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June 25, 2009

Chairman Graham and Members of the Board:

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

Interfacing with Riders and Communities

At its June meeting, the Council received presentations on three aspects of Metro's interface with riders and communities. Tom Harrington briefed the Council on a recently-begun study that will identify opportunities for improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities; Scottie Borders updated the Council on the bus stop information study; and Eric Gilliland, the Executive Director of the Washington Area Bicyclists' Association (WABA), gave an overview of WABA's ideas for how transit and cycling can complement each other in terms of providing transportation choices for the region. Members are encouraged that Metro is looking to improve access for the large numbers of riders who access Metro either by walking or bicycling and hope to encourage public participation in the study.

The Council's questions raised a number of issues regarding bus information and pedestrian/bicycle access. Members inquired about how Metro coordinates with member jurisdictions on bicycle, pedestrian and informational issues and the benefits of dedicated pedestrian/bicycle coordinators in local transportation agencies; how bus stop information will integrate NextBus and the new Express service and suggestions for including additional information on significant mid-route destinations; questions about how escalator and elevator outages impact pedestrian and bicycle access; and options for improving bike access—such as allowing bikes on “reverse-commute” trips during rush hour and permitting bicyclists to carry bikes on stairs.

NextBus

As I reported in May, for the past several weeks volunteers from the Riders' Advisory Council and the Accessibility Advisory Committee have been beta testing the NextBus real-time information system scheduled for public launch on July 1st. Beta test of the website initiated in early May and beta test of the telephone Interactive Voice Response system began in late May. By and large, users have found the system to be a useful service. It is our hope that the feedback provided by beta test participants as well as additional testing by Metro identifies remaining bugs and with the system are ironed out by the public roll out.

In addition, Metro staff provided a viewing and feedback session for Metro's NextBus web portal for R.A.C. and AAC members. Participants made a number of suggestions regarding the web-based access to NextBus, many of which involved cross-referencing NextBus information and other sources of information on the website. We were also glad to see the draft FAQs and look forward to providing input on those as well.

FY2010 Budget and Planning for FY2011

As riders, members of the Council are extremely appreciative of all of the work that the Board and Metro staff put into developing the Authority's FY2010 Budget, which you will vote on today. That Metro has been able to largely avoid the fare increases and deep cuts in service originally proposed for the system is a testament both to the diligent work of Board members, Metro staff, engaged members of the public and to the vital role that Metro plays in the National Capital Region. Thank you for your hard work throughout the past several months.

I was pleased to hear the Board's recent discussion concerning the development of the FY2011 budget, and to see the Board articulate a schedule for that process. I am glad that schedule includes opportunity for early public dialogue in the developing budget. I find these actions by the Board heartening, particularly in light of the R.A.C.'s suggestion in our letter of April 23rd that early opportunity for public involvement in the FY2011 budget would increase transparency in both process and decision-making. The Council looks forward to working with the Board of Directors beginning next fall to help advance a thoughtful public dialogue on how Metro can meet the challenges that it will face in the coming year and beyond.

Council Working Groups and AAC Report

Our Customer Service Standards Working Group met and discussed the overall organization of the Standards. We developed initial suggestions on how to organize the standards and present material as both an internally-facing and customer-facing document.

At its June 3rd meeting, the Council decided to form a Governance Working Group with two goals: develop recommendations to the Board on Bylaw revisions, and create a forum to have focused discussions about R.A.C. procedures. The first meeting of this Working Group is scheduled for Tuesday, June 30th.

In addition, Susan Holland, R.A.C. and AAC member, reported to the R.A.C. on recent work by the AAC and Metro staff to provide training for individuals with disabilities on how to use the fixed route bus and rail systems. The purpose of this project is to provide better access to the fixed route system for the benefit of both individuals with disabilities and Metro. Perhaps this program will provide some additional benefits by identifying types of information also useful to able-bodied Metro riders.

Comings and Goings

Robin White, representing Fairfax County and Lora Routt representing Montgomery County resigned their R.A.C. positions. Both will be missed. The Council looks forward to the Board appointing new members to fill current vacancies.

Thank you for your attention. I would welcome the opportunity to answer any questions that you may have.

Diana Zinkl
2009 Chair
WMATA Riders' Advisory Council