



Metro Entertainment Program Executive Summary

Purpose:

As an integral part of the community, Metro has been opening doors and helping to positively shape communities for 30 years. Metro has been the literal conduit that connects people in this geographically and culturally diverse Washington Metropolitan region. As a natural extension to this vital role, staff proposes consideration of a Metro Entertainment Program to further integrate the community at large into the Metro experience thereby providing a more enjoyable and dynamic experience for customers and visitors.

Accordingly, staff is providing this information to the Board regarding similar programs at other transit systems and seeking the Board's guidance on the various approaches which could be pursued to implement such a program in the Metro system. If ultimately approved, staff also would seek the Board's approval to amend the Authority's Use Regulations to meet the needs of the program and to seek changes to ordinances in the jurisdictions that support WMATA's current Use Regulations governing entertainment in the Metrorail system.

Background:

Entertainment is a standard feature in major transit systems around the globe. As Metro operates a world-class system in a region that contains what is arguably one of the world's most important cities, it is appropriate to extend such a feature to those who ride the Metro system. The goal of an entertainment program would be to enliven and humanize the customer environment and to attract more riders and revenue to the system, most notably during off-peak hours when operating costs are fixed regardless of ridership levels. Moreover, by staging performances that attract both current and prospective customers, Metro entertainment sites become exciting destinations and further strengthen the system's integration into the vibrant life of the region. In effect, Metro would be a place to come to rather than just through.

Since its inception, WMATA has not authorized performances by performers inside Metrorail stations as its Use Regulations prohibit this sort of activity except by Joint Promotions partners, such as radio stations, with the purpose of generating off-peak ridership. On such occasions, the promotions occur in unpaid or "free" areas of stations. To support WMATA's original Use Regulations, the jurisdictions long ago enacted ordinances precluding performances underground in the Metrorail system. Therefore, if an entertainment program were approved, staff would be seeking changes to those jurisdictional ordinances to support WMATA's revised Use Regulations with regard to the Metro Entertainment Program. Note that while waiting for jurisdictional changes, the entertainment program could still proceed above ground with the needed WMATA Use Regulation changes.

Other Transit Agencies:

Entertainment programs have been launched successfully in other major markets, including transit systems in New York City, Chicago and Paris, where entertainment activities are authorized with varying levels of control. New York MTA has the most unique program in that performers/entertainers (e.g., actors, dancers, vocalists, musicians, jugglers, pantomimes, magicians, orators) audition for access to stations. Volunteer professionals from the arts and entertainment industry audition the applicants before they are granted a permit. Chicago Transit Authority allows performances at designated stations that have the proper space and structure to support entertainment venues. Paris Metro operates with less demand on structure and supports the playing of musical instruments in the transit system.

Proposed Metro Entertainment Program:

WMATA's Entertainment program could be structured in various ways, none of which is mutually exclusive.

1. One element is the expanded Joint Promotions Partnership model which would allow for partners (such as Ringling Brothers, Shakespeare Theater, Washington Performing Arts Society, etc.) to present specific performances to promote their events. These Joint Promotions Partners would not provide ongoing performances and would be event-related. Given the empirical nature of their professionalism, they would bypass the audition process.
2. The second element would build upon the existing Arts in Transit Program which consists of permanent artwork in the system. This element would seek sponsorship monies to support paid entertainment at various times and in varying locations within the Metro system.
3. The third element of the proposed program could be called the "open audition" model. This would entail an Entertainment Selection Committee comprised of individuals from artistic disciplines throughout the region who reflect diverse artistic and cultural viewpoints. A committee would convene periodically to conduct auditions to ensure that performers selected for the program demonstrate the talents and skills required of their respective art form. Entertainers would perform at scheduled locations, days and times.

ACTION:

Management is seeking guidance on the Board's general interest in an entertainment program in the WMATA system and specifically their interest in the various elements described above.