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April 25, 2024

Chair Smedberg and Members of the Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Riders' Advisory Council's report for April 2024.

Wayfinding and Customer Service Updates

At the RAC's April meeting, Brian Anderson, Metro's Director of Digital Customer Innovation, provided an update to the Council on the wayfinding pilot at the L'Enfant Plaza Metro station and the plan to roll out these wayfinding upgrades throughout the system. Members are excited about the plan to broaden the scope of these wayfinding improvements to other stations, and encourage Metro to incorporate Metrobus information, including specific bus stop locations and real-time arrivals, to the greatest extent possible in any upgrades.

Better Bus Outreach:

The RAC also heard from the Better Bus team about their plan for outreach around the draft "Year One" network that will be unveiled next month. The RAC appreciates the extensive outreach planned to talk with customers and other stakeholders about the extensive changes planned for the Metrobus network. We look forward to digging into the specifics of the plan once it's released next month.

RAC Annual Report

The RAC approved its Annual Report (attached), identifying riders' top concerns along with rider-suggested ways to address these issues. While the report goes into greater detail, the top three issues cited by riders as their top concern are:

- Metro's Fiscal and Long-Term Health
- Service Disruptions and Related Communications
- Metrobus Reliability

The report also noted riders' increased optimism around Metro, driven largely by recent increases in frequency and reliability. We look forward to working with the Board and Metro staff to address these and other issues in the coming year.

Leadership Update

Finally, the RAC held its annual elections as part of its April meeting. In addition to my election as Chair, Ali Siddiqi from Maryland was elected as the Council's Maryland Vice Chair. We'll be holding elections for a Virginia Vice Chair at a subsequent meeting.

I want to thank our immediate past Chair, Mike Lebowitz for his thoughtful, consistent and thorough approach to moving the RAC forward over the past year.

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

Sincerely,

Cole Staudt

Cole Staudt, Chair
Riders' Advisory Council



THE WASHINGTON
METROPOLITAN AREA
TRANSIT AUTHORITY
(WMATA) RIDERS'
ADVISORY COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT TO
THE WMATA BOARD
OF DIRECTORS

APRIL 2024

REPORT PREPARED BY

WMATA Riders' Advisory Council Annual Report Committee

Riders' Advisory Council Annual Report Committee

Lucas Habosky, Chair
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Michael Lebowitz
Patrick Sheehan

**Report Approved by the
Riders' Advisory Council on
April 3, 2024**

Michael Lebowitz, Chair

To the WMATA Board of Directors,

The RAC Annual Report intends to serve as a voice for riders. The diverse sample of riders who contributed to this report is a direct reflection of the concerns and thoughts of the people who rely on Metro. We hope the Board, staff, and relevant stakeholders can use the RAC Annual Report as a resource for addressing rider concerns in an impactful way.

Sincerely,

RAC Annual Report Committee

Executive Summary



Purpose: The founding mission of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) is to “serve in an advisory role and recommend possible solutions to the Board and staff, based on public input, so that WMATA can effectively address the diverse concerns of the riding public . . .”¹

To fulfill this mandate, the RAC must engage in the following activities:

1. Endeavor to collect relevant data and information from a diverse cross-section of the riding public regarding matters and issues affecting riders and rider satisfaction;
2. Glean from the collected information possible solutions to resolve issues affecting riders and rider satisfaction; and
3. Effectively convey this information and proposed solutions to the WMATA Board of Directors, WMATA staff, and relevant stakeholders.

Authority: Production and dissemination of the Annual Report is consistent with the Bylaws of the WMATA RAC. The RAC Mission Statement articulates that “[t]he RAC exists to actively seek input from a broad range of riders and organizations with an expressed interest in public transit on operational and budgetary issues that affect Metrorail, Metrobus, and MetroAccess; advise the WMATA Board of Directors on ways to resolve such issues to improve Metrorail, Metrobus and MetroAccess services; and recommend possible solutions to the Board, based on public input and informed deliberation, so that WMATA can effectively address the diverse needs of the riding public.”^{2 3}

Scope: In accordance with the RAC’s founding mandate and bylaws, members of the RAC Annual Report Committee gathered public input from Metrorail, Metrobus, and MetroAccess riders across the Transit Zone, between November 2023 and February 2024. RAC Annual Report Committee members discerned riders’ top three concerns as they pertained to Metro, and solicited proposed solutions from riders that addressed rider concerns. Committee members also solicited positive observations, quotes, numeric ratings, and home stations/lines/bus routes, if volunteered or self-identified by riders. For purposes of informed deliberation in proposing and vetting solutions contained in this report, RAC Annual Report Committee members also engaged with WMATA staff—including those involved with rail, bus, safety, and technology—during regular RAC meetings.

Findings: Riders expressed increased optimism and positive sentiment toward Metro, mainly driven by satisfaction with service reliability and frequency (particularly Metrorail), wait times, and a lack of delays. However, riders were still hesitant to express full loyalty and trust in Metro, due to fiscal/budget concerns and historical inconsistencies with the system. This report finds that riders want to see improvements in tangible customer experience, reliability, technology, and communications. Riders also provided a wide array of diverse proposals on how to address specific concerns and expressed positive sentiment toward many ongoing initiatives at Metro.

¹ See 2005-44, Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (September 22, 2005)

² Bylaws, Article II, ¶ A

³ Bylaws Article II, ¶ B.1.a-e.

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Data Summary and Self-Identifying Rider Census



Data Summary

With respect to Metrorail and Metrobus riders, a percentage of riders providing input to the RAC Annual Report Committee identified the following issues as their top three concerns:

Rider Concern	Percentage Identified as a Top Concern
<i>Fiscal and Long-Term Health of Metro</i>	36%
<i>Service Disruptions and Associated Communications</i>	28%
<i>Metrobus Reliability</i>	27%
<i>Rider & Fare Technology (SmarTrip app, card readers, digital farecards)</i>	26%
<i>Safety</i>	24%
<i>Cleanliness and Littering</i>	18%
<i>Parking</i>	10%

With respect to MetroAccess, riders (through input provided by the WMATA Accessibility Advisory Committee and Chair Pat Sheehan) identified **WMATA Budget Deficit and Potential Service Cuts** as their top concern.

Rider Census

The RAC Mission Statement articulates that “the RAC exists to actively seek input from a broad range of riders” — in accordance with this mission, the RAC Annual Report Committee collected adequate feedback from riders in each of the following jurisdictions to inform this year’s RAC Annual Report:

<i>Arlington, VA</i>	<i>City of Falls Church, VA</i>	<i>Prince George’s County, MD</i>
<i>Alexandria, VA</i>	<i>Loudoun County, VA</i>	<i>Washington, DC</i>
<i>Fairfax County, VA</i>	<i>Montgomery County, MD</i>	

Although public input gathered by Committee members aims to be as non-intrusive as possible, and will not require rider names or most other personal information, committee members attempt to gather rail and/or bus line information from each responding rider, and jurisdictions of travel. Numerous riders did choose to voluntarily self-identify their home or most frequently used Metrorail line/station/bus route. Of riders choosing to self-identify, the RAC Annual Report Committee received contributions to the Annual Report from:

- Regular riders of all **6 Metrorail Lines**
- Regular riders at **26 different Metrorail stations across DC, Virginia, and Maryland***
- Regular riders of **17 distinct bus routes***

* Only representative of riders who volunteered to self-identify this information, accounting for less than 40% of all contributions to the Annual Report.

Introduction

Riders' top concern was the fiscal health and long-term funding of Metro. More than one out of every three riders highlighted funding and fiscal health as one of their top concerns. This concern was directly associated in many cases with the Fiscal Year '25 Budget, corresponding deficit, and potential service cuts. Riders continually expressed increasing optimism and satisfaction with Metro during the Annual Report feedback gathering. However, concerns over drops in service due to budget shortfalls and reminders of inconsistent operations in past years leave riders skeptical. Riders have clearly expressed that operational consistency and frequent, reliable service are the biggest factors in choosing Metro over alternative transportation options.

Riders' concern toward reliability was clearly highlighted in ways beyond the budget as the RAC engaged riders for this year's Annual Report. Riders highlighted service disruptions and Metrobus reliability (in the form of frequency, crowding, and tracking) as two of the top five rider concerns. More than one in four riders expressed concerns with both service disruptions (and their subsequent handling) and Metrobus reliability. These concerns come as little surprise to the RAC, as riders reported significant issues with Orange/Silver Line disruptions, Red Line disruptions, and shuttle buses over the past year. Similarly, rider satisfaction with Metrobus is a demonstrable priority at Metro — with a significant slate of initiatives already in progress to improve the service.

The other top concerns among riders centered around physical rider experiences within the system. Personal safety, cleanliness, and rider technology were all reported as top concerns affecting comfort and customer experience. Riders notably stated that these in-your-face issues, namely safety and cleanliness, were a common reason for not choosing to use Metro on a more frequent basis.

This report intends to serve as a voice for riders. The diverse sample of riders who contributed to this year's report is a direct reflection of the concerns and thoughts of riders who rely on WMATA for their everyday transportation needs and are passionate about WMATA succeeding. Although riders greatly appreciate the outreach carried out by WMATA staff throughout the year, most riders were extremely appreciative that their thoughts and concerns were conveyed to WMATA by independent advocates on the RAC.



Top Rider Concerns

A: Cleanliness and Littering

Issue: Metro has a reputation among visitors and residents for being one of the cleanest transit systems in the United States. However, although it is prohibited to eat, drink, smoke, or litter onboard vehicles or in stations, 18 percent of riders identified cleanliness and littering as one of their top three concerns. As ridership continues to rebound and grow, the system can only expect to see more trash and both accidental and ill-intended ding. Riders highlighted dirty seats, food and drink spills, and overflowing trash cans as their most frequent tangible concerns. Furthermore, riders expressed aggravation from witnessing and encountering littering on a repeated basis. Riders believe WMATA can improve by boosting trash collection, increasing littering enforcement, and consistently cleaning up seats on trains and buses.

According to respondents, littering on buses and railcars is a frequent occurrence. They noted the most prevalence during peak commuting hours and at the busiest core stations. Many riders expressed that littering and spilled food and drink were not only unsightly but contributed to greater crowding due to seats and standing areas being unusable. Riders witnessed substantial accumulations of trash and debris on the tracks across the system. The issue of trash in the trackbed presents a perceived concern of fire hazards and subsequent delays. Also, the issue of littering was commonly linked with safety issues onboard bus and rail vehicles. A handful of riders notably called out experiences on Metrobus, where they encountered alcohol consumption and smoking by unruly riders, who discarded their prohibited items on the seat or floor of the bus/railcar before exiting.

Trash collection and container availability was another critical area highlighted by riders who listed cleanliness and littering as one of their top three concerns. Riders expressed discontent with overflowing trash cans within stations and at bus stops. This not only prevented riders from easily disposing of their garbage but also led to others carrying trash onto the train or bus and those items being accidentally or purposely discarded in the vehicles. The number and location of waste cans were highlighted as an issue by some riders. According to riders, the overall cleanliness of Metro vehicles and facilities paired with the prevalence of littering directly impacts their comfort, perception of safety, and desire to use Metro.

Rider Quotes

"There's almost always three or four seats that no one wants to sit in when I'm riding the bus"

"Trash and spilled drinks go uncleaned"

"One night I saw about 20 rats on the opposite platform at Gallery Place/Chinatown"

"I wish more bus stops had trash cans"

Top Rider Concerns

A: Cleanliness and Littering

Big Picture Ramifications

Comfort, safety, and sanitation have a direct impact on a rider's desire to use Metro. Cleanliness and littering provide an exceedingly visible reason for riders to justify using alternatives to public transportation. Metro has an extensive reputation for being clean, but physical discomfort and a sense of disorder are overly common reasons that prevent both commuters and tourists from having greater utilization, and this poses threats to Metro's long-term viability, ridership, and revenue.

Riders' Proposed Solutions

1. Greater investment and coordination in trash collection and cleaning*

Riders expressed that more frequent collection of trash and emptying of waste cans, particularly at the busiest stations and during peak hours, is needed as ridership continues to grow and rebound during weekdays. Riders also suggested a greater emphasis on spot cleaning is needed to address food/drink spills and discarded waste onboard buses and railcars. Riders stated that a focused effort on in-service cleaning could go a long way to addressing cleanliness on a more active basis. Riders further requested additional waste cans at both rail stations and bus stops, to the extent such waste cans meet relevant security requirements. Riders also indicated a greater frequency of waste cans would help to eliminate both accidental and ill-intended littering. Furthermore, repositioning waste cans at regular intervals or positions would create better habits among riders.

2. Enforcement

Riders proposed increased enforcement of littering, eating and drinking, smoking, and alcohol consumption onboard both Metrorail and Metrobus. It is unlawful to litter, eat, drink, or smoke while riding Metro and riders suggested more Transit Police ride buses and trains to both enforce and deter littering. Most riders expressed that they believe citations and formal warnings are warranted. Many also communicated that they rarely witness enforcement, although the rules are posted in nearly every vehicle and station. Riders expressed the need for Metro's coordination with local law enforcement and special police officers to increase the enforcement of littering, as well as eating, drinking, and smoking on vehicles and in stations.

3. Announcements and signage*

Riders proposed that WMATA should publicize that increased cleanliness enforcement is being planned or carried out by Transit Police and special police officers. Furthermore, more frequent and direct announcements around littering and prohibited items and actions would help to serve as a deterrent for these types of behavior.

* - Indicates that the RAC endorses the riders' proposed solution.

Top Rider Concerns

B: Fiscal and Long-Term Health of the Metro System

Issue: Over 36% of riders cited concerns over Metro’s fiscal health and long-term viability as a top concern, the most common concern among riders. Most riders associated their concerns with Metro’s continual budget challenges and a lack of dedicated funding. As service has rebounded, and in most cases substantially improved since the COVID-19 pandemic, many riders have expressed fears that budget shortfalls will lead to a return of subpar service and a state of disrepair across the system.

Riders notably provided positive feedback in this year’s annual report around wait times, Metrorail frequency, and a lack of single-tracking and delays. However, the news of the upcoming fiscal year’s budget shortfall and potential service cuts led to an extensive number of riders voicing concerns over Metro’s fiscal health and funding.

It is clear that riders want a successful and effective Metro, and many riders expressed support for dedicated funding sources for Metro. Riders expressed dissatisfaction with the arduous budget process that seems to take place every one to two years. Many riders stated that they feel in any given year Metro could experience a significant shortfall, ultimately leading them to bypass Metro entirely.

Big Picture Ramifications

It is abundantly clear that service cuts and inconsistencies will drive riders away from Metro. Although Metro has shown improved performance over the last few years, the system has been historically inconsistent, which has led to limited loyalty from riders. If Metro faces budget constraints, it will have a major negative effect on ridership and rider satisfaction. Above all, riders want consistent and effective service, and ensuring Metro’s long-term fiscal health is crucial to doing so.



Rider Quotes

“There’s uncertainty, budget cuts will always be hanging over our head”

“My sole concern is Metro getting dedicated funding to preserve long-term health of system”

“Dedicated funding would ensure students can stay connected to the DMV region”

“More consistency with funding!”

Top Rider Concerns

B: Fiscal and Long-Term Health of the Metro System

Riders' Proposed Solutions

1. Pursue options for dedicated funding sources*

Riders proposed that Metro explore and pursue options for long-term dedicated funding. While the RAC understands that WMATA can not do this alone, it is important for the Board to understand rider sentiment on this issue. Specifically, several riders advocated for the implementation of a sales tax to fund Metro. Riders residing in DC voiced positive sentiment towards a sales tax for Metro if proposed by the city. One rider also proposed the establishment of a stand-alone excise tax on gasoline, which would fund Metro in an attempt to counteract the emissions emitted by drivers who are choosing to not take public transportation. Exceedingly common was rider sentiment that dedicated funding should be pursued in DC, Virginia, and Maryland.

2. Explore innovative funding ideas*

Riders also seemed fond of WMATA working with local jurisdictions to explore innovative funding options, outside of traditional taxes and subsidies. Some riders proposed a congestion pricing model, which would charge drivers by charging tolls to travel in certain areas or at certain times. Riders stated that the revenues received from the congestion pricing could go directly to fund Metro or be marked as transportation-specific funding by their specific municipality.

3. Revenue Optimization*

Some riders proposed more revenue specific ideas to address Metro funding. Riders proposed maximizing ad revenue by allowing for advertising in more places and forms across the system. Riders seemed increasingly comfortable with increased ads within Metro, given that the service is reliable and safe. Another unique proposed solution was selling fare value to conventions, groups, or employers in mass quantities, who could in turn provide it to guests, employees, or others.

4. Resource optimization*

Many riders suggested a wide array of ideas on how to optimize resourcing and cut costs. Specifically, riders proposed switching lights to energy-efficient LED variations to save on energy costs, forgoing spending on unnecessary touches such as phone charging ports, auditing overhead costs to address overspending, and renegotiating with vendors. Riders also expressed support for the investment in Automatic Train Operation (ATO).

* - Indicates that the RAC endorses the riders' proposed solution.

Top Rider Concerns

C: Metrobus Reliability



Issue: Over 27 percent of riders expressed that Metrobus reliability, namely frequency and wait times, were one of their top three concerns. A significant number of riders reported sporadic bus arrivals and frequency across the system, leading to numerous riders expressing they cannot rely on Metrobus for regular transportation needs. Riders also communicated that buses tend not to be spread out effectively, and if unable to catch one or two closely separated buses, they are forced to endure long wait times. Furthermore, many riders conveyed that bus tracking and next-bus ETAs are regularly not reliable. Bus reliability concerns were also specifically highlighted regarding weekend and evening Metrobus schedules and frequencies. Numerous riders stated their weekend service was not adequate, ultimately leading to riders choosing alternative methods of transportation on weekends. Another top area of concern was Metrobus crowding, with riders feeling both unsafe and uncomfortable due to buses being at capacity, specifically during peak hours.

“ Rider Quotes ”

“Bus schedules and eta(s) are unreliable”

“More regular bus timings please!”

“Super, super crowded buses to the point of being dangerous”

“There’s no arrival time consistency”

“The screen in the Metro station said my bus was arriving in one minute, I waited twenty”

Riders expressed specific concerns about destinations and commutes which required a Metrorail to Metrobus connection. The lack of reliable bus tracking paired with scattered, irregular bus frequency led to several riders considering bypassing the Metro system entirely when transfers are required. Riders conveyed that peak-time Metrobus schedules did not properly accommodate demand - and riders indicated that both crowding and sporadic bus frequency contributed to this concern. Concerns over how spread-out buses were, further confused riders. Riders, specifically in DC, highlighted that buses on highly trafficked streets and routes were regularly right behind one another, likely contributing to longer wait times.

The time spent on onboard buses was also posed as a significant concern by riders. Riders complained about buses being caught in traffic and struggling to get through congested areas in a reasonable amount of time. Riders stated that the inability to traverse routes efficiently led to being late to or missing obligations — when days prior the buses were on time.

Top Rider Concerns

C: Metrobus Reliability



Big Picture Ramifications

Discontent and poor rider sentiment with Metrobus reliability impacts both WMATA and riders. Failure to appropriately operate buses to the satisfaction of riders diminishes ridership and hinders Metro revenues. Rider discontent with Metrobus can further trickle down and impact riders' desire to use Metrorail and public transportation entirely. Consequently, these impacts can lead to a downturn in funding and revenues if ridership slips; this ultimately impacts the region's most vulnerable individuals who regularly rely on buses — with over 21% of individuals below the poverty line relying on bus transportation as their main mode of transportation.

It is abundantly clear that improving Metrobus service is a priority for Metro. Better Bus, Clear Lanes, 24-Hour Bus Service, and improvements to busETA all clearly highlight that Metrobus service needs are a priority. Riders across the system applauded these efforts while also offering tweaks and new ideas to improve Metrobus service.

Riders' Proposed Solutions

1. Investments in Bus Infrastructure*

Numerous riders indicated that more bus lanes are both wanted and needed. Riders expressed that greater investment in bus lanes would help to remedy the long times spent in traffic by buses and help to increase travel efficiency at choke points and along busy corridors. WMATA should continue working with the relevant stakeholders to deploy more bus lanes and priority signals across the region. Some riders further proposed that bus lanes should be a priority for any newly created bus routes across the system. Several riders also expressed the desire to see expanded partnerships with local jurisdictions, with the hopes of seeing greater implementation of bus priority lights, bus lanes, and potentially Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).

2. Reliable and expanded live tracking on all buses*

WMATA launched an initiative in December 2022 to provide more certainty that the location of a bus displayed on busETA is accurate. While live bus tracking has been improving, riders consistently expressed concerns about bus arrival times and tracking. Ghost buses and inaccurate arrival times are still persistent issues for many riders. This may be remedied through continually improving reliable live tracking, as well as a consistent and accurate experience on apps, transit screens, and posted schedules.

* - Indicates that the RAC endorses the riders' proposed solution.

4: www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Resources/resources/reportsandpublications/Documents/APTA-Who-Rides-Public-Transportation-2017.pdf

Top Rider Concerns

C: Metrobus Reliability



Riders' Proposed Solutions* (continued)

3. Strategic bus routing and deployment*

Riders stated that they would like to see bus schedules and deployment be more adaptable and flexible to accommodate peak hours and events. Multiple riders communicated that they would like to see extra buses deployed during the busiest times to alleviate crowding and increase frequency.

4. Continued rollout and investment in the Clear Lanes Program*

Riders familiar with Clear Lanes expressed strong support for Metro's partnership with DDOT to help keep bus lanes and stops clear of vehicles and decrease time spent in traffic. Riders stated they would like to see this program rolled out in Virginia and Maryland. Additionally, riders proposed that this program be publicized at a greater frequency and to a wider audience to help keep bus routes clear.

D: Parking Costs

Issue

Riders from suburban jurisdictions in Maryland and Virginia, who are regular weekday and weekend commuters, expressed that parking fees are too high. Ten percent of riders listed parking costs as one of their top three concerns. Riders stated that choosing to commute via Metrorail from their home/nearest stations, while requiring parking, was becoming too pricey and forcing them to consider alternative transportation options.

The lack of a parking fee structure that rewards and incentivizes regular park-and-ride commuters was commonly highlighted by riders. Riders using Park & Ride daily parking, who knew of the qualifying Metrorail trip discount, stated that the process was inconsistent and did not go far enough to alleviate parking costs for regular commuters.

Big Picture Ramifications

Riders indicated parking costs, specifically for Park & Ride daily commuters at stations such as Greenbelt and Vienna, are too high when combined with Metrorail fares. This is ultimately deterring riders from taking the Metro. For Metro to grow revenues and ridership long-term, suburban commuters are extremely important to the viability of the system. Not all riders have a dependable option to reach a Metrorail station without a car, and parking will continue to remain an important need for commuters.

* - Indicates that the RAC endorses the riders' proposed solution.

Top Rider Concerns

D: Parking Costs

Riders' Proposed Solutions

1. Create a lower tier of parking prices specifically for regular commuters*

Riders were abundantly clear that the cost of parking paired with their Metrorail fare was too costly. Riders commuting at least 4 days per week, or those who are monthly pass holders should be rewarded by Metro. Offering a lower pricing tier for regular Park & Ride commuters would allow these riders to continue to use Metro regularly and create loyalty. A lower pricing tier would also incentivize more riders to switch their commutes from alternative transportation methods to Metro.

2. Special pricing for early morning, late nights, and weekends*

Metro should strive to offer parking prices that are competitive when the price of parking is combined with the cost of a Metrorail fare. Many parking garages and lots offer early bird rates for work-week commuters. Riders expressed they would like to see Metro parking fees structured in a similar manner, where special or discounted rates are offered for early-bird, evening, and weekend parkers.

3. Dynamic pricing model

Another solution proposed by a rider was a dynamic pricing model that offered lowering rates when lots were at lower capacities. As opposed to surge pricing, this pricing structure would keep the most expensive parking rate the same. This strategy would incentivize Park & Ride customers by offering lower prices when the lot/garage is most empty or by offering lower prices on specific days of the week/month - such as on Mondays and Fridays when more people are working remotely, or on weekends/holidays when fewer people are commuting.

4. Parking loyalty/rewards program*

Several riders advocated for a parking loyalty program. Options such as a digital punch card, where customers buy parking for a certain number of days and get a day free were expressed by riders or providing one free Metrorail rider per day for customers who purchase a monthly parking plan.



Rider Quotes

"I commute into downtown DC Monday through Friday, the costs add up quickly"

"I wish parking options were outlined in my SmarTrip app"

"Lower parking fees would encourage ridership"

"Lowering the price of parking at terminal stations would incentivize me to ride more."

* - Indicates that the RAC endorses the riders' proposed solution.

Top Rider Concerns

D: Rider & Fare Technology



Issue: Almost 26% of riders cited issues with the SmarTrip app, digital farecards, and farecard readers as one of their top 3 rider concerns. Riders expressed specific frustrations with the SmarTrip app being insufficient, outdated, and hard to use. Further, multiple riders highlighted issues with ETAs and live tracking available in the app. A significant number of riders cited concerns about the reliability of their digital farecards, expressing that they regularly had issues with their phone not registering with the reader at fare gates and on buses. Riders also called out the issues with reloading their Apple or Google Wallet SmarTrip cards. Some riders stated the cards did not update quickly and were finicky when auto-reloading. Another frequent issue expressed by riders was fare card readers, particularly on buses, not registering or accepting fare cards entirely.

Rider Quotes

“Metro cards are finicky and do not update quickly”

“Fare card scanners don't always work correctly”

“Update the app and make it more user-friendly”

“The app is insufficient”

“SmarTrip & Scanners are not working on a regular basis”

Big Picture Ramifications

Failure to properly load, recognize, and use digital farecards has a direct impact on revenues, and these issues regularly lead to a loss of revenue from paying customers. Insufficient app performance and functionality can lead to riders choosing alternatives to Metro if they cannot regularly rely on ETAs and live tracking when planning their trips. With preloaded and auto-reloading cards being an extremely important revenue stream, it is important to maintain a consistent performance and user experience so customers do not opt for pay-as-you-go methods.

Riders' Proposed Solutions

1. Updates to the SmarTrip app to address ETAs and live tracking*

Riders proposed making any necessary updates to the app to create a more reliable ETA and trip-planning experience. Mirroring some of the proposals for Metrobus reliability, reliable live tracking for every bus and train is an item that a significant number of riders are requesting.

* - Indicates that the RAC endorses the riders' proposed solution.

Top Rider Concerns

D: Rider & Fare Technology



Riders' Proposed Solutions* (continued)

2. Continued replacement of all Metrobus fare card readers*

As Metro moves forward with updating Metrobus card readers, riders proposed that Metro roll out the changes in a quicker time frame. Riders proposed that Metro expand the implementation of new card readers to all bus routes as soon as resourcing allows.

3. Explore options for more universal transit payment

One rider suggested the implementation of a universal transit payment system. Each transit system throughout the country has a separate way of accepting payment. This solution would be particularly relevant to visitors. It can be confusing for visitors or new Metro users to understand the payment system and pricing structure. Coordination with other major transit providers, or a national view, of transit should be explored to create a more efficient and effective payment. This may include utilizing Apple Pay, or other digital credit cards, as an option for easier transactions.

E: Safety

Issue: Over 24% of riders reported that safety was one of their top three concerns. Specifically, riders cited concerns with personal and public safety while using Metro and unsafe behaviors from other riders in stations and onboard vehicles. Riders expressed direct concerns about unruly individuals making violent and harassing remarks toward others. Furthermore, many expressed concerns with arguments and fights witnessed within the system. Compounding these concerns was a lack of presence by law enforcement or Metro employees, which caused many riders to feel uneasy and sometimes scared while using Metro. Several riders called out experiences where they witnessed individuals possessing prohibited and illegal items onboard buses and railcars, including illicit drugs and firearms. A significant number of riders expressed concerns about crime within the system. Riders noted theft, robbery, and acts of violence as specific events they have witnessed or heard take place within the system.

Riders also notably mentioned experiences with individuals experiencing mental health issues, signs of substance abuse, and chronic homelessness while in stations and onboard vehicles. Although not directly threatened or harmed by these individuals, riders stated they felt unsafe—as these individuals did not seem to be in control of their actions, and were at risk of harming themselves or others. Some riders also highlighted that there was no easily defined option for reaching out to Metro in the cases of distressed individuals.

* - Indicates that the RAC endorses the riders' proposed solution.

Top Rider Concerns

E: Safety

Issue (continued): Additionally, a handful of riders mentioned that distressed individuals approached them and propositioned them for money, among other items. A rider also described how they were approached on multiple occurrences by individuals attempting to aggressively sell items onboard Metrorail.

Another significant and alarming safety concern among riders was the prevalence of unsafe actions by individuals onboard Metrorail and in stations. Some riders mentioned witnessing individuals attempting a form of “subway surfing”—mostly by juveniles. A large number of riders communicated witnessing riders attempting to pass between railcars, with some riders saying this behavior is a daily occurrence during their travels. Along with this, riders mentioned witnessing individuals riding between rail cars while trains were in motion. Another alarming concern riders witnessed at Metrorail stations was individuals jumping into the trackbed, for both the retrieval of dropped items or for an individual’s own ill-intent.

Big Picture Ramifications

Feeling safe and comfortable are two of the most important things that affect a rider’s desire to use Metro on a frequent, regular basis. If riders feel threatened or feel as if they may become a victim of a crime, it is understandably clear that they will prioritize alternatives to Metro. A safe and secure Metro system encourages more riders to utilize Metro while also increasing ridership among regular riders as they feel comfortable using the system more frequently - directly impacting ridership growth and revenues. A greater security presence means less unsafe behavior, more cleanliness, and less fare evasion—all improving service, ridership, and revenue.

Rider Quotes:

“Safety of train stations at night is the biggest thing stopping me from riding more”

“More security!”

“Safety is my biggest concern - crime onboard bus and rail is too common”

“There’s always people being disrespectful on the bus including loud music and smoking - sometimes I wish for intervention”

“I feel unsafe”

“I’ve encountered people trying to sell me things on the train rather aggressively”

It is abundantly clear that WMATA has a focus on safety across the system. The presence of Special Police (noted by many riders as “orange vest security guards”) across the system was regularly mentioned as a positive by many riders. Further, newly retrofitted fare gates, bus courtesy stops, MTPD presence, and signage and advertising for MTPD contact info and “Your Metro” “Safer Metro” and “Working Differently” campaigns are all acknowledged by riders and the RAC as positive and productive steps towards a safer system. Riders across the system applauded these efforts while also offering tweaks and new ideas to improve safety.

Top Rider Concerns

E: Safety

Riders' Proposed Solutions

1. Transit Police Resourcing and Visibility*

Riders' most preferred proposed solution was increased Transit Police resourcing and visibility. Riders proposed that WMATA continue to invest in officer recruiting and hiring. Additionally, numerous riders advocated for more MTPD presence on buses, trains, and in stations.

2. Continued investment in non-MTPD resources*

Riders frequently highlighted the presence of "orange vest" special police at stations throughout the system as a positive observation. Riders proposed that WMATA continue to assign special police at Metrorail stations while also increasing the presence of special police onboard buses and trains. Several riders proposed increased resourcing for Metro Crisis Intervention Specialists to help individuals in need of mental health assistance. Additionally, riders wanted to see more Metro Ambassadors and "yellow shirts" at more stations across the system and expressed they hoped to see investment and expansion of the Ambassador program. Riders also expressed support for continuing and expanding agreements with local law enforcement agencies to increase security presence and quickly address incidents across the system.

3. More education and advertising around how to contact MTPD*

Although signage is consistently present throughout the system, many riders still stated they did not know how to contact MTPD. Furthermore, some riders who did have MTPD's contact info stated they were unsure what information to provide or what response was expected when reaching out. Riders proposed education on how to properly contact MTPD, particularly for non-emergency situations, such as harassment or riders experiencing mental health challenges.

4. More intervention and enforcement of prohibited actions

Riders highlighted many instances where individuals performed prohibited activities, such as consumption of drugs and alcohol, smoking, playing music on amplified speakers, and littering. Several riders proposed increased enforcement and intervention of these actions.

5. More lighting and cameras, specifically at non-core, outdoor Metrorail stations and major Metrobus hubs*

Riders expressed that they felt safer at busier stations and once inside the fare gates. For Metro to continue to expand ridership, it is essential to create a safer, well-rounded experience regardless of station. Some riders called for increased lighting at outdoor stations, Metrobus hubs, and parking lots. Riders expressed that the presence of more lighting and cameras would help create a more secure experience and have a uniform feeling of safety the moment a rider steps on Metro property.

* - Indicates that the RAC endorses the riders' proposed solution.



Top Rider Concerns

G: Service Disruptions, Closures, and Corresponding Communications

Issue

Just over 28 percent of riders cited service disruptions and the communications surrounding those disruptions, or lack thereof, as negatively affecting their trips on Metro. Riders listed this as one of their top three concerns due to the hassle and disappointment that comes with not being able to complete a trip on Metro, combined with a lack of prior knowledge of the disruption in many cases. A prevailing sentiment among riders is that many service disruptions come as a surprise, and they particularly first find out about closures and disruptions only when arriving at or approaching a Metrorail station. This further contributes to rider frustrations in the lack of a clear alternative travel plan and confusion around how to navigate through the system when service disruptions are present in their area or along their commute.

Riders seemed to be particularly frustrated by shuttle buses and how the shuttle buses were organized. Riders in multiple areas of the transit zone reported long shuttle bus lines and significant delays when utilizing shuttle buses. Riders emphasized that long shuttle bus lines led to greater confusion at the impacted stations, which cascaded into further delays.

Service disruptions, especially in the form of track work and station improvements, are understandable and considered necessary by most riders. However, the consensus among many riders is that the controllable factors to create a better customer experience—specific communications, alternative trip planning, and shuttle bus service—need to be improved. Known service disruptions should be posted in the station and on social media days in advance to help riders plan ahead.

Big Picture Ramifications

Riders who listed service disruptions and closures as one of their top three concerns, as well as riders who experienced these issues firsthand, expressed growing frustration and a lack of trust in Metro. A handful of riders impacted by the most poignant service disruptions even went as far as stating they would avoid taking Metro entirely the next time a closure was along their commute. Although disruptions to service are routinely necessary, the way disruptions are handled and communicated is leading to greater distrust in the entire system. Further, these experiences leave a lasting impact on riders, ultimately causing riders to avoid using Metro more regularly or over certain periods, adversely affecting ridership growth and revenues.

Top Rider Concerns

G: Service Disruptions, Closures, and Corresponding Communications

Riders' Proposed Solutions

1. Earlier and more frequent communications*

Riders frequently expressed that they only knew of disruptions to service shortly before they were scheduled, or in some cases, once they encountered service disruptions directly. Metro does an ample job of communicating where and when track work and station closures are occurring, but in order for that information to trickle down to more riders, many riders suggested they would like to see communications occur earlier. Additionally, riders proposed Metro increase the frequency of announcements and communications in the days leading up to the closure. Furthermore, some riders noted that more frequent announcements occur across all channels including in-station announcements, signage, and in digital formats.

2. Shuttle Bus Alternatives and Enhanced Trip Planning*

A member of the RAC proposed that Metro should more consistently provide Metrobus alternatives when a rider's trip is affected by a service disruption. Although these suggestions are sometimes provided by Metro, riders would like to see an expanded list of alternative options. Essentially, if normal Metrorail service is affected for a particular station or line, an alternative to take Metrobus (or in some cases service partners) should always be provided for their trip. Riders in general, as well as the RAC, agree that this would be a viable option to help alleviate disruptions to travel plans. Amongst riders who took shuttle buses when impacted by service disruptions, most had a negative sentiment, illustrating the need for more Metrobus alternatives.

Rider Quotes:

“Need better comm[unication]s around closures and delays”

“I wish they would disseminate better information on closure much more in advance”

“There should be more transparency and outreach around issues and closures”

* - Indicates that the RAC endorses the riders' proposed solution.

MetroAccess and Accessibility



With the assistance of the WMATA Accessibility Advisory Committee and Chair Pat Sheehan, this year's RAC Annual Report aims to provide an update on the work of the AAC over the last year, including concerns and positive observations.

Much of the work done by the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) in 2024 has been in response to the upcoming budget crisis. Starting with outreach to the disability communities, the AAC used its general meetings and bandwidth to reach out to as many members of the MetroAccess community as possible. It was noted that in the worst-case scenario up to 9,000 of the existing 36,000 MetroAccess riders could lose all or part of their MetroAccess service. Additional outreach to the disability community over the following three months helped to urge support for the continuance of the MetroAccess service area and hours. It was reported that over 700 riders lobbied for the service area and hours to not be cut for WMATA's most vulnerable users. This outreach included testimony by ACC members to disability groups in Virginia, DC, and Maryland. In addition, many people were able to submit testimony via letters and surveys. A radio program from the Washington Ear which has listeners in all 3 jurisdictions helped to educate disabled listeners as to what harm could be expected if additional funds were not allocated. The response of over 700 MetroAccess riders helps support the narrative that WMATA's "safety net" for disabled riders must be preserved.

Throughout 2024, the AAC has also reached out to the Better Bus Network program to offer suggestions and confirm that routes, services, and accessibility concerns are addressed as part of an overall rollout. Further at AAC meetings, new railcars (8K) and accessibility improvements were discussed. With around 90 percent of the accessibility improvement requests being incorporated into the 8K design. Signage contrast issues within Metrorail stations are also part of accessibility improvements suggested by low-vision users.

The AAC's focus is on improving access to MetroAccess, bus, and rail systems to ensure that the facilities and systems are as accessible as possible. By providing timely information to address projects underway. The Bus, Rail, and MetroAccess subcommittees have around 20 members of the public each month who listen to project reports and can contribute suggestions.

Lastly, the expanded services in 2024 through the Abilities Ride program (a complementary program to the MetroAccess paratransit program) has had over 500,000 riders in 2024. Many of the questions and concerns of these riders have been addressed by AAC members and WMATA staff. If members of the public need additional information, they are always encouraged to utilize WMATA's digital broadcast media to get official information and updates.

Notable Quotes, Positive Observations, and Rider Sentiment

Throughout rider outreach, RAC members can hear from numerous riders about their top concerns and proposed solutions for Metro. Throughout this process, many riders volunteered to share some meaningful and joyful quotes about Metro and their experiences. Here are some of the most notable:

“Love Metro! Employees are kind, it's always clean, and I love the newer train cars.”

“Metro continues to stay smooth, clean, fast, convenient”

“Love the 24-hour buses!!!”

“I can consistently catch the metro anywhere on any day”

“My bus drivers are always kind and courteous”

“Train wait times downtown have encouraged me to take the Metro more.”

“My child loves taking Metro!”

“I love the DC metro system. It's my happy place!”

Notable Quotes, Positive Observations, and Rider Sentiment

Positive Observations

Although the RAC Annual Report aims to highlight primary concerns reported to the RAC and what proposed solutions riders want across the system, it is important to note that many riders volunteered positive observations, highlighting the desire of riders to see Metro succeed and the passion riders have for Metro.

Overall, riders across the system expressed satisfaction with Metro and had a growing positive sentiment towards the system. Mainly riders associated their positive feelings toward Metro with reliable service, increased frequency, and minimal wait times and delays. A majority of riders (even those who expressed wait times as a concern) spoke positively about Metrorail (and to a lesser extent - Metrobus) frequency and wait times across the system. Furthermore, most riders highlighted a notable reduction in delays during their trips. Respondents consistently mentioned improved reliability, frequency, and efficiency when speaking about Metrorail. Although trust and loyalty towards Metro are inexplicably tied to service and reliability, it is positive to note that Metro is meeting the moment when it comes to reliable service for riders.

Respondents also expressed positive sentiment towards many of the initiatives Metro has implemented in recent months and years. Numerous respondents called out noticeable improvements in safety and security presence in stations, fares and transfers, new fare gates, and station cleanliness. There was also a significant positive response to Metro's public outreach and online presence, specifically the "Your 2023 Metro Report"

Rider Sentiment

Although riders were not asked to provide a ranking of Metro, several riders did feel inclined to give Metro a one out of ten rating. Following this theme, several members of the RAC Annual Report Committee did ask individuals during rider outreach if they would provide a rating. Though not inclusive of all riders contributing to the Annual Report, the 52 individuals who did rate Metro on a 1 through 10 scale - rated Metro a 7.3 out of 10.



7.3 OUT OF 10*

**Overall Metro Rating
based on riders**

* Based only on input from riders who
elected to provide a rating



Conclusion

The RAC Annual Report is intended to voice the concerns of riders directly to WMATA's Board of Directors and senior leadership. This report provides a sampling of riders' most prominent concerns and proposed solutions, but is not inclusive of every concern or issue. That being said, riders have very diverse opinions and very innovative ideas. Riders want to be heard, and they want to voice their opinion and ideas to help make Metro better. The Annual Report aims to harness these voices and ideas to show riders they are heard and their concerns are being taken seriously at all levels of WMATA. The RAC encourages the Board and staff to continue to listen to and advocate for riders, as it is abundantly clear riders deeply care about Metro succeeding.

Above all, riders want a reliable, comfortable, and safe experience. Riders acknowledge that no transit system is perfect, but still take immense pride in every aspect of the system. If Metro can consistently and safely get riders where they want to go, then riders will continue to choose Metro.

As the sole organization officially chartered to serve in an advisory role on behalf of riders, the RAC looks forward to presenting riders' concerns to WMATA leadership and other relevant stakeholders through this report, and to further the RAC's mission to highlight matters of interest to riders and advise on possible solutions.

