



16 January 2020

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. FY2021 Budget

During our January 2020 meeting, the RAC continued to review available information on the FY2021 budget proposals, including recent additions by members of the WMATA Board. While the RAC plans to further review the Board approved docket and other forthcoming budget proposal analyses, RAC members did raise a number of questions and concerns.

Taken together, the current list of proposals does not yet seem to speak to a clear set of priorities (e.g., stabilizing and increasing rail and bus ridership, fare equity, etc.). We hope that the Board is able to articulate its own priorities as WMATA enters the public participation phase of this budget process. In general, the RAC encourages the Board to prioritize strategies that would drive increases in ridership and improve customer experience, including off-peak and weekend hours. Moreover, the RAC encourages the Board to consider how any proposed budget items would impact low-income riders across the region.

As is always the case, the RAC is concerned with the potential impact of fare increases, bus surcharges, and changes or eliminations of bus routes. As such, we look forward to understanding the justifications for these proposals and reviewing staff analyses of their potential impact. Members of the RAC specifically raised questions about the recently-added proposal to eliminate late-night bus service if weekend rail closure moves to 2 AM as WMATA's own data show significant declines in bus ridership overall. RAC members also raised concerns with the amendment to increase the proposed weekend flat fare; if such a change were implemented, it could represent an increase in base fare for some riders utilizing rail for short trips on the weekends and therefore discourage weekend ridership.

As we have previously noted, the RAC is generally supportive of expanding pass options and increasing the rail/bus transfer discount. Again, the RAC encourages the Board and staff to pursue strategies to ensure that all riders are able to purchase fares through their employee benefits administrators.

II. Effective Communication and Outreach

Given the breadth of budget proposals on the docket, some of which seem to conflict with one another, the RAC is concerned with making sure that riders are able to easily understand each budget proposal, its intended purpose, and its potential impact. We encourage the Board to proactively work with WMATA staff to develop public-facing materials, surveys, and outreach strategies that adequately communicate this information and drive informed input from riders and stakeholders across the region. The RAC is happy to lend a hand in this process and would gladly participate in public outreach efforts.

Of particular concern are proposed changes to bus routes as such changes can have significant impact on riders' daily lives. Some RAC members raised concerns with the lack of timely communication during changes to bus routes in recent months. We hope that WMATA will redouble its efforts to ensure that riders are well-informed of such proposed changes throughout the budget process and beyond.

We look forward to a fruitful dialogue on these issues in the coming months. Please feel free to contact me at colinreusch+metro@gmail.com with any questions or concerns.

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