



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

June 26, 2008

Mr. Zimmerman and Members of the Board of Directors:

I'm pleased to submit to you the Riders' Advisory Council's monthly report for June 2008.

Capital Improvement Plan:

Earlier this month at our June meeting, Rick Harcum, Metro's Budget Director, came to talk with the RAC about the development of Metro's Capital Plan which will begin in FY2011. The RAC understands the nexus between a well-maintained system and the Authority's ability to deliver convenient, safe and reliable service to its customers. We will be working on suggestions for inclusions in the Capital Plan from our perspective as riders – focusing on the material parts of the system that affect us every day.

Blue Line Realignment:

Also at our June meeting, the RAC received a briefing from Jim Hughes concerning Metro's proposal to route some Blue Line trains over the Yellow Line bridge. The RAC is still interested in receiving more detailed information on how Metro has reached out to its customers to get their feedback – and, of course, what the surveyed customers have said. We also look forward to learning Metro's plans for communicating this possible realignment of service to its riders. Mr. Hughes has promised to return to the RAC for more discussion. It is clear to the RAC that given all the high ridership days Metro has experienced, the system needs to utilize all of the capacity it has to carry passengers. However, this realignment of the Blue line – or enhancement of the Yellow line – does have its plusses and minuses for current riders and needs to be carefully considered.

Bus Priority Corridors and Planning:

At your May Planning and Development Committee meeting, you heard about Metro's plans to improve bus service on its busiest corridors. Staff also came to the RAC's Bus Subcommittee meeting this month to provide an overview of the plan. The RAC shares the Board's excitement at Metro's plans for improving bus service along the most heavily-used corridors and hopes that, as Metro progresses with this plan, it keeps its commitment to an extensive public outreach process as part of the planning for service changes and improvements. RAC was very impressed with the work done on the 30s line study, and looks forward to a similar process being used again.

SmarTrip:

The RAC is looking forward to a presentation at our July meeting from Greg Garback, Director of Metro's SmarTrip program. As Metro seeks to move more of its customers to paying with SmarTrip cards instead of cash, the RAC looks forward to improvements in SmarTrip sales and customer service that will make SmarTrip more convenient for all riders, especially bus passengers. The expansion of SmarTrip will have a profound impact on the customer experience for all of Metro's riders, and must be done with customers' needs at the forefront of all planning decisions – needs such as having places convenient to major bus stops that are not co-located with Metrorail stations where one can add to a SmarTrip card and/or purchase one. We hope that the Board, as well as staff, will remain focused on customers when making decisions as part of this process. I look forward to returning to you next month with the RAC's thoughts.

Service and Communications Issues:

It is clear that June, 2008 has been both the worst and the best of months for Metro. The rail system suffered through several service disruptions this month -- some of which were caused by circumstances beyond its control. And in the same month has achieved 6 of the top 12 weekday ridership days.

In the service disruptions, I believe Metro staff worked diligently to provide some level of alternate service and made major repairs in a short amount of time that allowed a return to normal service as quickly as possible.

As with all human endeavors, however, there remains room for improvement. This improvement, from the RAC's perspective, is in WMATA's communications with its riders. Based on comments from passengers caught in the disruptions, information in the press and discussion at this month's Board Committee meetings, we all know there continues to be work to do on this issue. I've asked RAC members to pass along their observations, and those of folks to whom they speak, to our staff person and I hope to have a discussion of them at our meeting in July.

During the disruptions I noted some communications -- notably press releases sent to riders who had signed up to receive them -- provided up-to-date, specific information about the nature of the service disruptions, the plans for shuttle buses and even the anticipated time that bus bridges would begin service. Other communications, including Metro's eAlerts, did not always arrive in a timely manner and were very vague as to the extent of the problems the system was experiencing. Specifically – the messages on Monday evening during the derailment spoke of a "train experiencing mechanical difficulties" outside of Court House station. This, of course, doesn't begin to convey the level of disruption the system was experiencing. (I would add that the eAlerts did improve for the "heat kink" incident later that week – but then slid back somewhat during the power outage incident.) Metro's website was also overwhelmed by customers seeking information on alternate transportation the day of the Orange Line derailment.

Moving forward, the RAC is encouraged that Metro staff are discussing steps to make improvements. Before the Board today are items that would improve Metro's internet reliability and hopefully allow the Authority to avoid communications disruptions like those experienced with these latest incidents. It is important in the 21st Century, tech-savvy riders can rely on Metro to make sure they have electronic access to information they need to help them make decisions about their commutes – whether it's in an unforeseen circumstance or not.

The RAC has heard the comments by Deputy General Manager, Gerald Francis, that the Authority will be reviewing its actions during each of the incidents to determine ways to make improvements. We request that riders be a part of these reviews – or at least some aspect of them. It is of course important for Metro to facilitate dialogue among its departments – and very important, as Mr. Zimmerman has pointed out, to have discussions with responders from the member jurisdictions. It is also very important that Metro talk to its riders – that they look outward for ideas and comments and not just inward. Each service disruption provides Metro with an opportunity to get customer feedback about its performance, and we hope that Metro's takes advantage of this opportunity. I'm sure the customer service email inbox has been full of late, and I know I've been hearing a lot of things, so there's a lot of data with which to work.

The recent record days of ridership clearly indicate riders want to use the system and do rely upon it – which just makes WMATA's commitment to work on communications all the more necessary.

As always, thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Nancy Iacomini, Chairman