

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Board Action/Information Summary

☒ Action ☐ Information

MEAD Number:
202279

Resolution:
☒ Yes ☐ No

TITLE:

Service and Fare Recommendations

PRESENTATION SUMMARY:

In support of the region's pandemic recovery, staff will present recommendations for Board consideration for changes in Metrobus and Metrorail service levels that adapt to current and future customer needs and fare policy changes to advance equity and ridership.

PURPOSE:

To recommend for Board approval of potential service and fare changes designed to support pandemic recovery in the region.

DESCRIPTION:

This presentation provides information for the Board's consideration regarding potential service and fare concepts to support pandemic recovery in the region, and outlines the anticipated benefits of these service and fare concepts.

Key Highlights:

- The Washington area is rapidly reopening and Metro remains committed to supporting recovery in the region.
- Management has developed service and fare proposals that better meet the needs of existing riders, reflect new travel patterns and lifestyle changes, as well as attract returning and new customers.
- Staff recommends frequent all day service, offering 12 minutes or better service on six rail and 20 bus lines, and additional improvements to base service levels on other bus lines.
- Staff recommends extending rail service to midnight seven days a week, beginning this summer and until 1 am on Friday and Saturday by Fall.
- Proposed changes would serve customers for all trip purposes as the region reopens and especially benefit low-income and minority riders in the region.
- Recommended opportunities to simplify fares and support emerging travel patterns in the near-term include free rail-bus transfers, lower 7-day regional bus pass prices, \$2 rail flat fares on weekends, and improved passes.
- The FY2022 Operating Budget increases from \$2.07 billion to \$2.08 billion excluding reimbursables, with the implementation of bus routes 16Y, 3Y, 8W, 1B, and overall rail and bus service improvements. Growth in expense and revenue reductions, from fare changes, are offset by additional federal relief funding utilization .

Background and History:

Pandemic Recovery Plan

Metro's pandemic recovery plan seeks to support the region's recovery, earn public trust that bus and rail travel is safe, and effectively communicate changing service and fare plans. The service restoration strategy is to (1) protect employees, (2) protect customers, and (3) stay ahead of demand. With the widespread availability of Covid-19 vaccines and increasing vaccination rates, Metro is entering the early stages of its recovery phase. This phase includes monitoring conditions and looking for opportunities to adapt service to meet evolving customer needs.

In April 2021, the Board approved the FY2022 budget which includes Metrorail service operating at 80% of pre-pandemic service and Metrobus at 85%. This includes the following approved service changes:

o June bus service improvements

- o 2 am service on 34 lines, seven days
- o Peak, full day, and weekend service restorations

o September bus service enhancements and modifications

- o Changes as part of new DASH network in Alexandria, increasing service frequency all day
- o Restructuring of downtown routes to improve corridor reliability by shortening some routes, realigning others, and reinvesting in the primary portions of the corridors

Discussion:

The Washington area is rapidly reopening with pandemic-related capacity restrictions lifted by June and school systems fully reopening by Fall 2021. Federal relief enabled Metro to avoid severe service cuts and layoffs and is projected to support the base operating budget through FY2023 and contribute to closing an anticipated FY2024 funding gap.

This item recommends service and fare changes for Board adoption:

Proposed Service Changes

Metrobus:

- Launch 12 minutes or better service on 20 lines from 7 am to 9 pm, 7 days a week.
- Offer consistent 20 minutes or better service on 16 lines between 7 am to 9 pm,

7 days a week.

- Restore or improve service on an additional 46 bus routes.

Metrorail:

- All 6 rail lines with improved all day and peak frequencies
 - 10 minutes or better peak
 - 12 minutes or better all day
 - 15 minutes or better late night
- Rail System Open Longer
 - Summer 2021: Extend hours to midnight, 7 days a week
 - Fall 2021: Extend hours to 1 am on Friday and Saturday; Sunday opening to match Saturday

If implemented, these changes would address a top customer priority and improve service for existing riders, increase rail and bus ridership above the levels expected if no service adjustments are made, especially benefit low-income and minority riders who are more likely to ride during off-peak periods and weekends, and support regional recovery as more riders return to school, work, and other activities in Fall 2021.

Proposed Fare Changes

- Implement the following Bus Transformation Project recommendations and deferred fare changes from approved FY2021 budget: Free rail-bus transfers (\$2 transfer discount), Lower Seven-Day Regional Bus Pass Price (\$12 from \$15), Regional providers in Metro passes, Rail weekend \$2 flat fares.
- Offer promotional pass pricing beginning in the Fall, including 50% off short-term combination rail-bus passes and reducing the price of monthly passes approximately 40% (reducing the multiplier from 36 trips to 22 trips).

Metro will monitor ridership and regional trends and develop additional service and fare concepts for Board consideration and the FY2023 budget development process.

Total subsidy required to support the proposed amended budget is unchanged from the FY2022 operating budget adopted by the Board on April 22, 2022. Base subsidy state-level requirements are also unchanged, while individual locality shares have been adjusted to reflect the proposed bus service plan with the addition of Routes 16Y, 3Y, 8W, and the 1B. The allocation of legislative exclusions has been revised to reflect the updated service plan.

FUNDING IMPACT:

Increases to the operating expenses and reductions to revenue, due to increased bus and rail

service, as well as fare changes, are offset by additional federal relief funding utilization in the proposed amended FY2022 Budget.

TIMELINE:

Previous Actions	May 2020 – Covid Recovery Planning Update June 2020 – Covid-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan & Budget update July 2020 – Covid-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan & Budget update September 2020 – Covid-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan & Budget Update April 2021 – FY2022 Budget Adoption
Anticipated actions after presentation	Fall 2021 – Implementation of near-term service and fare opportunities FY2022 – Development and consideration of further fare policy changes

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approving the service and fare changes for Fall implementation.