



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

December 8, 2009

Chairman Graham and Members of the Board:

Building on WMATA's recent budget town meetings concerning its FY2011 budget, the Metro Riders' Advisory Council (R.A.C.) would like to provide our initial thoughts on the budget development along with possible suggestions.

In our April 23, 2009 letter on the FY2010 public hearing process and proposed service cuts, this Council stated that the Board "should have presented the public with a full slate of budgetary options, including fare increases, rail service adjustments, and parking rate increases, rather than just asking for public input on a pre-selected list of cuts." As we begin the discussion on the FY2011 budget, we stand by that statement. We would also like to reiterate our March 2009 resolution on Service Adjustments that emphasizes the importance of maintaining basic transportation, safety, equity, alternatives within transit, and communication with the public in any service adjustments.

This Council strongly encourages the Board to present a list of clear and specific alternatives for the FY2011 budget, which give the public an opportunity to debate multiple options at any public hearings. These options should collectively total more than the FY2011 budget gap, to allow for public debate about which to implement and which to table. Meaningful public involvement in this process requires dialogue, debate, and detailed options that riders can comment on, rather than a single option that will likely draw widespread opposition.

We hope that the Board will put forward as many options as possible for public comment. Nothing should be taken off the table prior to analysis by Metro staff and opportunity for feedback by riders. This Council strongly feels that Metro should take a long-range approach to achieving a stable budget for FY2011 and future years to avoid the disruption and uncertainty experienced in FY2010.

A public hearing process that includes numerous budgetary alternatives for FY2011 and beyond is jointly beneficial. The public would be able to collectively weigh the cost and benefits of each individual proposal to cut costs or increase fares – no matter how small – and then comment on them in a substantial way. The Board would, in turn, have greater flexibility in making a final decision that accurately represents the will of the riding public.

We are confident that this approach – with specific fare, fee and budget options made publicly available for consideration by the Board and riders – will enhance the dialogue between the Authority, Board, and riders, and will improve the decision making power of the Board. This Council is well aware that there are many roads leading to a final FY2011 budget; we look

forward to working alongside the Board and general public in evaluating a detailed list of possible budget options.

Additionally, the R.A.C. notes that as part of the last round of fare and parking fee increases approved by the Board in December 2007, staff was directed to "study and report back to the Board of Directors a recommended fare policy that evaluates all aspects of fares, revenues and expenses including distance traveled, time of day, mode, capacity, elasticity and other variables that affect ridership, revenue and expenses." As part of that analysis, the Council requests that the Board fully consider and ask staff to evaluate the following fare and fee suggestions from a revenue and operational standpoint so that they can be discussed and considered in the context of any proposals for the FY2011 budget. Though we withhold judgment on any budgetary solutions at this time, we anticipate greater involvement once an analysis is complete and presented to the public as different alternatives for consideration. We suggest the Authority evaluate:

- Decreasing bus-to-rail and rail-to-bus transfer discounts, and either decreasing or eliminating the SmarTrip discount on Metrobus;
- Introducing a differential between the SmarTrip and paper farecard fare price on Metrorail;
- Adding a fare period on Metrorail during the weekday rush so that the fare structure includes three time-based tiers: reduced, regular, and peak;
- Simplifying the regular fare structure on Metrorail to reflect the three distance-based tiers used during reduced fare hours;
- Instituting an additional Metrobus fare period during the peak hour (during which the bus system is already operating at or near capacity) either system-wide or only on high-ridership bus lines;
- Adjusting the price of open and reserved parking spaces and reserved bike lockers to reduce congestion and wait lists and equalize demand with supply;
- Expanding the hours Metro charges for parking beyond the current schedule
- Creating more pass options for regular and/or occasional users as way to encourage overall ridership and thereby increase revenue. Options could include monthly passes, joint rail/bus passes, and additional short-term passes marketed to visitors.
- Increasing the age at which children accompanied by an adult are able to ride Metro for free, encouraging increased family/group use of Metro, especially at off-peak times when additional capacity exists.

Furthermore, this Council requests the Board and Authority seek out revenue and cost savings through other means, including:

- asking jurisdictions for increased subsidies as well as operational changes;
- increasing revenue from advertising and leasing space on unused Metro-owned land;
- closing low-traffic Metrorail station entrances during off-peak hours;
- ensuring capital purchases do not have higher than industry-standard operational costs.

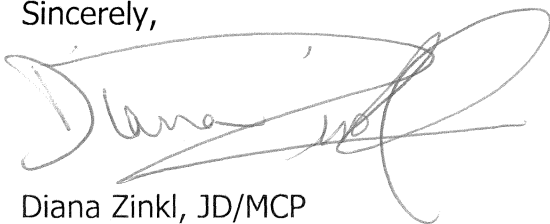
We also strongly encourage the Board to include any proposed operational changes in the public hearing process. While including these changes as part of any public hearings may not be required, offering riders the opportunity to provide their feedback on such proposals will provide additional guidance for the Board as it makes decisions on Metro's final FY2011 budget. For instance, finding cost savings by cleaning trains less frequently may be unacceptable to riders, who would rather pay extra (or have other services cut) than have a dirtier train. Hearings are an opportunity for the Board to hear rider opinions on tradeoffs such as this.

This Council is acutely aware that many of the proposals suggested above rely on completing essential and long-delayed upgrades to the SmarTrip program. We feel strongly that technology limitations should not hinder options in the FY2011 budget debate, and request that both the Authority and the Board place a renewed focus on completing these upgrades in a timely manner.

In closing, the WMATA Riders' Advisory Council calls upon the Board to request from the General Manager a comprehensive analysis of options for FY2011 (collectively totaling more than the current budget gap), including but not limited to those listed here, that can then be fully evaluated and debated by the Board and riders during the public hearing process.

We do recognize and applaud the efforts of the Board and Authority to engage the public so early in the FY2011 budget process. We hope that meaningful outreach continues and that this Council's recommendations are taken into account when preparing the docket of possible cuts and fare hikes for presentation this winter to transit riders in the Washington D.C. region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diana Zinkl", with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Diana Zinkl, JD/MCP
Chair, WMATA Riders' Advisory Council