



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

August 10, 2010

Dear Members of the WMATA Board,

The WMATA Riders' Advisory Council would like to commend Metro on the Transparent Metro Data Sets project. We conducted a meeting open to the public to discuss this project, and received many positive comments.

This project has the potential to open up many new opportunities for new tools that help riders find information, make information more accessible to riders with disabilities, and convey the value of our transit system to people across the region.

Metro staff including Jamey Harvey, Bill Rigney, and Suzanne Peck have clearly taken rider feedback strongly into account when designing this project, and have gone beyond most other transit agencies to provide a wealth of real-time and static information about bus and rail. We are confident that many programmers and others will make use of this data to benefit riders in many ways.

We would encourage Metro to reach out to other transit agencies in the region to incorporate their data, or at least the data they have such as the schedule information being used in the Trip Planner, into these Transparent Metro Data Sets in the near future.

We also appreciate that the legal department has at some point recently modified the Developer License Agreement ([http://www.wmata.com/rider\\_tools/license\\_agreement.cfm](http://www.wmata.com/rider_tools/license_agreement.cfm)) to remove any requirement of indemnification, which was a sticking point for many individual, private programmers interested in building useful tools on a volunteer basis.

At our meeting, we heard from some open source programmers one suggestion for the license agreement which we encourage Metro to adopt. They pointed out that one paragraph could be problematic for those who wish to present transit data alongside other map data in tools like Open Street Map, who wish to incorporate it into mobile applications, or who wish to present it in alternate formats to riders with vision impairments:

*LICENSEE must state in legible bold print on the same page where WMATA Transit Information appears and in close proximity thereto, "WMATA Transit information provided on this site is subject to change without notice. For the most current information, please click here."*

While we understand the desire of Metro to ensure that proper credit and a disclaimer is provided, this provision assumes that the data will be displayed on a Web page (hence the use of "page"), and in a visual format that allows for boldfacing and presenting of information in close proximity.

As an alternative, Metro could look to MassDOT ([http://www.eot.state.ma.us/developers/downloads/DLA\\_11-13-09.pdf](http://www.eot.state.ma.us/developers/downloads/DLA_11-13-09.pdf)) which only requires users of the data to "clearly acknowledge MassDOT as the provider of the Data" without specifying the specific format or location of any disclaimer. Meanwhile, BART's agreement (<http://www.bart.gov/dev/schedules/license.htm>) has no requirement of this nature.

In addition, riders and programmers at our meeting were so enthusiastic about the project that they devised a list of additional types of data that they would like to see added to this project. We understand that Metro must add data feeds step by step, and believe Metro has effectively chosen the top priority data feeds. However, in the future, as resources become available to add additional feeds, we suggest staff consider the following additions:

- Historic bus position data over time periods in the past (useful to generate algorithms to predict bus positions)
- Ridership numbers by stations (ins and outs, and if possible, origin-destination pairs)
- Bus ridership information
- Bus service disruptions
- Rail station information, including:
  - Numbers of bike racks at each station
  - Numbers of reserved bike lockers at each station
  - Numbers of car parking spaces at each station
- Whether rail station parking lots/garages are full, or other real-time parking occupancy data for each station, as technology makes it available (useful to direct drivers in real time to a station with availability)
- GPS coordinates of rail station entrances, escalators, and elevators (particularly useful to help riders with disabilities navigate the system)
- PDFs of the layouts of public areas of stations
- The status of cell phone coverage in stations and tunnel segments
- Locations of experimental or future 7000-series trains (which riders may want to go experience for themselves)

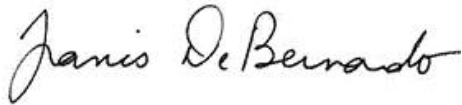
Riders also suggested, as future enhancements, implementing a system around the Open 311 protocol so that users of third party tools could easily report problems back to Metro in a structured way. This could make it easier for Metro to get real-time reports of escalator outages, extremely hot stations, railcars in need of cleaning, broken bus fareboxes, or other issues in need of attention.

There was also a suggestion to work with DDOT to implement QR codes, the two-dimensional mobile barcodes, on bus stops, buses, rail stations and/or train cars to allow riders to scan a code and immediately receive useful rider information.

We hope that the current disruption reports can become more detailed. In particular, current reports of escalator outages do not include information on which escalator is out. It would be helpful to enable station agents to report this information. Another possibility is that better reporting, such as the Open 311 suggestion above, could enable Metro to collect this information through “crowdsourcing” and make it available to riders.

All of these suggestions are items which could one day enhance the Transparent Metro Data Sets project. However, just launching what Metro has currently proposed is a tremendous step forward. Assuming the launch is completed as planned, we hope you will thank the employees who worked on this for their hard work, their embracing of innovative best practices in the transit industry, and their responsiveness to rider input on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frank DeBernardo". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Frank DeBernardo, Chairman