



Testimony of Paul J. Wiedefeld, General Manager and Chief Executive Officer of the
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Before a joint hearing of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Public Assets and the
Subcommittee on Government Operations under the Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
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Good afternoon, Chairman Mica, Chairman Meadows, Ranking Member Duckworth, Ranking Member Connolly and Members of the Subcommittees. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Paul Wiedefeld, General Manager and Chief Executive Officer of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, known as Metro.

I joined Metro four short months ago with more than 35 years of public and private sector experience in the transportation field. Prior to joining Metro, I ran Baltimore/Washington International Airport twice, from 2002 to 2005 and again from 2009 to 2015, and in between, I served as head of the Maryland Transit Administration.

On March 6th of this year, after 90 days on the job, I released my initial action plan to improve Metro and begin to restore pride in the National Capital Region's public transit system.

Through conversations with riders, advocates, employees, business and community leaders, elected officials, funding partners, regulators, railroad experts, and management consultants, the message was clear – make Metro safer and more secure,

improve service reliability by getting the trains and buses to run on time, and manage effectively and efficiently as stewards of customer fares and public assets.

As indicated by my decision last month to shut down the Metrorail system for emergency safety inspections, Metro and the region have some hard truths to confront.

First, the safety culture at Metro is not integrated with operations, nor well-rooted at all levels. Understandably, high-profile incidents have shaken the public's confidence in the operational safety of the rail system and corrective actions are needed.

Second, while riders tell me they want to feel safe, the top issue they point to again and again is service reliability. Last year, rail on-time performance fell from 92 percent to 85 percent, and the experience for many customers was even worse as rail car mechanical failures have doubled the number of late trains.

And third, there's more work to be done to improve Metro's financial standing. While I can say confidently that Metro's financial position today is stable – with expenses better managed and positive cash flow – our financial systems as a whole are substandard compared to other transit authorities and require continued efforts to modernize.

The action plan I released last month is focused on confronting these three areas of improvement with realistic reform goals. Under my plan, Metro is undertaking a portfolio of initiatives that, in the near term, deliver fundamental improvements to regain trust from riders and local governments. In the mid-term, the actions will build on the stronger foundation to achieve best in class status in the United States.

I have outlined 47 specific actions to improve safety, reliability, financial security, and restore the public trust – and we'll continue to add to the list whenever necessary. As part of Metro's commitment to transparency, members of the public can view Metro's progress towards completing these actions through a new Customer Accountability

Report. The report can be found on our website and will be updated regularly so the public can track our progress.

These priorities are the first in a portfolio of initiatives that are being undertaken to deliver the basics of better service. Actions will be taken in every department as part of Metro's business plan to make these initiatives successful and to ensure accountability. Some initiatives will be experimental and will only be pursued if they prove successful. Others will be fine-tuned as we learn. I look forward to working with Members of this Committee and the public as we work to implement this plan.

Now I would like to briefly discuss the recent fire incident at McPherson Square and the subsequent one-day shutdown of the Metrorail system.

A fire at McPherson Square on March 14th presented disturbing similarities to the L'Enfant Plaza incident of January 2015, prompting my decision to shut down the Metrorail system for emergency safety inspections. Beginning at midnight on Wednesday March 16th through opening on Thursday morning, March 17th, WMATA and contractor personnel inspected, documented and reviewed all underground jumper cables; repairing 27 defects and documenting other non-emergency repairs required. A total of 1,928 cables were inspected, which includes jumper cables, track feeder cables, transition and expansion cables. Twenty-seven defects, including three of high priority, were corrected immediately.

Starting April 1st, an expert team of 12 inspectors are now conducting regular inspections of the Metrorail system. In addition, I look forward to reviewing the recommendations WMATA received from a consulting firm to implement new preventive maintenance and inspection schedules and procedures.

Metro is working closely with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and, under FTA procedures, WMATA will provide the investigation report to the FTA.

I would like to take a moment to describe our process going forward.

First, we are going back and doing a thorough review of what actions were or were not taken following the fire that occurred at L'Enfant Plaza in January 2015. Basically I want to know how this could have happened again just 14 months later.

Second, we are conducting a complete review of the March 14th McPherson event. Specifically, I want to know the cause and did we apply the lessons learned from the L'Enfant Plaza event to what occurred at McPherson Square, particularly in terms of how the event was handled by the Rail Operations Control Center and the emergency responders.

Finally, the third area of focus is what needs to change in terms of our inspection and maintenance of power systems to prevent an occurrence like this from happening again. This is a place where I believe we need to step back and confront more hard truths. As was done several years ago when the region recognized that internal fiscal management issues at Metro were systemic and needed to be addressed in that manner. Similarly, I have found systemic issues with regard to track, power, and car maintenance, as well as stations, which must be defined and addressed.

Our current approach to dealing with these issues, lurching from crisis to crisis, is not working and we need a plan going forward to come at these issues more holistically. We are working to prepare that plan and will present it to you and the public in the next four to six weeks.

The solutions won't be easy, but they are necessary to return the system to where we all want it to be. Work will take time and will impact customers and stakeholders – but I have committed to being transparent and giving customers and stakeholders notice of any changes.

Meanwhile, we are taking any immediate steps necessary to provide safe and reliable rail service.

As you know, the NTSB will soon provide a final report regarding the L'Enfant Plaza incident and we stand ready to act on their recommendations. Metro will work closely with the NTSB and the FTA and I am committed to being completely transparent with the public in terms of the findings, our plan to respond to the findings, and how well we are doing in terms of meeting our goals.

Since the tragic bombings in Brussels, we have been working very closely with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force and the Transportation Security Administration to share intelligence. The Metro Transit Police Department has increased police presence throughout the system with plain clothes and uniformed officers, and our 27 K-9 units have been deployed throughout the system. I would like to thank the police departments of our local jurisdictions that have stepped up their patrols in stations located in their jurisdictions.

Like the majority of mass transit systems in the United States, Metrorail is an "open" system, which creates unique challenges and requires security strategies that are complex and multi-layered. The federal government provides significant funding for these efforts – Metro has invested nearly \$172 million of federal Homeland Security funding into the system since September 11, 2001. These resources have helped us install thousands of new cameras, and supported our anti-terrorism team, bomb squad and K-9 units.

I will close by thanking Congress for providing Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIAA) and federal formula funding, which WMATA has invested in a multi-year capital program that is making long-deferred improvements to the system. These safety and infrastructure improvements range from upgrades to our tracks, structures and signal systems, to the design of state-of-the-art railcars that exceed the latest safety standards. We have now received over 100 of our new 7000-series

railcars, with 12 new cars delivered in both February and March, and we are working to accelerate that delivery schedule moving forward. Already, these cars are providing improved safety and comfort to commuters and visitors to the National Capital Region.

Thank you and I look forward to answering your questions.