

Minutes

Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee



Meeting Date: August 02, 2023

Time: 12:30 PM

Location: 390 Robert Steet

Members Present:

- Chair, David Fenley, at large
- Vice Chair, Darrell Paulsen, Precinct F
- Sam Jasmine, Precinct A
- Christopher Bates, Precinct B
- Patsy Murphy, Precinct C
- Ken Rodgers, Precinct D
- Jeffrey Dains, Precinct E
- Kari Sheldon, Precinct G
- Rachel Garaghty, Precinct H

- Trevor Turner, MCD
- Erik Henriksen, MCD
- Diane Graham-Raff, MAAA
- Patty Thorsen, MAAA
- Heidi Myhre, MCCD
- Claudia Fuglie, MCCD
- Richard Rowen, AARP MN

Excused

Chair Fenley, Ken Rodgers

Ex-Officio:

- Council Member Liaison
 - Andy Streasick, Metro Mobility
 - Douglas Cook, Metro Transit Customer Advocate
 - Guthrie Byard, ADA & Title VI Administrator
- = present, E = excused

Absent

Rachel Garaghty, Trevor Turner

Public

Mike Klauda

Attending from Home

Sam Jasmine, Christopher Bates

Other Council Employees

Kimberly Malone

Call to Order

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Fenley called the regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee to order at 12:31 p.m.

Agenda Approved

It was moved by Henriksen, seconded by Thorsen to approve the agenda. The meeting ended with the viewing of the bus in the Metropolitan Council Robert Street garage. The Legislative Update was not presented. The reports were not presented. **Motion carried.**

Approval of Minutes

It was moved by Dains, seconded by Graham-Raff to approve the minutes of the July 5, 2023, regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee. **Motion carried.**

Business & Information Items

1. Metro Mobility Vehicle Update

Paul Colton, Fleet Services Manager, spoke to the TAAC Committee. I am glad to be here today with another bus discussion for you guys. And more creative ways that we can get fleet faster and maybe for better pricing.

In this crazy world of parts and trying to obtain fleet. We are continually looking at ways that we can get fleet faster to replace our aging fleet. So what we have discovered is that there is a bus that is made in Canada. And we have been aware of this for the last 25 years. But because we use federal funding, we are not easily able to obtain it. Because it doesn't meet the federal requirements.

But I can order small quantities using my local funding. So we are pursuing the opportunity to potentially buying some of these buses. We have a demo downstairs. It is a little different than what we would operate. But I think it gives folks enough of a view of the vehicle to give you an idea of how it is built.

So I want to give you a brief presentation about why we are headed this way. And some of the differences in this bus. Then we can head downstairs and take a look at it.

I will be glad to answer any questions you have down there as well.

I also want to introduce Mike Klauda. I think you guys met Mike at our last show and tell of the minivan. He is with North Central Bus. I am really glad to have Mike with us and with the bus.

Let me provide a little bit of background. We are researching and evaluating the purchase of up to 25 Micro Bird buses by Girardin. It's a small bus just like the ones we have on Metro Mobility and Transit Link right now. it is a Canadian bus manufacturer. Made in Quebec.

So why are we looking at a different minibus? The cost of new buses over the last four years has increased now by 133 percent. Which is unsustainable. We can't continue with a budget like that. And that has happened since 2019. So if I were to buy a bus in 2023, it is about \$125,000 for roughly the same vehicle.

The Micro Birds that we are looking at only represent a 90 percent increase. So we would save about \$40,000 per copy on this particular order if we were to move forward. If the Council were to approve it.

So this has been caused by delays in manufacturing by two years due to the pandemic and supply chain issues. And now an excessive backlog of fleet that has to be built. We have received our first 50 buses that have been delivered. We now have 16 of them in service. And the rest are in various stages of getting into service. Replacing our old fleet.

But we have another 350 more buses to go. We have just started with another batch of 20 online last week. We are making progress. But these buses, we potentially could have by the end of next summer. If we could get an order placed by early fall. Opportunities to save money and get a 2023 order delivered within a year.

We are all about trying to ensure that our fleet is in the best shape possible in seeking these opportunities.

We also experienced some initial quality issues on the first 49 vehicles. Nothing major but stuff that has slowed our ability to get them into service. Things that Mike has to do at North Central. His team has to do things that our contractors have to do to get them ready to put into service.

We want to introduce a little bit of competition as well to the market so that maybe we can at least get their attention and hopefully see some improvement in that area.

A little bit about Micro Bird. They have been around for decades. They have a great reputation in the small bus transit market. I am continuing to request basically information and issues, challenges, the positive things about these buses from other transit authorities that have been operating these over several years. We are going to fully vet the vehicle before we do anything. And obviously, get your feedback as well.

There are some differences in the Micro Bird bus compared to our current fleet that we operate. I want to run through those a bit. The plusses and the negatives. Nothing is perfect in this world. We don't want to gloss over it. it does have a much stronger floor structure than our current buses. The way it is tied into the vehicle gives it a sturdier flooring system. Better roll over protection in these vehicles. Which includes a better bus sub structure and integrity.

One of the challenges for our contractors will be they do use different parts. So they are going to have to maintain a different parts list with these vehicles. Compared to our current fleet. Our contractors are on board with that. They are O.K. with that.

I talked about using local funding for this purchase.



So the configuration is probably the biggest thing our riders will notice. One of the things that Micro Bird is not able to engineer and do right now is put the third wheelchair space between the wheel wells. We have the two in the far back. And then we have the one between the wheel wells. For this order, what we are proposing is keeping the two in the rear for now. And then the same seating configuration that we have on our current fleet.

We have looked at our operational numbers. And on our busiest days of service, we need the third wheelchair's base four to eight percent of the time on our routes. So it is not a significant amount in which 25 vehicles entering service would cause an operational issue. I vetted this with our operations staff, Andy, Christine and Clay. They said this would not be a big deal. So, from an operations standpoint, it would be fine.

if we moved forward and we love the bus, and we want to get more of these and we have the local funding to do it, there are options to add a third space. It's a different configuration and we would want to fully vet that with folks as well. But for now, to keep our process moving, we are comfortable with what we are proposing. And working with North Central and Micro Bird on.

That's what I have for the high-level presentation. Before we head downstairs, I would be glad to answer any questions that folks have.

Jasmine said did I hear that this didn't meet some federal regulations?

Colton said because the bus is manufactured in Canada, it doesn't meet the Buy America requirements. If the Met Council used their federal funding. We can still purchase the vehicle. But we would use our Regional Transit Capitol Funding, which is local. And that is permissible. So that is the only thing that doesn't meet federal requirement, is the funding.

Jasmine said how much space is behind both the driver's seat lengthwise and the seat behind the door?

Colton said the seat right behind the driver and the first row of seats behind the passenger door?

Jasmine said yes.

Colton said it would be similar. The footprint of the bus is the same as our previous buses.

Jasmine said I have a guide dog and part of that problem is sometimes you.

Vice Chair Paulsen said are you saying that you are not going to do the three seats? You are going to do the two in the back. So if you are going to do the two in the back, can we adjust those front seats or that layout in the front to just a little bit to give a little more room? Is it because of the wheel well? Or because of the layout that we can't give any additional leg room there.

Colton said great questions. We will try to maximize all of the legroom. So typically, on the state contract, it is a minimum of 28 inches hip to knee room. So we have to meet that requirement. And per the state contract, we would do the same for this contract, which is a national source well contract that this is on. That is the avenue we would be purchasing the bus on. So we would maintain that minimum. And in many cases, we exceed that minimum. What I would like to do is ensure that we would get maximum space in those seats where needed and try to do it. Because the seats are adjustable. At least on the tracking.

Jasmine said are there heaters under those seats?

Vice Chair Paulsen said good point. The heaters will usually be put in the back or on the side.

Colton said the heaters, we always have one under seat heater in the middle of the bus and one in the rear to allow for heating circulation and proper heating of the vehicle in the winter.

The heater in the middle of the bus is on the street side of the bus. Blowing towards the back.

Jasmine said if somebody could pay particular attention especially under those two front seats. Legs need to be able to fit as well as a guide dog.

Colton said could I ask a question, Sam? As a customer and passenger with a service animal, is it possible to sit in one of the single seats next to the wheel well where there is a lot of space for a



service animal or packages or whatever you may be carrying with you?

Jasmine said a dog is not safe in the aisle. Oftentimes, if you try to put the dog in that single space in front of you. The wheel well takes up a lot of that space. So your dog is on top of your feet. If you can make it work. if you cannot, and the dog is in the aisle, if there are sudden stops or sudden turns, which happens often, the dog flies. There is no safety for your service dog. If anything flies, as I have seen, and drivers don't fasten things down, it will hit your dog. So I prefer in back of the front two seats because there is a safety thing there. The driver's seat and the door is a barrier. If a sudden stop happens, your dog doesn't go flying. If it turns, the dog is able to be in front of your feet so you can control things. So that is why I worry about that.

Colton said thank you for that comment. I appreciate that.

Myhre said when you get these vehicles, there are three locations. Are you going to spread them out or does one location get more sooner than later? When we get the new vehicles. Can heavy people be in these vehicles? Do they have a limit?

Colton said these are buses that are currently in our bus replacement schedule. They will be distributed among the three different zones that we operate in. So all the garages will be testing these vehicles. So, a variety of customers will be able to test these vehicles.

The West zone have some that serves Minneapolis. The East zone will have some that serves Saint Paul. And the South zone serves mostly Dakota County. And Scott County will have some.

The lift limitation is we are ordering the same lift that we have in all of our vehicles. It exceeds the ADA requirements. It is an 800-pound lift. So the layout of the bus is essentially the same.

Henricksen said so the Buy America Act. So you will be using local funding. When you are doing maintenance on these vehicles, are you then required to use the local funding to purchase the parts or pay for those types of materials as well or is that not an issue?

Colton said we do use some federal funding for maintenance. It is called capital costs contracting. It is part of our federal grant applications every year. Because of the limited number of vehicles, we won't have any issue. We have so much in our fleet that meets Buy America that the percentage of federal funds that we use for operating isn't going to impact that. But, if we have more of these vehicles down the road, then we would have to make sure that we are O.K. with the FTA.

Henricksen said so the maintenance activity still will come from the local fund?

Colton said our operations are all local funds.

Henricksen said these buses that we are going to be looking at. These are going to be in regular service? Would these types of buses be the type that might have to call in a pass by? If there was no room or seats available? Or is this a different type of bussing route or system these are going into?

Colton said these 25 buses will operate in Metro Mobility Demand Service. It will be roughly minus the one mobility space. Same configuration.

Fuglie said just one quick question. If you have the small vans and you have a large scooter, power chair showing up, that doesn't fit in that, what will happen?

Colton said if that were to happen, dispatch would have to switch routes and get a vehicle as quickly as possible that can accommodate the scooter to the route. I will defer to Andy.

Streasick said the vehicle that we are talking about here will accommodate any mobility device that our buses can accommodate. This is different than the previous vehicle that we showed. Where some oversized chairs might not fit in it. Your question is an important one but is not relevant to this particular presentation. The answer is if we send a sedan or SUV, when somebody has a mobility device or a large mobility device, that we didn't have coded or somehow accidentally ignored the coding, we would dispatch another vehicle.

There are occasionally folks, if they are over 800 pounds in an occupied chair or has a bariatric chair that is either too wide or a scooter that is too long. that we just can't get on a bus, period. And



obviously, if that is the case, we will let them know that. And let them know that they are free to ride if they get a more workable mobility device. And that we won't be able to successfully pick them up in their current device.

Colton said I just want to add to what Andy said but from a fleet standpoint. Every bus that we purchase, in every dimension, that has an ADA specification, we exceed that. Our spacing for mobility devices is longer than what the minimums ask for. Our door widths are wider than what the minimums call for. So we try to get the biggest footprints of those items on our vehicles to accommodate as many people as possible. And as long as I am fleet manager, that is what we will continue to do.

Myhre said my other question is because it is coming from Canada, do the maintenance people know how to service the vehicles?

Colton said these will be built on the Ford chassis. So the identical chassis that our current vehicles are built on. But the body is different. It is a very different body design. At our garage. If there is a very different body issue, we will send it out to their body shop that they send their vehicles to. So, the body shop will know how to fix that. That is really the biggest issue that we would have. That it is a different design, body substructure on the bus.

Myhre said would that cause a delay? Because you are sending it outside of what you normally do.

Colton said we send every bus outside. The garages don't have body shops to do damage repair. Right now, everything takes a long time. Parts are really hard to get. Depending on what the issue is. I am hoping that it normalizes. It may take a week to four weeks to get a vehicle repaired instead of six weeks to eight weeks to 10 weeks. Whatever the case might be.

Vice Chair Paulsen said to piggyback on what Heidi said. You send all of your vehicles to get routine maintenance or regular maintenance. Do you have a particular vendor that you guys use so that you are not overloading that one garage or that one provider?

Colton said that is the responsibility of our contractors. To determine who they use for farming out any types of repairs that they can't do. At one point, both contractors shared the same body shop, and it worked out great. When we could get parts. And our body shop was an expert at fixing our buses. That body shop is no longer available. But they have found a replacement body shop. That works fine as far as scheduling and all of that. The bigger issue is everybody trying to get service.

The body shop has to fix it to spec. So if the bus is built to spec to ADA. They will repair it to spec.

Vice Chair Paulen said what I am concerned about. This goes to the fact that 73 percent of our participants are ambulatory. This fits right in line with some of those things. What I am worried about is can we, when driver shortage is down and drivers don't want to come in. And they often have at least two wheelchairs. Most of the time when I go to church, there are three wheelchairs. So the fact of saying that you won't use your third wheelchair spot a small percentage of the time. That percentage of the time usually lands on the weekend. Or when there are driver shortages. The drivers get very agitated about that third wheelchair spot.

Colton said so, we also have to remember on the weekend we are using a much smaller portion of the fleet. So scheduling the fleet with three wheelchair positions for the appropriate routes won't be an issue.

Jasmine said I have two more questions. Number one. How many steps does it take to get up into the bus? And are they consecutive? Like there is nothing on the corner. Number two. If you have to depend on local funds to fix this. Because of the whole federal thing. Is it conflicting with anything else?

Colton said in answer to your second question there shouldn't be any conflicts as it relates to the FTA.

On the first question, I believe it is two steps to the main level and then it is no additional steps into the vehicle. Based on this configuration. If we added the third wheelchair spot, it would add a third step. And/or a sloping isle.



Jasmine said would that third step be around the corner? Like you go up two and then you turn and there is another step?

Colton said if we went with a different configuration. The configuration we are proposing has two steps. We will get some good pictures. It would be similar to what it is today.

I have a few housekeeping rules that I need to go over with everybody who is traveling downstairs.

We are unable to put the vehicle in the location where we had the minivan, which is in the far corner of the garage downstairs. Right down from the ramp. It is too tall. So we have it just off of our dock. What I would like folks to do is come down the ramp and we will circle through the isle until we get to the bus.

The other thing is this is not the exact vehicle we would be ordering. It is a demo bus. It is the same size. But there are some features. We did not order this bus. This is a bus that North Central ordered. To have to show to people. So, we can talk through those differences. It will be noticeable. The differences are there.

I want you to see the footprint of the area. The size of it. That it is similar to what we are ordering. I want people to be comfortable with that. By being able to see it, not just talk about it. Then if there are other questions that come up based on what you see, I want to be able to address those. This is not a significant difference. But I still need to come to you anytime we make a change in fleet.

Streasick said I believe that our seating configuration is the same on this vehicle. Is that right? Essentially, these have some bells and whistles that we are not going to have.

Colton said the seating configuration is a little bit different. Let me elaborate why I don't have a vehicle exactly like we operate. I could order one vehicle. We would see it next spring. And then we could do that. Then we would go through it. We would make some modifications. Then we would place another order. Then we would get them in 2025. That's an O.K. way to do it. Again, we are approaching this from. We are trying to get vehicles as quickly as possible.

So is there a way for us to do that and still go through our process appropriately?

Streasick said as I think about that, obviously, being the Customer Service Manager, that is not an ideal situation. And I am less concerned. While taxpayer stewardship is very important, I am less concerned with the cost. As tremendous as it is. And more concerned with the reality that the supply line being what it is. We just can't get vehicles. We have the windows falling on vehicles. We have got lifts that have warped floorboards in front of them. So we can't deploy the lifts. We have had vehicles start on fire every once and a while. Because we are forced to have buses out on the street that are in some cases, almost double where we would be looking at end of life. If we were able to meet our normal operating parameters right now.

So I say that just to point out that I hear everybody's concerns and I share them. But I get what Paul is saying, too. That it may make sense to prioritize getting these out on the street. And giving you guys a strong idea of what the layout is without being able to provide the exact replica of that. If that means we can get some new buses out sooner.

Vice Chair Paulsen said I would be O.K. with that in the sense that if we really do that by eliminating the third spot. But those two spots in the back will be put next to each other. That is going to be so tight for a lot of your drivers. A lot of your drivers are bigger drivers, or they need a little more room to maneuver. When you put those two wheelchairs together, the drivers have to tie down one chair at a time. In the winter months, one wheelchair person has to sit outside in the cold to wait for the first chair to get done. Tying two wheelchairs down at the same time is going to irritate the drivers.

I like that front section and then the back section and then the third one over by the door. Like it currently is. Because you then have that extra space for those bigger drivers to move around. If you eliminate that first seat, which is a better ride than the others. To eliminate that, is my concern.

When you put two wheelchairs next to each other, people bump into each other.

Henricksen said when we do the tour, it can be pointed out what the differences are. But if it is



possible, can you email the TAAC members with the actual diagrams and specifications of what the actual vehicle might be. That might help us at least provide some feedback. If this is our opportunity to provide feedback and request alterations. And we are not seeing the entire of what is going to be ordered. That might be the best we can do in order to provide additional feedback to guide some of those alterations that we might want to see.

Colton said what I am visualizing for a packet is the photos we take of the vehicle so everybody can see the difference. Some of the unique things. A stairwell. That kind of thing. There will also be a floor plan printed out. Which will look very similar to our current floor plan. It will be a little bit difficult to tell the differences from that. But it will give you a visual.

Streasick said and Paul, make sure that you run that by the Communications Department. Make sure it has adequate Alt Text. So that Sam and Ken and others will be able to weigh in. That will be useful information for them. Start with Sara Maaske.

Colton said everybody will have the ability to get on the bus. We will try to do it in groups of people. To keep it manageable.

Streasick said that this is Alison Coleman's last meeting. He spoke about her. She is going to be retiring.

She has been the TAAC Recording Secretary since 2000.

Vice Chair Paulsen spoke about her and gave her a card that the TAAC members signed, and a Macys gift card.

Reports

Subcommittee

1. **Blue Line – Ken Rodgers**

This item was not presented.

2. **Green Line – Christopher Bates**

This item was not presented.

3. **Gold Line – Vice Chair Darrell Paulsen**

The Gold Line is currently under construction. From Woodbury to Saint Paul. You can notice the changes in the utility work. And everything that they are doing out there.

4. **Purple Line – Vice Chair Darrell Paulsen**

The Purple Line is going through some adjustments as we are looking at going down White Bear Avenue, now.

Bus Priority Seating TAAC Work Group

This item was not presented.

Chair

This item was not presented.

Public Invitation

None.

Member Comment

None



Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Certification

I hereby certify that the foregoing narrative and exhibits constitute a true and accurate record of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting of August 2, 2023.

Approved this 02 day of August, 2023.

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