

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Board Action/Information Summary

☒ Action ☐ Information

MEAD
Number:
202150

Resolution:
☒ Yes ☐ No

TITLE:

Bus Transformation Project

PRESENTATION SUMMARY:

The Executive Steering Committee is seeking Board endorsement of the Bus Transformation Project's vision, goals, strategy, and recommendations.

PURPOSE:

Seek Board endorsement of the Bus Transformation Project's vision, goals, strategy, and recommendations, which were presented as an information item on December 12, 2019.

DESCRIPTION:

In September 2018, Metro, its partner jurisdictions, and local transit agencies launched the Bus Transformation Project with the goal to create a bold, new vision and a collaborative action plan for the future of bus in the region. Three briefings have occurred to date that updated the Board on the project's goals, timeline, and deliverables; draft strategy and recommendations; final Strategy and Action Plan.

Contractors and Interested Parties Involved in the Work: **AECOM, Boston Consulting Group (BCG), Foursquare Integrated Transportation Planning, and NeoNiche Strategies**

Key Highlights:

- The Bus Transformation Project was organized as an independent assessment of the region's bus system to gain regional consensus on a vision and collaborative action

plan for the future of bus in the region and the role of Metrobus within the bus system. The project's Executive Steering Committee (ESC) guided the strategy's development and was comprised of recognized regional leaders. Over 35 project committee meetings were held to gain consensus from local bus providers, state and local departments of transportation, advocates, community organizations, and riders. A full list of all committee members can be found in the Strategy Summary and Action Plan Summary located at www.bustransformationproject.com.

- The Strategy incorporates four key recommendations: Frequent and convenient bus service; Bus priority on roadways; Customer experience; and a Task Force to implement the Strategy. Within the four categories, a set of 26 more specific recommendations were provided.

Background and History:

Buses are an integral part of the National Capital Region's transportation system and carry over 620,000 trips per day over a network that reaches 81 percent of the region's residents. Metro and the other local providers like ART, CUE, DASH, DC Circulator, Fairfax Connector, Ride On, and TheBus affordably connect residents to jobs, school, and other aspects of daily life. However, traffic is increasing and bus speeds are decreasing, leading to longer travel times and unreliability in getting to a destination. Customer expectations have changed and there is increased competition for fewer passengers. Government budgets are under pressure to do more with less. Bus's market share is eroding as competition becomes more plentiful and, in some cases, more affordable. The allure of new technology, such as autonomous cars, distracts from the fact that driverless cars and transportation network companies (TNCs), such as Uber and Lyft, won't solve the region's mobility problem without defying the laws of physics and geometry. Empirical research points to the likelihood that the new options will make current problems worse.

The Executive Steering Committee released the Bus Transformation Strategy on September 5, 2019 after

incorporating comments gathered in the spring and summer of 2019 from the general public, project stakeholders, local jurisdictions, regional transportation boards, and the WMATA Board. The Strategy has four key recommendations: Frequent and convenient bus service; Bus priority on roadways; Customer experience; and a Task Force to implement the Strategy. Within the key recommendations, a set of 26 more specific recommendations were established.

A multi-year Action Plan was released on December 9, 2019 to prioritize the Strategy's recommendations to ensure maximum impact. The milestones and duration to implement each recommendation are based on each recommendation's transformational potential and the challenges involved in implementation. The Action Plan incorporates feedback from the project's Technical Team and Strategy Advisory Panel, as well as from a survey of bus providers and departments of transportation to gather progress to date. All documents are available at www.bustransformationproject.com.

Earlier briefings to the Board occurred on [January 24, 2019](#), [July 25, 2019](#), and [December 12, 2019](#).

Discussion:

Extensive public and stakeholder engagement, which has been integral since the project's launch, enabled the development of the strategy. The project was led by the Executive Steering Committee (ESC), with additional stakeholder groups including the WMATA Leadership Team, a Technical Team, and a Strategic Advisory Panel. The Technical Team was comprised of subject matter experts from Metro, local and state departments of transportation, and local bus providers. The Strategy Advisory Panel was comprised of transit agencies, transportation agencies, advocates, community organizations, and riders.

The outcomes of the Bus Transformation Project are both the Strategy, which provides direction for the regional bus system with four key recommendations, and a multi-year Action Plan, which outlines the specific implementation steps and milestones to advance the recommendations. The vision is that 'Bus will be the mode of choice on the region's roads by 2030, serving as the

backbone of a strong and inclusive regional mobility system.’
Goals include regional connectivity, rider experience, financial stewardship, sustainable economic health and access to opportunity, and equity.

Following the Metro Board of Directors’ endorsement of the Strategy, the Strategy and Action Plan will be presented to regional transportation board and local elected councils/boards at each jurisdiction.

The individual elements of the Action Plan will be implemented by Metro, and each jurisdiction, over the next several years. Execution towards several key recommendations are already underway in Metro’s FY 2021 budget process, including full transfer discount between local bus and Metrorail, regional passes, and mobile solutions to plan and pay for a trip. Additional action plan elements concerning planning and funding will be presented to the Board for decisions within the year.

FUNDING IMPACT:

This is the endorsement of a strategy. Board Action directs staff to integrate recommendations into applicable budget, plans, policies, at which time budget implications will be identified.	
Project Manager:	Allison Davis
Project Department/Office:	PLAN/SPPM

TIMELINE:

Previous Actions	May 2018: Consultant awarded contract for Bus Transformation Project September 2018: Kick-off Summit for all stakeholders November 2018: Completed first round of public engagement; Completed strategic considerations discussion with each committee Winter-Spring 2019: Draft strategies developed
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	May 2019: Draft strategy and recommendations released for public and stakeholder comment June 2019: Completed second public survey and open houses. Completed listening sessions and presentations with project committees July 2019: Complete presentations and discussions with regional transportation organizations September 2019: Strategy and recommendations released. Begin work on Action Plan December 2019: Complete Action Plan for implementation, including input from project committees and bus providers
Anticipated actions after presentation	January - March 2020: Present Strategy and Action Plan to regional transportation boards and local elected councils/boards at each jurisdiction

RECOMMENDATION:

Resolution to endorse the Bus Transformation Strategy

SUBJECT: DRAFT ENDORSEMENT OF BUS TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

RESOLUTION
OF THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
OF THE
WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

WHEREAS, Pursuant to Compact Section 9(b) and Board Bylaws Article II.1, the Board is primarily responsible for policy, financial direction, oversight, and WMATA's relationships with its customers, jurisdictional partners, and signatories; and d

WHEREAS, The Washington, D.C. area relies on an integrated transportation network, in which buses play an essential role as the most efficient mode of surface transportation, reducing roadway congestion, providing the most affordable mobility option, extending the reach of transit into communities across the region, and connecting residents with jobs, education, healthcare, and is fundamental to the region's prosperity; and

WHEREAS, Over 620,000 trips on local buses are taken every weekday, and 81 percent of residents live within a quarter-mile of a bus stop; and

WHEREAS, Bus providers are contending with significant challenges as bus speeds are declining, ridership has fallen, and, the world of transportation is innovating rapidly, and our region's bus system has not kept pace; and

WHEREAS, Metrobus is one major component of the Washington area regional bus network, which consists of local bus services operated independently by Municipalities, Counties, States, other Regional Agencies and private providers, and

WHEREAS, Metrobus ridership has declined by 13 percent during the period 2012 through 2017, and

WHEREAS, The quality of bus service is a shared responsibility of bus service providers, departments of transportation who own and operate streets and curbs and enforce use regulations for these amenities, and funding partners ("Responsible Parties") and these Responsible Parties must work together to create a regional system that meets customer needs; and

WHEREAS, A steering committee of regional civic and business leaders led a project on behalf of the region, with the ambitious vision that buses will be the transportation mode of choice on the region's roads in the future, serving as the backbone of a strong and inclusive regional mobility system (the "Bus Transformation Project"); and

WHEREAS, Civic and business leaders from across the region exchanged views on the vision and strategy to transform bus in the region and sought involvement of regional political leaders to act now; and

WHEREAS, The Bus Transformation Project benefits from more than a year of outreach to nearly 9,000 citizens and 140 leaders from jurisdictions, bus providers, businesses, community organizations, disability advocates, labor and other stakeholders, provides a Strategy that outlines recommendations and the direction to transform the region's bus system, and develops a ten-year Action Plan with implementation steps to gain momentum over time; and

WHEREAS, The region's residents and civic and advocacy groups clearly indicated their desire for a fast, frequent, reliable, and affordable bus system that feels unified across the region; and

WHEREAS, The Bus Transformation Strategy includes key recommendations to: provide frequent and convenient bus service, give buses priority on roadways, create an excellent customer experience, and establish ongoing stewardship to transform bus regionally, while enabling local action;

NOW, THEREFORE, be it

RESOLVED, That the Board believes strongly in investing in the region's bus network in a financially responsible way to improve mobility, reduce congestion, promote regional competitiveness, promote a more livable region, and fight climate change; and be it

RESOLVED, That the Board in broad terms endorses the vision, goals, and the high level strategy recommendations of the Bus Transformation Project to (1) Provide frequent and convenient bus service that connects communities, (2) give buses priority on roadways to move people quickly and reliably, and (3) create an excellent customer experience to retain and increase ridership, putting aside for the time being the recommendation of a Task Force to lead the implementation phase, as the direction required to transform bus in the region, recognizing that capital and operating impacts on local providers will have to be determined, evaluated and agreed upon before specific funding commitments, projects, and agreements are secured from the Responsible Parties and through the WMATA's annual budget process; and be it

RESOLVED, That the Board directs WMATA staff to engage with Jurisdictions and local bus service providers to develop an action plan that considers the recommendations of the BTP report with the goal of implementing said recommendations to the extent feasible and financially prudent; and be it

RESOLVED, That in this regard the Board urges that favorable consideration for early implementation be given to the following recommendations of the BTP if financially feasible:

(1) Update WMATA's Metrobus service guidelines; (2) Study the restructuring of the Metrobus network to create an efficient and customer-focused network; (3) Support implementation of bus priority projects such as bus-only lanes and bus rapid transit (BRT) within WMATA's role as a service provider and facilitate the study of bus priority projects by lending expertise to Jurisdictions and Responsible Parties actively implementing and funding such projects; (4) Provide free transfers between Metrobus and Metrorail and local bus service providers where supported by jurisdictions and within funding constraints; (5) Create and implement a mobile app solution for Metrorail, Metrobus and local bus service provider customers to plan and pay for trips in one place; (6) Develop regional passes that work across all providers (7) Test and evaluate zero emission, including electric buses to add to the bus fleet; (8) Provide jurisdictionally funded fare buy down options for low-income riders; and (9) Incorporate major Metrobus and regional provider bus routes in the Metrorail System Map wherever displayed; and be it

RESOLVED, That the Board directs WMATA staff to continue to coordinate service with locally provided bus service and Responsible Parties to respond to customer demand and create a bus network that works within the realities of the complex funding and governance structure in the Metropolitan Washington region, while advancing a system that is customer-focused and feels unified to the public; and be it

RESOLVED, That the Board directs WMATA staff to work with other Responsible Parties and regional bus service providers to improve fare system integration and to offer more convenient and flexible seamless trip planning and payment options in the context of the complex financial arrangements for bus service in the Metropolitan Washington region; and such work should address the fiscal impacts to other providers associated with these programs; and be it

RESOLVED, That the Board recognizes that giving buses priority on roadways is essential to providing fast and reliable bus service and encourages Responsible Parties to find opportunities to move quickly from planning to implementation of bus priority measures, including bus rapid transit (BRT) where practical; and be it

RESOLVED, That the Board adopts those recommendations as specified in the prior Resolved Paragraphs as guidance to staff in drafting relevant policies such as Metrobus service standards and future potential recommended changes to Metrobus service definitions, as a means to create an excellent customer experience and encourages collaboration among all Responsible Parties on these expeditiously; and be it

RESOLVED, That the Board encourages Responsible Parties to incorporate the Bus Transformation Strategy's recommendations, where feasible, into their local planning and funding activities to ensure progress on transforming the region's bus network;

RESOLVED, That the Board directs staff consistent with the prior Resolved Paragraphs to update applicable budgeting and planning documents to incorporate the Bus Transformation Strategy and recommendations to be given favorable consideration for early implementation; and be it further,

RESOLVED, That the Board will seek specific ways to support implementation of the strategy at WMATA including through the annual budget process, the capital improvement program and the adoption of relevant policies; and be it finally,

RESOLVED, That this Resolution shall be effective 30 days after adoption in accordance with Compact Section 8(b).



Paul Smedberg
Chair

WMATA File Structure Nos.:
6.6.4 Bus Route and Service Planning