



21 June 2019

Chairman Evans 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. Cash Free Bus Pilot

The primary item for our meeting was an update from Catherine Vanderwaart on the results of the cash-free bus pilot.

In previous discussions on related matters, RAC Members have indicated their concerns about the impact eliminating cash fares on Metrobus could have on lower income WMATA users. At the same time, WMATA's May 2018 "Stabilizing and Growing Metro Ridership" report argued that "every 1 percent increase in bus speeds is expected to increase ridership 0.4 to 1 percent," one of the potential outcomes of eliminating cash fares.¹ The RAC agrees with that report's recommendations and continues to strongly support their rapid implementation.

That said, the RAC was surprised to learn that there was limited to no improvement in Route 79's travel times, potentially because of the route's already limited cash user base (6-9%). As the "Stabilizing and Growing Metro Ridership" report suggested, all door boarding and the development of more bus lanes (including the expansion of the Georgia Avenue bus lane) would likely yield significant travel time improvements.

While WMATA does not have the power to designate or construct bus lanes, implementation of all-door boarding could yield significant benefits to the bus network's performance. San Francisco's Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) has achieved significant improvements in the performance of their bus network, one that operates with limited bus lane mileage in the second densest city in the US. Finally, the implementation of all door boarding in San Francisco has led to improved fare compliance with fare evasion decreasing from 9.5 percent to 7.9

¹ Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. "Stabilizing and Growing Metro Ridership." May 2018. p. 15. Available at bit.ly/wmata-ride

percent, netting \$1.9m in additional fare revenue for the agency. To quote the report directly: **“The success of All-Door Boarding in San Francisco’s operating environment demonstrates the potential benefits of this policy for other cities that are exploring cost-effective opportunities to speed up transit.”**²

The pilot also revealed that many cash customers are unaware that they can reload their SmarTrip card at a variety of retail outlets and not just at Metrorail station machines. Part of this likely stems from lower income individuals having disproportionately limited or no access to the internet and the fact that a listing of the retail outlets where cards may be reloaded with cash is exceedingly difficult to find on the WMATA website. Finally, even at those outlets where customers can reload, they are still dependent on variable store hours and the availability of store staff to handle the transaction.

Finding information about where SmarTrip cash customers can reload their cards (or that they can reload at retail locations at all) is a reminder of a broader problem with the quality, consistency, and amount of communication from WMATA to riders. This has been an ongoing issue that the RAC has raised on numerous occasions, most recently in our May 2019 Report after our meeting with GM Wiedefeld. As WMATA continues to undertake initiatives to rebuild ridership and move the system beyond “Back to Good,” the RAC earnestly hopes to work with WMATA staff to constructively address these concerns.

II. Bus Transformation Project

The RAC’s representative on the Bus Transformation Project (BTP) has reported that the project is potentially at risk of failure due to ongoing difficulties between the jurisdictions. The RAC strongly urges the jurisdictions to undertake the difficult steps necessary to transform the regional bus network and improve connectivity for years to come.³

III. Employee Recognition Initiatives

In response to rider suggestions, the RAC considered the development of a means through which the public could highlight the ways in which WMATA staff regularly make a difference to riders. Due to logistical difficulties (e.g., how does one correctly identify a Metrorail operator?), the proposal was tabled. Instead, RAC

² San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency. “All Door Boarding Evaluation Final Report.” December 2014. p. 1. Available at bit.ly/smfta

³ Cf. Matthew F. Letourneau “Letter to the Bus Transformation Project Team.” Attachment 5B, Northern Virginia Transportation Commission June 2019 Meeting Materials, pp. 101-102. Available at bit.ly/nvtc619.

members will continue to pass rider compliments about staff to the RAC Secretary, so that they may include the subject staff in the “Extraordinary in the Ordinary” program.

IV. Ongoing Concerns

The RAC urgently requests an update on the repairs to the Dupont Circle/Farragut North cooling system. This is a matter of increasing concern as temperatures continue to rise and temporary fans do not provide a significant cooling effect. Returning to our comments about the need for improved communication with riders, the RAC encourages WMATA to proactively provide riders with information on this and every other major construction project at both stations and online. The information provided to the RAC and the public on major areas of concern too frequently comes from the media, social networking sites, and not WMATA.

Finally, while the RAC applauds WMATA for announcing the return of automatic door operation on the Red Line, we would appreciate knowing when automatic doors will be rolled out across the remaining lines. At the same time, further information on the status of the automatic train operation system, including the release of the report WMATA commissioned on ATO reintroduction, would be appreciated. The RAC is puzzled by the abrupt reversal of Mr. Wiedefeld’s October 2018 announcement that ATO would return systemwide in 2019. Ride jerkiness resulting from manual train operation is a source of frequent rider complaints.

As always, the RAC stands prepared to engage with all stakeholders in a serious dialogue about what steps WMATA and the Greater Washington Region might undertake to make transit the Region’s transportation mode of choice. Please feel free to contact me at **rac@kierig.org**.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Kierig". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "K" and a long, sweeping underline.

Andrew Kierig
WMATA RAC Co-Chair
Representative of the Commonwealth of Virginia