



December 2020

2020-12-06

Dear Chairman Smedberg and Members of the Board:

FY2022 Budget Proposal

RAC members had serious concerns about the impact this budget would have on people currently riding the system, let alone riders who may return. As one RAC member noted: "if WMATA expects people not to show up, people aren't going to show up." In other words, WMATA is suggesting that these might be service levels at a time when vaccines may be widely available may encourage some to consider the purchase of a car. Releasing this budget proposal now was unequivocally the wrong decision.

As WMATA Budget Staff were unavailable to answer our questions in person, the RAC has submitted the following questions for written response or at a future meeting:

1. What data are WMATA using to support the assumption that such a low percentage of riders would return? Did WMATA consult major employers (e.g., OMB) or educational institutions? How were recent vaccine developments taken into account?
2. If 30 minute headways were to become reality, would WMATA develop a schedule to allow for timed transfers at major Metrorail interchanges?
3. What capital projects are being deferred to use \$160 million of the capital budget for operational expenses?
4. How does closing Metrorail stations save money if station managers are still on site for safety reasons?
5. Does this budget assume that WMATA will continue to charge peak fares during "peak" hours even at 30 minute headways?
6. In earlier discussions on WMATA's Covid Response, staff have said that WMATA requires an entire quarter to prepare for a service ramp up. What specific steps are WMATA taking to shorten the service ramp up time? For example, if Congress were act in May to provide additional federal dollars for WMATA's FY22 budget, would WMATA be able to adjust service based on the availability of those funds?
7. What lobbying efforts is WMATA currently engaged in, both independently and through APTA or Transportation for America? How might riders play a part in contacting their congressional representatives?

Recognizing the importance that congressional action plays in averting a doomsday scenario, three RAC members have been tasked with drafting talking points for riders interested in contacting their congressional delegations. RAC leadership is also in informal contact with regional transit advocacy groups to discuss their lobbying efforts. A copy of the document produced by our working group will be provided to the board in a later report.

We understand that the budget process demands significant lead time and that the budget must be made on the basis of data available now. Nevertheless, WMATA has created unnecessary confusion among current riders about the specific changes being made. Anecdotally, some essential workers--in this case grocery store employees--understood the proposed budget to be taking effect in January and not July. They were unaware of the Board's previous action on the revised FY21 budget and their confusion about the changes made in this budget proposal (especially headways and Metrorail 9pm closing/lack of weekend service) has caused them considerable stress. For that reason especially, we strongly encourage WMATA to quickly begin distributing brochures and posters outlining Metrorail and Metrobus service changes taking effect in January and February.

It is important to remember that WMATA will continue to charge these essential employees and thousands like them the same peak fares they pay now, regardless of actual service levels. At a time when low paid retail employees have been called "essential" and want nothing more than to put food on the table while avoiding a deadly and highly infectious disease, they deserve so much better than muddled communications about their (in many cases) only means to get to work. They deserve better from all of us, now more than ever.

Finally, it is with great sadness the RAC bids farewell to our retiring colleagues Yvette Washington and Wil White. Their insights have been invaluable to our deliberations and we are grateful for their years of service to WMATA's riders. We are all better off for it.

My colleagues and I wish you all a peaceful and healthy holiday season and a happy 2021.

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Kierig", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Andrew Kierig
Chair