

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Board Action/Information Summary

☒ Action ☐ Information

MEAD Number:
201935

Resolution:
☒ Yes ☐ No

TITLE:

2018 Customer Confidence Program

PRESENTATION SUMMARY:

To request Board approval of the 2018 Customer Confidence Program.

PURPOSE:

Management will present and seek approval of the 2018 Customer Confidence Program to promote Metro as a reliable form of transportation, retain ridership following service disruptions, encourage ridership growth, and improve customer satisfaction.

DESCRIPTION:

Since SafeTrack and the Back2Good initiatives, Metro has achieved many critical safety and service reliability improvements. Management now has gained confidence in the weekday rush hour service offering to rail and bus customers and is prepared to back that up with a financial commitment.

To personalize improved weekday service reliability and encourage customers to ride Metro, management seeks Board approval to implement a new Customer Confidence Program to provide customers delayed 15 minutes or more during the weekday rush hour travel periods with a SmarTrip credit. Credit would be in the amount of the delayed trip for customers using stored value; or for customers using pass products, credits would be in the amount of \$3 for a rail trip and \$1 for a bus trip. The General Manager would be given authorization to develop appropriate terms and conditions for the program.

Key Highlights:

- Today, nearly nine out of 10 weekday Metrorail trips arrive on-time due to better performing railcars, the completion of SafeTrack maintenance program, and improved rail scheduling.
- Despite safety and reliability improvements achieved in 2017, ridership has been slow to return. At least 30% of riders indicate they are riding less due to reliability concerns.
- To encourage new and returning riders to make more trips and to demonstrate confidence in weekday rail and bus reliability, which is now comparable to most major US transit systems, management proposes the Customer Confidence Program to provide SmarTrip credits to qualifying customers who experience a weekday rush hour delay of 15 minutes or more.
- The program would be in effect during Calendar Year 2018 only, and would include certain terms and conditions established by the General Manager.

Background and History:

Reliability and Ridership

As staff presented in October, when examining ridership factors that are within the control of WMATA, it is clear that improving service delivery is critical for retaining customers and beginning to bring back those who left in recent years. In fact, research has found that at least 30% of our ridership losses in 2013-2016 were due to decreasing customer on-time performance.

Today, roughly nine out of every 10 weekday trips on Metrorail arrive on time. While Metro has made significant progress delivering predictable weekday trips since the conclusion of SafeTrack, ridership growth has been slow to respond to the improvement, and some riders who were encouraged to use alternate travel modes during SafeTrack may have concerns about returning to Metro.

Subsequent research shows that when a customer experiences a trip that takes 30 minutes or more than planned, they are significantly more likely to leave Metro entirely, or at a minimum, severely reduce how

frequently they ride.

MyTripTime and 15-Minute Grace Period Launch

In July 2016, Metro introduced the MyTripTime online tool as a new way of measuring “on time performance” from the customer’s perspective. MyTripTime provides a more accurate measure of the true customer experience by measuring a customer’s actual travel time based on their SmarTrip tap-in and tap-out, and compares it to the planned travel time for each trip.

Today, Metro is able to use MyTripTime to identify customers who experience delayed rail trips and develop meaningful strategies to improve their satisfaction.

Also in July 2016, Metro introduced the 15-minute grace period for customers who entered the system and left from the same station within 15 minutes. This provided customers with a trip credit in the event they entered the system and found a significant backup and decided not to travel on Metrorail. The program, which is still in effect, does not take into account customers who decide to travel on Metrorail and are delayed 15 minutes or more.

Discussion:

Peak-period ridership has stabilized since the conclusion of SafeTrack, following several quarters of declines. Despite improvements under the Back2Good program in major categories, including on-time performance, reduction in the severity of delays, railcar mechanical reliability, infrastructure reliability, and record escalator/elevator availability, customers note Metro’s recent history of unpredictable service (e.g. SafeTrack) as creating an environment that places pressure on potential ridership growth.

Metro is seeking Board approval to implement the 2018 Customer Confidence Program to demonstrate accountability for improved weekday service and encourage ridership. The program -- supported by a broad communications campaign -- would automatically credit registered SmarTrip customers who experience a Metrorail delay of 15 minutes or more during weekday rush hour periods (Mon – Fri, opening-9:30 a.m. and 3-7 p.m.). Metrobus customers delayed by 15 minutes or more due to a late dispatch or mechanical breakdown would fill out a simple web form to receive their credit.

The program would have two key objectives:

1. Improve customer satisfaction among existing customers by quickly acknowledging a major delay and issuing a credit to registered SmarTrip accounts
2. Demonstrate to potential customers that Metro has greater confidence in the reliability of its weekday service

Based on research demonstrating that delays of 30 minutes or greater result in significant ridership losses, management believes this program may help to retain customers who experience severe delays, earn back trips, and prevent revenue loss.

More than 58 million trips were taken on Metrorail in the four months following the conclusion of SafeTrack (July - October 2017). Of those, 285,296 trips taken during weekday rush hour periods were delayed by 15 minutes or more. This accounts for about 0.5% of all Metrorail trips. Approximately half of those trips were taken by customers using a registered SmarTrip card, which would be a requirement to receive a credit under the Customer Confidence Program.

	Trips delayed ≥ 15 peak	% of total trips	Cost of all trips delayed	# of refund- eligible trips*	% of total trips	Cost of all refund-eligible trips
07-2017	83,880	0.58%	\$318,201	44,788	0.31%	\$175,453
08-2017	54,815	0.38%	\$199,147	26,951	0.18%	\$99,785
09-2017	70,931	0.51%	\$265,199	38,319	0.27%	\$147,059
10-2017	75,670	0.50%	\$301,741	44,566	0.29%	\$183,542
4-month	285,296		\$1,084,289	154,624		\$605,839

TOTAL

**trips are considered "refund-eligible" if the customer's SmarTrip card was registered at the time of travel.*

The proposed marketing campaign to support this program would include more Back2Good campaign messages to inform customers of Metro's ongoing efforts to improve, the announcement of the Customer Confidence Program, and social media, print, television, radio and direct marketing to support the program and raise awareness among customers.

Staff conducted research in December 2017 to gauge potential customer response to the proposed Customer Confidence Program. The survey found:

- 89% agree – the program would grab my attention
- 79% agree – the program conveys to me that Metro is serious about improving its performance
- 41% agree (37% neutral) – would encourage me to ride Metro more often

Management requests that the Board authorize the General Manager/CEO to determine appropriate terms and conditions associated with the program. For example, the terms and conditions may have provisions intended to prevent potential "gaming" of the program by fraudulent means. The terms and conditions would also establish program "blackout dates" around major planned capital improvement projects, in the event of a significant weather event like a blizzard, and in the case of a major regional emergency.

Metro proposes to limit the duration of the Customer Confidence Program to Calendar Year 2018. Any extension would require additional Board action.

FUNDING IMPACT:

If approved, 2018 Customer Confidence Program costs are estimated between \$2 - \$3.5 million.	
Project Manager:	Lynn Bowersox
Project Department/Office:	Customer Service, Communications and Marketing

TIMELINE:

Previous Actions	July 2016 – July 2017: SafeTrack maintenance program
	July 2016: Launch of MyTripTime
	July 2016: 15-minute grace period for Metrorail customers goes into effect
	November 2016: Back2Good initiatives announced
Anticipated actions after presentation	January – December 2018: Customer Confidence Program

RECOMMENDATION:

Board approval of the 2018 Customer Confidence Program.

PRESENTED AND ADOPTED: January 25, 2018

SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF CUSTOMER CONFIDENCE PROGRAM

2018-03

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

WHEREAS, In Resolution 2017-11, the Board of Directors approved changes to fares for FY2018, to be incorporated in the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Tariff; and

WHEREAS, The Customer Confidence Program will provide customers with credits for fares paid for trips experiencing excessive delays pursuant to guidelines, terms and conditions, and exclusions established by the General Manager/Chief Executive Officer (GM/CEO), and will require changes to the Tariff; NOW, THEREFORE, be it

RESOLVED, That the Board of Directors authorizes the GM/CEO to provide credits to WMATA patrons for excessive delays as follows: full credit for rides paid for by SmartBenefits® or stored value on Metrorail or Metrobus; \$3.00 credit for rides paid for with a pass on Metrorail; \$1.00 credit for rides paid for with a pass on Metrobus; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Board of Directors authorizes the GM/CEO to establish guidelines and terms and conditions for the Customer Confidence Program including, but not limited to, the times of the day and days of week on which the credits will be available, defining excessive delays, and exclusions from the program and make conforming changes to the Tariff; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Customer Confidence Program is authorized to take effect immediately and continue through December 31, 2018, the exact start and end dates to be determined by the GM/CEO; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That this Resolution shall be effective immediately in order to accelerate program implementation.

Reviewed as to form and legal sufficiency,



Patricia Y. Lee
General Counsel

WMATA File Structure No.:
9.12.9 Tariff (WMATA Fare Structure)

Motioned by Ms. Harley, seconded by Mr. Goldman

Ayes: 8 – Mr. Evans, Ms. Harley, Mr. Corcoran, Mr. McMillin, Mr. Price, Mr. Goldman, Mrs. Hudgins and Mr. Horner