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October 22, 2009

Chairman Graham and Members of the Board,

I am pleased to present you with the Riders' Advisory Council report for October 2009.

Bus Stop Design and Information

At its October meeting, the Council heard from Metro staff about plans to promote enhancing the rider experience at bus stops. This included presentations on guidelines for bus stop design that Metro is developing for region-wide use, and Metro's own plans to improve the information offered at Metrobus stops and more closely integrate information from other transit providers. Staff presented information on a number of potential enhancements to bus stop design, many of which are practices in accordance with ADA standards, and increasing bus stop spacing. Council members were glad to see that Metro is looking to improve the customer experience at its bus stops both by providing guidance to jurisdictions on items under jurisdictional control and by creating standards for items under Metro's purview.

Council Members had several comments and suggestions, including:

- The use of universal design to make stops and information as accessible as possible to customers with disabilities;
- The benefits of incorporating NextBus service into new signage;
- The possibility of including "tourist" operators at Metrobus stops, if that would provide enhanced revenue for Metro;
- The need for clear maps at shelters;
- The need to make paper schedules more available – either at Metrobus stops or other locations;
- Making sure that new formats for information are clear to regular users of the system who are used to the current presentation of bus stop information.

Safety and Security

The Council also received a presentation from Deputy Chief Lee from the Metro Transit Police Department. He provided an overview of MTPD's activities to protect public safety in the Metro system—including the casual clothes officer program and the detector dog program—along with statistics about incidents in the Metrorail and Metrobus systems. Council Members were interested to learn that while bus drivers are the target of incidents on average more than once per week, rail station agents and train drivers are rarely targets of criminal incidents. Council members were interested in the new juvenile crime enforcement initiative, and expressed concerns about distinguishing between typical young person horseplay and more serious crime.

The Deputy Chief explained that distinguishing between harmless roughhousing, rude and intimidating behavior, and potentially explosive situations is difficult for MTPD and Metro field staff as well, and that concern with the seriousness of some recent juvenile crimes led MTPD to determine that juvenile situations in general receive heightened awareness by MTPD. One Member raised concerns about behavior by students in school groups on Metro. In her experience, Dr. Sharon Conn related that children who use Metro as part of official school field trips are inadequately supervised and disciplined by staff chaperoning the trips. Perhaps official outings provide a forum to better educate children on the importance of calm behavior on Metro.

Deputy Chief Lee also briefly highlighted the public safety challenges presented by maintaining the large parking lots owned by the Metro system and the statistics associated with criminal activity at these facilities.

Council Members asked for several follow up items from the Deputy Chief and we look forward to continuing to work with MTPD on safety and security, two issues very important to the rider experience and encouraging Metro use.

FY2011 Budget

As Metro continues the development of its FY2011 budget, the Council is glad to see that the Board and Metro are reaching out to jurisdictional stakeholders and members of the public to start the dialogue about how to best address challenges of developing next year's budget as well as Metro's next capital improvement plan. The Council looks forward to hearing specific details about the budget as they become available. Council Members from Virginia and I were pleased to take part in the panel discussions held earlier this week in Virginia and the District, and we look forward to continuing to working with the Board and Metro as part of an inclusive public process as the budget process continues. We remain concerned about potential impacts on service to bus, rail and MetroAccess, and look forward to unbundled information on cost increases and reduced revenue that will help target challenges and formulate solutions.

National Harbor Service

Members of the Council held a special meeting to discuss recent changes to the NH-1 bus route in response to riders' concerns about these changes on Tuesday, October 20, 2009. I look forward to providing you with an update on this meeting at the October Board meeting.

Rider Outreach

At my request, members of Metro's Marketing and Advertising staff are working to develop outreach materials – specifically signs to post on Metro property and vehicles as part of Metro's public service advertisement campaigns - to help publicize the Council and let Metro riders know that they have additional avenues to bring issues to Metro's attention. I am hopeful that additional suggestions and communications from riders will help inform the Council's discussions and, in turn, help us to provide better advice and feedback to both the Board and Metro staff. I appreciate the support of Chairman Graham and Mr. Catoe on this initiative.

Meeting with Executive Leadership Team

Last week, I and jurisdictional co-Chairs, Patrick Sheehan (1st Vice-MD), Penelope Everline (2nd Vice-VA) met with Metro's Executive Leadership Team (ELT). Many of the Members of the ELT were familiar to us, and we also met a few new faces. We shared our thoughts and goals for the Council and its relationship to Metro and answered questions. Ms. Everline suggested that Metro staff would enhance the feedback provided by the R.A.C. if they offered additional guidance during presentations in the form of open ended questions; Mr. Sheehan highlighted that improving the accessibility of the rail and bus systems could result in mutual benefits to the Authority and the disability community, specifically that investments in disability "friendly" changes could pay substantial benefits in MetroAccess costs. We look forward to continuing to work with the ELT to strengthen the relationship between Metro and the riding public.

New Members

The Council was pleased to welcome two new members from Montgomery County – Ron Whiting and Victoria Wilder.

This concludes my report. I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,

Diana Zinkl, JD, MCP
Chair
Metro Riders' Advisory Council