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April 24, 2025

Chair Santos and Members of the Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Riders' Advisory Council's report for April 2025.

Better Bus Implementation Update

Staff presented an update on the implementation new Better Bus Network which will go live at the end of June, including information on the timeline of implementation and outreach activities and the different ways that Metro will inform riders of the significant changes taking place. RAC members look forward to working with Metro and our networks to spread the word about the new network and participate in outreach activities.

As part of Metro's outreach, RAC members urged Metro to make timetables for new routes available so that riders will be able to see the full breadth of service available to them, in addition to Trip Planner tools to help riders figure out specific point-to-point journeys. Members also appreciate Metro's focus on in-person outreach given the scope of the changes and the likelihood that, despite the already-extensive communications around the service changes, many riders aren't focused on the upcoming changes. The RAC looks forward to continuing to work with the Better Bus team in the weeks leading up to July 29th implementation.

FY2026 Budget

The RAC also reviewed Metro's Proposed FY2026 budget at its April meeting, and staff present were able to address questions around proposed rail service changes and the implementation of contactless payments. The RAC commends the Board on adopting a budget that includes targeted service improvements while improving efficiencies.

Annual Report

Finally, the RAC is pleased to submit to the Board our FY2025 Annual Report. It represents interactions and conversations between RAC members and almost 200 Metro riders and, while not a statistical sampling, provides a good overview of riders' thoughts and concerns. Riders give Metro high marks overall and many of the issues identified in the report are issues that Metro is tackling; their focus on ensuring that Metro is able to meet expanding demand and remain that it remains sustainable into the future.

The top issues reported by riders interviewed for this report are:

1. Increasing frequencies and reducing delays on Metrobus
2. Increasing frequencies and reducing crowding on Metrorail
3. Improving safety on Metro

4. Ensuring Consistent and Effective Bus Tracking
5. Tackling Rail and Bus Fare Evasion
6. Streamlining Maintenance and Technical Issue Responses
7. Maintaining Metro's Cleanliness

More details and proposed solutions are detailed in the report, which is attached for your review.

As always, thank you for your time and attention; I'm happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Cole Staudt

Cole Staudt, Chair

Riders' Advisory Council

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

FY 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



**PREPARED FOR THE WMATA
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	LETTER TO THE BOARD & FY25 RAC MEMBERS LETTER TO WMATA BOARD OF DIRECTORS • FY25 RIDERS' ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS
2	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PURPOSE • AUTHORITY • SCOPE • FINDINGS
3	SECTION I: INTRODUCTION PURPOSE • AUTHORITY • SCOPE • FINDINGS
4	SECTION II: DATA SUMMARY & RIDER CENSUS DATA SUMMARY OF RIDER CONCERNS • SELF-IDENTIFYING RIDER CENSUS
6	SECTION III: TOP RIDER CONCERNS ISSUE SUMMARY • IMPACT ON RIDER EXPERIENCE • RIDER QUOTES • PROPOSED SOLUTIONS
27	SECTION IV: ANALYSIS OF RIDER SENTIMENT POSITIVE OBSERVATIONS SUMMARY • NOTABLE QUOTES • RIDERS' RATING OF WMATA
30	CONCLUSION

LETTER TO THE BOARD & FY25 RAC MEMBERS

Letter to WMATA Board

To the WMATA Board of Directors,

The Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) Annual Report intends to serve as a voice for riders. The diverse sample of riders who contributed to this report across the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia directly reflects the concerns and perspectives of the thousands of people who rely on Metro every single day.

We hope that members of the Board, WMATA staff, and relevant stakeholders can use this year's RAC Annual Report as a resource for addressing rider concerns in an impactful way. The RAC has historically had a strong partnership with WMATA that we hope to continue to foster in the long run through the publication of our annual report.

Sincerely,
WMATA Riders' Advisory Council

FY25 RAC Members

Solomon Chen
Matthew Clark
Eli Craveiro Frankel
Lucas Habosky
Alex Mendelsohn
Brian Meyer
Joseph Pope
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Brandon Wu

RAC Approval

Multiple RAC members supported outreach and drafting efforts for this year's report. Annual Report Committee Chair Brandon Wu presented a draft of the report on April 2, 2025, and the report was approved by the RAC under the leadership of Chair Cole Staudt.

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...”

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

1. Aim 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 WMATA RAC's Bylaws. 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, RAC members gathered public input from Metrorail, Metrobus, and MetroAccess riders across the Transit Zone between December 2024 and February 2025. RAC members discerned riders' top three concerns as they pertained to Metro and solicited proposed solutions from riders that addressed rider concerns. RAC members also voluntarily solicited positive observations, quotes, numeric ratings, and home stations/lines/bus routes. For the purposes of informed deliberation in proposing and vetting solutions contained in this report, RAC members also engaged with WMATA staff—including those involved with rail, bus, safety, and technology—during regular RAC meetings.

Findings

While riders have noted positive trends in reliability, safety, and cleanliness, Metro riders seek faster frequencies for both Metrobus and Metrorail, while also calling for greater investments in safety, bus tracking, maintenance, and cleanliness. Riders also gave feedback on potential solutions to the concerns they expressed and rated Metro a 7.5 out of 10 on satisfaction, signaling interest in ongoing Metro initiatives.

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

The RAC's FY25 Annual Report aims to provide key insights into the concerns and positive observations noted by Metro riders across the system. The next section of this report, Section II, will provide a data summary and a rider census, detailing riders' top concerns and key demographic information on riders who responded to RAC outreach. Section III aims to address key top concerns reported by Metro riders. For each concern, this report includes a summary of the issue, notable rider quotes, a note on the impact on rider experience, and solutions informed by both RAC members and rider feedback.

Riders' top two concerns were tied to frequency on Metrobus and Metrorail, with 36% and 29% of riders respectively noting concerns with Metrobus delays and Metrorail crowding during commuting. While riders' top positive observation from riding Metro in the last year has been greater reliability and higher frequencies (especially on Metrorail), the rise in ridership has also subsequently led to riders seeking out more consistent service and higher frequencies across Metro services.

The other five issues that rounded out the top seven reported rider issues include safety on Metro, more effective bus tracking, rail and bus fare evasion, addressing maintenance and technical issues, and maintaining cleanliness. Our annual report aims to take into account both existing WMATA initiatives coupled with rider feedback to provide tangible and sustainable solutions in response to rider concerns. This year, the RAC has also sought to prioritize accessibility within its Annual Report in our partnership with the WMATA Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), ensuring that the interests and concerns of all riders—including our older riders and MetroAccess riders—are represented in this report. The final sub-section of Section III addresses other notable rider concerns, like Metrorail expansion and budget concerns.

Section IV includes an analysis of rider sentiment, including notes on any significant quotes and positive observations from riders. Reliability, safety, cleanliness, reduced fare evasion, and technology upgrades were the top five positive observations and each recorded by at least 10% of respondents. Out of our 175 riders who filled out a rating, they rated Metro a 7.5 out of 10 — up from 7.3 out of 10 from last year's report. Finally, the conclusion of this report will recap key observations and overall recommendations for the Board.

SECTION II: DATA SUMMARY & RIDER CENSUS

A. Data Summary of Rider Concerns

Based on feedback provided by Metro riders to the RAC, the table below shows the top seven concerns shared among riders:

Rider Concern	% of Riders Identifying as Top Concern
Increasing Frequencies & Reducing Delays on Metrobus	36%
Increasing Frequencies & Reducing Crowding on Metrorail	29%
Improving Safety on Metro	21%
Ensuring Consistent & Effective Bus Tracking	14%
Tackling Rail & Bus Fare Evasion	11%
Streamlining Maintenance & Technical Issue Responses	11%
Maintaining Metro's Cleanliness	9%

Feedback was also solicited from riders of MetroAccess (input was provided by WMATA Accessibility Advisory Committee and Chair Pat Sheehan), whose main concern was maintaining MetroAccess customer satisfaction.

SECTION II: DATA SUMMARY & RIDER CENSUS

B. Self-Identified Rider Census

The RAC collected responses from 175 riders via a feedback form that was sent out to people living across the region. The RAC's outreach centered on the distribution of an online voluntary feedback form to individual RAC members' networks in addition to outreach to over 40 community organizations and stakeholder groups across D.C., Maryland, and Virginia.

In 2025, the RAC's outreach had respondents from the following jurisdictions:

- **Washington D.C.** — 58% (102 respondents)
- **Maryland (6%)**
 - Montgomery County: 4% (7 respondents)
 - Prince George's County: 1.7% (3 respondents)
- **Virginia (36%)**
 - Alexandria: 4.6% (8 respondents)
 - Arlington: 23% (41 respondents)
 - Fairfax: 5.7% (10 respondents)
 - Falls Church: 1.7% (3 respondents)
 - Loudoun County: >1% (1 respondent)

The RAC aims to collect feedback from a wide range of communities across the region while remaining non-intrusive. Riders were not asked for their names nor their most personal information and instead were asked to volunteer their jurisdiction and most frequently used Metrobus route(s) and/or Metro station(s).

The large majority of respondents chose to give information about their most used Metrorail lines, stations, and bus stops/routes, and we received contributions from regular riders of:

- **All 6 Metrorail lines**
- **46 Metrorail stations**
- **41 distinct bus routes**

SECTION III: TOP RIDER CONCERNS

7	————	A. INCREASING FREQUENCIES & REDUCING DELAYS ON METROBUS
10	————	B. INCREASING FREQUENCIES & REDUCING CROWDING ON METRORAIL
12	————	C. IMPROVING SAFETY ON METRO
15	————	D. ENSURING CONSISTENT & EFFICIENT BUS TRACKING
17	————	E. TACKLING BUS & RAIL FARE EVASION
20	————	F. STREAMLINING MAINTENANCE & TECHNICAL ISSUE RESPONSES
22	————	G. MAINTAINING METRO'S CLEANLINESS
24	————	H. METROACCESS & TRANSIT ACCESSIBILITY
27	————	I. OTHER RIDER CONCERNS

A. INCREASING FREQUENCIES & REDUCING DELAYS ON METROBUS

Issue Summary

WMATA has led the country in bus ridership growth, with bus ridership growing at 39% and leading the country for the last three years.⁴ More than one in three respondents to the RAC's feedback form expressed concerns with Metrobus reliability and issues with delays. Multiple riders noted issues with bus bunching, lack of reliability, and infrequency of routes. Moreover, some riders expressed concerns with crowding and noted that long delays in neighborhoods reliant on Metrobus exacerbates inequalities in transit service. Similar to past annual report responses, riders sought greater service, more accurate timetables for higher traffic routes, and greater bus street infrastructure—such as the creation of more bus lanes, bus lane enforcement, and transit priority technology.

Riders also called for improved bus-to-rail transfers, so that riders are able to mitigate missing bus or train transfers by a matter of less than a few minutes. Finally, riders noted concerns with bus tracking and bus expansion / Better Bus, which are covered respectively in Section III, Subsection D and Section III, Subsection I of this report.

Impact on Rider Experience

One of the key aspects of WMATA service in many communities across WMATA's service area in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) is fast and reliable Metrobus service. However, poor rider experiences with Metrobus harms WMATA due to lower ridership and reduced revenue. Moreover, riders may be incentivized to shift away from WMATA services and further lead to reduced ridership—disproportionately harming the over 21% of individuals below the poverty line who rely on bus service as their primary mode of transportation.⁵

A. INCREASING FREQUENCIES & REDUCING DELAYS ON METROBUS

WMATA has taken clear strides to focus on improving the quality of Metrobus service, seen through efforts like the Clear Lanes program, 24-Hour Bus Service on many routes, and Better Bus public outreach. Riders have made note of how some of these programs have been effective, but are now seeking expansion of these efforts to help make Metrobus even more efficient in connecting them with the places they need to go.

Rider Quotes

- “Bus frequency slows down as the night gets later”
- “Traveling east to west north of the orange/silver/blue lines is difficult. The buses servicing those directions are infrequent and often not on time.”
- “Frequencies. I really think the 25B deserves better than 30 minutes frequencies”
- “bus bunching in these corridors (S2/S9 on the 16th St corridor and 43/42/L2 on Columbia Rd/Connecticut Ave).”
- “A 30 min bus delay (I experienced it in 02.18.2025 with the H6 route) in the middle of the day really discourages people who might consider riding the bus as an alternative to car dependency and really, really disrespects the many residents that do not have any other option but Metrobus.”
- “There needs to be more bus routes going east-west in the city and more consistency, more consistency in bus arrival time and frequency”

Proposed Solutions

1. WMATA should continue its efforts in strengthening engagement with transportation agencies and local governments.

WMATA can grow its engagement with the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), and local county jurisdictions across Maryland and Virginia to invest in the expansion of technologies like bus lanes, bus priority and transit priority signal technology, and bus lane enforcement. Two models for partnership are WMATA’s partnership with MDOT to expand bus lanes on Georgia Avenue⁶ and the introduction of bus lane enforcement by DDOT has already led to 147,000+ vehicles in nine months ticketed for blocking bus lanes.⁷

A. INCREASING FREQUENCIES & REDUCING DELAYS ON METROBUS

2. The WMATA Board should consider committing and sharing a public engagement timeline after implementation of Better Bus.

WMATA's Better Bus Initiative will launch on June 29, 2025, which will result in the adoption of a new bus network, change to all bus route names, and consolidation of bus stops to increase bus speeds. The RAC expects that Better Bus may lead to some initial challenges from riders who may have to adjust to new bus route names and changes in routing; however, the RAC firmly believes that Better Bus's implementation—coupled with several rounds of public engagement—will result in faster and more reliable bus service for riders across the WMATA service area.

However, to ensure that riders can have their voices heard, we encourage the WMATA Board to commit to a timeline for public engagement, including public town-hall style meetings, employees soliciting feedback at buses/stations, and online feedback forms. We commend the WMATA Board's past public engagement efforts with Better Bus and proposed budgets, including the publication of responses to common points of feedback—and we hope that can continue after Better Bus implementation.

3. WMATA should provide updates on all-door bus boarding implementation and the status of its expansion to additional routes.

WMATA announced its adoption of all-door boarding in December 2023, with current use on seven routes in DC, Maryland, and Virginia.⁸ WMATA has noted that all-door boarding can reduce customer boarding time by 12-20%, speeding up service and increasing trip reliability, and most Metrobuses have had SmarTrip scanners installed at the back door. While WMATA has announced that there are plans to add other routes in the future, it remains unclear whether those efforts have been paused with the adoption of bus fare evasion mitigation strategies in addition to the Better Bus Initiative. WMATA should provide updates in a future Board meeting regarding updates to all-door bus boarding implementation and the status of its expansion to additional routes under the new bus network beginning in late-June 2025.

B. INCREASING FREQUENCIES & REDUCING CROWDING ON METRORAIL

Issue Summary

Metrorail riders have been enthusiastic about the greater frequencies compared to past years of Metrorail service. Metrorail notably has reached 600,000+ trips recently on March 27th, and Metrorail ridership has increased 60% from 2022 to 2024.^{9,10} However, with the federal government and other workplaces' mandates to return to the office, riders have begun to report crowding on their commutes in the morning and afternoon. Over 29% of riders in our feedback form noted issues with crowding on their commutes or called for higher increases in frequencies on Metrorail—especially off-peak in the early mornings and evenings and on the weekends.

Riders noted interest in additional 8-car trains systemwide, especially during commuting hours, and advocated for automatic train operation (ATO) on all Metrorail lines. Finally, riders noted some issues with reliability after initial ATO implementation. Responses to feedback on rail expansion are below in Section III, Subsection I.

Impact on Rider Experience

Daily commuters and visitors to the DMV alike all heavily rely on Metrorail to reach the destinations they need to go to. Commuters have the choice between riding Metrorail or commuting with single-occupancy vehicles, and reducing crowding will help maintain Metro's strength in ridership growth on Metrorail. Service workers and workers outside of the 9-5 work schedule will also immensely benefit from higher off-peak frequencies. Finally, with higher frequencies across the board, DMV visitors will continue to prioritize Metrorail to reach their destinations over rideshare or alternative forms of transportation—increasing ridership and revenues.

Rider Quotes

- “[There’s] crowding on Metrorail during peak hours”
- “Time between trains being inconsistent”
- “Frequency of trains and buses especially on weekends”
- “Frequency of yellow line trains”
- “Train frequency and overcrowding is a major problem...Step up the services to meet this demand!!!”
- “Travel times into DC are too long - door opening and closing takes too long”
- “More late night bus and train service for service workers.”
- “I would like to see the system continue to move to full automated train control”

⁹ <https://x.com/wmata/status/1905626822932299844>

¹⁰ <https://x.com/wmata/status/1889087136772612443>

B. INCREASING FREQUENCIES & REDUCING CROWDING ON METRORAIL

Proposed Solutions

1. WMATA can continually be responsive to rider and RAC feedback on rail service changes, such as the recent FY26 Budget Metrorail service adjustments.

The RAC commends WMATA for its continual efforts to expand service given its budget constraints, seen through their efforts in the proposed FY26 budget to extend partial Yellow Line service to Greenbelt, increase rail service to New Carrollton, provide additional weekday peak Silver and Red service, and extend hours of operation.¹¹ We are especially grateful to WMATA Board members for hearing out the RAC on the possibility of extending hours of operation on weekend evenings in addition to the expansion of weekend morning rail service. The RAC hopes that WMATA can continue to adopt service changes to increase rail frequency and maximize existing infrastructure to ensure fast and efficient Metrorail service.

2. Metro should seek out opportunities to add more 8-car trains during peak commute times, especially as 8000-series cars are brought into service.

Many riders expressed interest in bringing more 8-car trains into service if possible, especially during commuting times. The RAC acknowledges that WMATA's projected timeline for bringing 8000-series trains appears to be in 2027; however, in the scenario that Metro is able to bring 8000 cars into service earlier by next year—following in its history of precedent completing projects early and under budget—we hope that WMATA can consider bringing more 8-car trains during peak commute times.

3. Metro should continue its implementation of Automated Train Operation (ATO) across all Metro lines on schedule to reduce rider travel times.

As WMATA has noted, ATO would provide energy saving enhancements through optimized acceleration and braking while helping increase consistency in arrivals and departures to improve on-time performance. Coupled with the use of automatic door operation, ATO can help save between 4-8 minutes across all six lines—roughly a 10% savings in overall runtime.¹² The RAC advocates for WMATA to follow its published timeline and continue its efforts to expand ATO across all lines through 2025, while also adhering to WMSC recommendations and requirements.¹³

¹¹ <https://www.wmata.com/initiatives/budget/upload/Proposed-Metrorail-Changes-FY26-Budget.pdf>

¹² <https://www.wmata.com/about/board/meetings/board-pdfs/upload/3A-Rail-Operations-and-Safety-Update.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.wmata.com/about/news/Metro-to-begin-Automatic-Train-Operation-for-the-first-time-in-15-years.cfm>

C. IMPROVING SAFETY ON METRO

Issue Summary

21% of riders noted that one of their top three concerns was safety on Metro. Riders shared concerns about unruly passengers staying on train cars or buses for multiple stops, occurrences of people arguing with other passengers and drivers, and other anti-social behavior. Notably, more riders have noted the increase in presence of Metropolitan Transit Police Department (MTPD) officers and security on the system, though some riders have noted that presence seems to decline later in the evenings.

Riders further highlighted calls for etiquette education, support for those experiencing mental health crises and chronic homelessness, and the need for late-night security in Metro parking lots and throughout trains and buses. Riders also called for a balance between security personnel and other preventative measures, with some riders making note how solely increasing policing may not provide a comprehensive solution toward addressing safety issues on Metro. Rather, riders noted the need for security personnel to be accompanied by mental health and outreach partners.

Impact on Rider Experience

Safety has continued to be an area where Metro has made significant strides, with crime down nearly 40% in 2024¹⁴ and efforts made to streamline training for MTPD officers, increase special police officer (SPO) patrols, and employ crisis intervention specialists. Coupled with greater fare enforcement in the system, modernization of video technology, and the passage of a banning policy for repeat and egregious offenders, Metro has continued to invest in security. However, it is critical that riders feel the impact of these investments.

To ensure riders continue to choose Metro, WMATA must continue its efforts to ensure riders feel safe and comfortable. A more holistic and comprehensive approach to safety will improve rider perceptions of Metro while simultaneously improving fare compliance and cleanliness—improving revenue, ridership, and service quality.

C. IMPROVING SAFETY ON METRO

Rider Quotes

- “Would really like to see WMATA partner with people in the community whose expertise is mental health and outreach. Hire some social workers! Or partner with social service orgs in the District.”
- “I often need to come home from work late at night and have had scary encounters on trains and in Metro parking lots”
- “I believe WMATA needs to crack down on anti social behavior especially on buses, though enforcement may be hard considering the driver should not be tasked with this and it can be hard to refuse to people.”
- “I want more officers doing fare evasion enforcement at heavy traffic stations. More security guards walking trains and telling people not to play loud music or be disruptive.”
- “Safety at/outside metro stations, and especially on bus routes”

Proposed Solutions

1. WMATA can explore opportunities for partnerships with mental health and outreach organizations, including social workers and Safe Passage teams.

Several riders have noted that while MTPD security presence and visibility has been helpful in many cases on Metrorail and Metrobus, there is a need for more comprehensive support for those experiencing chronic homelessness or mental health crises. Riders have suggested employing more crisis intervention specialists—as Metro currently employs only 23 specialists—to support MTPD’s work in ensuring safety. Moreover, riders proposed building relationships with DMV organizations, including partnering with social workers and the DC Government’s Safe Passage program to support students as they travel to/from school and within the community.¹⁵

2. WMATA should continue and expand MTPD and SPO patrols on Metrorail, Metrobus, and at Metro parking lots.

Riders have advocated for increased MTPD and SPO resources across the system, including greater presence on buses and at Metro parking lots. Riders have also called for greater patrols during evenings and weekends, advocating for a goal of having security presence across the system regardless of when you are riding on Metro.

C. IMPROVING SAFETY ON METRO

3. WMATA should expand promotion of the MTPD security phone number and texting option across the Metro system, while also considering the expansion of rider reporting tools with non-MTPD responses when appropriate.

The RAC strongly believes in reducing barriers to access reporting mechanisms, and to help ensure that MTPD is aware of potential security concerns, WMATA should consider expanding promotion of the MTPD security phone number and the texting option across social media, rail cars, buses and bus stops, and in bus announcements.

Additionally, the RAC would like to hear more from WMATA staff about the determination of when crisis intervention specialists may be sent in response to a rider calling or texting MTPD, or if MTPD is always dispatched after a rider calls or texts.

As some riders may be hesitant to explicitly call or text the police department line directly, the RAC encourages WMATA to explore options for riders to be able to seek assistance and responses from non-MTPD resources, such as Metro-employed crisis intervention specialists or other local partners like the aforementioned Safe Passage staff or social workers.

4. WMATA should continue efforts to adopt state-of-the-art transit technology that improve safety, including platform screen doors.

The RAC commends the WMATA Board for their interest in a potential platform screen door pilot at a Red Line station in its FY 2026-2031 Capital Program.¹⁶ Platform screen doors serve as a primary example of how WMATA can not only lead other transit agencies in the United States through adoption of new technology, but also simultaneously help increase security through its modernization efforts. Additionally, WMATA can consider efforts like improving station lighting and further prioritize improvements to its video security system to ensure complete coverage of Metro services for security.

D. ENSURING CONSISTENT & EFFECTIVE BUS TRACKING

Issue Summary

14% of riders noted that they experienced issues with Metrobus tracking in the last year. While this issue was highlighted in our Fiscal Year 2024 annual report under Metrobus reliability, the RAC has separated this issue in this year's annual report to highlight the need to develop comprehensive solutions to address issues with bus tracking. Riders reported that some buses would appear at bus stops despite not showing up on busETA, and some riders noted the reverse issue of ghost buses where buses were on busETA but never arrived at the stop or were not in service. Some riders who take buses at the terminuses of routes noted that busETA was often unhelpful in providing estimates of when buses were departing as well. Finally, many riders noted that integration with external apps like Apple Maps, Google Maps, Transit, Citymapper, and DC Next Bus was often inaccurate.

Impact on Rider Experience

Riders should be able to use WMATA tools like busETA and MetroPulse in addition to external apps like Transit, Citymapper, and DC Next Bus and trust that bus estimates are accurate. However, currently, some buses either show up as 'ghost buses' and are not in service or other buses are not being tracked. Correct bus estimates are critical to ensure that riders can use Metrobus consistently without fearing that they may be late to their destination.

Rider Quotes

- "[Need] accurate arrival and departure times, communicated on the tracker"
- "Bus timeliness and accuracy of the online tracking system"
- "Nighttime buses often don't arrive, not easy to track how close a bus is"
- "GPS trackers to show where buses...are in real time and when they will arrive"
- "Real-time live tracking of buses and trains in an app... so people are not stuck waiting for buses which are 'scheduled' but never show as shown on apple/google maps. Essentially I should be able to trust that a bus will show when it is supposed to show."
- "I have had ghost buses tracked on busETA, but then pass me at the stop because they are not in service"

D. ENSURING CONSISTENT & EFFECTIVE BUS TRACKING

Proposed Solutions

1. WMATA should ensure that all buses have updated and reliable live tracking and that busETA only shows buses in service.

Metro made significant strides in December 2022 to announce its technology upgrades in busETA to end “ghost buses.”¹⁷ Metro’s performance scorecard for FY25 also noted that 93% of scheduled bus trips have real-time predictions.¹⁸ However, riders have continued to note how they have had difficulties in bus tracking through busETA, with evening bus riders especially highlighting buses not arriving to routes. WMATA should also work to ensure that busETA and MetroPulse provide accurate timing for those at the first/last stops of routes.

2. WMATA should work closely with external app developers and provide updated General Transit Feed Specification data to reflect new schedules, delays, and detours. Metro’s December 2022 announcement of ending ghost buses also aimed to improve data sharing with third party applications through updated GTFS data. However, many riders who use external applications continue to report inaccurate bus times when attempting to plan trips on Metrobus. WMATA should continue to monitor reports of inaccurate bus schedules on third-party apps, and should ensure that any data on delays and detours is communicated to external applications promptly.

3. WMATA should continue its efforts in testing the MetroPulse app and expand communication about MetroPulse after its anticipated spring launch.

WMATA’s MetroPulse beta phase website provides information on tracking performance and travel planning on Metrobus and Metrorail. MetroPulse has also entered beta testing for an Apple and Android app that allows for real-time service information and a chat feature—another example of WMATA adopting technological innovations driven by the needs and interests of riders.¹⁹ The RAC encourages WMATA to continue on its timeline to launch the MetroPulse app in the coming months while also seeking to continue its feedback collection efforts with riders in the general public.

4. WMATA can consider adoption of new technology like QR codes on new bus stop signs for riders to be able to access busETA for their stop.

Riders have suggested that WMATA reduce barriers to entry to access bus tracking, and the RAC recommends that WMATA consider adopting new technology and promotional marketing such as the inclusion of QR codes on new bus stop signs or flyers. Riders could then scan these QR codes to be able to access busETA for their specific stop, removing the need to search for the route on their own.

¹⁷ <https://www.wmata.com/about/news/Metrobus-customers-now-saved-from-the-frustration-of-ghost-buses.cfm>

¹⁸ <https://www.wmata.com/about/records/scorecard/index.cfm>

¹⁹ <https://www.wmata.com/about/board/meetings/board-pdfs/upload/9-GM-Report-2025-02.pdf>

E. TACKLING RAIL AND BUS FARE EVASION

Issue Summary

Roughly one in ten riders noted fare evasion on buses or trains within the system as a top concern for riders. While many riders have noted the increase in fare enforcement on trains, many still report that Metrobus fare evasion remains high. Riders have noted that the redesigned Metrorail station gates have still allowed for some piggybacking at Metro stations and how payment enforcement is not consistent on buses. Notably, riders advocated for a variety of solutions ranging from technological changes to changes in legislation that may necessitate engagement with external government partners. Riders also mentioned that some people may be unaware of the Metro Lift program that provides 50% off Metrobus and Metrorail trips for DMV customers enrolled in SNAP.²⁰

Impact on Rider Experience

World-class transit systems rely on riders to pay fares to support the system's development, and simultaneously, transit systems must help work to ensure that all riders can access transit for their day-to-day needs. Fare evasion can reduce rider morale and incentivize others to not pay fares, and revenue from fares contributes toward maintaining high-quality transit for all riders across the WMATA service area.

Rider Quotes

- "DC City Council must be involved in implementing the enforcement piece especially."
- "Seek some sort of action when people are seen evading so other customers feel that it is not being accepted. what can station managers safely do? can they take photos of the bad actors? Can they call law enforcement to potentially arrive and enforce when the person reaches the station exterior?"
- "More officers on buses to enforce fares."
- "While much of bus fare evasion is intentional, many riders are still unaware that WMATA returned to collecting bus fares after the pandemic emergency."
- "I never see officers at Brookland aiming to deter fare evasion, and customers use the emergency exit door as they please with no siren ringing...what's the point of paying if that's the case?"

E. TACKLING RAIL AND BUS FARE EVASION

Proposed Solutions

1. Using new fare gate infrastructure, WMATA should continue supporting MTPD's enforcement of rail fare evasion that has reduced rail fare evasion by 82%, and WMATA should consider expansion of its bus fare evasion enforcement efforts.²¹

WMATA's completed installation of new modernized faregates across all 98 stations across the Metrorail system has been critical in helping drive enhanced security and higher farebox recovery at Metrorail stations. Metro should continue its efforts to station MTPD officers at high-volume stations to issue civil citations,²² especially given as MTPD's initial stops for fare evasion often leads to arrests for those with open warrants and other more significant crimes.²³

2. WMATA should further expand its public education campaigns to ensure that K-12 students are tapping their fare cards and Metro Lift eligible riders are able to sign up for lower fares.

WMATA has several programs to help increase transit accessibility, including multiple K-12 programs for students across DC, Montgomery County, Arlington, and Fairfax County, the U-Pass program for college students, and its Metro Lift program for SNAP recipients. WMATA currently touts 125,000 DC students tapping their Kids Ride Free cards²⁴ and should continue its marketing campaigns to ensure all DC students are tapping cards at faregates at rail stations and buses.²⁵

Moreover, WMATA can build on its momentum with additional public promotion and advertising of Metro Lift, which has already enrolled 10,000+ customers taking more than 1 million trips.²⁶ Given that there are 137,500+ SNAP recipients in the District of Columbia alone, WMATA should engage with the RAC further on their marketing and communications plans to help accelerate Metro Lift registration.

21 <https://www.masstransitmag.com/safety-security/press-release/55265595/wmata-washington-metropolitan-area-transit-authority-crime-and-fare-evasion-rates-went-down-in-2024-for-wmata>

22 <https://www.wmata.com/about/news/MTPD-to-begin-issuing-citations-under-new-law-that-toughens-enforcement-of-fare-evasion.cfm>

23 <https://x.com/MetroTransitPD/status/1888015121638670613>

24 <https://x.com/wmata/status/1832479228354265195>

25 <https://x.com/wmata/status/1696179672176824685>

26 <https://x.com/wmata/status/1847404864277553221>

E. TACKLING RAIL AND BUS FARE EVASION

WMATA staff's community engagement work already includes Metro Lift tabling at farmers' markets and community events, and we would encourage WMATA to further increase their promotion of Metro Lift to make registration more accessible. Moreover, WMATA should consider partnerships with DC's Department of Human Services, Maryland's Department of Human Services, and Virginia's Department of Social Services to provide information to new SNAP recipients regarding Metro Lift eligibility. Finally, WMATA could consider working with community partners that reach SNAP recipients, including organizing fairs or providing promotional materials that they could distribute to Metro Lift eligible riders.

3. WMATA should consider adding a new automated announcement to remind riders that they must pay their fare, in addition to announcing that riders enrolled on SNAP are eligible to sign up for Metro Lift for discounted fares.

WMATA should seek out—as one rider put it— low-cost and low-conflict opportunities to encourage riders to pay their fare. WMATA could consider adding bus and rail automated announcements to remind riders that they must pay their fare. Metro could also consider promoting Metro Lift registration on all trains and buses across the system through a brief announcement, including information on how to register online or in-person for Metro Lift.

F. STREAMLINING MAINTENANCE & TECHNICAL ISSUE RESPONSES

Issue Summary

Roughly one in ten riders also noted technical issues that were not resolved in a timely manner or maintenance that lacked a transparent timeline for completion. Riders shared concerns about broken displays, delays in elevator and escalator maintenance, repetition of automatic announcements in trains, and difficult-to-hear speakers on train cars. Moreover, other riders noted how faregates or farecard machines often did not scan, mentioned issues with sidewalk repair outside Metro stations, and generally noted how reporting issues within the system was not immediately clear.

Impact on Rider Experience

Riders should be able to visit their home bus station, rail station, and ride Metro knowing that technical issues are being resolved and are aware of timelines of technical upgrades to escalators and elevators in stations. Given the value placed on fare enforcement and the strides Metro has continued to take in modernizing the system, WMATA must also ensure that the small details in technical upkeep are addressed and communicated about on a regular basis.

Rider Quotes

- "Broken "not in service" displays when buses are in service and the route can't be determined visually."
- "Escalators improvement project takes too long at each station"
- "Improve sidewalk from parking lot at East Falls Church so it is safer for older persons."
- "If there's a delay, please stop the automatic announcement from repeating itself every 30 seconds. It's strangely demoralizing and I swear that "May I have your attention please" is a part of my nightmares at this point."
- "The speaker system is still very difficult to hear without the metros, some are clearer than others."
- "escalators flowing against the flow of traffic during predictable traffic times on weekdays"

F. STREAMLINING MAINTENANCE & TECHNICAL ISSUE RESPONSES

Proposed Solutions

1. WMATA should provide more transparent communication regarding how to report technical issues both at bus/rail stations and on social media.

Some riders have seen issues at Metrobus stops, Metrorail stations, and across the system that they felt like they didn't know how to report. WMATA currently has online customer comment forms, daily live chat agents, and customer complaint forms in addition to taking feedback over social media. However, many of these options are not well known for riders, and Metro could promote QR codes with links to access reporting tools through creative billboards, posters, and social media. Metro has also had a track record on social media of providing public updates following up on customer reports; the RAC strongly encourages WMATA to continue this precedent of transparency and follow up with customers if possible to let them know their feedback was heard and that staff are addressing the issue.

2. WMATA should consider adopting signage at Metro stations and bus stops with timelines on escalator/elevator repairs if they take longer than 1-2 days to complete. WMATA already publicizes on its website the service status of elevators and escalators and the need for repairs due to either modernization and inspection repairs with estimated returns to service.²⁷ However, many riders may not be aware of the service status site, and they have noted that these estimated returns to service were not publicly displayed within stations. The RAC encourages WMATA to provide updates (e.g. posters/signs) outside and within Metrorail stations that specifically note the deadline for estimated returns to service for elevators and escalators undergoing service.

3. WMATA should consider timing non-emergency maintenance to be outside of peak weekday commuter hours if possible.

Riders have noted that WMATA has expanded beyond just a daily commuter system and that rail or track maintenance on weekends can negatively affect those trying to reach their destinations, and maintenance during weekday commuter hours can also result in more congestion and crowding within Metrorail systems. However, the RAC recognizes that emergency maintenance may need to occur during weekends or during commuting hours, and it may not be feasible to schedule all maintenance to be during later evenings or earlier mornings within the system. The RAC encourages WMATA to consider the feasibility of moving some non-emergency maintenance to be outside of peak weekday commuter hours to minimize disruptions to riders using Metrorail.

G. MAINTAINING METRO'S CLEANLINESS

Issue Summary

Roughly one in ten riders noted concerns with Metro's cleanliness, including how Metrorail stations and bus cloth seats were not consistently clean and how station tiles could be slippery either after rain or after certain cleaning agents were used. Riders responding to the RAC this year noted how it wasn't clear whether cleaning mainly occurred only when trains or buses returned to their railyards or bus garages or whether cleaning occurred between trips.

Impact on Rider Experience

While reports of cleaner Metrorail stations, Metro trains, and buses have increased, some riders still report dirty bus seats and Metro stations. Metro can continue its work to ensure its stations, buses, and trains meet the highest standards for cleanliness. A consistently clean experience with WMATA can build rapport among riders, encouraging continual ridership with Metro rather than pursuing alternative transportation options.

Rider Quotes

- "More cleanliness on the trains itself if possible."
- "Maybe clean the buses or trade them out more frequently. It's gotten astonishingly disgusting lately."
- "The [bus] seats are often very dirty"
- "It's very slippery in stations after rain"
- "Floors dangerously slippery when wet seems related to cleaning agent"
- "Power washing and deep cleaning metro stations when they're closed"

Proposed Solutions

1. WMATA should continue efforts to change bus seats from old cloth to vinyl seats and provide an updated timeline on conversions.

WMATA announced in June 2024 that it would install vinyl seats on all buses serving Metrobus routes to replace cloth seats that absorb spills, stains, and odors.²⁸ Metro noted that it plans to complete all 1,500+ buses by 2025, and the RAC requests that WMATA provide confirmation to the RAC that they intend to complete cloth-to-vinyl conversions by the end of the calendar year.

G. MAINTAINING METRO'S CLEANLINESS

2. WMATA should share updates on the scheduling of cleaning staff on trains and buses and explore the feasibility of mid-day cleaning on high-traffic trains/buses.

WMATA has publicized via its social media details on its cleaning procedures for trains and buses, noting that rail cleaning takes roughly 4-8 hours but has been streamlined to lead to an increase in cleanliness customer survey ratings by 11%.²⁹ Moreover, Metrobus deep cleanings occur every 16 days, with daily cleanings when buses go back through the service lane for spot cleaning.³⁰

The RAC requests that WMATA share additional information on cleaning procedures if they were needed in the middle of routes (e.g. spills) in addition to daily cleaning procedures across stations, buses, and trains. Additionally, the RAC is interested in seeing if there is a feasible path for WMATA staff to provide spot cleaning on trains and/or buses on high-traffic routes in the middle of the day between when they first leave the railyard or bus garage and when they return.

3. WMATA should consider taking action in response to riders' reported issues of slippery stations after rain and due to cleaning agents.

A few riders have noted concerns with slippery tiles after rain and application of cleaning agents, and we encourage WMATA to explore ways to remedy these concerns from riders regarding concerns with station floors. WMATA could consider including more non-slip mats at entrances or signs that indicate that tiles are slippery when wet or after cleaned to address rider concerns.

H. METROACCESS & TRANSIT 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 coupled with feedback received from riders related to MetroAccess and transit accessibility. This section is relevant to the rider experience because WMATA services and transportation options must be accessible, efficient, and effective for all riders, including older and disabled riders.

Much of the work done by the Accessibility Advisory Committee in FY 2025 followed the stated mission of the AAC: to provide solutions to the WMATA Board to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of transportation options for disabled users in the metropolitan area.

In July 2024, WMATA awarded a new MetroAccess contract which sought to increase efficiencies in service by reducing the number of providers from three to one, and reducing the existing 5 MetroAccess transit bases to three. It was hoped that consolidated communication and resources could be more effectively managed by one contractor rather than through multiple providers. Within 90 days of contract award, it became evident through customer complaints and available data that this new process was not effective, and on-time performance subsequently dropped to 87% instead of the overall 5-year average of 92%. WMATA management acted swiftly to remedy this situation by reactivating local MetroAccess bases in 3 jurisdictions. Since November, MetroAccess on-time performance has steadily increased, and the AAC is monitoring this progress.

In addition, the MetroAccess Abilities-Ride complimentary rideshare program has provided over 50 percent of the MetroAccess trips for customers free of charge. In addition, since these trips are usually less expensive than the traditional MetroAccess Trip, the Abilities Ride program has saved WMATA considerable expenses during this difficult transition.³¹

Throughout FY 2025, the AAC provided substantial accessibility recommendations for the 8K Gangway cars, especially in the areas of wheelchair access, lighting improvements, slip resistant flooring, and between car door barriers. Most of the suggestions made by the AAC to improve accessibility within the 8K cars were adopted by WMATA engineers.

H. METROACCESS & TRANSIT ACCESSIBILITY

In addition, the AAC commented on the new signage adopted by WMATA throughout their MetroRail and Metrobus networks. The AAC focused on color contrast of signage for low vision riders, appropriate use of Braille and tactile large print characters, and placement of this new signage in the MetroRail stations. Working alongside WMATA's communications leadership, the AAC saw many of our recommendations accepted, thereby increasing use of signage for disabled persons.

Lastly, the Accessibility Advisory Committee is working with Prince George's County (PGC) to increase transportation options for disabled users in the county. Through monitoring the progress of PGC's 2025 Transit Vision Plan and combining the efforts of the Better Bus Network alongside the regional DMVMoves plan, it is hoped that a more robust bus system will emerge in Prince George's County that will provide a comprehensive transit infrastructure with a bus network that will showcase more reliable and effective transit options for all patrons.

In February of 2025, the Waymap's platform went live across the entire Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) transit system.³² Waymap is a free navigation app designed for people with vision impairments and other disabilities, expanding access to transit and empowering all riders. Riders can utilize Waymap to navigate 98 rail stations, over 11,000 bus stops and 325 bus routes throughout WMATA's system. Waymap's SmartStep™ technology gives step-by-step audio instructions with up to three feet of accuracy throughout a user's journey. Waymap notes that with over 32 million square feet of real estate mapped globally, its services do not rely on mobile phone signal, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth beacons, GPS or other physical infrastructure.

"Metro plays a vital role in the community—connecting people in the region to jobs, schools, major attractions and recreational activities. Ensuring that America's Metro System is a leader in accessibility on a global scale is a priority for all of us at Metro," said WMATA General Manager and CEO Randy Clarke. "Safe, accessible public transit not only increases ridership, it also leads to a stronger economy, improved access to arts and culture and a better place to live and work overall. Waymap also has the potential to make our region's transportation network easier for all people to navigate."

H. METROACCESS & TRANSIT ACCESSIBILITY

Rider Quotes

- Reliability:
 - “For MetroAccess and Abilities-Ride, getting a realistic pick-up time when drivers are behind schedule is difficult; we are often told on the phone it will be there in 15 minutes, only to call about and be told it will be another 30 minutes, and then call again and be told it will be 15 more minutes”
 - “MetroAccess riders should not have more than a 30 minute window and if the ride can’t get there within this window, [the] client should be notified.”
 - “MetroAccess outside of central DC”
- Safety:
 - “Improve sidewalk from parking lot at East Falls Church so it is safer for older persons.”
 - “Safe hand-to-hand transfers for seniors and individuals with dementia/memory loss.”
 - “Bus stops in front of all senior centers to improve access without falls.”

Proposed Solutions

Based on input from the AAC, RAC, and rider feedback, our recommendations and proposed solutions are as follows:

1. WMATA should maintain and improve on its overall five-year average of 92% on-time performance for MetroAccess by monitoring customer complaints and available data.
2. WMATA should prioritize safety-enhancing measures for older adults.
3. WMATA should continue the Abilities-Ride program, which saves riders money.
4. WMATA should adopt the accessibility recommendations from AAC, including for railcars and signage.
5. WMATA should continue and enhance the Waymap navigation app, which expands access by providing step-by-step, audio instructions for riders with vision impairments and other disabilities.

I. OTHER RIDER CONCERNS

11% of riders noted concerns about Metrobus bus routing/Better Bus route adjustments or Metrorail expansion. The RAC urges riders to continue engaging with WMATA's Better Bus Initiative and future rail expansion initiatives, and the RAC will continue advocating for greater public feedback opportunities for both Better Bus and long-term rail expansion. The RAC also urges WMATA to share details on a future timeline for Blue/Orange/Silver line capacity relief rail expansion, including the possibility of developing new rail line infrastructure.

There are three other concerns that the RAC would like to address from riders' responses to our feedback form. The first is better communication on Metrorail single tracking, train/bus delays, and shutdowns. The RAC urges WMATA to ensure that MetroAlerts are updated as soon as possible on each of these issues and communicate information on delays/detours to external app providers if possible. Moreover, we encourage Metro to further encourage riders to sign up for MetroAlerts through social media and systemwide promotion.

The second issue is concerns about financial sustainability and the Metro budget. The RAC would like to highlight the key efforts being undertaken by the DMV Moves Working Group, launched in May 2024, to help develop a unified regional vision and sustainable funding model for WMATA's capital and operating budget.³³

This third and final issue is that some riders expressed the need for expanding bus shelters and benches at high traffic bus stops, and the RAC calls on WMATA to provide updates to riders on their plans for how they choose where and when to build new bus shelters and benches for riders.

SECTION IV: ANALYSIS OF RIDER SENTIMENT

A. Positive Observations Summary

Although the RAC's Annual Report primarily serves to highlight concerns from riders reported to the RAC and proposed solutions to those key issues, many riders also voluntarily answered our questions asking about positive observations they have noticed within the last year, demonstrating riders' desire to see Metro succeed and their passion for public transit in the region.

Metro riders have overall expressed satisfaction with WMATA, and the top five issue areas for positive observations from riders were **greater reliability and higher frequencies, greater safety and security in the system, greater cleanliness, reduced fare evasion, and technological upgrades**. Notably, 40% of riders highlighted greater reliability and higher frequencies as a key positive observation, demonstrating how riders are enthusiastic about faster, more efficient, and more reliable service.

B. Notable Quotes

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

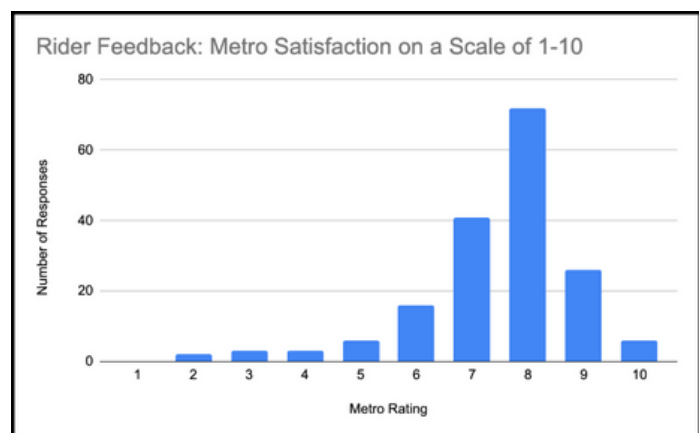
- "Better reliability in terms of rail frequency and bus OTP [on-time performance]. More people paying fares."
- "More police presence within stations and on train cars... great service reliability"
- "The Y8 North has been reliable around 700 and rarely later than three minutes. Last year this frequently concerned me.""
- "While there is room for improvement, overall Metro is undoubtedly one of the best public transit systems in the United States. The system is wide, navigation is intuitive, hours are reasonable, and overall most stations are safe and clean. Thank you for your work in accomplishing this!"
- "The staff is incredibly helpful, and I think is truly what makes the WMATA system one of the best transit systems in the US."
- "The Metro and buses are very clean and feel very safe! I also appreciate the kindness of many of the Metro workers."

SECTION IV: ANALYSIS OF RIDER SENTIMENT

- “Huge improvement in communicating with riders! Excellent organization of signage and shuttles for scheduled track-work service disruptions! More frequent trains (red line). Shiny new escalators! these are all excellent improvements :)”
- “Reliability is good, safety concerns have become less frequent, and WMATA leadership seems more responsive than the past”
- “Increased service--I never have to stress about departing my house for a specific train anymore. I trust there will be one arriving shortly after arriving at the platform.”
- “Metrorail is far more frequent, I don't feel like I have waited more than 10+ minutes in a long time and I remember headways used to be like 20 minutes. Makes riding a less stressful experience.”
- “Metrorail frequency, user information experience in stations (“next train coming” signs), cleanliness, security. For buses, the tap-docks at the front and backs of the bus, and more protected screens for bus operators”
- “Bus stops and lanes are less obstructed, meaning I get to my destinations more reliably and on time. The new buses also have useful information on the screens. I also noticed Metrorail is running more frequently, making it even more convenient for my longer-distance trips.”

C. Riders’ Rating of WMATA

Riders were asked to rate Metro on a scale from 1 to 10, and of the 175 individuals who voluntarily provided a rating, **Metro earned a 7.5 out of 10—up from 7.3 from last year, even after a more than three-fold increase in responses.** This rise in satisfaction shows how WMATA’s rider-focused outreach and approach toward improving the system have been critical in riders’ positive perceptions of WMATA and Metro as a whole.



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 WMATA 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.