

PUBLIC OVERSIGHT ROUNDTABLE
ON
THE ELEVATOR MAINTENANCE STANDARDS ACT
OF 2009

Before the
Committee on Public Services and Consumer Affairs
Council of the District of Columbia

The Honorable Muriel Bowser, Chair

April 22, 2009
2:00 p.m.
Hearing Room 412
John A. Wilson Building

TESTIMONY OF
JACK REQUA
ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER
OPERATIONS SERVICES
WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Good Afternoon Chairman Bowser, members of the Committee, and staff. I am Jack Requa, Assistant General Manager, Operations Services, for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). Joining me today to help answer the Committee's questions is David Lacosse, Director of Elevators and Escalators. Thank you for allowing us to speak on behalf of WMATA on the Elevator Maintenance Standards Act of 2009. We became aware of this proposed legislation only recently and appreciate the opportunity to share WMATA's concerns with the Committee.

I would like to provide some background information on WMATA's vertical transportation system - elevators and escalators. WMATA owns and maintains 589 escalators and 285 elevators in the Metrorail system. Three hundred and seventy-two escalators and 104 elevators are located in the District of Columbia. The longest escalator in the Western Hemisphere is located at the Wheaton Metrorail station - 508 feet (70 meters).

On a typical weekday, WMATA's elevators and escalators operate 20 hours a day, providing vertical transportation for nearly 800,000 Metrorail passengers. For every train ride customers take, they typically ride two or three escalators. That is a lot of people riding up and down these pieces of machinery, and Metro must make every effort to ensure the safety of each one of our customers.

Although Metro's escalators are heavy-duty industrial grade systems, they are subjected to heavy use and exposed to environmental elements like the build-up of brake dust from trains and, in some cases, water that collects from area ground water. Run-off from rainfall and snow are other factors that add to their wear. Even with this heavy use and exposure to the elements, Metro's average in-service rate for escalators is 93%, and for elevators it is 97.5%. Our annual budget for elevator and escalator operations is \$29.9 million and includes 176 budgeted positions.

Of the 176 positions, 129 positions are full-time mechanics and 25 positions are Qualified Elevator Inspectors (QEIs). Staff works 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our mechanics are trained skilled craftsmen with diverse backgrounds including IUEC (International Union of Elevators Constructors) training, CET (Certified Elevator Technician) certification and training in a District of Columbia-approved and registered Apprenticeship Training Program. To address the shortage of skilled elevator and escalator mechanics, WMATA went to the effort and expense to create an in-house training center complete with a full escalator and elevator for hands-on training. To date, 57 mechanics have graduated from this four-year program and 39 are currently in class. Nineteen of these mechanics will graduate in 2009.

To keep escalators and elevators in good repair, Metro must regularly inspect and clean units, as well as replace and repair parts. This often requires machines to be out of service for a period of one to two weeks, depending on the extent of service necessary. Also, if an accident does occur on an escalator, Metro is required to shut down the unit while an investigation is conducted. Until the unit is inspected and deemed safe, it cannot be put back in service. Unfortunately, this contributes to delays in restoring the unit into service. So, the next time you pass a barricaded escalator, think safety. Your safety.

While Metro supports all measures and legislative initiatives that ensure the safety of our customers and employees, we have some concerns about some of the provisions of the proposed legislation and its potential impact on WMATA operations.

License Required

Section 2 requires that Elevator Mechanics must be licensed by the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs. This proposed legislation could potentially create substantial additional costs for WMATA for licensure fees. Currently, WMATA's inspectors meet QEI requirements and mechanics have completed IEUC training and CET certification. A licensure requirement would be redundant and

create an unnecessary layer of requirements for WMATA elevator and escalator staff, as well as adding unnecessary cost.

Elevator Contractor

Another provision of the proposed legislation requires that all elevator mechanics must work under the direct supervision of a “sole proprietor, firm or corporation” who is an Elevator Contractor. It is not clear whether this provision would require WMATA to become an Elevator Contractor and to obtain a business license or whether WMATA would be excluded from maintaining our equipment. If the latter, this provision could potentially prohibit WMATA from performing work on its own elevator and escalator system.

Insurance

Section 12 of the proposed legislation requires Elevator Contractors to provide various types of insurance coverage. As you know, Metro is self-insured, which raises the question: if this legislation is passed, and WMATA is not excluded/exempted, would Metro’s insurance meet these requirements, or would Metro have to incur additional costs to provide this insurance from another source?

Permits

The permitting process for doing work is in addition to our current internal requirements, and we are concerned that such processes as well as permit and license renewal will delay efforts to return equipment to maximum operability.

If the legislation is to go forward, there are substantive issues that should be addressed. The legislation lacks definitions, does not cap the licensure or registration fees, and appears to prohibit public-sector participation. In addition, it would be helpful if the Council provided some guidance regarding how this legislation would impact existing legislation.

In conclusion, WMATA believes that this legislation would not increase the safety of Metro's customers on our elevators and escalators, but would instead increase WMATA's costs and lengthen the time it takes to keep our vertical transportation systems operational. We believe that in these difficult financial times, the District should be seeking ways to reduce administrative costs and burdens on WMATA, rather than increasing those costs and burdens as this legislation would do.

Specifically, WMATA respectfully requests that the legislation be amended to clarify that WMATA would not be subject to its terms. In addition, WMATA believes the proposed legislation should be amended to include a provision to allow qualified WMATA mechanics and Inspectors to perform all work necessary to return a piece of equipment back in service. WMATA also requests that the proposed legislation be amended to allow WMATA to enter into an agreement with DCRA in which WMATA is authorized to perform its own inspections and place units back in service. For example, during the recent Presidential Inauguration, DCRA authorized WMATA to perform inspections to restore units in operation quickly. Such an agreement going forward would result in more working units, better service for our customers and fewer complaints that we and YOU receive daily.

To sum up: WMATA's goal is to minimize unnecessary expenses - which we would have to pass back to the jurisdictions that fund Metro - and to lessen any additional processes that slow the implementation of service or return to service. Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify, and we look forward to working with you. We will be happy to respond to questions from the Committee.