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November 16, 2023

Chair Smedberg and Members of the Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Riders' Advisory Council's report for November 2023.

FY2025 Budget/Fare and Service Concepts:

At the RAC's November meeting, Mark Irvine and Alex Block, from Metro's Office of Strategic Initiatives, briefed the Council on the development of Metro's Fiscal Year 2025 budget, including current ridership trends and potential options for changes to fares and service to address the proposed deficit.

It's clear that Metro's current level of frequent service during all hours, not just at peak commute times, coupled with improved reliability, has brought riders back and is making them more satisfied with their service. As a Board, you've heard it in meetings and presentations, and as RAC members, we've heard it from the riders we represent.

Unfortunately, many of the service and fare options presented to address the expected budget shortfall would, as one member put it, render Metro "unusable." As the Board works with the General Manager and his staff in refining budget options for consideration, we urge you to consider options that preserve as much service as possible. For its part, the RAC will continue with rider engagement endeavors to ensure that rider perspectives are included in the overall budget discussion.

Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School Service

In addition, several students from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School attended the November RAC meeting to express their concerns about crowding on Route J2, which serves the high school. The students reported that buses have become so crowded before and after school that students are often unable to enter a bus as it passes their stop, and must wait approximately 40 minutes for the next bus. Students recommended additional trips to relieve crowding – westbound in the morning, eastbound in the afternoon – to avoid instances where riders, including students, are unable to board the bus. As Metro periodically reviews and changes service to meet changing customer needs, we urge staff to find ways to better match service on the J2 with demand.

As always, thank you for your time and attention, and I remain available for any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Mike Lebowitz

Mike Lebowitz, Chair
Riders' Advisory Council