



May 23, 2019

Chairman Evans, WMATA Board members, and WMATA staff:

I am pleased to present you with an update on the activities of the WMATA Riders' Advisory Council (RAC).

During our May meeting, the RAC welcomed WMATA General Manager Paul Wiedefeld for a general discussion of rider-facing issues and organizational updates. Prior to his visit, the RAC submitted a number of questions to Mr. Wiedefeld on issues ranging from the anticipated return of automatic train operation (ATO) to more detailed information on the impact of the Blue/Yellow line platform reconstruction project, as well as efforts to improve agency transparency and customer service.

Rail Operations

On issues of system operation, Mr. Wiedefeld recommended that the RAC speak to operations staff and the RAC plans to invite Laura Mason, Acting Assistant General Manager for Rail Operations, to speak to us during one of our upcoming meetings. RAC concerns and questions regarding rail operations include:

- Restoration of automatic train operation
- Consistency in utilization of turnbacks during scheduled or unscheduled track work and appropriate communication of changes in such operation
- Schedule and headway adherence, especially during off-peak operation
- Mitigating the impact of and isolating track work to ensure optimal operation and schedule adherence while reducing impacts to riders as much as possible
- Implementation of safety and communications procedures for passengers with disabilities
- Restoration of late-night service and the need for interim solutions like additional bus service instead of subsidizing ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft

Customer Service

With regard to customer service, Mr. Wiedefeld assured the RAC that efforts were underway to change organizational culture and improve customer interactions with front-line personnel, an overarching concern that the RAC has raised repeatedly in recent years. Mr. Wiedefeld stated that his priority is to create a customer service environment akin to that of Southwest Airlines or Chick-fil-A; however, he indicated that current hiring and promotion policies would need to change in order to accomplish this. That said, WMATA leaders have, on multiple occasions, informed the RAC that training curriculum has been improved and have also indicated that they

would welcome the RAC's attendance at a station manager training refresher course, an opportunity which we look forward to.

The RAC believes that while ongoing maintenance to improve system safety and reliability is paramount, improving customers' daily experience through better communication and customer service are also important strategies in maintaining and increasing ridership. We look forward to receiving additional information on customer service related informational requests and further encourage the Board to emphasize the importance of formal policies aimed at improving customers' experience and interactions with WMATA personnel.

Fares

Mr. Wiedefeld encouraged the RAC to consider what the future of WMATA fare structure should be. While the RAC does not yet have a comprehensive policy stance on fare changes, we have previously recommended making bus/rail transfers free, a policy suggested in WMATA's May 2018 set of recommendations for stabilizing and growing ridership. The RAC reiterated this recommendation to Mr. Wiedefeld during our meeting.

In addition, the RAC has previously emphasized the importance of increasing the number of customers who are pass holders and making the process of signing up for a pass as easy as possible. Again, this is also a recommendation for stabilizing ridership from WMATA's May 2018 report and we regularly hear from riders that adding passes to one's SmarTrip account is often burdensome or confusing, especially for customers who utilize Smart Benefits through their employers. Often employer HR departments are not aware of pass options or how to activate them and riders who attempt to sign up for passes through their individual accounts report difficulty in navigating the website or adding bus options to the Select Pass, for example. As such, the RAC encourages the Board to seek policy changes to streamline the pass process, a strategy that holds promise for reducing ridership declines.

Strollers on Buses

The RAC has previously recommended allowing children in strollers on Metro buses as a means of encouraging parents to utilize transit instead of other options. Yet again, this recommendation echoes WMATA's May 2018 report on stabilizing and increasing ridership and it is a policy question that we discussed with Mr. Wiedefeld during our May meeting. So long as strollers do not pose a problem for riders in wheelchairs, the RAC recommends allowing parents to bring children in strollers onto Metro buses.

We look forward to working with the Board and its relevant committees on these and other rider-focused issues. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns at: reusch.colin@gmail.com.

Thank you,
Colin Reusch,
Chair, WMATA Riders' Advisory Council