



600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
202-962-2891

September 4, 2009

John Catoe, General Manager
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Catoe:

On September 1, 2009, *The Washington Post* reported that the Metro will shut down the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (herein referred to as National Airport), Pentagon City, and Crystal City stations on the Blue and Yellow Metrorail lines over Labor Day weekend from 9:30pm on Friday, September 4th until 5:00am on Tuesday, September 8th.

While the closure is necessary to ensure a high safety standard and rehabilitate deteriorating platforms and track switches, it will greatly affect travelers flying in and out of the only airport in the Washington metropolitan region with easy access to Metrorail. Metro offers area residents a reliable, low-price, and convenient means to reach their flight.

The Riders' Advisory Council knows that safety should always be the number one priority for any transit agency and understand the strong connection between preventive maintenance and the reliability and security of the Metrorail system. We also understand that there are often street closures and other circumstances that require rerouting Metrobus and MetroAccess services, most of which are out of Metro's direct control. At this time, the Council makes no negative judgment on the Authority's decision to schedule major maintenance on the Blue and Yellow lines over Labor Day weekend, and understands that long weekends are a rare opportunity to perform significant rehabilitative work.

That said, the Council has serious concerns about the notification process for the planned Labor Day weekend service disruption – concerns which can be extended to all future planned service disruptions, especially those resulting in station closures.

While cursory notification of the planned closures was provided in a Metro press release on August 5, 2009, widespread notification of the Blue and Yellow line closures was not made until the week immediately prior to Labor Day weekend. Many riders were caught off guard, and will now have to make alternate plans, or use additional time, to travel to or from National Airport or other stations on the Blue and Yellow lines.

While Metro's planned outreach efforts – including extra staff, handout flyers, website notification, and posters – are appreciated, they do little for riders who booked their travel (often at an increased price compared with other airports in our region) from National Airport months ago. For many, choosing to fly a more expensive flight out of National Airport for the sake of convenience became a major headache when they found out Tuesday that Metro would suspend service on the Blue and Yellow lines over the Labor Day weekend.

We are especially concerned that advance communication with riders was limited in a case when the closure directly affects a major travel hub on a weekend that traditionally is associated with increased levels of travel.

In order to help us better understand Metro's policy and practice on communications alerting riders to disruptions of this nature, and to assist the Council in its role in advising Metro, we request the you provide the Council with the following information:

- 1) Background information on Metro's decision to suspend service along the Yellow and Blue lines over Labor Day weekend;
- 2) Information outlining all communications and outreach efforts that were undertaken to alert riders to the closure.
- 3) A detailed account of existing Metro communication policy regarding planned service disruptions (for Metrobus, Metrorail, and MetroAccess) that adversely affect riders on dates which historical trends indicate may have expanded ridership at affected stations or stops;
- 4) Specific reasons, if any, which would prevent public notification of planned service disruptions at least forty-five days in advance.

The WMATA Riders' Advisory Council looks forward to receiving your written response to our questions by September 23, 2009 so that we may have ample time to review it before our regularly scheduled October meeting.

We thank you for your cooperation in helping us understand this situation, and request you direct all questions to the Council through John Pasek, Staff Liaison in the Office of the Board Secretary.

Respectfully,



Diana Zink, Chair
Riders' Advisory Council

cc: Members, WMATA Board of Directors