

Report by Safety and Operations Committee (A) 12-09-2021

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Board Action/Information Summary

☒ Action ☐ Information

MEAD Number:
202319

Resolution:
☒ Yes ☐ No

TITLE:

Metrorail Station Name Change Proposal

PRESENTATION SUMMARY:

Jurisdiction request for Metrorail station name change.

PURPOSE:

Board consideration of a new name proposal for the White Flint Metrorail station.

DESCRIPTION:

There are no interested parties in this matter.

Key Highlights:

- Silver Line Phase 2 service presents an opportunity to review current station names during station signage and map updates.
- A proposal was received from Montgomery County to change the name of White Flint Metrorail station, along with letters of support from various community groups. Letters of support can be provide.
- The jurisdiction has committed to fund \$332K for the signage changes.
- The proposed name is in response to efforts to rebrand the area around the Metrorail Stations to encourage transit-oriented development.
- WMATA conducted a survey of riders and the public to collect feedback about the proposed station name.
- The Montgomery County survey yielded 4,720 responses. The survey found that the majority prefer the current station name.

Background and History:

Station names are guided by Board policy (P/I 4.1/4). Station name changes (or new names) are to be submitted by jurisdictions to the Metro Board for approval. The submissions must include community support and a funding commitment for any signage and map changes.

Major tenets of the Metro System Station Names Policy include the following:

- Jurisdictions must complete outreach in their communities to determine potential station names. Names are then formally submitted to WMATA staff to conduct required regional research on the potential names;
- Names should identify the station locations by geographical features or centers of activity when landmarks are within one half mile of the station (walking distance);
- Names should be distinctive and evoke imagery in the mind of the patron; and

- Each station name should be no longer than 19 characters (including spaces and punctuation), except for transfer station names, which should not exceed 13 characters.

In May 2011, the Board revised the Metro System Station Names Policy to include the following:

Higher Education/Universities:

- Grandfather all existing higher education/universities
- Limit future names to main campuses within ½ mile

Institutions/Landmarks:

- Retain current policy
- Grandfather all existing institutions/landmarks
- Encourage landmarks on neighborhood and interactive maps

Hospitals:

- Retain current practices

Commercial Naming Rights:

- Continue current practice of not selling commercial naming rights
- Promote station domination and other opportunities to grow revenue outside of changing station names

Discussion:

In advance of the next phase of Silver Line service, Metro is preparing for systemwide signage and rail map changes. Notices went to the Board and jurisdictions that station name changes could be considered as part of the signage changeouts. The signage changes need to be finalized by December 31, 2021, in order to meet all deadlines and avoid delay penalties.

Montgomery County submitted a proposal under the current policy to change the name of White Flint Metrorail Station to North Bethesda Metrorail Station. The jurisdiction has committed to fund \$332K needed to make signage changes throughout the Metrorail system.

The proposed name change is in response to economic redevelopment efforts by the jurisdiction.

White Flint Metrorail System opened in 1984, serving those closest to the Rockville and Bethesda neighborhoods. It was named based on the station's close proximity to White Flint Mall. Since approximately 2010, the community began to evolve, and many believe that the name North Bethesda best represents this area. White Flint Mall was destroyed in 2017.

Following community outreach, Montgomery County submitted the following name change to WMATA for customer testing:

- North Bethesda

Consistent with the policy, WMATA conducted an online survey. The survey was actively promoted via local TV news, print media and social media. 4,720 respondents completed the survey..

Respondents were asked to rate the potential station name in meeting each of the following Metro System Station Names Policy criteria:

- Brevity: Easy to remember
- Uniqueness: Not easily confused with other station names
- Evocation: Appealing; Clearly conveys where you are when you reach the station

- Relevance: Describes the location well

The results of the survey found that the current station name of “White Flint” is significantly preferred over “North Bethesda” across all key criteria.

**Group: Respondents to Montgomery County Survey
n=4,720**

“White Flint”							
	Agree	Disagree	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
I like the name	51%	29%	36%	16%	19%	13%	16%
The name is easy to remember	74%	14%	51%	23%	12%	8%	7%
The name is not easily confused with other station names	82%	9%	62%	21%	9%	4%	5%
The name clearly conveys where you are when you reach the station	44%	43%	30%	14%	13%	19%	24%
The name describes the location well	40%	47%	26%	14%	13%	19%	28%

“North Bethesda”							
	Agree	Disagree	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
I like the name	40%	53%	25%	14%	8%	14%	39%
The name is easy to remember	51%	35%	30%	21%	14%	13%	22%
The name is not easily confused with other station names	29%	62%	18%	11%	8%	18%	44%
The name clearly conveys where you are when you reach the station	43%	50%	28%	16%	7%	13%	37%
The name describes the location well	43%	49%	28%	15%	8%	13%	37%

FUNDING IMPACT:

There is no funding impact because the jurisdiction has committed to cover the \$332K in costs related to station name changes that are beyond the Silver Line signage plan.	
Project Manager:	Lynn Bowersox
Project Department/Office:	Customer Service, Communications and Marketing

TIMELINE:

Previous Actions	2011 – Board revision to Metro System Station Names Policy
Anticipated actions after presentation	2021 – Metro begins systemwide signage changes for after adoption of Silver Line Phase II

RECOMMENDATION:

Our history with Metrorail Station naming informs us that our riders and the communities we serve develop strong attachments to rail station landmarks and resist change. It speaks to the strength that WMATA has to help support jurisdictions leverage the power of Metrorail station names to create a sense of place, encourage transit-oriented development, and rebrand an area while riders learn about new destinations, landmarks, and changing travel patterns.

In the case of “North Bethesda” 51% of the survey respondents found the name easy to recall and not confusing with other names. However, the naming convention itself, North Bethesda was not an obvious choice with respondents because it is not currently connected to a sense of place. That said, noteworthy developments such as Pike & Rose have started to adapt the namesake into their branding and identify as being located in the city of North Bethesda. We will continue to see this take hold throughout the county. Should the Board wish to approve the jurisdiction’s request, it is likely that the new name will become synonymous with the surrounding community over time and customers will find it sufficient for wayfinding.

SUBJECT: WHITE FLINT STATION NAME CHANGE

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

WHEREAS, Pursuant to Resolution 2011-36 and Metro System Station Names Policy (P/I 4.1/4), as amended, the Board of Directors is required to approve all changes to Metro station names; and

WHEREAS, Montgomery County has requested that White Flint Station be changed to North Bethesda Station and committed the funding (\$332,000) for the full cost of the name change; and

WHEREAS, The station name change will continue to assist the traveling public in wayfinding;

NOW, THEREFORE, be it

RESOLVED, That the Board of Directors approves the following station name change:

- White Flint Station to North Bethesda Station

that will take effect upon installation of new signage associated with the beginning of passenger service for Silver Line Phase Two stations; and be it finally

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

Reviewed as to form and legal sufficiency,

/s/Patricia Y. Lee

Patricia Y. Lee

Executive Vice President and General Counsel