced the program to cap the number of trips as well as the maximum dollar amount the provider has to pay. Therefore, it’s actually to the providers’ advantage to wait because they will never pay more than the $10 / trip as the customer picks up the cost after the $18 limit.

Unknown Member of the Public: I work more than 16 times per month.

The program can be adjusted for medical, work and school.

1. Comments and Announcements.

Ron invited VMAAG members to comment on non-agendized items. There were no comments or questions requested. Ron invited members to make any new announcements.

Unknown VMAAG Member: The Health and Wellness Center at Ability 360 is conducting their Health and Wellness Fair on Friday and Saturday.

Yes and Valley Metro is sponsoring so if you come, please stop by.

Kristy Ruiz: The bus and light rail policies for customers with disabilities that we worked on together is available and can be located on the Valley Metro website. This has also been posted on the Public Transit website and is also available in alternative formats such as Spanish, large print, etc.

The plan is to provide the policies to all our various contractors, as well as our city members that oversee our contractors so they can share these policies in a Train-the-Trainer format and so that the information will disseminate down to the bus operator level.

1. Next Meeting – Thursday, May 25, from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m., Valley Metro Tenth Floor Board Room, 101 North First Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85003.
2. Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:40 p.m.