



600 Fifth Street NW
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December 11, 2017

Chairman Evans, WMATA Board members, and WMATA staff:

The RAC's activities and priorities this month are described in the following letter.

FULL RIDERS ADVISORY COUNCIL

The RAC met on Wednesday, December 6. Eric Christensen, Chief of Internal Compliance, joined the group to discuss some of the internal investigations that WMATA's Quality and Internal Compliance Operations is undertaking.

On Tuesday, November 7, RAC members were invited to join a meeting with Ray LaHood and other groups of regional transportation stakeholders. Members had the chance to speak with Mr. LaHood about his proposals for WMATA and to provide their own feedback on both WMATA and the region's transportation issues.

Four RAC members also participated in the quarterly safety exercise held in Virginia on Sunday, November 5.

Virginia RAC members will have a lunch with their counterparts on the Board on Thursday, December 21, in Arlington's Government Center at Courthouse.

RAC COMMITTEES

The **Budget** committee continues to coordinate with Nina Albert, Director of Real Estate and Station Planning, about retail opportunities on WMATA properties.

The **Customer Service** is drafting a letter to the Board about the updated policy on exit fare recommendations; the Board will receive this soon. The RAC generally supports the move away from negative balances on SmarTrip cards, but has recommendations for ways to smooth the transition process.

The committee continues to seek an opportunity to attend a station manager training to learn more about how this important rider-facing position is taught and managed.

The **Programs, Projects, and Planning** committee plans to launch a RAC twitter account by the end of the year. In discussing the changes to WMATA's developer license agreement, both the committee and the entire RAC are concerned that WMATA sees existing apps as competition for one that it may be developing. Ideally the apps would be complementary, with all developers (WMATA included) focusing on their technological strengths.

The **Safety** committee compiled answers to questions asked by their counterparts on the Board safety committee during a joint meeting in September. These questions from the Board included perceptions of safety and measures of improvement. On behalf of the entire committee, Sawyer Baker, committee chair, sent Bob Lauby answers to these questions, along with recommendations of actions to take for the following year.

Sincerely,

Katherine Kortum

Chair, Riders' Advisory Council



RE: Accepting Noncash Payments at Exit Fare Machines

December 7, 2017

Dear Chairman Evans:

On November 24, 2017, WMATA issued a press release stating that, effective January 8, 2018, negative balances will no longer be permitted on SmarTrip® cards. The cited rationale for the policy change is that over the past seventeen years of using the SmarTrip® payment system, the bus and rail system has lost nearly \$25 million in unpaid fares. In order to mitigate in-system confusion and stress after the policy change, WMATA strongly suggests riders check SmarTrip® balances before entering the system, carry sufficient cash, or sign up for Auto Reload linked to a debit or credit card account.

The Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) requests that by the time WMATA implements the policy change that WMATA adapt exit fare machines to accept noncash payments either to pay exit fare or recharge SmarTrip® cards. If adapting all exit fare machines system wide is not feasible in this timeframe, we suggest at a minimum that stations with high ridership have at least one exit fare machine be made available to accept noncash payments for exiting riders. Alternatively, we suggest that one of the credit card-accepting machines from the mezzanine area be switched out with an exit fare machine for the first 90 days of the policy until riders are acclimated.

The reason for our suggestion is twofold. First, we are concerned that WMATA's new policy would unnecessarily delay riders entering and exiting the rail system fare gates. And, because the regional rail system bases its fares on time of day and distance traveled, WMATA's suggestions may be insufficient for riders who do not carry significant cash and cannot check their balances on the internet. These risks disproportionately impact lower income riders, our seniors, and members of the accessibility community. Also, the policy burdens and presents a negative image to past riders we want to attract back to Metro and visitors to our Nation's Capital.

Second, when riders attempt to enter the rail system or board a bus without the minimum SmarTrip® balance, they are required to recharge their SmarTrip® cards at the point of entry. However, if a rail rider had the bare minimum fare on a SmarTrip® card to enter the rail system, but his travel exceeds the remaining balance and does not carry cash, that rider may be prevented from exiting, becoming literally trapped inside Metrorail.

Rather than accepting his fate as a permanent resident of the Metrorail system, the rider may resort to panhandling fellow riders, desperately contact loved ones to be bailed out of the system, or, worse yet, attempt to forcibly exit the system without paying. This places our station managers in a precarious situation by either physically preventing riders from exiting the system or acquiescing and allowing riders to exit without paying the proper fare. These interactions increase the risk of selective enforcement, which is already a concern since WMATA has recently cracked down on fare evasion. None of these potential outcomes are ideal, as they adversely affect the flow of riders, potentially impair the safety of WMATA riders and personnel, and ultimately fail to adequately address the revenue shortfall.

It is also worth noting that in the process of crafting the new SmarTrip® policy, the RAC was not informed or consulted on the matter and only became aware of the policy when it was publicly announced. We assume that members of the Board were equally blindsided by the announcement, and we can agree that both rulemaking process and communication were less than ideal. But going forward, we hope to fulfill our role in advising the Board and WMATA in implementing this and other policies effectively and with minimal disruption to all stakeholders.

That being said, the RAC recognizes that capturing revenue is critical to WMATA's fiscal health. We also recognize that no fare payment system is going to be perfectly efficient, effective, and easy for all to use. Nor is there a foolproof way to ensure every rider pays the proper fare. However, small incremental measures like placing noncash payment options inside the fare gates would mitigate some of our concerns and furthermore, help WMATA capture revenue without sacrificing service.

We thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Paul J. Meissner, RAC Representative, City of Alexandria, Virginia

Katherine Kortum, RAC Chair

Members of the WMATA Riders' Advisory Council (RAC)

cc: General Manager Paul Wiedefeld

WMATA Board of Directors