

Public Comment

Metro Board of Directors Meeting

May 13, 2021



Tiffany Brown (ANC 7B02, Washington, DC)

- WMATA Board of Directors: Paul C. Smedberg, Chair, Virginia Stephanie Gidigbi, First Vice-Chair, District of Columbia Michael Goldman, Second Vice-Chair, Maryland Matt Letourneau Gregory Slater Steve McMillin Canek Aguirre Tom Bulger Devin Rouse Walter L. Alcorn Thomas Graham Anthony E. Costa

I am writing today to request that the WMATA Board reject the proposed budget plan that eliminates one-seat trips from SE to NW on the 30N and 30S buses. With the funding provided in the federal relief bill in March 2021, the WMATA staff has sent a revised draft FY2022 budget to you all that reverses most of the dramatic spending cuts and service reductions WMATA initially put forward for public comment in January/February of 2021. Despite the pleas from ANC Commissioners, Community Leaders, and residents, the WMATA staff is proposing to discontinue the 30S and 30N cross-town buses after June 30, 2021, thus eliminating one-seat trips from SE to NW. This change would require riders to transfer to another bus or Metrorail if they want to travel across town, crossing the National Mall and continuing beyond a few blocks to the northwest or southeast.

As the Board will recall, in 2020 when this same proposal was made, dozens of people turned out for the hearings and submitted comments pleading to maintain that service, among the largest numbers of any route in the city. Many of the regular riders are still using Metrobus, but this year they are even busier and more challenged by the challenges of living and working during COVID-19. We cannot all make it to a “virtual” hearing to tell those stories, but the need is no less great this year. The arguments are compelling: This service is needed by many essential workers who work long hours and have very long commutes.

When WMATA was first formed, the top officials at the transit agency and the District agreed that they would maintain the cross-town bus service between Southeast and Northeast, even after Metrorail opened and some of the lines paralleled the bus routes or could be used as an alternative because they believed that preserving the economical one-trip bus service was essential for maintaining connections among neighborhoods and parts of the city. That commitment has served well for over 45 years and is just as important today, as a matter of inclusion, connection, and equity.

Tiffany Brown (ANC 7B02, Washington, DC) cont'd

The 30S/30N buses are one of the few routes being eliminated in the budget, justified solely on the basis that it is duplicative of other services, but it is not matched by any other service. That is certainly true in terms of the overall cost in time as well as money. Metrorail is several times more expensive for a cross-town trip, which adds up for someone making the trip five days a week or more. WMATA's analysis is supposed to assess differential effects on vulnerable populations, but this methodology does not recognize that it is a significant effect to force hundreds of riders to make a transfer mid-trip in an hour-long or longer journey.

A petition was created and since Friday nearly 500 commuters have signed on urging this Board to maintain the 30N & 30S buses as they currently exist beyond June 30, 2021. As WMATA General Manager Paul Wiedefeld said in the Washington Post article of April 16, 2021, "One important lesson of the pandemic this year is that essential workers ride the bus," he said. "To what extent should we ensure bus service directly links underserved communities to job centers, even if such service may not be as productive as other services?"

Clearly, the budget will continue to be squeezed. WMATA is only expecting about 34% of pre-COVID ridership in the fiscal year starting July 1, 2021, so finances are going to be challenging again next year or later this year if ridership falls below forecasts. But the loyal daily riders are the ones making up that 34% and WMATA says it is continuing key Metrobus operations to provide essential services to customers. Please do not eliminate the 30N/30S service, which is essential to so many people.

Tiffany L. Brown ANC Commissioner 7B02 Chairperson, ANC Commission 7B The following is a list of the 483 commuters who signed this petition.

Barbara Wood (Washington, DC)

I am a DC resident, I live in Ward 8. I use Metro for a means of transportation. I attend work/related information at the following location: 300 A Street NE, Capitol Hill. I have to walk from there 4 blocks to a bus stop. The blocks are very long in that area, I am a senior citizen.

Most times by the time I reach the stop, I miss the bus, and have to wait 30 minutes to 45 minutes for another one. I would like to know if possible could they place a stop a lot closer?

Thank you for your time.

John Nicholson (Fairfax County, VA)

This is my third attempt to get action by WMATA to remove a potential biohazard on the site of the Franconia-Springfield power substation. Twice before I submitted feedback to the Metro customer relations email address (ref 210111-000064 and 210329-000051), receiving only automated canned replies and then... nothing.

The issue is an overflowing Don's Johns portable toilet on the substation at the end of the walking path from Franconia Road to the Metro station. The sewage in this toilet has been full to overflowing for months and months and neither the vendor nor Metro - in charge of the vendor - has taken any action to remove the biohazard. Can you not direct your vendors to clean up this hazard? I am so frustrated with being ignored on this that my next correspondence will be to my Congressman. Please take action. Thank you.

Timothy Smalls (Fairfax County, VA)

I have two concerns:

Number 1: Your website is in dire need of update with regard to the disabled. When I moved here last week, I came down on my prosthetic leg via two buses and two trains from Fairfax County to supposedly complete the procedure for reduced fare card for under age 66, based on the clearly delineated website instructions only to find your office no longer handles the forms in person. The pandemic has been in effect for 14 months. I think you've had enough time to update your site accordingly.

Number 2: How can the Nation's Capital be insensitive to the needs of seniors and the disabled who visit the area by not accepting presentation of the red, white and blue Medicare card in conjunction with government-issued photo ID as proof of disability? Those cards are accepted as sufficient for senior transit access in cities and towns larger and smaller than Washington, and to mandate such restrictive, almost penalizing actions for visitors not used to such restrictions in their hometowns is not symbolic of what the people's government should be presenting.

As a travel agent with 20 years' experience, focused on seniors, disabled veterans who have sacrificed for this country and those with certifiable disabilities and special needs, as prescribed by the Social Security Administration, I have a moral responsibility to organize the downtrodden and alert the media as to this travesty.

We've taken such measures in Richmond and we've taken such measures in Kansas City, both of which had positive impact. Now we are here. So fighting for our rights as disabled is something we will have to do here as well.

I hope the Board, and through them, the rank-and-file of WMATA, will honor our right to be treated fairly and without penalty. I look forward to interacting with the Board on these issues, hopefully in an atmosphere of congeniality, but irregardless of how we are received, the people will be heard and the truth will set us free.

Ruth Woollett (Arlington County, VA)

I am commenting on WMATA purchasing CNG vehicles. New CNG vehicles and infrastructure will be used for 20 years. DC cannot meet climate goals doing this. Fleets must be electrified and no more CNG vehicles should be purchased.

Robyn Winz (Washington, DC)

WMATA needs to act swiftly to electrify its Metrobus fleet so that D.C. residents can breathe cleaner air, and so that the city can be on track to meet its Clean Energy commitments. As a carless D.C. resident, I would be more likely to take Metrobus (as opposed to walking or biking) if I knew the bus I would be riding was not emitting nitrous oxides and other pollution that harms my and my neighbors' health, or releasing climate change-causing CO₂. D.C. should be a leader in electrifying its bus fleet for the benefit of all DMV residents and the climate.

Steve Banashek (Alexandria, VA)

I'm a thirty year plus resident of Alexandria and live about equidistant between the Braddock Road and King Street stations. While DASH has put six electric buses into regular service, is expecting eight more electric buses this year, and has committed to electrifying their fleet by 2035, Metro has made no such commitment much less put any electric buses into service. Also locally, the DC Circulator has had fourteen electric buses in service for a couple of years now and has plans to fully electrify their fleet before 2030. Montgomery County's Ride-On and Prince George's County's TheBus are electrifying their fleets. And it's not just local transit; Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Seattle, and New York City have all committed to electrified bus fleets. It's time Metro lives up to the Clean Energy DC Act's requirement to electrify fifty percent of the bus fleet by 2030 and be all electric no later than 2045, preferably sooner. Metro should also commit to phasing out the purchase of fossil fuel buses by 2025 and halt investments in fossil fuel infrastructure such as the CNG fueling station at the Shepherd Parkway bus garage that is likely to be a stranded asset before its intended lifespan. Instead, invest in on route charging infrastructure at Metro's rail stations. The King Street Metro station just had its bus bay area rebuilt but I suspect charging infrastructure was not even considered. That was a lost opportunity for Metro, DASH, REX, and others that serve the station. I suspect that opportunity exists at Metro's other suburban rail stations. The recent Sierra Club report outlined the environmental, front-line community, and economic benefits of Metro bus fleet electrification. It's disheartening that Metro's fossil fuel buses are continuing to blunt the benefits of electrification from DASH, DC Circulator, Ride-On, and TheBus. It's disheartening that Metro's fossil fuel buses continue to foul the air and contribute to climate change. It's time for Metro to follow the Sierra Club report recommendations and live up to the Clean Energy DC Act by committing to go electric and to get started now.

Rebekah Whilden (Sierra Club)

- WMATA Board Members-

My name is Rebekah Whilden and I am a Senior Campaign Representative for the Clean Transportation for All campaign with the national Sierra Club. In October of 2020 18 organizations [released a report](#) calling on WMATA to electrify the bus fleet. Over the last seven months, we have not heard any concrete plans from you to do exactly that even after residents testified that they wanted you to take action. Attached is a petition signed by 783 resident of the DMV area urging you to:

Publicly committing to meeting, and ideally exceeding, Clean Energy Act electrification timelines for 2030, 2035, 2040 and 2045, as numerous other transit agencies are doing.

- Publicly releasing a bus electrification plan in 2021. The plan should include opportunity for input from the general public; government agencies; WMATA workers; utility commissions in Washington D.C., Virginia and Maryland; and other transit agencies.
- Phasing out the purchase of new internal combustion engine buses immediately, and publicly committing to stop buying diesel buses by 2025.
- Prioritizing the deployment of electric buses in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods and environmental justice communities to ensure electrification benefits metro residents who are disproportionately harmed by smog and other transportation-related air pollution.
- Transportation is now responsible for more carbon pollution than any other sector of the U.S. economy and cities across the country are demonstrating that transit electrification offers a local solution to help address this global problem. Given that it serves the national capital region, WMATA has an opportunity to lead on climate and public health and save metro area taxpayers money at the same time. WMATA's plans for an equitable and sustainable electric bus future can and should be accomplished without raising fares for the riders who depend on WMATA every day.

Do the right thing.

Cheri Conca (Sierra Club)

Cities around the country are transitioning to all-electric bus fleets. WMATA should, too. Pollution from diesel buses drives up asthma rates, with children and low-income communities bearing the greatest burden. A 100% electric WMATA bus fleet would save DMV residents more than \$8 million per year in healthcare costs, according to a 2020 Sierra Club report. Please make the commitment to phase out the purchase of fossil fuel buses by 2025, stop investing in CNG infrastructure, and 100% electrify the bus fleet by 2045 or earlier for healthier, more resilient communities and climate action.

Elliott Negin (Union of Concerned Scientists)

This week, 52 elected officials; 26 public health, environmental, faith and labor groups; and nearly 800 residents from the Washington metropolitan area sent a clear message to Metro: Set a target date to completely electrify your bus fleet within the next two decades, stop buying fossil fuel buses after your current contract, abandon plans to install new methane fueling equipment, and prioritize introducing electric buses in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods that have disproportionately suffered from pollution.

Bus systems across the country are way ahead of Metro. Los Angeles Metro plans to electrify its 2,320 buses by 2028. San Francisco's buses will be all-electric by 2035. And fleets in Chicago, Seattle and New York City—which has nearly 6,000 buses—will be all-electric by 2040. Even smaller, local bus fleets are surpassing Metro. Alexandria's DASH bus system will have 14 electric buses by the end of this year, the D.C. Circulator system plans to be all-electric by 2029, and Montgomery County's Ride On system, which acquired four electric buses last year, plans to add another 10 by next year. Montgomery County also plans to electrify its entire 1,400 school bus fleet by 2035.

We haven't heard a peep from Metro staff since last November about Metro's sustainability plans, and apparently the topic is again not on the Metro Board agenda this week. The public deserves transparency about your plans. What is the status of your 12-bus pilot project? Why do you need two years to determine what kind of electric bus best suits your needs? Why are you planning to waste more than \$5 million on a new methane fueling facility when it will certainly become a stranded asset? Other bus transit agencies are faced with the same challenges as Metro, but they are forging ahead with their bus electrification plans, pandemic or no pandemic. Now that the pandemic is receding and your budget has stabilized, it's time that you stop slow-walking the transition to an electric bus fleet. We are facing a climate crisis and have to wean ourselves off of fossil fuels as quickly as possible. Metro should be a leader, not a laggard.

David Baron (Earthjustice)

Members of the WMATA Board: We urge WMATA to immediately begin electrifying its bus fleet on a schedule in line with or faster than that set forth in the 2019 Clean Energy DC Act. Switching to zero emission buses is a matter of public health. Even the lowest-emitting fossil fuel buses emit dangerous pollution that can lead to asthma attacks, emergency room visits, hospitalization, and premature death. EPA classifies diesel exhaust as likely to cause cancer in humans. And fossil-fueled buses emit large volumes of greenhouse gases at a time when the threats of climate change have never been greater. Electric buses are also less costly overall due to lower operating and maintenance costs.

A Sierra Club analysis using an Argonne National Laboratories model estimates that electrifying 50 percent of WMATA's fleet by 2030, would save WMATA more than \$350 million on lifetime costs compared with the total cost of ownership of WMATA's current fleet. By 2040, with 90 percent of the fleet electric, those savings increase to more than \$440 million. Unfortunately, WMATA is currently on track to acquire hundreds of new fossil-fuel buses between now and 2030 – buses that, according to WMATA's 2017 fleet management plan - will likely stay on the road for 15 years each. Rather than locking the region into a climate-polluting fleet for decades, WMATA must stop buying fossil-fueled buses and promptly transition to zero emitting vehicles. WMATA's current pilot plan for 14 electric buses in 2021, while welcome, falls far short of what's needed for a bus fleet totaling around 1,500. New York, Chicago, Portland, Seattle, San Francisco, and LA have all committed to fully electrify their bus fleets. WMATA can and must do the same.

David Baron Managing Attorney Earthjustice Washington, D.C.