



600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001

April 23, 2009

WMATA Board of Directors
600 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Public Docket B09-3

Dear Board Members,

We are writing in response to the Board's express solicitation of comments from the R.A.C. on proposed service cuts, the General Manager's 2010 proposed budget and the public hearings in the March 26, 2009, resolution authorizing public hearings on those proposals.

Summary

We are concerned that the currently proposed bus service cuts will affect only one mode, harm transit-dependent riders, remove vital connections, reduce safety and increase other costs such as MetroAccess. We urge the Board and member jurisdictions to continue to explore other alternatives to cuts. To increase public participation in the budget process, we also request that Metro make public the complete 2010 budget proposal before further decisions are made.

Further, we believe that the public's involvement in these hearings was needlessly compressed in time and limited to a small range of topics. In the future, we hope the Board will allow more time for hearings, avoiding the need for multiple hearings on the same night, and permit the public to weigh in on a broad range of potential budget solutions that span rail, bus, parking, and other services, instead of a predetermined single choice. We also urge the Board to begin the open process of discussing the 2011 budget gap very soon after concluding the 2010 budget process, providing time for a thorough debate of all alternatives.

Service Cuts

Aware that service cuts might be part of the WMATA 2010 budget process, the R.A.C., at its March 4, 2009, meeting, adopted a resolution on service adjustments. This resolution encourages the Board, WMATA and member jurisdictions to pursue service cuts as a last resort and, if cuts are necessary, outlines principles to guide those decisions. A copy of the resolution is attached.

Our comments in this letter are based on the principles in that resolution which we strongly reaffirm. Additionally, the feedback comes from our personal experiences using the various modes of the WMATA system, from our discussions with other riders and among ourselves, from the information which WMATA staff has provided, and from our attendance at all of the public hearings held from April 13 to 17, 2009.

We maintain the strong belief that WMATA should not balance the budget on the backs of bus riders. The burden of the cuts falls exclusively on one subset of riders who use the target services.

In particular, we have serious concerns that:

- These cuts eliminate needed connections to jobs, houses of worship, grocery stores, laundromats, health care and child care options;
- Headway lengthenings, reroutings and reductions in hours of service will increase safety risks to riders;
- Some of the services slated for elimination lack realistic alternatives, and
- Many supposed alternatives require transfers, which are especially burdensome to senior citizens and persons with disabilities;
- The cuts will increase unemployment rates and, thus, social service spending;
- Elimination of bus service may increase use of MetroAccess, neutralizing some or all potential cost savings.

The R.A.C. welcomes a holistic and community-based reexamination of the bus network, and opposes cutting individual routes annually in the budget process and in response to shortfalls. R.A.C. members are encouraged by the Board's recent interest in improvements to bus service and hope this signals a lasting commitment to creating equity between bus and rail service.

Transparency in the Public Process

We are disappointed in the lack of transparency in the decision-making process for these service cuts, despite the recommendations for such in our resolution. We feel the Board should allow ample time for the public to meaningfully comment and for management to advertise any service changes. For example, the public hearings scheduled for the week of April 13, 2009, featured two sets of hearings at the same time and day. In addition, we are concerned that the testimony at hearings did not accurately represent the working poor, some minority groups, and individuals with limited English proficiency, who are disproportionately affected by bus service cuts. Finally, the R.A.C. feels 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.

In the event that WMATA moves forward with service cuts, we believe it should conduct a very intensive public information campaign, so that riders have specific and explicit information about how their service is affected.

Finally, in recent weeks there has been general discussion about the Fiscal Year 2011 budget, but with little specific information available to the public. Given the compressed and hurried nature of our process this year, the R.A.C. encourages the WMATA to seek public input about the 2011 budget immediately, rather than waiting until late in the fiscal year.

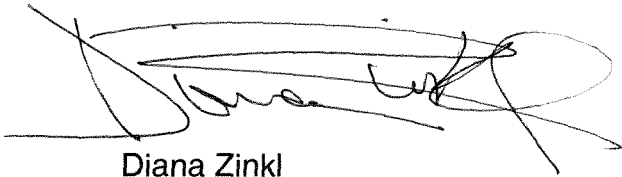
The 2010 Budget

In past years the R.A.C. has reviewed WMATA budget proposals—both operating and capital—and provided input to the Board and the Authority. To date, the R.A.C. has yet to receive a copy of the 2010 General Manager's budget proposal. A series of PowerPoint presentations available on the WMATA website provided only vague information on the upcoming budget cycle, lacking the detailed and systematic information available in a complete

and thorough budget proposal. An accessible copy of the detailed budget on the WMATA website would make this publicly available to many at minimal expense. Without a detailed budget to review, the R.A.C. is unable to comment on the 2010 budget, but we look forward to doing so once it is available.

While we are aware the Board, WMATA and jurisdictions have gone through a lengthy process to reduce the original budget gap, we ask that you continue to examine this budget for further opportunities to reduce costs. We would also urge the jurisdictions to apply the subsidy rebate from 2009 to the 2010 budget and increase contributions. Finally, we continue to encourage creative solutions to bring in additional revenue.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Diana Zinkl', written over a horizontal line.

Diana Zinkl
2009 Chair
WMATA R.A.C.

Patrick Sheehan
1st Vice Chair

Penelope Everline
2nd Vice Chair

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Dr. Kelsi Bracmort, Washington, DC

Dr. Sharon Conn, Maryland

Kenneth DeGraff, Washington, DC

Chris Farrell, Maryland

Lora Routt, Maryland

WMATA Riders Advisory Council Resolution on Service Adjustments

Whereas, the Riders Advisory Council recognizes the need for WMATA to achieve a balanced budget,

Whereas, the Authority, the Board and the member jurisdictions should search for additional cost savings and sources of revenue, work to improve efficiency, develop a better understanding of the quantitative and qualitative benefits of the system, strongly consider additional, targeted subsidy increases, and aggressively pursue alternative funding before reducing service;

Whereas, the Advisory Council acknowledges that a balanced budget may require WMATA to achieve cost savings through service adjustments as well as non-service associated cost savings and additional jurisdictional subsidy;

Whereas, the Advisory Council believes WMATA should preserve the quality of the rider experience and not sacrifice the goal of maintaining the best ride in the nation and a high level of civility and cleanliness; now, therefore be it

Resolved, the Advisory Council adopts the following principles for service adjustments should guide any decisions made by the Board or the Authority:

- maintaining basic transportation—recognition that Metro provides a critical service, 24 hours a day, seven days per week, enabling residents of the region to travel to work, school, personal appointments, entertainment and recreation at all hours of the day and all days of the week.
- customer, employee and public safety—service adjustments should take into account direct effects on safety, such as operator training and work hours, and indirect effects on safety, such as availability, frequency and security of evening and late night service.
- interjurisdictional and intermodal equity—service adjustments should be adopted in a manner that distributes service, adjustments and the burden of those adjustments throughout the region and among modes and types of services provided by the Authority, acknowledging that existing service in some areas may already be limited under current scheduling.
- valuing social equity—providing service based on community need as well as efficiency and demand. Recognize that for transit dependent individuals, even limited service provides opportunities to participate in basic community functions that might be out of reach otherwise.

- maintaining alternatives within transit—seemingly overlapping services may provide needed options, prevent overcrowding and bottlenecks, minimize the impact of service disruptions and are not necessarily “duplicative.”
- sensitivity to “day of week” and “time of day” changes in demand—Metro should consider broader use of targeted service adjustments that reflect time of day and day of week variation in demand and minimize the impact of service adjustments on customers (for example the weekend closure of the 17th street entrance to the Farragut West Metro is one example of a “targeted service adjustment”).
- strong communication to the public on service adjustments—
 - transparency at all stages in the development of any and all service adjustments, including detailed information available to the public and open, public, noticed meetings for all discussions of service adjustments, except where directed to do so by the Board.
 - opportunity for public input into service adjustments through public hearings in affected areas for all service reductions.
 - any service adjustments need to be widely and unambiguously communicated to the public to prevent confusion, delay, and maintain strong relationships with the riding public, taking into account regular users, occasional users, tourists and special needs riders.

Approved by the Riders’ Advisory Council – March 4, 2009