

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

## **Board Action/Information Summary**

Action  Information

MEAD Number:  
203385

Resolution:  
 Yes  No

### **TITLE:**

Better Bus: Network Redesign

### **PRESENTATION SUMMARY:**

The Better Bus: Network Redesign project aims to improve bus service for customers and the region. As part of the effort, there will be a significant level of engagement and outreach to customers, jurisdictional partners, community organizations, and other audiences. This presentation is the first update to the Board on the project and will outline the guiding principles, project roadmap, major tasks and deliverables, and a more detailed approach and timeline for Phase 1.

### **PURPOSE:**

Staff will provide an update on the Better Bus: Network Redesign project and recommend adoption of the project's guiding principles.

### **DESCRIPTION:**

This presentation serves as the first update to the Board on the Network Redesign project.

For conflict-of-interest purposes, Staff has identified the following contractors and interested parties involved in the Network Redesign: **Kimley-Horn, Cambridge Systematics, Foursquare Integrated Transportation Planning, NeoNiche Strategies, WBA Research, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, and Sharp & Company, Inc.**

### **Key Highlights:**

- Better Bus: Network Redesign is underway and will fully incorporate the service and network of Metrobus, Prince George's TheBus and City of Fairfax CUE systems, while building on other local bus existing services to enhance and align transit service in the region.

- The Network Redesign builds on the Bus Transformation Project strategy recommendations including Service Guidelines, the full transfer discount between Metrorail and bus, and Metro's bus priority program and partnership with jurisdictions to make buses more reliable.
- The project seeks to improve service for customers by addressing the region's changing ridership patterns, increasing access to frequent service, promoting equity and access to opportunity, aligning with bus priority investments, and defining Metrobus' role for the region.
- Extensive engagement will be a cornerstone of the project to create a customer-focused, data-driven network and service plan that meets the needs of customers and the region.
- Outreach to current and potential customers will begin in October 2022 with a launch event, survey, roadshow pop-up events, and bus stop chats, which will continue through November.
- Guiding principles provide the framework for decisions throughout the Network Redesign project.

### **Background and History:**

In January 2020, the Board endorsed the *Bus Transformation Project* (BTP) (2020-01) strategy to create a bold, new vision and a collaborative action plan for the future of bus in the region. The Board identified 10 recommendations for early action, including collaboratively redesigning the region's bus network and service to create a more efficient and customer-focused system. The full BTP strategy and Action Plan, along with other project documents can be found at [www.bustransformationproject.com](http://www.bustransformationproject.com).

Extensive customer and community engagement during BTP identified customers' investment priorities as more frequent service, more reliable and faster service, and more direct buses with fewer transfers. These priorities are largely consistent across the different regional geographies and demographic groups and continue to be customer priorities, even during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic brought the importance of the region's bus system into sharper focus. In response to the pandemic and customer input and in line with the BTP strategy, Metro has

- Adopted new Bus Service Guidelines (adopted December 2020)
- Published the FY19-21 Annual Line Performance Reports for bus service (published December 2020 and September 2022)
- Enabled a full transfer discount between Metrorail and bus (FY2023 budget)
- Launched a Frequent Service Network of 36 bus routes at 12-min and 20-min frequencies all day and all week (September 2021)
- Created a bus priority capital program and is actively partnering with road owners to increase the reliability of bus service
- Adopted a fleet plan and started the transition to zero-emission vehicles

## **Discussion:**

Buses are a major part of the region's transportation network and were the core of public transportation during the pandemic, consistently carrying customers to jobs and healthcare during the pandemic. BTP set a vision for bus to be the mode of choice on the region's roads by 2030, serving as the backbone of a strong and inclusive regional mobility system. The outcome was a strategy and action plan with four strategies with 26 recommendations to transform the bus system into a fast, frequent, reliable, affordable service that feels unified and advances transit equity. The strategies included:

1. Frequent and Convenient Bus Service
2. Bus Priority on Roadways
3. Customer Experience
4. Task Force to Implement the Strategy

The Network Redesign builds on the BTP strategy and recommendations including the adopted Metrobus Service Guidelines and corresponding Annual Line Performance Reports ([wmata.com](http://wmata.com)), the recently adopted full transfer discount between Metrorail and bus, and the creation of a bus priority program at Metro and partnerships with departments of transportation to prioritize buses and increase their reliability.

The Network Redesign also builds on the extensive engagement that occurred during BTP in 2018-19 and has continued during the pandemic. In the BTP surveys, customers identified the top two barriers to riding the bus as low frequency and low speed. Customers' investment priorities were more frequent service, more reliable and faster service, and more direct buses and fewer transfers. These priorities were consistent across the region's geographies, demographic groups, and how often respondents rode bus service.

## **Network Redesign Purpose, Approach, and Outcomes**

Redesigning the bus service and network provides an opportunity to meet our customers and the region needs, such as:

- Access to frequent transit
- Existing and planned bus priority infrastructure to create a more reliable network
- Easier to use and understand
- Development and travel patterns
- Payment systems and fare structure, such as the adoption of the transfer discount

- Access to opportunity for customers to create a more inclusive region and
- A long-term sustainable, predictable funding model for bus service

During the redesign effort, the team will identify service improvements that can be implemented during Metro's bi-annual service changes so that customers need not wait until the conclusion of the project to experience improved service. At the completion of the Service Redesign, customers, the region, and our partners will have a:

- Recommended bus network and service plan to be adopted by the Metro Board and implemented during FY2025;
- Future bus network and service plan for beyond FY2025 that provides a path forward to meet some of the region's longer-term goals; and
- Clearly defined role of Metrobus in the region and a long-term sustainable, predictable funding model for bus service.

The Network Redesign will include extensive engagement with customers, regional audiences, and partners during each phase. The first part of the project will develop the Planning Foundations, which form the basis for redesigning the network and service plan. Next, network alternatives will be developed that provide options, illustrate trade-offs, and show aspiration and growth opportunities. Finally, feedback from the network alternatives will inform the recommended network for FY2025 and the transit plan for beyond FY2025. Outreach and engagement will be held during each part of the project. In Planning Foundations, the guiding principles, goals, metrics, and priorities will be developed to form the basis of future service and network recommendations. The technical work includes analyzing demand, assessing the market, and assessing transit's competitiveness; evaluating the existing network and service; and identifying gaps and opportunities. Stakeholder and public engagement will communicate the purpose and benefits of a service redesign, gather public and stakeholder priorities to inform project goals, and identify bus service gaps, needs, and opportunities.

Prior to launching the Network Redesign, Metro staff held listening sessions with our jurisdictional partners and local bus providers, and met with leadership from each jurisdiction and local bus provider. These discussions provided perspectives on desired objectives, outcomes, and how each local bus provider wanted their network/service to be included. Based on those discussions, Prince George's County and the City of Fairfax requested that Metro include TheBus and CUE networks and service in the project's analysis and redesign. Metro is collaboratively working with Montgomery County's Ride On as part of their Ride On Reimagined project. All other local operators in the Compact requested that Metro collaboratively redesign Metrobus service using the existing local service as a basis to enhance and expand bus service for customers in each jurisdiction and across the region.

## **Customer, Partner, and Stakeholder Engagement**

Metro is committed to engaging current and potential customers, our partners, local and regional leaders and organizations, elected officials, and others authentically, inclusively, and transparently throughout this project. Success for a redesigned bus network and service plan is as much about building consensus and engaging people across the region as it is a technical assessment of where, when, and how frequently buses should run. Therefore, each phase of the project will include extensive outreach and engagement across all audiences to align with the technical work underway. The project team will work with jurisdictions and local bus providers to extend the reach of engagement into communities across the region, especially those who have been historically underrepresented.

The different audiences that will be engaged are as follows:

- Customer and Non-customers
- Technical Advisory Committee: Subject matter expert staff from partners, local bus providers, and Metro
- Metro workforce, including Bus Operators
- Community Connections Committee: Representatives from community-based organizations, the business community, and transit and rider advocacy groups, such as the Riders Advisory Committee and the Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Elected officials from across the region
- Union Leadership

The project team will use a variety of outreach tactics and media to ensure project awareness and gather input. The team is committed to ensuring that plans, scenarios, and messages that are shared are accessible and understandable. Once it is live, the project website will serve as the public home of public project information for the duration of the project. Social media, e-newsletters, videos, paid digital and printed advertisements and signage, and multilingual take-ones will be developed to increase knowledge of the project and gain additional input from a wide variety of customers and potential customers.

During Planning Foundations, customer outreach will focus on communicating the purpose of the redesign, gathering priorities, and identifying gaps and opportunities from customers and potential customers across the region. Following the project launch in October, an online survey will be available and the project team will be out in the region – at bus facilities, farmers markets, and other locations and/or events – to bring the roadshow to customers where they are. These pop-up events and bus-stop chats are critical to engaging customers and potential customers where they are, with a focus on historically underrepresented communities. Listening sessions will be held at bus divisions along with internal communications to Metro staff. Subsequent outreach in

2023 will utilize similar tactics, with the team utilizing lessons learned from this fall's engagement to build success.

### **Draft Guiding Principles**

Guiding principles serve as the north star of a project. They provide a framework to guide the project's approach and decisions, leading in any situation or challenge that may occur over the course of the project. The draft principles were generated from input gathered during listening sessions in spring 2021 with Metro's jurisdictional partners along with discussions with peer agencies and their lessons learned from redesigns. The draft guiding principles are as follows:

- Ensure a customer-focused and regional perspective
- Engage and communicate authentically, inclusively, and transparently
- Ensure equity is a value throughout the project
- Allow customers' input, region's needs, data, and service guidelines to drive decisions
- Attract customers with frequent, reliable, connective service
- Make cost-effective and data-driven business decisions

### **FUNDING IMPACT:**

No funding impact at this time.

### **TIMELINE:**

Previous Actions	January 2020 –Bus Transformation Project July 2020 – Framework for Transit Equity December 2020 –Metrobus Service Guidelines
Anticipated actions after presentation	September-November 2022 – Public and stakeholder engagement activities December 2022 – Board update on Network Redesign

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends adoption of the guiding principles for the Better Bus: Network Redesign.

SUBJECT: GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR BETTER BUS - NETWORK REDESIGN

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 of Directors is responsible for policy, financial direction, oversight, and WMATA's relationships with its customers, jurisdictional partners, and signatories; and

WHEREAS, in Resolution 2020-01, the Board of Directors endorsed the vision, goals, and recommendations of the Bus Transformation Project (BTP), which included a redesign of the bus network, to make buses 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; and

WHEREAS, there is a need for guiding principles to provide a framework for the Better Bus - Network Redesign project approach and decisions; and

NOW, THEREFORE, be it

*RESOLVED*, That the Board of Directions adopts the following guiding principles for the Better Bus - Network Redesign project:

- Ensure a customer-focused and regional perspective
- Engage and communicate authentically, inclusively, and transparently
- Ensure equity is a value throughout the project
- Allow customers' input, region's needs, data, and service guidelines to drive decisions
- Attract customers with frequent, reliable, connective service
- Make cost-effective and data-driven business decisions; and be it finally

*RESOLVED*, That this Resolution shall be effective immediately to include the guiding principles for the Better Bus - Network Redesign project in the current stakeholder engagement and outreach efforts.

Reviewed as to form and legal sufficiency,

/s/  
Patricia Y. Lee  
Executive Vice-President and General Counsel

WMATA File Structure No.:  
6.6.4. Bus Route and Service Planning

PROPOSED