



21 October 2019

Chairman Smedberg and Members of the WMATA Board:

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

## I. Discussion with Chairman Smedberg

The RAC was pleased to welcome WMATA Board Chairman Paul Smedberg to our October meeting, during which we were able to discuss the Board's ongoing priority setting process as well as the RAC's continued focus on improving rider experience.

During this discussion, we agreed on the need to jointly examine modernization of WMATA's fare structure, with an eye toward equity as well as a balance between incentivizing commuter travel and shorter trips within the system's core. While the RAC has not advocated for any particular fare model, we have to date encouraged the Board and staff to consider the shortcomings of the current structure in remaining competitive with alternative transportation options like rideshare services. In general, the RAC is wary of across-the-board fare increases, but would appreciate the opportunity to have a dialogue about strategic updates to the fare structure as the Board and staff begin analyzing the potential effects of fare policy options.

As part of any upcoming budget and fare deliberations, the RAC encouraged consideration of strategies to increase ridership and system efficiency on both bus and rail, many of which have already been outlined by WMATA staff.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. "Stabilizing and Growing Metro Ridership." May 2018. Available at: <http://bit.ly/wmata-ride>.

In general, the RAC encouraged Chairman Smedberg to lead the Board in a more proactive stance with regard to WMATA policy and culture change. In doing so, the RAC echoed its longstanding concerns with WMATA customer service, communications, and transparency as well as our desire to restore system service and ridership to optimal levels. While the Board has historically focused its energy largely on its fiduciary responsibilities, a more deliberate and perhaps prescriptive approach to improving system operation, customer experience, and accountability is warranted. The RAC is encouraged by Chair Smedberg's stated commitment to a more strategic vision for the agency and we look forward to working closely with the Board to achieve it.

## II. Ongoing Bus Performance Challenges

During the public comment period, the RAC heard from James Pizzurro, an independent rider advocate and developer of the mobile application MetroHero. Mr. Pizzurro and his colleagues also partnered with the Coalition for Smarter Growth to produce the recent Metrobus Report Card, which found that only 60% of Metrobus stop visits were on schedule.<sup>2</sup>

Riders have repeatedly informed the RAC of ongoing bus performance issues, especially along with the 7Y, 11Y, D13/14, and H1/2/3 routes. Data provided to the RAC by MetroHero for the 7Y and 11Y routes suggests that many trips are simply not operating.

Route	AM Average Missed	AM Median Missed	PM Average Missed	PM Median Missed
7Y	5	0	7	0
11Y	1.5	6	7	9
11Y (from 9/9/2019)	5	6.5	4	1

*Data from the period June 3, 2019 to October 16, 2019 as provided via the WMATA Realtime Bus Prediction Data Stream.<sup>3</sup> Data is not available for the D13/14 and H1/2/3 routes. A spreadsheet containing the original for these calculations is available at <http://bit.ly/11y7y2019>.*

<sup>2</sup> Metrobus Report Card. Available at: <https://metrobusreportcard.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> MetroHero does not retain every route's historical Metrobus performance data, given the volume of total data. WMATA Real-Time Bus Predictions API, <http://bit.ly/metbus-api>.

Mr. Pizzurro informed the RAC that WMATA's own data feeds are not providing complete real-time bus data and are not capturing many Metrobus trips. Using data collected in May of this year, Mr. Pizzurro estimated that as many as 14% of scheduled bus stop visits across 34 Metrobus routes did not occur or there was no data to validate that they occurred. As a result, many riders are unable to rely on information provided via WMATA's own real-time bus tracking system or third party mobile applications. While it is possible that the missed trips recorded by MetroHero are operating but lack functioning on-board bus position equipment, this is exceedingly difficult to rectify vis-a-vis ongoing rider complaints about buses that simply fail to appear at or near their scheduled times, including and especially at route terminals.<sup>4</sup>

The RAC is concerned by these findings. If riders are not able to rely on real-time bus data or WMATA timetables, they cannot accurately plan their commutes and may choose alternatives. Moreover, we believe that this presents a risk to WMATA from an accountability standpoint. As such, we encourage the Board to seek information on this missing data and work with staff to rectify the situation.

### III. Rush Hour Promise

The RAC continues to have questions about WMATA's decision to suspend the Rush Hour Promise following the October 7 collision of two non-revenue trains at Farragut West. This was the first service day immediately following the overnight collision of two out-of-service trains at Farragut West, when the Blue, Orange, and Silver lines ran severely reduced service throughout the day. The Rush Hour Promise was in effect during the morning rush on October 7, but suspended during the evening rush period.

According to the information provided to the public about the Rush Hour Promise, suspensions will occur only in certain limited circumstances:

Most common causes of delay are included in the Rush Hour Promise. However, credits will not be issued under the following limited circumstances:

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<sup>4</sup> The RAC has previously discussed how WMATA's existing data streams limit the ability of customers to access information they need, especially during service disruptions and for trip planning. See: <http://bit.ly/rac19-9>.

- Major capital work projects when customer notification is made in advance.
- Severe weather events (e.g. major winter snowstorms) when Metro service is adjusted and/or customer notification is made in advance.
- Extraordinary circumstances or force majeure events, such as a region-wide blackout or major security incident, when service is affected.<sup>5</sup>

It is unclear how the suspension of the Rush Hour Promise is consistent with WMATA's policy as advertised to customers; in fact, many riders expressed their consternation with this decision. Earlier this month, the RAC sent a request for information on the Rush Hour Promise policy to WMATA staff.<sup>6</sup> The response from staff was that WMATA decided to suspend the policy during the afternoon rush hour partially to discourage riders from entering the system and prevent overcrowding. In addition, staff said that the Rush Hour Promise remained in effect during morning rush hour *"in consideration of customers who might not have heard about the disruption, or who might not have had the ability to consider alternate transportation on short notice."*

While the RAC understands that WMATA had the opportunity to notify riders prior to the afternoon rush hour and sought to discourage overcrowding, those riders who were not aware of the disruption and chose to take WMATA to work that morning would still largely have been reliant on WMATA to get home. Moreover, such ad hoc policy decisions run the risk of further eroding riders' trust in the system at a time when WMATA simply cannot afford to lose customers.

The RAC encourages the Board and WMATA management to seek a more consistent, transparent, and rider-friendly refund policy. In addition, given WMATA's own justification for suspending the Rush Hour Promise during this most recent episode, it would behoove WMATA to analyze whether the Rush Hour Promise policy actually incentivizes more riders to use the system during major disruptions as was assumed. A better understanding of the ways in which such policies change rider behavior or affect rider satisfaction may be informative as the Board considers modernizing fares as well.

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<sup>5</sup> WMATA Rush Hour Promise Terms & Conditions. <https://wmata.com/fares/smartrip/rush-hour-promise-terms.cfm> (accessed 17 Oct 2019).

<sup>6</sup> RAC request for information on the Rush Hour Promise policy, October 17, 2019. See: <http://bit.ly/rhp10-19>

We look forward to building a more meaningful dialogue with the Board, staff, and regional stakeholders as we all continue to work together to make WMATA the region's first choice for transportation. Please feel free to contact me at [colinreusch+metro@gmail.com](mailto:colinreusch+metro@gmail.com) with any questions or concerns.

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