Bridging the Gap

Connecting Riders to the Washington
Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Cali Ence and Daniel Paepke

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Executive Summary

Citizens are an important element in public decision making. However, organizations struggle to successfully respond to and manage public participation, and ordinary people do not always have the necessary skills and resources to effectively engage themselves. The following report examines the value of citizen engagement in government and explores how public participation can best be encouraged and managed, particularly within the context of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and its Riders' Advisory Council (RAC).

As graduate students studying public administration at the George Washington University, we chose the RAC as the focus of our capstone project. The RAC was established in December 2005 by WMATA to be more receptive to its riders and in an effort to connect citizens to their government. The RAC is composed of volunteers dedicated to improving the responsiveness and transparency of WMATA.

Through our research, we found that credibility, accountability, and communication are essential to bridge the gap between citizens and their government—in this case, between the RAC and WMATA.

After researching the RAC, other advisory councils at selected mass transit agencies, and meeting with several RAC members and WMATA employees, we discovered that the RAC does not have a formal way to analyze, monitor, and communicate its initiatives, or to hold the WMATA Board of Directors accountable for its actions. We propose two recommendations to improve the organizational effectiveness of the RAC and facilitate communication between the RAC and WMATA:

(1) modify WMATA's existing customer relationship management database system to include RAC programmatic initiatives and recommendations; and

(2) implement a simple, survey-style tool (which we call the RAC Track) that facilitates the analysis, tracking, and monitoring of programmatic initiatives or recommendations created by the RAC.

Modifying existing information technology practices can be an efficient and cost-effective way for WMATA to continue its already established business processes to include, monitor, and implement suggestions from the RAC. Additionally, using the RAC Track will help members of the RAC analyze and document their initiatives and also capture the necessary information for the RAC staff coordinator to enter each recommendation into the WMATA database.

The RAC is one way to connect riders and WMATA, and thereby citizens to government. We encourage members of the RAC to thoroughly review and track their many initiatives and we urge WMATA staff and Board of Directors to be responsive and attentive to the RAC's recommendations.

Introduction

Elected government officials are constantly being pulled in different directions by varying interests and issues: funding, taxes, political parties, etc. They struggle to work through the muck and mire that comprises modern-day politics and in the end, it generally seems that no one is happy with the results. Public administrators are in a similar situation. Tasked with carrying out the programs and initiatives created by their political leaders, the public servants of today are equally pulled by special interest groups. Both politicians and public administrators are also feeling increased pressure from another surprisingly powerful interest group: ordinary citizens.

Nationwide, governments and governmental agencies are learning—arguably, they are learning again—that the work they perform must meet the needs, desires, and satisfaction of the public. Some governments and agencies turn to town hall meetings, allowing the public to question their elected and appointed officials face-to-face. Others convene focus groups, trying to really learn what it is the people of that jurisdiction want. Still others turn to advisory boards, or small, organized forums where appointed citizens can make policy and operational recommendations to a public organization.

This report examines the role of advisory boards in public transit agencies with a specific focus on the Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). In an effort to learn as much as we could about the RAC and its position within WMATA, we interviewed and spoke with dozens of people, read countless articles on civic engagement in today's society, and the role technology can play in facilitating the interactions between public agencies and the citizens they serve. We found that credibility, accountability, and communication are essential to bridging the gap between citizens and their government—in this case, between the RAC and WMATA.

Literature Review

New Public Service is a developing theory in public administration focusing on the importance of civic involvement in government policy and processes. Academics and practitioners championing New Public Service attempt to answer the question: To what extent should citizens participate in policy and administration, and what is the most effective way for them to do so? This literature review first focuses on why public participation is important, and then explores how to bridge the gap between government and the public that it serves.

Why Involve Citizens?

Over the years public administrators have struggled with how to define and treat the public—are these people consumers, voters, clients, or citizens? The New Public Service movement focuses on people as citizens rather than as voters or customers. As a result, governments and agencies that practice the principles of New Public Service tend to be citizen-centered. Public managers shift their focus from the old model of solely striving for efficiency to also include building and maintaining public trust and responsiveness.

The New Public Service movement deliberately involves citizens in administrative and governmental processes. Experts believe that public participation in government improves policy decisions, smoothes implementation, and creates more accountable agencies. Denhardt and Denhardt in *The New Public Service, Serving not Steering* suggest two rationales for public participation: [1]

- Administrators have an ethical responsibility to educate citizens through opportunities of dialogue and mutual learning. If we believe in democratic government, administrators must listen and pay attention to the people. According to Denhardt and Denhardt, public trust must be built through public servants caring about and incorporating citizens into their work. [2]

- Increased participation helps meet citizen expectations that they are being heard and that their needs will be addressed. [3] Greater public participation improves policy by relying on a broad range of perspectives. Citizens can offer thoughtful and significant contributions to the policy debate, as they tend to look at the broader picture rather than getting bogged down in the specifics and details. More involvement in government leads to smoother implementation of policy as citizens become a part of the process. Public participation also leads to greater transparency and accountability of governments, increased public trust, and a better informed citizenry. These qualities, in turn, decrease corruption and waste while improving efficiency and effectiveness.

Bridging the Gap Between Government and Citizens

The gap between governments and citizens can be examined from two perspectives: (1) citizens need to become more involved; or (2) government needs to do a better job of encouraging and allowing public participation. In his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam points out a decline in social capital over the past twenty years and proposes a combination of institutionally and individually focused changes to help increase civic engagement.[4] Putnam suggests there should be institutional changes to adapt antiquated organizations to allow and encourage public participation. He also recommends that there be increased engagement from individual citizens fostered through education and the building of public trust.

Lisa Zanetti, in her article *At the Nexus of State and Civil Society: The Transformative Practice of Public Administration*, suggests that the role of public administrators is to mediate between the government and the people.[5] She explains that professional and technical experts within government have a tendency to become too far removed from citizens. Given this disconnect, public administrators have the responsibility to bring together the "knowledge of expertise [government professionals] with the knowledge of experience [citizens]."[6] Doing this requires that public administrators facilitate community involvement as well as educate citizens on how to best communicate concerns and desires. Public servants should expect value from the knowledge of ordinary citizens and strategize how best to obtain and use citizen feedback.

Zanetti points out that reluctance by 'knowledge experts' to share information with the public is a failure in accountability. "Sharp distinctions are made between expertise—the study of the problem—and experience, or the subjective living of the problem."[7] The people 'living the problem' (i.e., citizens) need to be a part of the conversation when deciding the solution, as they contribute great value through knowledge experience.

In Nalbandian's *Professionals and the Conflicting Forces of Administrative Modernization and Civic Engagement*, the author distinguishes between modernization and civic engagement. Modernization emphasizes the managerial practices of government, while civic engagement augments the role of people. Nalbandian points out several gaps between modernization and civic engagement, one of which is the gap between specialists and citizens. Specialists, or professionals, have knowledge and expertise but sometimes become removed from the citizens that they serve. Nalbandian argues that organizations must create 'go-betweens' to bridge the gap between specialists and citizens.

In order to effectively contribute to the democratic process, citizens must learn how to participate. Christopher Leydon, in an *Open Source* audio program "Experiments in Democracy," pointed out the challenges of bringing citizens together to participate in government.[8] People need a

general understanding of how to meet together, listen, analyze, think critically, and collaborate.[9] Gathering a group of citizens in a room and asking them to make recommendations is challenging already—when politics, funding, taxes, and even Robert's Rules of Order are added to the mix, the task can quickly become overwhelming. Public administrators can and should provide opportunities for citizens to learn the necessary skills for civic participation.

Fairfax County, Virginia has an excellent model for educating citizens about community and government involvement in its Neighborhood College program.[10] The program is comprised of six free sessions that teach local citizens leadership styles, an increased understanding of county government, and effective participation skills. Through education and outreach, Fairfax County is attempting to bridge the gap between citizens and their government.

One of the challenges for public administrators within the framework of the New Public Service movement is educating citizens in democratic processes. Another difficulty is adapting already established and defined institutions and organizations to include and to be responsive to citizen participation. There needs to be new channels and processes for public administrators to overcome these challenges. The New Public Service theory argues that organizations need to create ways to bridge the gap between the government and citizens. There are a variety of ways that institutions adapt to address the needs of an engaged citizenry—advisory councils, education programs, public hearings, and online chats. No one way is best, but experts agree that organizations which strive to connect and respond to the public are more transparent, accountable, and effective.

Objectives, Scope, Methodology, and Limitations

Our objectives for this study were to improve the credibility, accountability, and communication of the RAC and WMATA through:

(1) increasing the organizational effectiveness of the RAC; and

(2) creating methods allowing the RAC and its members to make more reasoned, informed, and analytical recommendations to the WMATA Board of Directors.

As the RAC was established just over one year ago, it is especially important that it form a solid foundation of credibility and accountability, and foster open lines of communication with WMATA's Board of Directors, staff, and riders. Under the guidance and direction of the current RAC Chair, we chose to help the RAC create a centralized database for the multiple initiatives and programmatic ideas RAC members propose.

We conducted a thorough literature review of relevant trade journals, articles, and other sources to provide background information for our report. These sources primarily focused on:

- Civic engagement;

- New Public Service, a recent public administration movement that aims to involve citizens in governance and agency decision making; and

- The relationship between public servants and citizens.

We began our project by meeting with the past and current Chair of the RAC. Both gentlemen provided an in-depth background on the makeup, composition, and duties of the RAC from its establishment in 2005 and helped us in the design of our project. In total, we conducted eight qualitative interviews with various officials from both WMATA and the RAC, including the past and current Chair of the RAC, the RAC staff coordinator, the Director of the Office of Policy and Government Relations at WMATA, and WMATA's customer relationship database administrator. All of these interviews were semi-structured, meaning that we prepared for each interview with a set of very flexible, open-ended questions and treated the interaction as a conversation between ourselves and the interviewee. In addition, we conducted a semi-structured, qualitative interview via the telephone with a private citizen in San Francisco, California regarding his work with the Citizens' Advisory Council of the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency.

We conducted extensive qualitative research using online and print sources in the following subject areas:

- The establishment, membership, and mission of citizen-led advisory councils at mass transit agencies throughout the United States;

- The role and duties of advisory councils in public agencies; and

- The capabilities and benefits of information technology and information management systems in both public and private organizations.

We selected four other transportation advisory councils to compare with the RAC. These advisory boards were chosen based on the size of the city (i.e., we looked for advisory councils in larger mass transit areas) and the accessibility of information found on the Internet.

At the RAC monthly meeting held on April 4, 2007 we gave a 15 minute presentation on our preliminary findings and recommendations and gathered feedback from RAC members. We plan to present this report and our final findings at the RAC monthly meeting to be held on May 2, 2007.

Our work was conducted from January 2007 to April 2007 as part of the Master of Public Administration degree program at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. Although not officially certified by independent reviewers, our work attempted to be in accordance with ethical standards for social and behavioral research used by institutional review boards in the United States (especially privacy and confidentiality of statements made by subjects) and with generally accepted government auditing standards (especially in the collection of comments from our client and interested stakeholders, and in maintaining an independent, objective, and nonpartisan position when conducting our research).

The information presented in this report has several validity and reliability concerns that should be noted. Validity is a term which describes the accuracy and precision of an entire study or the data used in the study.[11] We recognize that there are several factors that might have reduced the validity of our data and this report, some of which include:

- *Time Effects* – We had a very short time period (roughly 13 weeks) to design our project, conduct research and field interviews, and produce this report. Alternative or additional conclusions might have resulted if the time period for this study was longer.

- *Selection Effects* – Due to a lack of funding for this project, we were forced to select transit advisory councils that had working websites with relevant and up-to-date information. There is no way to be certain how representative the advisory councils we chose are when compared to other advisory councils.

- *Misrepresentation* – We have full faith and confidence in those persons we interviewed. However, in some cases, the interviewees may have accidentally misrepresented their responses to our interview questions. There is no way to be certain that misrepresentation of data did not occur, causing us to be hesitant on the true accuracy of all the data we gathered.

Reliability in social science research refers to "the extent to which a measurement can be expected to produce similar results on repeated observations of the same condition or event."[12] After completing an interview or conducting traditional research, we compared our individual remarks and notes in an attempt to enhance the accuracy and reliability of our observations and resolve discrepancies as they emerged. As such, we feel that the reliability of our research and this report, given the limitations noted above, is high.

Background –
The Riders'
Advisory Council

WMATA has increasingly become aware of the importance of maintaining open communication with the public and being responsive to riders' interests. In 2005 WMATA showed commitment to increasing citizen participation by holding three town hall meetings with members of the WMATA Board of Directors, WMATA staff, and the public. WMATA is also trying to accomplish the goal of transparency and responsiveness through the creation of and attention to a riders' advisory council. An advisory council like this can help bridge the gap between WMATA and its riders.

In December 2004, the Chair of the Sierra Club's Transportation Committee wrote a letter to WMATA's Chief Executive Officer (now titled General Manager) and Chairman of the Board of Directors that included ten recommendations to improve the relationship between WMATA and the public.[13] The proposal called for the formation of a passenger advisory council to help collect public input and represent citizen interests to the Board of Directors and WMATA staff. Over the next 12 months, members of the Sierra Club wrote letters and extensively lobbied WMATA, advocating the creation of a passenger advisory council.

WMATA officials soon showed movement toward the creation of an advisory council, and introduced bylaws for public comment in July 2005. The Sierra Club initially responded unfavorably to WMATA's proposed bylaws because the agency suggested the advisory council staff coordinator, a position explicitly listed in the bylaws, be appointed by and under the direction of WMATA's General Manager. Sierra Club members argued that the advisory council needed an unbiased staffer who would first and foremost be loyal to the members of the advisory council. The two parties eventually compromised and created a part-WMATA, part-advisory council staff member.[14]

In September 2005 WMATA called for interested passengers to apply for membership in the soon to be created RAC. Members of the RAC would represent the interests of citizens and report them directly to the Board of Directors. RAC members would offer recommendations and suggestions on how WMATA can be more open and responsive to riders. In the three weeks the application was open, 940 people applied for 21 positions. On December 15, 2005 the RAC was officially established by the Board of Directors and the 21 newly appointed members were publicly announced.[15]

Mission and Goals

As stated in its bylaws, the mission of the RAC is to:

> "actively seek input from a broad range of riders on operational and budgetary issues that affect Metrorail, Metrobus, and MetroAccess riders and organizations with an expressed interest in public transit;

advise the WMATA Board, on ways to resolve such issues in order to improve the Metrorail/bus system and MetroAccess; promote WMATA responsiveness to riders; and recommend possible solutions to the WMATA Board of Directors and staff, based on public input, so that WMATA can effectively address the diverse concerns of the riding public. This mission is consistent with WMATA's goal to encourage public input in order to provide the best service to all of its customers."[16]

The bylaws also state that the goals of the RAC are to:

- "Advise the Board of Directors on operating and budgetary issues that have a direct impact on Metrorail, Metrobus, and MetroAccess riders;

- Encourage rider awareness of the RAC and of the opportunities that the RAC provides for riders to make their voices heard;

- Encourage open decision-making process by WMATA that clearly reflects riders' needs and concerns;

- Support improvements in service;

- Aim for a high level of rider satisfaction with WMATA; and

- Strive for a high level of public confidence in WMATA."[17]

Membership   Members of the RAC are selected and appointed by WMATA's Board of Directors. The 21 RAC seats are divided geographically and include: 6 seats for each jurisdiction (the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia); 2 at large seats; and 1 seat for the Chair of WMATA's Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee.[18] RAC membership is designed to represent the diversity of WMATA's riders by including different ages, ethnic groups, geographic locations, and occupations. For example, current RAC membership consists of a high school student, retired person, lawyer, government employee, and civic activist. RAC members are representative of all WMATA services and include people who regularly use Metrobus, Metrorail, and MetroAccess. Each RAC member is appointed for a three year term with one-third of the body turning over each year. A RAC Chair is elected each year by the members. The Chair's jurisdiction must rotate between the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. The first Chair of the RAC was from the District of Columbia and the current Chair is from the Maryland delegation.

Staff   WMATA allotted the RAC one staff person who is supervised jointly by the
                             Director of the Office of Policy and Government Relations and the RAC
                             Chair, and whose duties include acting as a liaison between WMATA and
                             the RAC. The staffer is a WMATA employee who was mutually selected by
                             and receives annual performance appraisals from both WMATA and the
                             RAC. The current RAC staff coordinator started work in October 2006 and
                             has an office in WMATA headquarters.

RAC Meetings and   The RAC holds regular meetings on the first Wednesday of each month.
Communication   There are subsequent meetings held throughout the month for the RAC's
                             five subcommittees: Metrobus, Metrorail, Budget,
                             Personnel/Rules/Administration, and Communications/Customer Service.
                             All meetings are open to the public, conducted using Robert's Rules of
                             Order, and begin with a public comment period. The RAC Chair prepares a
                             monthly report and presents it to the Board of Directors during each
                             regular meeting. The monthly report highlights the RAC's recent activities
                             and recommendations.

                             Information about the RAC including links to the bylaws, past meeting
                             minutes, monthly reports, and notices of upcoming meetings are posted on
                             WMATA's website at <www.wmata.com/about/rac/rac.cfm>. However,
                             information regarding the RAC has not received wide public exposure and
                             it seems that it is unfamiliar to most riders. RAC members have recently
                             tried to increase awareness of the RAC by distributing flyers for
                             subcommittee meetings, circulating press releases, and posting
                             information on electronic signage in Metrorail stations. These efforts are
                             likely to not only improve recognition of the RAC, but also to help
                             encourage greater rider participation in RAC initiatives and
                             recommendations.

                             The RAC is an ambitious body, having already proposed a document with
                             its "Top 65 Initiatives" for the year (see Appendix I), organizing budget
                             workshops, and introducing a myriad of other proposals. However, the
                             RAC has no formal tracking mechanisms to organize, monitor, or report
                             the many initiatives and recommendations it introduces. By taking steps
                             to improve the organizational effectiveness and credibility of the RAC, and
                             to help create methods allowing the RAC and its members to make more
                             reasoned, informed, and analytical recommendations to the WMATA Board
                             of Directors, the RAC will be able to create a foundation of trust and
                             mutual respect between itself and WMATA.

Analysis of Selected Mass Transit Advisory Councils

The RAC is not alone in the effort to bridge the gap between public agencies and the people they serve—many other mass transit agencies throughout the United States have advisory councils with similar missions and responsibilities. This section will look at the similarities and differences between the RAC and four other passenger advisory councils at mass transit agencies. A summary table of the transit agencies we selected can be found on pages 14 and 15.

When comparing the selected advisory councils, we classified each board's style, or its approach to interacting with both the public and with the transit agency to which it is an advisor. We discerned three advisory board styles:

- *Low Activity* – Advisory boards which have little official interaction with the mass transit agency to which they are an advisor. Low activity advisory boards tend to be more of a 'sounding board' for the public to provide input on policies and procedures implemented by the transit agency, but do not make many recommendations to the agency's board of directors.

- *Moderate Activity* – Advisory boards which sometimes interact with the mass transit agency to which they are an advisor. Moderate activity advisory boards have some input from the general public on policies and procedures taken by the transit agency and they also make some recommendations to the agency's board of directors.

- *High Activity* – Advisory boards with intense, sometimes antagonistic interactions with the mass transit agency to which they are an advisor. High activity advisory boards not only have extensive input from the general public and from members, but they also make frequent recommendations to the agency's board of directors. High activity advisory boards even create public reports and audits that provide program analysis and evaluation of initiatives undertaken by the transit agency.

It is important to note that these classifications on the activity level of citizen-based advisory councils at mass transit agencies are relative to the five boards we examined and not to an objective standard.

With only one year in service, the RAC must prove itself a worthy body to the WMATA Board of Directors if its recommendations are to be taken seriously by the Board in subsequent years. We believe that the RAC can significantly benefit from and grow to be a stronger, more effective citizen-based organization by analyzing the successes or mistakes of other transit-oriented advisory boards. While some advisory boards have greater interaction with the public than others, and some produce audits and reports while others do not, all seek to integrate citizens into the policymaking process—something we endorse.

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Table 1: Comparison of Selected Advisory Councils of Mass Transit Agencies in the United States

	Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) – Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) [19]	New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (NYMTA) – Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee (PCAC) [20]	San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) – Citizens' Advisory Council (CAC) [21]	Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (SCVTA) – Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) [22]	Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) – Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) [23]
Year Established	1992	1977	2000	1996	2005
Reporting Body	LACMTA Board of Directors	Independent	SFMTA Board of Directors	VTA Board of Directors	WMATA Board of Directors
Number of Members	20	38	15	17	21
Method Members are Chosen	Each principal member of the LACMTA Board of Directors appoints four members to the CAC. Should the appointing LACMTA Board of Directors member leave the Board, the CAC member must seek an appointment from another member of the Board.	Members are appointed by the Governor's office upon the recommendation of county executives and, for New York City, the mayor, public advocate, and borough presidents.	One member is appointed by each of the eleven members of the San Francisco City-County Board of Supervisors; four members are appointed by the mayor.	Members are directly chosen and approved by the Board of Directors.	A selection committee reviews applications and presents their selections to the Board of Directors for appointment.
Composition of Membership	Members of the CAC shall be selected so as to reflect a broad spectrum of interests and all geographic areas of the County.	The PCAC is a regional advisory council made up of three smaller advisory bodies: • Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council (LIRRCC) with 12 members; • Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC) with 11 members; and • New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC) with 15 members. Members must reside in the jurisdictions served by their applicable MTA service (i.e., MNRCC members must reside in a county serviced by the Metro-North Railroad, etc.).	Membership of the Council shall be reflective of the diversity and neighborhoods of San Francisco and all members must be residents of the City or County of San Francisco. Additionally: • 10 members must be regular riders of the Municipal Railway; • At least 2 members must use the Municipal Railway's paratransit system; and • At least 3 members must be over the age of 60.	• 6 citizens from the various city and county groupings noted in the CAC's bylaws*; • 6 citizens representing the following community interests: Senior citizens, Disabled persons, Mass transit users, Environmentalists, Bicyclists, and Pedestrians; and • 5 citizens representing the following business and labor groups: Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group, Homebuilders Association of Northern California, National Association of Industrial and Office Properties, South Bay AFL-CIO Labor Council, and Santa Clara County Chamber of Commerce Coalition.	All members must reside within WMATA's jurisdictional boundaries. Membership is comprised of: • 6 members each from Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia who also represent different WMATA services (i.e., bus, rail, etc.); • 2 at-large members; and • The current chair of the Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee.

Table 1 (Continued)

	Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) – Citizens Advisory Council (CAC)[19]	New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (NYMTA) – Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee (PCAC)[20]	San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) – Citizens' Advisory Council (CAC)[21]	Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (SCVTA) – Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)[22]	Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) – Riders' Advisory Council (RAC)[23]
Mission	The CAC shall consult, and will obtain and collect public input on those matters of interest and concern to the community, and will communicate the CAC's recommendation to the LACMTA. Issues may also be assigned to the CAC by the LACMTA for its review, comment and recommendation. Subject to the direction and concurrence of the LACMTA, the CAC may also engage in such related activities as are appropriate to the discharge of its responsibilities, and bring matters of public concern to the attention of the LACMTA. In meeting its responsibilities, the CAC may conduct meetings and appoint committees and subcommittees.	The purposes of the PCAC are to act as a coordinator and staff resource for the three statutory councils, and to serve as a source of information, timely advice to the NYMTA, its subsidiaries and affiliates about finance, operations, management, planning, and service issues, and to hold the NYMTA Board and senior management accountable to the users of NYMTA facilities.	The Council may provide recommendations to the SFMTA with respect to any matter within SFMTA's jurisdiction, and shall be allowed to present reports to the Board of Directors.	The CAC advises the Santa Clara VTA's Board of Directors on issues and policies referred by the Board of Directors or the General Manager from the perspective of the committee's members and the communities and organizations they represent. It also serves as the oversight body for the 2000 Measure A Transit Sales Tax program, a 30 year funding initiative aimed at extending and improving current VTA services.	The mission of the RAC is to actively seek input from a broad range of riders on operational and budgetary issues that affect Metrorail, Metrobus, and MetroAccess riders and organizations with an expressed interest in public transit; advise the WMATA Board, on ways to resolve such issues in order to improve the Metrorail/bus system and MetroAccess; promote WMATA responsiveness to riders; and recommend possible solutions to the WMATA Board of Directors and staff, based on public input, so that WMATA can effectively address the diverse concerns of the riding public.
Advisory Board Style	Low Activity	High Activity	High Activity	Low Activity	Moderate Activity

* The city/county groupings are: (1) two members from Group 1 (City of San Jose); (2) one member from Group 2 (Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Mountain View, Palo Alto, Santa Clara, and Sunnyvale); (3) one member from Group 3 (Campbell, Cupertino, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, and Saratoga); (4) one member from Group 4 (Gilroy, Milpitas, Morgan Hill); and (5) one member from the County of Santa Clara.

Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Citizens Advisory Council	The Citizens Advisory Council of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) was established by the State of California in 1992 when the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission and the Southern California Rapid Transit District were merged to create the LACMTA. As part of this state law, LACMTA was required to create a citizens advisory council with the express purpose of consulting with and collecting input from members of the public on polices proposed by LACMTA. The Citizens Advisory Council is required to report their findings from the public to their authorizing body, the LACMTA Board of Directors, on a regular basis.[24]

Each principal member of the LACMTA Board of Directors appoints four members to the Citizens Advisory Council, for a total of 20 seats. Members are sponsored by the Director who appointed them—should that Director leave his or her position on the Board of Directors, the Citizens Advisory Council member must either resign from their position or seek an appointment from another member of the Board. Although there are no specific guidelines regarding the demographic composition of the Citizens Advisory Council, members of the Board of Directors who are appointing persons to the Council must strive to select citizens who reflect a broad range of interests and all geographic areas of Los Angeles County.[25]

When reviewing its past agendas and minutes, we found that the Citizens Advisory Council made few recommendations to the LACMTA Board of Directors. When recommendations were made, they had minimal public input. Most meetings focused on presentations by LACMTA staff, followed by a question and answer period with the staff member, and ended with a public comment period that generally had little or no comments.[26] [27] Minutes from the February 2007 meeting showed that the members provided a recommendation to the Board of Directors, but that it focused solely on the composition and membership of the Citizens Advisory Council and not on any programmatic or policy initiative.[28] Because of limited substantive recommendations and public input, the Citizens Advisory Council of the LACMTA can best be classified as a low activity advisory board.

New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee	The Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee (PCAC) of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (NYMTA) was founded by concerned local politicians in 1977 and was given greater authority by the New York State Legislature in 1981. PCAC is one of the longest existing passenger advisory boards in the United States. PCAC serves as the coordinating body and funding mechanism for the three passenger advisory councils created by the state legislature: the Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council (LIRRCC), the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC), and the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC). PCAC is an independent agency that does not directly report to NYMTA but is tasked with being the primary citizen-based source of "informed, timely advice to the [NYMTA], its subsidiaries, and affiliates about finance, operations, management, planning, and service issues."[29] PCAC and its constituent

councils hold regular public hearings, conduct research and audit projects, and maintain a support staff of transportation planners. In addition, PCAC has held a non-voting seat on the NYMTA Board of Directors since 1995.[30]

Members of the PCAC come from each of the individual councils created by the state legislature, for a total of 38 seats on the Committee. Members must be regular users of the NYMTA system and "are appointed by the Governor's office upon the recommendation of county executives and, for New York City, the mayor, public advocate, and borough presidents."[31] While members must reside in the jurisdictions served by their applicable NYMTA service (i.e., MNRCC members must reside in a county serviced by the Metro-North Railroad), there are no other provisions for the demographic makeup of the PCAC or any of its constituent councils.[32]

PCAC's objectives are to increase NYMTA's cost savings while maintaining or even improving service, and to increase the accountability of NYMTA and its officials. PCAC and the three individual councils have full authority to investigate the performance of their applicable entities and are guaranteed cooperation by the State Legislature. In this capacity, the PCAC acts as an independent version of an office of inspector general through the production of financial and performance audits aimed at improving NYMTA services and the agency's accountability. Furthermore, PCAC readily incorporates public input into its reports and recommendations to NYMTA through public comment periods at meetings and through the use of focus groups.[33] Based on its long-standing history, endorsement by the State Legislature, independence from the NYMTA and its Board of Directors, publication of quarterly and annual reports, and more, the PCAC can be considered a high activity advisory board.

San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency's Citizens' Advisory Council

In November 1999, citizens of San Francisco passed Proposition E, an amendment to the City and County Charter that combined the San Francisco Municipal Railway and the San Francisco Department of Parking and Traffic as the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA). This law also created the Citizens' Advisory Council, an advisory board charged with presenting reports and recommendations to the SFMTA Board of Directors on any matter within SFMTA's jurisdiction. The Citizens' Advisory Council reports directly to the SFMTA Board of Directors.[34]

Proposition E established criteria for how members of the Citizens' Advisory Council are to be chosen. Each member of the San Francisco County Board of Supervisors appoints one citizen to the Council and four are appointed by the Mayor of San Francisco for a total of 15 members. Proposition E also required that all members must be residents of the City or County of San Francisco and at least 10 must be regular riders of the Municipal Railway. In addition, at least two members of the Citizens' Advisory Council must be users of the Municipal Railway's paratransit system for disabled riders and three members must be at least 60 years old. Finally, members of the Council must be reflective of the diversity and neighborhoods of San Francisco.[35]

The interaction between the Citizens' Advisory Council, the SFMTA Board of Directors and staff, and the public is extensive. The Citizens' Advisory Council frequently has SFMTA officials present information about current SFMTA policies and operations. The Citizens' Advisory Council not only allows the SFMTA officials to be questioned by Council members, but also invites members of the public to provide comment and ask questions during the presentations—a practice very few transit advisory councils permit. Through our interviews and research, we found that participation during the many public comment periods was well organized, analytically driven, and readily acknowledged by members of the Council.[36] Although all of the other advisory councils we examined have public comment periods, none explicitly permit public comment after any and all agenda items. This interaction between the public, the Citizens' Advisory Council, and staff and Board members of SFMTA is unique and seeks to bridge the gap between citizen and government. Because of its demographic composition, interaction with the public, and recommendations to the Board of Directors, the Citizens' Advisory Council of SFMTA can be considered a high activity advisory board.

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority's Citizens Advisory Committee

The Citizens Advisory Committee of the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (SCVTA) was founded in 1996 by the authority's Board of Directors. The Committee has two primary duties to its reporting body, the SCVTA Board of Directors. First, the Committee advises the Board of Directors on issues and policies referred to it by the Board or the General Manager from the perspective of the Committee's members and the communities and organizations they represent. Second, the Committee serves as the 'Independent Citizen's Watchdog Committee' for the 2000 Measure A Transit Sales Tax program, a 30 year initiative aimed at extending and improving current SCVTA services. In its capacity as the Watchdog Committee, members are required to: (1) hold public meetings and issue reports on at least an annual basis to inform residents in the Santa Clara area on how funds from this tax program are being spent; (2) in complying with the previous requirement, request SCVTA staff to perform an annual independent audit to ensure compliance with the tax program; and (3) again in complying with the first requirement, publish the results of the annual audit and any reports related to the tax program and make these reports available to the public.[37]

The 17 members of the Citizens Advisory Committee are all chosen and approved by the SCVTA Board of Directors. The bylaws of the Committee set specific standards on its membership including members chosen by geographic location, and by community, labor, and business interest groups.[38] See Table 1 for more information.

The bylaws of the Citizens Advisory Committee explicitly state that the Committee is to serve only in an advisory capacity and that it has no authority to communicate outside of the agency.[39] Although the Committee does have some authority in its role as the Watchdog Committee, the SCVTA limits the Committee's overall power by requiring it

to request SCVTA staff to perform the annual audits and produce the associated reports. The Committee is not to actually draft the report and is only permitted to review and comment on these reports prior to their public distribution. Furthermore, the makeup of members from the Citizens Advisory Committee is wholly different from the other advisory boards we observed—only six of the 17 members are 'average' citizens, while the remaining members represent special interests such as labor and business groups. In addition, minutes from the past 12 regular meetings of the Citizens Advisory Committee showed no public comment on any topics. Due to the composition of its members and limited public interaction, the Citizens Advisory Committee of the SCVTA can best be classified as a low activity advisory board.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's Riders' Advisory Council

Compared to the other advisory boards we examined, the RAC has a moderate amount of interaction between its members and citizens and some communication with the WMATA Board of Directors via in-depth reports at each monthly Board meeting and informal conversations outside of official meetings. However, most RAC meetings are sparsely attended by members of the public with an average of one to three people contributing during the public comment period. A limited number of people are even aware of the RAC's existence. The RAC has produced a sizable number of recommendations to the Board of Directors and promises many more, but few of these have been analytically reviewed by RAC members, WMATA staff, or members of the public. As such, we feel that the RAC can best be classified as a moderate activity advisory board— it has an average amount of interaction between citizens and WMATA staff, but has not yet reached the high activity level.

The Role of Customer Relationship Management Database Systems in Public Agencies

Beginning in the latter half of the last century, governments across the United States have become revolutionized by rapidly changing forms of technology. For example, through several executive orders and public laws, the federal government has attempted to expand 'electronic government'—or e-gov—to help improve the way the federal government interacts with citizens, businesses, and state and local governments.[40] Public and private organizations have found the Internet, computers, and other forms of technology to improve efficiency, lower cost, and dramatically increase customization and customer satisfaction.

During our research, we discovered that WMATA already uses a database to respond to and track customer comments—the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database system. CRM is a program that helps manage the relationship between customers (in this case, riders) and providers (in this case, WMATA). Information management experts argue that CRM "recognizes that customers are at the core of the business and that the company's success depends on effectively managing relationships with them."[41] CRM is used by countless private and public organizations with the express purpose of customizing the response between individual customers and the organization. In the case of public organizations using CRM, the system can be seen as an electronic form of civic engagement helping to bridge the gap between citizens and governments.

WMATA unveiled its CRM program agency-wide in January 2006. CRM is used by all major divisions within WMATA (e.g., Metrorail, Metrobus, MetroAccess, etc.), but it is primarily used right now as a customer service tracking and response tool. The comments or complaints entered by riders using the online form found on WMATA's website are automatically entered into CRM as a new case. Among other things, this online form collects the type of incident, the rider's comments, and his contact information. CRM generates an automatic email informing the rider that their comment was received and that they should expect a response shortly. The CRM program then creates a time and date when a response is due, and the appropriate method of response (i.e., email, letter, phone, etc.). The case is forwarded to appropriate personnel who read the comment, draft a response, and send it to the customer. For more information on how CRM is used at WMATA, please see "CRM at Work" on page 21.

Database management systems like CRM have many advantages and capabilities over more traditional customer-organization interactions, including:

- The ability to access and analyze information from a variety of sources is greatly increased;

- Inconsistency and redundancy of data collected is reduced;

CRM at Work: An Example of How WMATA Uses CRM

John Smith* resides in the Pentagon City area of Arlington, Virginia and rides Metrorail's Yellow Line to the Gallery Place-Chinatown station for work both in the morning and evening. While on his way to work one morning, Mr. Smith boarded a Yellow Line train bound for Mt. Vernon Square. After leaving the Pentagon City Station, the train abruptly stopped. When it eventually arrived at the Pentagon Station, the driver came on the public address system and informed passengers that the train needed to be taken out of service and that all passengers had to exit at the Pentagon Station to wait for another train. Mr. Smith was frustrated because he had an important meeting to attend that morning. Mr. Smith arrived to work late and that evening, he decided to file a complaint with WMATA via the agency's online customer comment form. He entered the information shown in Figure 1.

The next morning, Ms. Jane Jones*, a WMATA customer service employee, received an email from the CRM system notifying her of a new case. She logged into the CRM system and saw Mr. Smith's complaint. She looked at the time and date stamp—a tracking device that all cases in CRM use—and determined that she is the appropriate person to respond and that no other WMATA employees have responded to Mr. Smith as of yet. Ms. Jones investigated yesterday's problems on the Yellow Line around the time Mr. Smith noted on the online form. She drafted an email with a response to Mr. Smith in CRM, sent it, and marked the case as 'Closed-Resolved.'

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Smith received the email from Ms. Jones. She apologized for the delay and explained that the train was taken out of service due to a faulty computer system in one of the cars. She went on to state that the problem car has been removed from the Yellow Line and sent to a rail yard where it can be repaired.

* Fictitious names.

Figure 1: WMATA's Online Customer Comment Form

Type	Complaint
Category	Rail
Topic	Vehicle
Incident type	Delay/late
First name	John
Last name	Smith
Email	JSmith@email.address
Address 1	101 Pentagon City Street
Address 2	Apartment 101
City	Arlington
State	Virginia
Zip code	22202
Telephone	(703) 123-4567
Incident date	04/21/2007
Incident time	08:45 A.M.
Bus route no.	n/a
Bus no.	n/a
Rail line	Yellow Line
Car no.	1234
Station	Pentagon
Destination	Gallery Place-Chinatown
Incident address	Pentagon
Incident city	Arlington
Incident state	Virginia
Comments	While on my way to work, the train I was riding on broke down, making me very late. There was no reasonable response from the driver and I would like to know: (1) what happened to cause our train to break down, and (2) what WMATA is doing to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future. Please contact me by email.

- Data can readily be updated, edited, changed, or deleted;

- Since data is interrelated from a variety of sources and cases, changes to one case automatically update related sources and cases;

- Users can very easily search by case type, date, staff member, or any other query;

- Users are able to export information to produce reports for stakeholders and supervisors.[42]

The CRM system at WMATA has allowed riders to interact with this large public agency, and has also improved WMATA's capability to respond to riders' concerns.

Conclusions

This report examined the value of citizen engagement in public decision making and how organizations can best encourage and manage public participation. While there are a variety of ways in which to connect citizens and governments, we focused on the benefits of citizen-based advisory councils, particularly those in mass transit agencies. The RAC is one example of how governments and governmental agencies are attempting to bridge the gap between WMATA and its riders.

In order for this connection to be most effective, the RAC should consider applying some of the operational practices or lessons learned from other citizen-based advisory councils. Although the current RAC is an ambitious body—having already proposed a document with its "Top 65 Initiatives" for the year (see Appendix I), organizing budget workshops, and introducing a myriad of other proposals—it has no formal tracking mechanisms to organize, monitor, or report the many initiatives and recommendations it introduces. Thus, the RAC should take steps to critically think through its recommendations, and clearly prioritize and track its initiatives. Because the RAC is such a newly formed group, implementing these actions will help the RAC members and WMATA officials build a foundation of trust and mutual respect. RAC members desire not to be treated as volunteers but as consultants, offering years of experience, diversity, perspectives, skills, expertise, and a commitment to making WMATA better for all riders.

WMATA has taken great steps to improve its relationship with the public over the past several years. We commend WMATA for the creation of the RAC and encourage continued dialogue as the RAC establishes itself as an effective and influential advisory council. We complement all RAC members for their dedication to improving WMATA and the many hours they donate to ensuring a safer, more transparent, and more efficient public transit system for the Washington, DC area.

Recommendations

In order to increase the organizational effectiveness and credibility of the RAC, and to help create methods allowing the RAC and its members to make more reasoned, informed, and analytical recommendations to the WMATA Board of Directors, we recommend that the Chair of the RAC, the RAC staff coordinator, and other relevant stakeholders including RAC members and WMATA staff, take the following two actions:

(1) modify the existing CRM system to incorporate RAC programmatic initiatives and recommendations; and

(2) implement a simple survey-style tool that facilitates the analysis, tracking, and monitoring of programmatic initiatives or recommendations created by the RAC.

Recommendation One

We recommend that the RAC Chair and the RAC staff coordinator work together with the members of the RAC and the CRM administrator to create the necessary changes that would allow the RAC to become integrated into the CRM system. Some modifications we believe might be necessary include:

- *Source* – Add 'The RAC' as a new source for cases in CRM;

- *Case Type* – Add 'Recommendation' as a new case type; and

- *Category* – Add 'Budget,' Communications,' and 'Safety' as new categories of cases.

WMATA's current CRM system can be adapted to incorporate RAC programmatic initiatives and recommendations to the WMATA Board of Directors. By modifying specific entry forms in the system, the WMATA staff coordinator—who has access to the CRM system—will be able to quickly and easily enter RAC initiatives into CRM. Once a RAC-initiated case is entered into CRM, personnel in the WMATA divisions impacted by the case will be notified by CRM and will be required to take action prior to due dates set by the RAC staff coordinator. The RAC staff coordinator will have the ability to produce reports whenever needed that list due dates, who has reviewed RAC-related cases, and the current status of any RAC-initiated case currently in CRM.

These and any other modifications to CRM should be decided by a collaborative group that includes the RAC Chair, RAC members, the RAC staff coordinator, and the CRM administrator, and other relevant stakeholders. A collaborative working group will ensure that the informational and technological needs of each interested party are met in a satisfactory manner.

After CRM has been adapted to include RAC recommendations, we suggest that the RAC staff coordinator print monthly CRM reports to be reviewed by the RAC and WMATA's Board of Directors. These reports will include the number of cases introduced by the RAC and the current status of each recommendation. This accounting report will keep RAC members and WMATA informed as to what action has been taken on each initiative and what more needs to be done.

Recommendation Two   We recommend that the RAC Chair and the RAC staff coordinator work together with the members of the RAC to implement a simple survey-style tool that will allow RAC members to begin the process of analyzing the programmatic initiatives and recommendations they intend to propose to the Board of Directors, and to allow the RAC staff coordinator to track and monitor these RAC's initiatives as they are analyzed and implemented by WMATA staff. We have created a draft mediating document titled the RAC Tracking Document, or the 'RAC Track' (see Appendix II for examples of blank and completed RAC Track documents). We presented the RAC Track at the regular RAC meeting on April 2, 2007 and received several suggested modifications, which we incorporated throughout the document.

The RAC Track has several benefits, including:

- beginning the analysis and evaluation process before the initiative is presented to the Board of Directors. By starting the analytical process early on, RAC members will have well-constructed arguments in support of their recommendations or initiatives and will be able to recognize any potential weaknesses before the Board of Directors is presented with the recommendation.

- narrowing the scope of the initiatives being considered. We found that several of the 65 initiatives proposed by the RAC at the beginning of this calendar year were rather vague. Narrowing the scope of these initiatives will help RAC members better focus on what steps and actions need to be taken in order for this initiative to be approved by the Board of Directors.

- collecting the required information for future data entry and analysis. Many of the fields in the RAC Track are identical to those found in CRM. A completed RAC Track document will have gathered nearly all the information the RAC staff coordinator will need to enter the recommendation into the CRM system.

We also suggest that no longer than six months after the RAC Track has been implemented, the RAC staff coordinator, RAC Chair, and WMATA officials review the RAC Track's usage and utility. The RAC Track is meant to be an evolving document and may need some additional adjustments to become a more effective analysis and management tool.

We recognize that this initiative tracking system will increase the workload of the RAC staff coordinator. As such, we suggest that after the RAC Track has been implemented, the RAC Chair and WMATA officials—in consultation with the RAC staff coordinator—review the workload of the RAC staff coordinator in order to ensure that he has sufficient time and resources to devote to this tracking system.

Implementing information technology systems—like CRM—and information management practices—like the RAC Track—into the RAC's work would not only benefit the organization and efficiency of the RAC, but also help increase the level of responsiveness it provides WMATA's riders. Increasing the RAC's information technology and management tools will help it achieve the objectives we set out to complete—namely to improve the credibility of the RAC, accountability of WMATA, and communication between the two.

Comments from Stakeholders

We provided a draft version of this report to the current Chair of the RAC, the RAC staff coordinator, and the Director of the Office of Policy and Government Relations at WMATA to review and provide technical clarifications, which we incorporated where appropriate. We also asked all three parties to provide their responses to the report, especially the recommendations. All three parties agreed with both the report and its recommendations, and have given us written permission to reprint their comments below.

Comments from the Chair of the RAC

The efforts under taken by the authors of this report have proven to be extremely helpful in support of my tasks as Chair of the RAC. The analysis and recommendations are beneficial in three ways.

First, the analysis and review of other citizen advisory entities in other mass transit locales provides insight and alternatives to assist the WMATA RAC in its organization and approach as it finds its sea-legs. It is useful to build on the successes of others and also to learn from the mistakes of others as we evolve into an effective organization that serves the riders we represent and provides valid and useful advice to the WMATA Board. Hopefully, the contacts from these other advisory groups will be provided by the authors.

Second, the recommendation to use WMATA's internal CRM system as a foundation for tracking the RAC's initiatives is a highly efficient, cost effective, and rapidly deployable solution to meeting our needs. This solution will allow the RAC to have in place a solution prior to the end of my term as Chair, a significant accomplishment considering the historical cost and time to implement information technology investments. Also, having a solution integrated with WMATA's business practices will allow our staff to be supported, and increase the likelihood that information from our initiatives will be distributed as desired, tracked along with other WMATA customer inquiries, and hopefully receives the attention required.

Finally, the creation of an initiating document and processes provides the RAC with a template methodology for formulating, rationalizing, and processing our initiatives prior to their release. This work product will allow the RAC Chair, and Subcommittee Chairs to better prepare for presentations to other RAC members, provide staff with useful information to be entered into CRM, and provide the appropriate elaboration required to keep the Board properly informed.

I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to the authors of this study, and to the faculty and administration of George Washington University for encouraging the active civil involvement of students as part of their studies. This effort has made a real difference in the quality of the RAC's ability to serve both the public and this mass transit authority.

Daniel Paepke and Cali Ence both were highly professional in the efforts required to conduct their study and publish their final report. From the

first day when Mr. Paepke introduced himself to me at a WMATA Board meeting, through the set-up of our first interview by Ms. Ence, through to the presentation of their status to the full RAC, and their presentation of the draft report; I've been impressed by their preparation, presentation and follow through. In interview situations, they provided alternative dates and times, were punctual and well prepared. A number of times I asked them for pre-meeting agendas, and/or write-up of expectations to allow me to better prepare for our meeting. They accommodated my requests without hesitation. I appreciate this extra effort and their recognition of the value of my time and the time of others they interviewed.

This experience was well worth my efforts and time, and I encourage the continued civic engagement by Mr. Paepke and Ms. Ence upon their graduation. Likewise, I ask that GW encourage other students to consider providing analysis, research, and recommendations in support of WMATA and the WMATA RAC. As part of the initial analysis for this project the authors uncovered numerous other opportunities for study and participation in our efforts.

Comments from the RAC Staff Coordinator

This report provides a good foundation of recommendations for the RAC to use as it moves forward and grows into its mission to represent WMATA's riders. The "RAC Track" evaluation document is well-organized and provides a clear, straightforward process for RAC members to perform an initial "self-evaluation" of a proposed initiative. Its requirement that "rider benefit" and order-of-magnitude cost estimates be provided as part of a recommendation is helpful to give RAC members an idea of the scope of their proposal. It may have also been helpful to include a section in the "RAC Track" where the RAC can lay out specifically how its suggestion differs from existing WMATA policy. On the whole, the document is a good tool to focus the RAC's recommendations, and to clearly describe the suggestions to WMATA's Board of Directors and agency staff tasked with evaluating the suggestions.

The recommendation that the RAC's suggestions be tracked via WMATA's CRM software is also helpful because it allows WMATA to integrate the RAC's suggestions into an existing process, rather than create a whole new framework for interacting with the RAC. Like the first recommendation, it will require some modification by the RAC, but the modification process has the potential to increase the RAC's acceptance of using this system. Both recommendations demonstrate show that the researchers took time to understand the dynamic between WMATA and the RAC before drafting recommendations and took the time to gather information from several sources. The researchers were very professional in their approach to scheduling meetings and were engaged and professional during meetings and interviews. The quality of their report suggests significant attention to detail and analysis of information. It was a pleasure to work with these students and I look forward to them presenting their findings to the Riders' Advisory Council.

Comments from the Director, Office of Policy and Government Relations

Cali Ence and Daniel Paepke did a superb job in developing a tracking system for WMATA's Riders' Advisory Council. They performed an excellent service for both the RAC and for WMATA. Given that the RAC is still in its formative stages, few processes and procedures have been put into place to structure the RAC's recommendations. The RAC Track not only will help to focus each RAC recommendation, but also will give WMATA a management tool to ensure responsiveness to the RAC. It is particularly gratifying that Cali and Dan figured out a way to integrate their recommendations into WMATA's existing business processes. They did not "re-invent the wheel", but rather determined a way to help WMATA use our existing CRM system – but take it a step further.

I was extremely curious to read the background research to see how WMATA's RAC compares to RACs throughout the country. I found their research thorough and full of insights as to how other RACs work. Their classification of "Low – High" RAC activity levels provides a useful tool in evaluating RAC's operational styles and some analysis as to what RAC traits and practices tend to lead to RACs being a more effective advisory board.

In reading their report, I had very few edits to the paper because it is well thought out and structured. It is factually correct and presented in a very balanced manner.

Cali and Dan were exceptionally professional in their approach to this project. They not only appeared professional, but also conducted their research and interactions with the RAC and WMATA staff in a thoroughly business-like manner. They were respectful of WMATA staff time; eager to learn; very well-prepared; enthusiastic about their project; and very personable.

RAC RIDERS' ADVISORY COUNCIL

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

February 15. 2007

Mr. Deegan and Metro Board Members,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to present the February 2007 Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) report to the Board. This written report discusses the establishment of five RAC subcommittees; outlines the RAC's concerns surrounding the fiscal year 2008 budget and safety and security issues; introduces the RAC's tracking initiatives; and includes a formal request for RAC Bylaw clarifications.

Establishment of RAC Subcommittees:

For 2007, the RAC has established five subcommittees designed to solicit rider input, generate initiatives, identify solutions or alternatives, and follow through with Metro and the Board for action. These subcommittees are:

- Bus Subcommittee – Dedicated to MetroBus service issues including operations, scheduling, safety, and improvements to services for the communities served by this mode of transportation.

- Rail Subcommittee – Dedicated to MetroRail, MetroRail Stations, elevator/escalator, and parking-related services, including safety, cleanliness, recycling, lighting, bicycle/pedestrian/special needs accessibility, infrastructure, expansion, and improvement to services for the communities served by this mode of transportation.

- Budget Subcommittee – Dedicated to exploring opportunities for Metro to increase non-fare revenue, identify cost saving measures, and to vet management recommendations for changes in fares and services, with the goal of maximizing customer value in transit services consumed.

- Communication and Customer Service Subcommittee – Dedicated to exploring improvements to customer communication regarding transit services and better outreach to riders that rely on these services via the vast array of media used by Metro, including signs, announcements, the web site, advertising, event publicity, system outage alerts, and disaster/emergency planning.

- Personnel, Rules and Administration Subcommittee – Dedicated to assisting the RAC and the other Subcommittees in establishing and supporting processes, procedures, resources, and general housekeeping.

One of my goals this year is to encourage Subcommittee Chairs to meet, preferably monthly, with Metro management counterparts to follow-up on initiatives, offer our services to review strategic activities, and to share input received from riders. Below are some examples of initial meetings that have taken place:

Ms. Lillian White, Rail Subcommittee Chair, and I met with Mr. Fred Goodine and others in the System Safety Division to learn more about the dynamics and engineering around slow speed

derailments, and other safety related initiatives. We anticipate some forthcoming recommendations based on these discussions following a Subcommittee meeting dedicated to this topic.

Ms. Aline Stone, Communications and Customer Service Subcommittee Chair, and I met with Mr. Ray Feldmann and his Division Directors to familiarize us with advertising, outreach, media relations, government relations and the other services designed to keep Metro Riders well informed.

Additionally, Ms. Stone and I organized last week's RAC meeting presentation by Mr. Murry Bond on opportunities for exploring alternatives for increasing non-fare revenues through advertising and other initiatives. As an initiative of the Budget Subcommittee, we plan to continue this dialogue to help strike a well-reasoned balance between the level of tasteful advertising in the Metro system, the value of services which are funded by advertising revenue integrated with information riders consider useful, and complimentary support for the arts.

Mr. Kevin Moore, Budget Subcommittee Chair, and RAC staff continues to work with Mr. Rick Harcum of Management and Budget, Mr. Ray Feldmann, and Ms. Deborah Lipman to move forward on RAC-sponsored workshops. We anticipate a press release and other forms of outreach to continue our effort to generate innovative and creative ideas that will improve the quality of Metro services, expand peak capacity, and increase the use of under-utilized resources as the fiscal year 2008 budget evolves.

Metro's Fiscal Year 2008 Budget:

In conversations with Mr. Catoe and Mr. Deegan last week, and in public statements, Mr. Catoe stated that, with regard to the fiscal year 2008 budget, "*before I go back to the board to discuss fare increases, Metro needs to be **as lean as possible**.*" As customers of Metro services, the RAC would like assurance that this does not mean that Metro will be cutting services, making changes that would impact the quality of services, or limit Metro's ability to expand to meet the needs of a growing Regional demand.

Moreover, in conversations with management representing Management and Budget, Customer Communications, and Safety, the RAC is concerned that across the board budget cuts like hiring freezes, reduced marketing to expand off-peak ridership, and slow downs in capital infrastructure investments could have an adverse impact on safety, quality, and revenue. The RAC fully supports healthy pruning of low-payback resources, provided that Metro is not cutting into the heart-wood of the Authority that implements basic transit services.

Safety and Security of Metro:

At the January 2007 Board Meeting, I asked Mr. Catoe and the Metro Board to make safety and security, Metro's #1 priority. Since his appointment, Mr. Catoe has stressed the importance of having a good safety record. He said that, "while we have a strong safety record, we must have a safety record that is second to none" and that the system is "safe, but not safe enough." Mr. Catoe has detailed a new safety initiative that the RAC fully endorses, which includes empowering all employees to proactively implement safety measures. This is a strong cultural change that cannot just be a slogan, but must be part of every Metro employee's core values including the desire to achieve excellence in customer service and communication with customers.

A desire for improvements to safety and security within the system is not a new theme. The RAC and the Elderly and Disabled Committee have been strongly recommending changes that could improve on customer, employee and system safety. One initiative, I'll highlight is a desire to have

bumpy domes installed at every rail station. In my observation of passengers waiting for a train, most people stand in back of the bumpy domes, which provide a full 3 ½ feet of clearance from the trains' envelope. When only a granite edge is present this clearance is cut by more than half. The RAC endorses an aggressive schedule to install bumpy domes in the remaining stations and a safety campaign to encourage customers to wait behind the bumpy domes. The installation of bumpy domes benefits both the special needs community and the general riding public.

Initiative Tracking:

Last month's report presented the initial goals for the Bus, Budget, and Rail Subcommittees of the RAC. These goals are key to making improvements to the system. The RAC has moved forward with a process to formally track initiatives received from Riders at town hall meetings and through our activities as a Council. With the help of two GW Master's Candidates who are working with the RAC as their final project, the RAC will be developing a process and system to record initiatives, identify a RAC subcommittee and RAC member as sponsor, track the progress in communication with the Board or Metro Staff, record cost and timelines, and hopefully celebrate their completion or closure. As the saying goes "what gets measured gets done, what gets celebrated gets done well."

Resolution:

Last month, Mr. Dennis Jaffe, as part of the public comment period raised his concerns about an unfortunate incident in which a MetroBus driver used a slur against a rider, and he had hoped the victim would receive an in-person apology. I encourage you to examine this issue in the context of Metro management's ability to motivate all employees to deliver quality service to the public, and to continually improve.

As a unanimous resolution, the RAC urges Metro to thoroughly investigate what actions and the tools other governmental agencies have at management's disposal to address the use of unacceptable slurs by union employees.

Bylaw Clarification Requests:

A member of the 2006 RAC, Mr. Rodney Elin, has expressed interest in continuing to volunteer his time and energy to the efforts of the RAC by serving on two of our subcommittees. I have also been approached by some of the over 950 applicants who submitted RAC applications about opportunities to participate as members of a subcommittee. Lastly, the Rail Committee Chair has expressed a desire to have expert assistance in the form of an engineer, who can help us to better understand the dynamics of Rail Car engineering, specifically engineering around slow speed derailments. In my occupation as a consultant to the U.S. Department of Transportation, I have identified an engineer who is very interested in serving on the Rail Subcommittee. Robert's Rules of Order allows the Chair of the RAC to appoint subcommittee members who are not members of the body, with the approval of the body. The RAC has asked for guidance from the Board, as the entity that created the RAC, on whether they endorse this practice and if endorsed would the Board prefer these non-RAC members serve as non-voting members of the subcommittee.

Concluding Remarks:

Following last month's Report to the Board I was informed that the RAC had a full plate with all the goals and initiatives presented. These initiatives are key to making improvements to the system as in the words of Mr. Catoe "it moves from good to great".

To make our initiatives reality, I've challenged each and every RAC members to take ownership of a few initiatives and drive them home. This way we'll be able to tackle a very aggressive agenda. I've included as an attachment the top 65 initiatives the RAC will be tracking, and hope to closeout many of them this coming year. In subsequent reports I'll generate a report out of our tracking system that will explain in more detail the initiative, our progress, and other supporting information. In my meeting with Mr. Catoe and Mr. Deegan last week I reiterated the need to empower all Metro employees to do the same. Metro's customer service initiatives are recorded on Customer Comment forms and recorded in a database. The processes used by Metro must include following up on the satisfaction of Metro's response to these complaints, questions, comments, and commendations to seek input into how Metro can do even better. I'll reiterate, "what gets measured gets done, what gets celebrated gets done well."

Again, I ask you to find opportunities for the RAC to participate in focus groups, workshops, and media events as Metro addresses the challenges of budgeting, operations, planning, communication, safety, security, and other critical services. I want everyone at Metro in the pre-planning phase of a new initiative to ask:

What would Metro's customers on the RAC think of this idea?

I. Michael Snyder
Chair, Riders' Advisory Council

[ATTACHMENT]

Riders' Advisory Council
Top 65 Initiatives

	Bus	Rail	Budget	Communications	Other
1	Pedestrian Safety	5000 Car Derailments	Ad Revenue	Signage	Police Presence
2	Schedules	Bump Domes	Overtime Policy	Web Site	Elevator / Escalator Reliability
3	System Maps	Operator Audibility	Event Marketing	Trip Planner	**MetroAccess Door to Door** *
4	Safety Check	Station Lighting	Dedicated Funding	PIDS Outside Stations	MetroAccess Patron Tracking
5	Operator Announcements	Newspaper Recycling	Sensible Fares	Electronic Signage	MetroAccess Scheduling
6	NextBus	River Crossings	Three-Tier Fares	Non-Internet Calendar, FAQ, etc	Snow and Ice Safety
7	Rationalize Bus Stops	Off Peak Capacity	Parking Reuse	Event Notifications	Security Cameras
8	Disabled Rider Waiting Area	Peak Capacity	Sensible Marketing	Emergency Evacuation	Facility Perimeter Security
9	Express Bus Service	Dulles Line	Credit Cards for Parking	Station Greeters	Eating, Drinking, and Smoking Policy
10	Bunching	Pedestrian and Bike Access	SmartTrip Program	Smoking on Escalators	Bike Lockers
11	Late Night Service	A-Frame Signs	Other Non-Fare Revenue	Stand Right / Walk Left	Investment in the Arts
12	Shelter Safety and Safety Zones	Security Cameras	Outsourcing Policy	SmartTrip Marketing	ATM Machines
13	Trash and Graffiti	Door Standards for better Flow	Intern Policy	Parking Lots Full	Cell Service

* Done!

Appendix II: RAC Tracking Document – Instructions, Blank Form, and Completed Form

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE RAC TRACKING DOCUMENT

Purpose: The RAC Assessment Document begins the analysis and evaluation process, narrows the scope of the initiatives being considered, and collects the required information for future data entry and analysis.

Fields to Complete:

Sponsoring RAC Member: Enter the name of the RAC member sponsoring this initiative.

Date: Enter the date the initiative is first analyzed.

Initiative Title: Enter a short title for the initiative.

Issue Description: Briefly describe the main objectives or points of the initiative.

Case Type: Select the type of case this initiative describes:

Policy – Initiatives that impact WMATA policies.
Example – An initiative aimed at improving emergency evacuation procedures for Metro stations.
Operational – Initiatives that attempt to change WMATA operations or procedures.
Example – An initiative aimed at increasing the locations bus maps are distributed.
Budgetary – Initiatives that impact the WMATA budget.
Example – An initiative aimed at creating dedicated funding for WMATA.

Category: Select the category this initiative most directly affects.

How does this initiative affect riders?: Describe how this initiative will affect riders using WMATA services.

Recommended Action: Describe the steps required to implement this initiative and any further recommendations to the Board of Directors.

Required Resources: Enter the following pieces of information:

Estimated Cost – Provide an assessment of the implementation and future costs of this initiative.
WMATA Staff – Provide an assessment of the impact this initiative will have on WMATA staff, especially if new staff will need to be hired.
Other Resources – Provide an assessment of any other resources that are required to implement this initiative or recommendation.

Estimated Timeframe for Completion: Enter the estimated amount of time it will take to fully implement this initiative.

Has the RAC Voted on this Issue Before?: If known, determine if this issue has already come before the RAC. If so, enter the date and describe what actions were taken and their results.

Submit Completed RAC Track to Whom?: If known, enter the name(s) of the appropriate WMATA staff member, representative of the Board of Directors, or relevant department within WMATA that should respond to this initiative or recommendation.

Next Step: Place a checkmark next to the appropriate action to take:

Further Analysis: Choose this option if more time is needed to research and evaluate the initiative in order to make an informed recommendation. In the space provided, specify the time needed to complete the evaluation.
Submit to Customer Comment Form: Choose this option if the initiative is mainly a customer service issue (such as a delayed train, a very specific problem for one customer or one location, etc.). **If this option is chosen, it is the responsibility of the Sponsoring RAC Member to enter this information into WMATA's Online Customer Comment Form found at** http://www.wmata.com/riding/ridercomment.cfm.
Enter into CRM Database System: Choose this option if the initiative is a policy or budgetary recommendation, or another broad reaching issue. Make certain that all information in the RAC Tracking Document is completed and submit the form via email to John Pasek, RAC Staff Coordinator, at jpasek@wmata.com.

RAC TRACKING DOCUMENT

SPONSORING RAC MEMBER: [____]

DATE: [____] (Enter as MM/DD/YYYY)

INITIATIVE TITLE: [____]

ISSUE DESCRIPTION:
Enter a brief description of the issue here.

CASE TYPE: ☐ Policy ☐ Operational ☐ Budgetary ☐ Other: [____]

CATEGORY: ☐ Bus ☐ Rail ☐ MetroAccess ☐ Budget ☐ Comm. ☐ Safety ☐ Other: [____]

HOW DOES THIS INITIATIVE AFFECT RIDERS?
Describe how this initiative will affect riders using WMATA services.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:
Describe the steps required to implement this initiative and any further recommendations to WMATA.

REQUIRED RESOURCES:

   Estimated Cost: [____]

   WMATA Staff: [____]

   Other Resources: [____]

ESTIMATED TIMEFRAME FOR COMPLETION: [____]   ☐ Weeks(s)   ☐ Month(s)   ☐ Year(s)

HAS THE RAC VOTED ON THIS ISSUE BEFORE?   ☐ Yes (Date: [____])   ☐ No

If yes, what actions were taken and what were the results? [____]

SUBMIT COMPLETED RAC TRACK TO WHOM? (Specific WMATA Staff Member, WMATA Board of Directors, Department within WMATA, etc.): [____]

NEXT STEP: *If initiative requires more time to research and evaluate potential RAC recommendations:*
   ☐ Further Analysis to be Reevaluated in Specify Timeframe
      Date Submitted: [____] (Enter as MM/DD/YYYY)

   If initiative is mainly a customer service issue (train delayed, specific station problem, etc.):
   ☐ Sponsoring RAC Member enters into WMATA's Online Customer Comment Form
      Date Submitted: [____] (Enter as MM/DD/YYYY)

   If initiative is a policy or budgetary recommendation or a broad reaching issue:
   ☐ RAC Staff Coordinator enters into WMATA's CRM Database System
      Date Submitted: [____] (Enter as MM/DD/YYYY)

SUBMIT ALL COMPLETED FORMS TO THE RAC STAFF COORDINATOR

RAC STAFF COORDINATOR USE ONLY: Date Processed: [____]   CRM Case Number: [____]

RAC TRACKING DOCUMENT

SPONSORING RAC MEMBER: John Smith	**DATE:** 4/21/2007 (Enter as MM/DD/YYYY)

INITIATIVE TITLE: Dedicated Funding Recommendation

ISSUE DESCRIPTION:
Provided that the National Capital Transportation Amendments Act of 2007 passes Congress, WMATA must take several steps in order to receive federal funding of approximately $1.5 billion over a ten year time period. Most notably, in order to receive this funding, the District of Columbia, the State of Maryland, and the Commonwealth of Virginia must all provide WMATA with a permanent source of dedicated funding. DC has already passed legislation to create dedicated funding—Maryland and Virginia must do the same to receive federal funding.

CASE TYPE: ☐ Policy ☐ Operational ☑ Budgetary ☐ Other:

CATEGORY: ☐ Bus ☐ Rail ☐ MetroAccess ☑ Budget ☐ Comm. ☐ Safety ☐ Other:

HOW DOES THIS INITIATIVE AFFECT RIDERS?
- Limits fare increases in the long-term
- Improves safety and fleet maintenance
- Helps ensure continued (and potentially, increased) services

RECOMMENDED ACTION:
The RAC strongly encourages the WMATA Board of Directors to encourage the State of Maryland and the Commonwealth of Virginia to match the District of Columbia's sales tax initiative that would provide WMATA with a source of dedicated funding.

REQUIRED RESOURCES:

    Estimated Cost: Low (Less than $10,000, not including salaries)

    WMATA Staff: High (Will require a great amount of input from nearly all WMATA divisions)

    Other Resources: n/a

ESTIMATED TIMEFRAME FOR COMPLETION: Five	☐ Weeks(s) ☐ Month(s) ☑ Year(s)
HAS THE RAC VOTED ON THIS ISSUE BEFORE?	☐ Yes (Date:) ☑ No

If yes, what actions were taken and what were the results?

SUBMIT COMPLETED RAC TRACK TO WHOM? (Specific WMATA Staff Member, WMATA Board of Directors, Department within WMATA, etc.): Elizabeth M. Hewlett, Chair, WMATA Board of Directors

NEXT STEP: *If initiative requires more time to research and evaluate potential RAC recommendations:*
    ☐ Further Analysis to be Reevaluated in Specify Timeframe
        Date Submitted: _____ (Enter as MM/DD/YYYY)

If initiative is mainly a customer service issue (train delayed, specific station problem, etc.):
    ☐ Sponsoring RAC Member enters into WMATA's Online Customer Comment Form
        Date Submitted: _____ (Enter as MM/DD/YYYY)

If initiative is a policy or budgetary recommendation or a broad reaching issue:
    ☑ RAC Staff Coordinator enters into WMATA's CRM Database System
        Date Submitted: 4/21/2007 (Enter as MM/DD/YYYY)

SUBMIT ALL COMPLETED FORMS TO THE RAC STAFF COORDINATOR

RAC STAFF COORDINATOR USE ONLY: Date Processed: 4/23/2007   CRM Case Number: 07-12345

Appendix III: Acknowledgments

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