

WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

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 TOWN HALL MEETING :
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Tuesday, November 16, 2004

WMATA Board Meeting Room
 600 Fifth Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C.

The town hall meeting in the above-
 entitled matter was convened, pursuant to notice,
 at 6:59 p.m., before:

For the WMATA Board:

BOB LEVY, Moderator

ROBERT SMITH, Chairman
 DANA KAUFFMAN, Vice Chair
 GLADYS MACK, 2ND VICE CHAIR
 DAVID CATANIA
 CHARLES DEEGAN
 JIM GRAHAM
 GORDON LINTON
 CALVIN NOPHLIN
 JACK REQUA
 MARCELL SOLOMON
 CHRISTOPHER ZIMMERMAN

For the WMATA Staff:

RICHARD A. WHITE, Chief Executive Officer
 LEONA AGOURIDIS

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. LEVY: Welcome to our first ever town hall meeting on behalf of Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. I am Bob Levy. I am your moderator tonight, and it's a pleasure to see the room so full, and it's a pleasure to be up here for the next two hours with members of the Board at this table and members of the senior staff around the room here to answer your questions.

I apologize for the sound system. Most of the sound system that you're hearing is the one that my mother and father gave me. I'll try to be as crisp and as loud as I can, and I'm hoping that the 21st century will be audible way back there. I'll do my best.

I am here tonight not because of my looks, certainly, but because, as I sometimes like to say, I may be Metro's best customer. I have been riding Metro bus or Metro rail since I washed up on shore here 37 years ago. I was on the first red line train to Rhode Island Avenue. On my first day in Washington, I rode the L-2 bus down Connecticut Avenue. Just this day, I have ridden five buses and five subways, and I'm not done yet. I like the system. I know the system. I use the system, and if some of you are

bus fans, you may still see my photo on the side of some buses, where some slanderous person says that I'm riding Metro bus because, hey, have you ever seen me drive? Well, a little fiction never hurt anybody.

We are here tonight to answer as many of your questions as we can. The spirit of the evening is one of openness. And by that I mean that we are going to try to answer any question that any of you would like to pose. There will not be censorship. We are not going to try to tailor questions or load questions or shape questions. The idea is for you, ladies and gentlemen, to ask these ladies and gentlemen the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Let me explain the way the evening will work. You will ask questions by writing the questions on yellow cards that will be available all around the room. Debra is holding them up. If you want a card and want to ask a question, do what this gentleman just did, raise your hand, write the question out. Please sign the yellow form. I am retired about nine months ago from the media industry, but my brothers and sisters in the business are still saying, "How will we know who asked the question?" That's how we'll know. Sign the question, and I will let them know later on

who you were, and we'll put it together backwards.

I will read the questions aloud. And, ladies and gentlemen, on the Board panel, we are going to ask that each of you hold your answers to two minutes, please. Yes, I'm the moderator. I am also the cop, and I will break in if you go far, far over 10 minutes. I'd like not to do that. So I would ask that each of you keep your answers, please, to two minutes. Each question will be answered by two members of the panel. I will pick them out by show of hands. I'll recognize one and then the other.

A few housekeeping announcements, if I could. Rest rooms are located opposite the board room, past the guard's desk and to the left. Pay phones and vending machines are also out there, but to the left as you leave. No food or drink in this room, please. No cell phone. And please make sure, when you fill out the yellow cards, that they are legible. Let me just check and see if there is anything else I need to touch. Yes, this.

We may not get through every question tonight, and if we do not, we will collect your questions, and WMATA will answer those questions on its website within the next few days. All questions that are asked and answered tonight

will be up on the website within one week. For those without Internet access, you may sign up to have a copy mailed at the Customer Service exhibit outside.

Are we ready for our first annual meeting? It looks as if we are. It's great to see such a full house. I am going to kick things off. I am not Bob Schiefer [ph], but I get to be Bob Schiefer for three questions. I am going to ask questions that I have put together to kick things off tonight, and then after that it's up to you.

Ladies and gentlemen of the panel, Question 1. There is no question that Metro has had a tidal wave of poor publicity recently about passenger unfriendliness, rudeness of kiosk attendants in the subway, questionable arrests by Metro police for minor-seeming food violations, and a general feeling among some customers that Metro's golden days were a long time ago and that customer service is not now part of the equation.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Board, two of you, please, are we going to see measurable progress in the area of passenger friendliness? Who would like to take this one on?

Yes, Mr. Smith.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Bob, and welcome everyone to WMATA.

Yes. The answer is, yes, absolutely. And I think that you'll find that in the next couple of weeks and certainly in the next couple of days the general manager is going to come forward with a plan by which we will be trying to turn this agency, from what I have said is a culture of construction mode, where we've had a Corps of Engineers' mentality to build one of the largest public work systems in the nation--one of the largest public works projects in the nation--and to turn us, instead, to a customer-service, customer-oriented mentality, kind of listening more to the Marriotts of the world, if you will, than listening to the Corps of Engineers in the future, and I think we're going to see immediate results on that. I know that it was advertised in most of the media, today, some of the training programs that we put forward with our HIFI [ph] program.

CHAIRMAN SMITH: Who else would like to answer the question?

Yes, sir?

MR. ZIMMERMAN: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity. Unfortunately, I'm not going to be able to

stay for most of this evening. I regret that very much, but the county board on which I serve has a regularly scheduled hearing, which began about 35 minutes ago, and I'm going to have to leave shortly to go vote.

But I'd really like the opportunity to answer this question in particular because I do think it's one of the most important aspects of what we do. Many of the things that we're dealing with, many of the problems are new things, but I don't think this area is necessarily really a new one. I think it's an ongoing challenge for transit agencies everywhere.

I go back to when I was a kid, and I remember riding the rail, the old Penn Central, and those places weren't really known for customer friendliness. It wasn't the same experience, but one of the reasons I think that rail died--and there are a lot of reasons for it--but when you went to the airlines, there was a whole different approach to customers than you got when you went to the trains. And I think, to some degree, that kind of culture sort of imbued itself through transit. And we've done hearings on various issues over the last few years around the region.

And when I've done mine, people will come and testify, and I will hear about great bus drivers. I will hear about some of the Metro people who are just fantastic, and they're definitely out there, but you only have to have a few bad experiences. I mean, one bad experience really can turn somebody off and say, "I'm not going to take that any more. I'm not taking the bus any more." And that's the issue is can you have consistently strong performance in the area of customer service. Can you consistently show people, when they get on the system, we want you here. We want to help?

And I think we have to say honestly we have not had that at Metro. We have some good people, but we don't have a consistent culture of we're here to serve customers. Any time you walk in a train station, if you have a question, there ought to be somebody there who is happy to answer your question and happy to help you. So I think as Chairman Smith said, this is an area where we're really looking to make a cultural change here, and I see no obstacle. This is not something that takes billions of dollars to do. It will take some work, but it is one of the things we can do that doesn't take billions of dollars, and

I think can make a real difference for our customers every day they ride the train or catch the bus.

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much.

Question 2. Everyone in the room knows that Metro does not pay for itself from the fare box, but some people in the room may not know that Metro has never tried to pay for itself from the fare box or ever intended to. The issue always has been a dedicated funding source for Metro, a consistent stream of money given to Metro by various governments.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Board and senior staff, are we ever going to see a day when there is a dedicated source of funding for Metro?

Who would like to take that one on? Yes, sir?

MR. KAUFFMAN: Yes, I'm Dana Kauffman, and I represent Fairfax County on Metro Board. And, Bob, the simple answer to start with is I've seen the day when we don't have a dedicated funding, and we need to find a better day.

We're in somewhat of a Catch-22 based on some of the things I read about our federal partners and state partners, the quest for the perfect before additional

dollars come. Well, frankly, we need that additional assistance now to attain that level of perfection that gets us back to that Metro system in which we can all take great pride.

There is a blue ribbon panel--many of you read about it--that is meeting during this period, and they should be coming to a close here in mid December. And certainly it's the hope of everyone around this horseshoe that come mid December they'll have articulated some viable funding options that we can share both with our federal partners and with our state governments because the bottom line, certainly from Virginia and Maryland, is we need that state buy-in.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Who else would like to answer? Yes, sir?

MR. LINTON: Thank you very much, Bob. Gordon Linton, representative from Montgomery County.

Let me just say that, clearly, dedicated funding is something that is crucial to Metro. Obviously, we've spent a tremendous amount of our time being focused on support from our subsidizer, but I think one of the things that is important for everybody else in this room to know is

that we have one of the highest recovery ratios in the country, which means right now, unlike a lot of transit systems around the country, a significant portion of what it takes for our system to operate comes from the fare box, and even then we are not going to be able to continue to deal with longstanding issues within our system without a dedicated source of funding that allows you to build, develop and continue to operate your system on a focused way, with a planned expansion, planned customer service. All those you need a reliable dedicated source of dollars in order to be able to do.

This is crucial. We just got the Metro Matters Agreement through all the jurisdictions. That will give us some short-term relief. We won't see the effects of that until several years, unfortunately, but once, once again, the jurisdictions have stood up and made some commitments to that agreement. But on top of that, we need dedicated funding like many of the major transit systems across the country.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Third question from me, and then we will turn it over to your questions on yellow.

System expansion. I'm looking at the maps behind

you, ladies and gentlemen, and I'm looking, in particular, at the corridor out to Dulles Airport, where more than a million people live and another half-million live about 20 miles west of there, and there is no subway, and there's no subway around the Beltway, and there is no subway in other parts of the area where they are growing very quickly. Who would like to take on the question of where, when and whether there will be system expansion?

Yes, sir, Mr. Kauffman?

MR. KAUFFMAN: Also, by the way, Kathy Hutchins, my colleague on the County Board and Metro Board couldn't be with us this evening, and she represents the area that will be served by rail to Dulles. And I say "will be" because this is something we have to have. If you don't have transit expanded, you guarantee sprawl. And, certainly, if you look at the Dulles corridor, over the next 20 years, you're going to see some 200,000 new people, some 200,000 new jobs.

So we have to secure that expansion to keep the area moving, to keep, frankly, the economic engine of the Commonwealth of Virginia vibrant. Now, to do that, certainly, we've had exhaustive review. We've been talking

about this informally from the time of the initial study, since 1992. If all things hold well, we're in Phase 1 right now, and that should be opened in 2011.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Who else would like to take a swing at this question?

Mr. Catania?

MR. CATANIA: Thank you. My name is David Catania. I represent the District of Columbia as an alternate on the Board.

We're very excited about the expansion that is taking place here in the District. And what folks need to understand is that each of the jurisdictions, once we move past the original 103-mile system, that any expansion has to be paid for completely by the jurisdiction proposing the expansion.

In the District over the last couple of years, we have been excited about the expansion within our system. This next weekend, we'll be opening the new New York Avenue station, which started about five years ago. We broke ground in December of 2000, and that's very exciting. It's the longest stretch of transit track in the District without a station. So that's thrilling. We're already seeing the

ATF will be located near that and other economic developments around that.

And just this last weekend, the District, and what I've certainly been a part of and have championed, as have many members of this Board, we had a groundbreaking on the introduction of light rail into the District that will connect the Sousa Bridge, Pennsylvania Avenue, where it crosses the river, and there will be six light rail stations that connect the Sousa Bridge to Bolling Air Force Base. This is important because it will be an important engine of economic development for the region east of the river, important transportation options for a population that is dependent on mass transit, and it also lays the groundwork, where you mentioned Dulles.

I happen to think the region ought to be looking further east, and it's a way to integrate the green line with the light rail, ultimately taking it to National Harbor Place in Prince George's County and integrating Wards 7 and 8, east of the river, which I represent, with a county of 800,000 people which has yet to have a core economic center that rivals a Tysons, but has the population, the talent, the resources to do so.

So I do believe there are some bright spots. It's incumbent upon each jurisdiction to fund it, and it's difficult at this time, with Maryland, and to a greater extent I think Virginia having some financial difficulties. They are not in imperil, but things are tight, nonetheless, so it's hard to finance these expansions.

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much. One housekeeping announcement. Those of you ladies and gentlemen standing across this wall, there still are some seats back here, a few of them anyway. If you'd like to sit, that's how to do it.

Let me double back before I get to your yellow questions. I foolishly forgot to let the two top leaders of Metro introduce, first, one and then the other will introduce the other. Let me introduce the Chairman of the Board, Bob Smith.

Bob?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: Thanks, again, Bob. I think it's important as well to introduce each of the members of the Board so you know who is coming from which direction, and some of them have done adequately themselves so far, but I did want to welcome everyone to WMATA. And when I first

came to WMATA over a year ago, the unifying theme in the e-mails and phone calls that I was receiving was widespread distress, frustration expressed by all of our customers in their inability to communicate directly to the Board itself. And the few customers that were getting through were offering some valuable firsthand comments and usable ideas. And we were able to straighten out some misconceptions of how the system is funded and let people know the capital deficiencies that exist and the system operates under today.

So I was surprised to find that a forum such as tonight had never been held in the history of WMATA. And while tonight's forum probably will not magically solve all of our problems, and it may even encounter more than a glitch or two with the speaker system, I would like to thank our staff, which has been operating under the direction of Leona Agouridis, for the concerted effort that has been made to bring this opportunity to fruition.

And I know that the majority of my colleagues and I believe that tonight's meeting will be only the first of these in an ongoing dialogue with our customers. Mr. Kauffman, who is going to take over the chair in January, has indicated a desire to continue these and to take them

out into the jurisdictions in the region.

With that, I do want to introduce each person at the table, so that you know where they come from and what area they represent.

As you face us, to my right, to our left, is Marcell Solomon, who is an alternate representing Prince George's County and appointed by the county executive of Prince George's County.

Immediately next to him is Mr. David Catania, an alternate, as he said, from the District of Columbia; followed by Mr. Charles Deegan, who is appointed by the governor of Maryland, representing the state from the jurisdiction of Prince George's County.

Immediately next to me, as you've heard speak a couple of times, Mr. Dana Kauffman is the Vice Chair and will be Chairman of this Board come January. He represents Fairfax County in Virginia.

Immediately to my left and your right, is Mrs. Gladys Mack, who represents the District of Columbia, and in particular the mayor's office.

Immediately next to her is Mr. Christopher Zimmerman, who represents Arlington County and sits on the

Arlington County Board.

Next to him, who introduced himself already at one occasion, Mr. Gordon Linton, who is appointed by the county executive of Montgomery County and represents Montgomery County as an alternate to the Board.

Immediately next to him is Mr. Calvin Nophlin, of the District of Columbia, who also is an alternate supporting the mayor's office.

And then that brings me to our general manager and chief executive officer of Metro, Mr. Richard White, who I would like to welcome and offer a couple of comments to.

[Applause.]

MR. WHITE: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Metro. We are very pleased to host you tonight. This is the beginning of what we all hope and expect to be a more open and proactive dialogue with all of you and all of our customers and our stakeholders.

The purpose tonight is for us to hear from you. So we want to do more listening than we want to do talking, but at the same time we want to help you understand some of the things that we're doing to address clearly questions that we know that are on your mind. So we hope to be able

to give you some amount of satisfactory answer and some sense of some of the things that we're up to and when you'll be able to hear more from us.

It's been a tough year. We know it's been a tough year, particularly for people who are riding on the red line. And people want to know, they want to have some answers to some of these questions, they want to know what's going on, and we hope to be able to begin that process to help you understand that.

Also, to let you know that the staff now knows, with the factors that we are now facing, with the extreme crowding on the system, with the fact that the system is aging, 60 percent of our rail system is 20 years of age or older, our assets are getting worn out, and quite frankly we are having more and more difficulty doing what you expect us to do every day. And we really have to figure out how we can put the shoulder to the wheel. We are waiting for the benefits of some of this investment money, the Metro Matters that you heard some of the Board members describe. The good news is relief is on the way. The bad news is it's going to take a little time to get the money spent, so you can actually see the benefit of that relief.

So, quite frankly, the challenge to this organization is to figure out how to do our jobs better than we have been doing recently to address primarily the area of service reliability. We know it is probably the most important factor that drives your individual decisionmaking. And when we have more trouble with service reliability, it causes more difficulty in your continuing to use Metro for your daily commutes.

So we want to explain to you our focus on service reliability. Back to basics. It's time for this organization to get recommitted to basics, to make sure we're doing everything we need to do on the safety, the reliability and the cleanliness side. And as Mr. Zimmerman and others have said, and some of their answers initially here is, we've got to re-engineer how our organization provides customer service and outreach. We're going to do the best we can. Please work with us in that regard. Help us out. Give us your good suggestions. Be a tiny bit patient with us if you can, and we're all going to work on this together.

Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

MR. LEVY: Thank you, Mr. White.

Okay, panel, here they come, the questions. And, once again, ladies and gentlemen of the curved table, two minutes per answer, please.

We want to introduce one more person. Please go ahead.

CHAIRMAN SMITH: Right. I just would like to introduce Councilman Jim Graham, from the District of Columbia. He is a representative to the Board from the County Council of the District of Columbia.

MR. LEVY: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN SMITH: City Council--I apologize. To the City.

MR. LEVY: The first question from the audience, from Sally Liska, of Adelphi, Maryland. How can you handle a major incident like an act of terrorism when you can't keep my car from being stolen?

[Laughter.]

MR. LEVY: Who would like to answer that one? Yes, sir?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: There is crime in the region that we are aware of, and it varies from jurisdiction to

jurisdiction. And, yes, cars do get stolen from time to time. And our police have redoubled their efforts in covering our parking lots over the last year, and I think the statistics indicate that that type of crime, in particular, is falling over the last year because of our redoubled efforts in that regard.

On the other portion of the question, and that is the terrorist attack, the real question is who in the world can handle some of the terrorist attacks that we've seen over the past couple of years? Who could even imagine the horror of them? But, nevertheless, I think you'll find in this system, particularly with regard to biological attack and chemical attack, we have taken extensive safeguards and monitoring, with computerized systems that will help us to control any area of attack, to the extent that we are probably one of the top, if not the leader, in the nation in protecting our riders against such attacks to the extent that any of us can be protected against horrendous attacks of the nature we've seen over the past couple years.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, sir.

Who else would like to answer? Mr. Linton?

MR. LINTON: I think one of the things, I think,

when anybody has had their own individual car stolen, they feel a sense of hopelessness in that you're vulnerable to those things that occur. I think one of the things that is very important to keep in perspective is that, one, Metro has one of the lowest crime rates of transit agencies around the country, but also you need to understand that, in the context of where you live, the rates of car thefts and entering in your own communities are probably higher than they are on the Metro system, at least being very consistent with the Metro system.

So I think it's important to not expect that the thefts, the break-ins within the systems are also reflected of the crime that's in the community. I think that's one thing to understand.

And going back to Chairman Smith's response. I think I wore a former hat a number of years ago, and I had a good chance to see the perspective of transit systems around the country, in terms of they build up an ability to handle terrorist attacks. You're in the center of the mecca, in terms of a transit ability to be able to respond to that. If you understand the fact that in the nation's capital, on a regular basis, Metro has to deal with just ongoing crowd

control, ongoing concerns about high-level officials traveling among their community, communication with various levels of government. You happen to be in one of the jurisdictions where the highest level of that interaction and also that ongoing activity heightens their ability to be able to handle it. So it's not perfect, but it's better than most.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, sir.

Next question from R. Braxton Quinn of Southeast Washington. How many of you board members actually take the train or do most of you live in the suburbs and drive in having no idea what it's like on these trains?

[Applause.]

MR. LEVY: Who would like to take that one?

Yes, sir?

MR. DEEGAN: Well, I can truthfully say I've never come to this Board without riding the train from New Carrollton, taking the orange line, getting on the green and yellow and coming in here and retracing going back.

I find it to be a rewarding experience because if I want to be here trying to regulate this agency, I ought to know what the hell it does. And there's a number of things,

and the staff can tell you that I point out to them, as I come in the morning of every Board meeting.

Mr. Boylin, I'm still waiting on that fan down in the artwork of the Gallery Place.

MR. BOYLIN: Yes, sir.

MR. DEEGAN: But you have to ride the system to understand why it's broke, and there's a lot of things that I think Mr. White has just divulged that he is now riding the system. It's a great experience. I've ridden several of the buses. We had a hearing in Prince George's County, where a number of the people complained about the bus route, and I got up one morning, and I'm a northerner, went all the way to Southern Prince George's County and rode that bus route in, and that's how I figured you learned how best to solve the problem. And I'm proud to say I enjoy riding it. I'm not a little guy, and I can appreciate the overcrowding issues, trust me.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Solomon?

MR. SOLOMON: Thank you, Bob.

I'm Marcell Solomon from Prince George's County, and I live in the county, Mitchellville, and my office is in

Greenbelt, Maryland. I'm a lawyer, so I run to court very often, and sometimes the judges call, and you have to drop everything else you're doing. There's no transit in terms of rail from my house to my office, and there is no way to get there. I can go to New Carrollton, take the train into town, come back to Greenbelt, get on the bus and come over, but that doesn't make any sense.

On Thursdays, we have committee meetings on Thursdays and Board meetings the third Thursday of each month. And I try to take the rail on those Thursdays to the extent I can. Pretty much about one-third of the travel into the city, I use the Metro rail. The other times I will drive the car because I will have to run to some meeting afterwards in Upper Marlboro or otherwise.

I have ridden the bus in the county up Greenbelt Road just to get the feel for the citizens' experience on the bus. I haven't ridden the Metro bus very often. I have gotten on in the city on a Thursday just to travel around the city and then come back over to here if I'm driving or if I'm taking a train.

But all of the Board members, from my experience, have used the system. There are various degrees of use

among the Board members, but we take our job very seriously, and we try to use it as often as we can so that we can have firsthand knowledge of your experience on the system.

Thank you.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, sir. Latecomers, another housekeeping announcement. If you would like to ask a question, you need to obtain a yellow card like the ones I'm holding up. Blanks are coming around the room. If you'd like one, get one, fill it out and hand it back to the staffer who will bring it to me.

Next question, panel, from Kevin Moore, who gives his address as MetroRiders.org. He lives in cyberspace.

[Laughter.]

MR. LEVY: Please address the issue of bus bunching. Complaints about this issue are always met with some version of "it can't be avoided." Thank you.

Who would like that one? Yes, sir?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: Thanks again, Bob, and I know that my good friend from Arlington, Mr. Zimmerman, who sits on the Arlington County Board, and the Arlington County Board, unfortunately, is meeting tonight, and so he had to move to vote in Arlington, and I apologize to him for having

scheduled this on top of an Arlington County meeting, but we do have 12 people scheduled to make this around. And he would love this question because he's a huge bus proponent.

Part of our problem in bunching is the traffic situation. As you know, buses are in traffic with the rest of the traffic on the road. Occasionally, one will come and will get backed up, and one will be right behind it. And that's an unfortunate item. We are constantly in our planning division trying to retool bus routes. We've just done several in Virginia. I know some of you here this evening I spoke to out in the lobby are here from the Route 29 corridor, where that has been retooled as well.

One thing that is interesting for the future that is a buzz word that is coming is bus rapid transit, wherein, we provide dedicated ways for buses to ride, dedicated lanes for buses to ride in. Therefore, you'll be able to maintain regular headway distance between the buses and not have them bunch up and gather, where you have one full and one empty right behind each other. And I think the first place that's coming to is K Street in the District of Columbia sponsoring a plan, where K Street will develop dedicated bus lanes, and we think there's a lot of promise for that in the future,

particularly in the economics of it, in terms of not having to build extra rail.

MR. LEVY: Anybody else on bus bunching?

Yes, Ms. Mack, we haven't heard from you yet.

MS. MACK: Right. I'm Gladys Mack, and I represent the District on the Metro Board. As we often say in the District, we have more bus riders in the system than many of the other jurisdictions, and the issue with the bus bunching really is related to the traffic concerns we have. As you all know, our buses all have a schedule. We have headways for them. They have tried to maintain those headways. However, the traffic is very unpredictable, and we simply sometimes are not able to maintain those schedules.

I would say that, in addition to our dedicated busways, we do have a plan that would have the light rail that Mr. Catania talked about in Anacostia in other areas of the city, and that will give us an opportunity to have more predictable timing as we make our bus trip. So it is an issue that we are constantly trying to resolve and one oftentimes that simply we don't make much progress on, but it is a concern. And I just want to say that we appreciate

your patience. We appreciate the support that we get from all of you at Metro, and we certainly will strive to be more customer friendly, and you've heard us talk about that tonight, and we're going to continue to do that.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, Ms. Mack.

Next question is from Matthew Miller, of American University in Northwest Washington. Matthew asks what actions is Metro taking toward unruly school kids who disrupt passengers on buses and trains. These kids eat and drink in stations and on rail cars. They swing from the metal bars like monkeys, and they run from car to car at stations to chat with their friends. I've even seen some kids pushing senior citizens around as they come off escalators at Dupont Circle.

Who'd like to comment on this one? Yes, sir?

MR. NOPHLIN: I'm Calvin Nophlin from the District of Columbia. Let me say that we have worked very hard to correct this problem. There is a committee with the superintendent of schools and administrators to try to resolve this. We understand there is an issue, and it's not all students, by the way. It's just a few, and those few we have to correct that issue. And I do know that Metro police

have tried to correct that problem with the cooperation of the mayor's office and City Council.

Thank you.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, sir.

Ms. Mack?

MS. MACK: Let me comment on that. The District of Columbia school bus is the Metro, and in our counties and our other jurisdictions most, if not all, of them have their own dedicated bus systems for your students, and so often you don't have to interact with the school kids. You know, school kids have a lot of energy, and those on those dedicated bus systems are probably exhibiting the same level of energy that you see on the Metro.

As Mr. Nophlin says, we work to try to make sure that school kids are good riders and that they are respectful of our other riders, but it is unique in that we are the only jurisdiction where Metro really is our school bus.

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much.

Next question from William McKlosky of Bethesda, Maryland. He asks why do Metro rail operators so often slam doors in the faces of customers? I use Philadelphia, New

York, Chicago, and Boston mass transit, and they never do. On my way here tonight, an operator did it at Farragut North, Metro Center and Gallery Place, and it happens on almost all my trips.

Comments?

MR. LEVY: Yes, Mr. White.

MR. WHITE: This is a tough problem. There is no doubt about it. There's a tension here between the staff trying to make sure that we can keep the throughput of the trains going through the systems so that we can maintain these headways that we are offering to you, which happen to be every 2.5 minutes during the peak period on the red line and 3 to 6 minutes on other lines. Sometimes we go too far.

I know there's a constant battle inside the organization here about can we keep our schedule? Can we move our trains through it? Because, basically, the best railroad is one that just keeps moving the people through. And if you can count on a train being behind you, then that's the fastest way we can move people through.

However, we find that people take a long time to get out of trains and a long time to get into trains. So there's a healthy tension here. We are I think about ready

to try and take the next step on this issue, which is to kind of become more precise than we are today by trying to develop more station-specific dwell time. So, if you need more time in Metro Center and you need more time in Gallery Place because it's a high volume, it's a transfer station, there's a lot more people moving in and out, we're going to need to put a little bit more dwell time on that door cycle. And maybe if we're in a smaller station, we can make a little bit of that up.

Quite frankly, a problem out of this whole thing is people's anxiety to get on and off the train. A lot of the reason why we have train mechanical failures is just because the door is not operating because of the customers' interface with the doors. As you know, they're not like an elevator door. You can't put your hand in your there, and it doesn't go back. So this is a healthy tension here between trying to run a good railroad that runs efficiently and according to a schedule, but one that is mindful of the time it takes to move people in and off the trains. We're going to try and take the next step to tailor it a little bit more to each station-specific location.

MR. LEVY: Room for one other comment. Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: To get to the part of the question that dealt with the bus doors slamming as well, in particular, and I appreciate the general manager's comments on the rail site because it is a safety issue that's very critical of the system. But on the bus issue, and one of the reasons I pointed in that direction was because, as the comments opened up this evening, the slamming of the doors on a bus customer is inexcusable, and I don't think there's anyone sitting here on the Board level that thinks that that's appropriate. And somebody can object to it, if you care to take a contrary opinion, but the reality of it is it's a customer service issue, as we discussed in the beginning, and it's a sea attitude change that has to do with the program, as I said at the beginning, that the general manager is going to bring forward in the next couple of days that has got to turn the attitude of our whole employee organization to a customer service-based organization from what has been a bricks-and-mortar plow organization. Let's build this thing as soon as we can.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, Mr. Smith.

Next question is from Alicia Revis. And, Alicia, I'm sorry if I'm mispronouncing either of your names. She

has turned in a two-page question, which I'm going to condense in the interest of time. But she is a Metro Access customer who lives in Northeast Washington and works in Chantilly, Virginia. Her scheduled pick-up time at the office in Chantilly is 5 p.m.

And she writes that last Tuesday, MetroAccess kept me waiting in the lobby of my office building for almost five hours. A driver did not arrive for me until 9:35 p.m. I've waited for a driver for as long as two hours, she says, but never four 4.5 hours.

She then goes on to say that she called the dispatcher, and someone said that a driver would be there in 20 minutes, but none ever came. She called again and was told that the driver that they had sent did not know his way around Virginia, and they were looking for someone else.

Then, the next morning she called the Quality Control Office of MetroAccess to report the incident, and no one would take it. She kept getting transferred to death, and she says, to date, I still have not been able to register my complaint.

Comments from the Board. Yes, sir?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: Well, that's incredibly

distressing, and unfortunately I've got to tell you that I believe it in its entirety. Last winter, at a public hearing for, ironically enough, the fare hikes that we had last summer, I had the occasion to chair a public hearing at Rockville, after which another staffer, who was pretty dedicated here at WMATA, and myself sat with two individuals who were sight-impaired and their seeing dogs, as well as had the opportunity to walk their dogs over the hour and a half to two hours that we waited for MetroAccess to respond.

It is very problematic this system of Metro Access, and it is extremely costly, to the tune that some of the trips that we provide are only upwards of \$37 a trip, where we provide trips for people door-to-door from the hinterlands of our area up in Northern Montgomery County to even Virginia. So it's not as, as ghastly as it sounds, it's not an easy problem to solve.

We contract out with it, and I'm here to tell you that other jurisdictions around the country have similar problems and are under threat of lawsuit and are being sued over this issue. It is a result of the Americans With Disabilities Act passed in 1992 by the Congress, which is a strict federal unfunded mandate insomuch that it demands

that these systems provide this service, and I don't think there's one in the nation that has adequately provided this service under the requirements of the law at this point.

We are struggling with it. It's unconscionable that anyone had to go through that experience. I hate to suggest that that's part of our public service culture change because that's just so abominable beyond that even that I almost can't fathom it myself. We are working on it. That's all I can say.

MR. LEVY: Mr. Graham, a comment?

MR. GRAHAM: I just want to say what's described is inexcusable. There's no question about that. But I do want to allow our general manager to comment on what our reports are showing in terms of our on-time service because, as bad as this is, and how much we all of us hate to hear it, the fact of the matter is the more common experience has actually improved very considerably over the past several years. And if we could just get a quick statistic from Mr. White because I think that would be helpful.

MR. LEVY: Mr. White?

MR. WHITE: Yes. We have I guess about 3,000 trips per day that we provide. And we know, for everyone of

those people who take that trip, that's an essential part of their ability to enjoy life, and they depend upon us to do that.

We run about 92 to 93 percent what we call on-time performance. That is plus or minus the 15-minute window which is what the law and the regulation prescribes as an on-time pick-up. A few years ago that was about 89 percent, so it wasn't very good, and it's better now. What is unacceptable is these kinds of I'll call them horror stories. These are clearly unacceptable. We have to have a system with our contractor.

As was said, this is a contract service provided by somebody under contract to Metro. We just have to have a way to prevent these extreme and egregious situations from happening, and we'll keep on working on it.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, gentlemen.

Next question from David Kreynor from Southeast Washington, who asks a question that was a favorite of a certain retired columnist at the Washington Post. David asks why not switch Metro rail to automated station announcements like the buses use?

We've silenced them. Who would like to try that

one?

MR. WHITE: Is the question station announcements?

MR. LEVY: No, in the trains.

MR. WHITE: Oh, in the trains themselves.

MR. LEVY: Yes.

MR. WHITE: That's slightly different.

This is another one of those things that has an endless debate to it and a long history inside the organization.

The real kind of things here is Metro was one of the first automated systems in the country where, by design and under the normal circumstances, the train operator just kind of oversees the functioning of the train, that which is controlled by the computers, and there is very little manual intervention that the operator does.

Now, yes, the operator does provide certain trips under certain conditions under manual operation where they are in control of the train. The reason why I'm saying this is the theory is you've got to keep the operator involved in the train if the computer is driving it. And one of the best ways to keep the operator's head in the game is to have them make station announcements so they are paying attention

to what's going on. That's the real reason why we do that. We trade that off with people who, you know, swallow the microphone, you can't hear what they're saying, garble their message, and it's a yin and a yang, but quite frankly I still come down on the side that it is one of the few ways we have, in an automated train operation, to keep the operator involved, and we've got to work on the human performance side of that allocation, good way of being able to perform that messaging.

MR. LEVY: Anybody else on the curved panel want to comment?

[No response.]

MR. LEVY: Seeing none, let's go on to the next question. This is an anonymous question, but a good one. What is Metro's policy on cell phone use with or without a hands-free device.

We've silenced them again. No, we haven't. Mr. Linton?

MR. LINTON: Well, there isn't any. There isn't any. And it's an interesting question because there's often major concerns about what we do to enforce some of the rules and regs that we have now, and there's complaints on both

sides. There are those that think that individuals should be allowed to eat anything on the train that they want. There are many of us who actually think that we enjoy the fact that we have one of the cleanest systems in the country because there is an effort to both maintain some standards, in terms of food and beverages on the trains.

But there is that tension, and if the gist of the question is that we should, on top of that enforcement problem, have to deal with enforcing the use of cell phones, I think there's probably too many demands that they're going to be putting on our police force and the ability for them to perform in a special way.

MR. LEVY: Anybody else care to comment about cell phones?

MR. DEEGAN: As I said earlier, I like to ride the system. The one thing I found very irritating to me is my cell phone doesn't work on Metro. The only system that works is Verizon, and that's something I think we need to work on so all systems will work on there, and it'll make the customers feel a whole lot safer riding the system.

MR. LEVY: Good point, sir.

MR. WHITE: Bob?

MR. LEVY: Yes?

MR. WHITE: If I could just make sure that everybody knows, our employees follow the law when it comes to bus operators and things like that, if that's implied in the question here. Our bus operators do not use cell phones except in certain emergency situations, and they're not supposed--

[Audience erupted.]

MR. WHITE: They're not supposed--okay. It's an enforcement issue. It's an enforcement issue.

[Off-microphone comments by audience members]

MR. WHITE: That's good feedback. Thank you.

[Laughter.]

MR. LEVY: By the way, that question was asked by Carol Wabington, of Northwest Washington, who left her name off the previous card. Carol, there you go.

Next question from Jabar Holston--yes, sir?
Comment?

MR. LINTON: I want to definitely withdraw my comments because I actually thought the question was addressing general use of cell phones, but obviously the use of cell phones by drivers is not acceptable behavior. In

fact, that's extremely dangerous. So there is no excuse for that, and it's something that we need to address.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Again, if you have questions or comments, that's why we have the yellow cards. Thank you.

From Jabar Holston, of Bowie, Maryland, this question: Metro is always stating that a lot of the problems with the system are because the infrastructure is old. My question is why was Metro not proactive and plan ahead so the needed money would be in the budget?

Mr. Linton, you're up again.

MR. LINTON: Unfortunately, I had the experience of being a federal transit administrator for nine years, and I shouldn't say "unfortunately"--seven years--and that was responsible for all the transit systems in the country and working with the Congress and making sure they have funding.

I can say to you that I recall, as a federal transit administrator, being in meetings with Dick White 10 years, when he in fact was saying what he's been saying over the last 10 years; that the system is getting old, that it needs a major infusion of capital. We have a blue ribbon panel, but I can also give you dates where there have been

six or seven other blue ribbon panels of regional representatives, one of which I was involved in, included the secretary of transportation and two governors.

So I want to suggest that the issue of asking for the dollars, trying to suggest to the jurisdictions that those dollars were needed, that's happened over a series of years and is not something that Metro was not trying to do and has, quite frankly, spent a considerable amount of time, even in most recent years, to get that message across that Metro Matters has been a successful part of that.

But the Blue Ribbon Panel for Long-Term Solutions is once again another panel that's meeting, another panel that recognizes this need, and we need to find out this time whether or not we get a solution to those continual requests for additional dollars.

MR. LEVY: Anybody else want to comment on this?
Mr. Catania?

MR. CATANIA: This gets back to the reason why we need a dedicated funding source, and it's one of the complications which we don't expect the average rider to fully contemplate. The system is working or it isn't. But the complication in the funding service, we have three

jurisdictions--the District, Maryland and Virginia--and there's almost a race to the bottom. If any one of these jurisdictions is having financial problems, because of the funding formula, that becomes the ceiling of how much we can spend.

So, in the mid '90s, when the District was having financial problems, we could only meet a certain level. Because of the funding formula the other jurisdictions were really locked into what we could afford. And so as fortunes reverse and as one jurisdiction suddenly is flush with cash, it just so happens that another jurisdiction may not have the cash. And so it's always a race to the bottom.

And then within each of these jurisdictions, you have competitions for these dollars. I'll just say, in Virginia, there is some competition between Northern Virginia and the rest of the state. The rest of the state is eager to eat up everything Northern Virginia can deposit in Richmond, right? And so there is a difficulty with Richmond and the folks from Northern Virginia being able to deliver those dollars.

Similarly, in Maryland, if you have an administration that may or may not be positively predisposed

to the surrounding suburban counties, that affects the commitments the jurisdiction will make to Metro.

In the District, where we have a federally capped amount of money we can spend no capital, where the average age of a D.C. public school is 65 years old, that consumes two-thirds of every dollar we can spend, and we can't spend any more, it leads a very small part of the pie that can be used for transportation, rec centers, primary care facilities, roads, bridges, et cetera. So one of the reasons we need a dedicated source is to even out this cyclical nature of funding in the three jurisdictions and the political accommodations that have to be made that don't always put transit first.

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much.

Next question comes from a woman named Joy, who doesn't give a last name or an address. Her question: During the hot, smoldering days of Washington summers, it is ridiculous to strictly enforce a no drinking policy on Metro, especially when people are riding buses with no air conditioning. With this in mind, says Joy, why does Metro have such a strict no drinking policy, especially during the summer months when heat exhaustion and dehydration are most

common?

Who would like to comment? Yes, sir. Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: It's a difficult balance to attain on both the eating and the drinking side of the equation. It would be nice that everyone was reared with proper manners and did not spill or slurp their drinks or leave their bottles behind. Certainly, a large percentage of the population could do that and take their trash with them. The unfortunate experience I think that all of us have come across is the train at 7 o'clock at night, where you're coming in and left to sit in someone else's garbage. And achieving that balance is very difficult to do.

Let us say that, when riding a bus, when one leaves this place of business, knows that he's going to get on the bus, it is possible to take drink or sustenance, hopefully, enough that when the bus ride is end, you're not deprived of that at that point, that you're not starved or without drink by the time the ride is over.

And I think that if you consider that, when you weigh those two things out, the better side of the decision at this point is to have the policy it has because it keeps the system, both bus and rail, clean to the extent it is

clean at this point.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Anybody else care to comment on this one?

Yes, sir.

MR. KAUFFMAN: The constant challenge is that you're never going to be able to codify common sense, and sensibility and civility, for that matter. Obviously, on a hot day, if someone is taking a sip discretely of some water, I don't think you're going to have someone jumping on you. But at the same token, when you're coming down an escalator at Gallery Place, and you're looking at somebody's Starbucks coffee cup that they've left sitting there, that's another matter all together.

One of the things that's been the pride of this system has been the cleanliness of the system. We have to find a way to recapture that because, frankly, today, you may be the thirsty person or the hungry person. The next time you may be the person sitting in that food or stepping on that drink someone left behind.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Next question is an anonymous question. When will other bus systems, such as Arlington's and the Fairfax Connector,

start using SmartTrip?

Mr. Kauffman?

MR. KAUFFMAN: We are ruling that out. It's interesting. Earlier, folks asked the question about the bus bunching, and part of that is because of the difficulty of getting the fares out, the change in the media, and that is being put in place. One of the great things, and, frankly, I'll admit that Fairfax is copying Arlington, is that how do you get more people to want to ride a bus? How do you make it more convenient to attract, other than those who are transit dependent, how do you give folks who have a choice a reason to choose transit?

And we just put in place a 50-percent increase in bus service along the Richmond Highway corridor, along Route 1, the Metro 9 buses. We have the priority signals in place. We are going to be putting the SmartCard readers in place, and we want you to ride the bus. Frankly, we can't build enough parking structures to accommodate. We have to get people to ride the bus.

MR. LEVY: Another comment from anyone?

[No response.]

MR. LEVY: Next question from Ryan Morris of

Silver Spring. Ryan asks: The use of eight-car trains and improved switching equipment has been promoted as an answer to growing crowds on red, orange and blue line trains. Does Metro have enough equipment to sustain operation of eight-car trains? If not, what is needed, and what steps are being taken to meet these needs? Eight-car trains.

Ms. Mack?

MS. MACK: We just last month approved the Metro Matters program, an agreement that was a commitment from all of our jurisdictions to put in funding in order to assure that we will be able to execute an agreement to purchase 120 additional rail cards. As we begin to get those cars, it will allow us to run eight-car trains.

You may have noticed, during the recent event, when we had the accident on the red line, we did run a few eight-car trains as a way to try to move our people a little faster during that event. We will not only be able to purchase the trains, but of course there are rail yards and other adjustments that have to be made in order to run the eight-car trains.

What we face in the future is enormous needs for funding. You have heard us already repeat over and over the

need for dedicated funding. The jurisdictions have been very generous in terms of their own local budgets and putting together the funding that was needed to keep the system running.

In fact, five years ago, we funded an infrastructure renewal program which was again a commitment of funds from our local jurisdictions, digging deep into our pockets, to find the funds that were necessary to keep Metro running. So we are facing a constant increasing demand for additional funds that will support our eight-car trains, the facilities that are necessary to go along with them and also the buses because, when we are running more trains, we're carrying more people on the trains. It, also, in many cases, means that there are more people connecting with those trains using our bus systems.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Anybody else on eight-car trains?

Mr. Kauffman?

MR. KAUFFMAN: Just something to keep in mind. Eight-car trains is certainly essential. And what that would really help us address is what's called the peak of the peak because one of the unfortunate realities of

commuting, as we know it, in Metropolitan Washington, is everybody seems to have to be at the same place at the same time, going the same direction.

So one of the things that we certainly want to also be able to help you do, in addition to getting these eight-car trains, is how do we change the nature of the way Washington works? How do we help you convince your bosses that you should be able to telecommute or that you should be able to ride at different hours because right now, for all of the crowding that you experienced riding our system, particularly on the rail side, there's some 58 percent, I believe, Dick, or 53--some 58 or 53 percent that's unused because it's all jammed into those peak periods. We need to help you find a way to change the nature of how Washington works.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, gentlemen.

Next question from Kenneth April of Arlington, Virginia. Kenneth asks: Why does Metro rail call rush hour fares regular fares when they are, in effect, during a minority of operating hours? This is an insult to the intelligence of the customers. By definition, regular fares are the fares charged during the largest fraction of

operating hours. If Metro must persist in charging different fares at different times, at least it should have the decency to call them peak and off-peak fares.

Comments, anybody? Yes, sir?

MR. DEEGAN: Well, as the newest member on this Board, I too share his concern because it was very confusing to figure out how much do I want? It took me a while, and then I figured out that I was riding for free anyhow thanks to being on the Metro Board.

[Laughter.]

MR. DEEGAN: But for the customer, it's difficult. And so I said, "Why can't we have a flat fare and just charge everybody the same?"

And my colleague from Maryland says, "You get the votes from the District of Columbia, and we'll do it."

So I don't know if it will ever change, but it seems to me the simpler the better. If we could only charge a dollar, two dollars, three dollars, even it all out, everybody would be happier. I don't think it's going to happen any time soon.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Anybody else comment on this one?

Mr. Graham?

MR. GRAHAM: Does your comment suggest your willingness to review the formulas for jurisdictional funding as well?

MR. DEEGAN: Sure.

MR. GRAHAM: Well, that's an excellent step forward. Because I think we'd be glad to look at the fares if you'll look at the funding formulas. Because the way it is right now, in the District of Columbia, those of you from the District of Columbia need to know that we're pretty much taking about 39-percent of the overall costs of this system, and with 11 percent of the population and with an obvious fact that a lot of the purpose of this system is to bring people into work in the morning and take them home in the evening.

So why am I saying this? I'm just emphasizing the fact that there's a lot of delicate complexities to how this system runs every single day, and there are things that have been put into place many years ago that are likely to stay in place for many years. And one of those issues is how long is the ride and how long a fare should you pay for the longer rides?

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much, everybody.

Next question from Anthony Sadler, of New Carrollton, Maryland. He says: Why doesn't Metro have a one-zone fare like New York City or Atlanta?

Mr. Deegan, you saw this question coming.

[Applause.]

MR. LEVY: The Metro buses have one base fare of \$1.25; why not the subways?

Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: Well, I can get into the explanation of it, I guess, as Mr. Graham sort of alluded to. I mean, the reasoning back then, when it was derived to charge in the way that the system charged, which was long before I arrived here, but the reasoning is that there are folks who travel longer distances on the rail, and therefore impact the rail in more significant ways.

And there are folks in some jurisdictions who are more or less likely to travel longer distances and, in fact, have a preponderance of shorter trips. Therefore, the wise men at the time came up with this particular system to try to create balance between those folks in the core of the system that took short trips versus other folks that were

taking much longer trips on the system.

The issue is always an interesting point of discussion, but as Mr. Graham indicated, things were founded that way some time ago, and things are difficult to change that are that much ingrained in the system.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Anybody else care to comment on this one?

Ms. Mack?

MS. MACK: Well, I will just add to what's been said, that the structure of the fares was really an attempt to build in equity in terms of the length of the ride. Many District of Columbia riders ride a much shorter distance than do the suburban riders. And the way to try to make that fair--f-a-i-r--is to make sure that the person who rides the short distance is actually paying less than the person who is riding the longer distance.

The other important point to make here, though, is that the fares do overall make up about 50 percent of the total cost to the system, and so our local governments kick in a very significant amount of funding to support the system. And in that funding that comes from the local jurisdictions, the effort also is to make sure that they are

having an equitable share of the cost of running Metro.

So it is subtle, and it is complicated, and it should be reviewed. This formula was put in place over 25 years ago, and it has been studied a couple of times, but we never had any significant change. So it's something we need to look at.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, Ms. Mack.

Next question is from Shakina Ealy, who would like us to know that she is 11 years old, and she says: Can you---

[Applause.]

MR. LEVY: Thank you, Shakina. Can you put cameras on the bus, she asks. And why do people stand up talking to the bus driver and talk back when they are not supposed to?

Who would like that one? Mr. White?

MR. WHITE: First of all, is Shakina here?

That's great. That's an excellent question from an 11-year-old. That's terrific.

We are moving in this direction of cameras on the buses. We have cameras on 100 of our buses. Each new bus that we purchase it is now a standard piece of equipment that we make sure is on the bus, added expense, trade-off

decision here. It makes sense to move in that direction. So, over time, we'll have an entire fleet that will be outfitted with cameras.

They serve a couple basic purposes--basically, to ensure the overall safety and security of people who use the bus and our employees who are on the bus. It helps provide both a deterrent and a recorder of anything that takes place. And, quite frankly, secondarily, it keeps the fraudulent claims down. Lots of people like to think they had a bad experience with the Metro bus and got hit or something happened, and they try and go after us. And we've already gotten one person caught on fraud related to that didn't happen because we had it on tape.

So I think the cameras are good for customers, they're good for employees. They're good to make sure the right things happen and the wrong things don't.

MR. LEVY: Anybody else want to speak to Shakina? Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: Yes, I'll comment on the wisdom of a youngster here who actually knows what's right and wrong and how to behave, in terms of why would someone talk back when they're not supposed to? And part of the reason

we're here this evening is to create a civil dialogue between the masses of law enforcement in the system who have had difficulties and problems and haven't had the ability to reach the Board directly so that we can listen to those points, maybe provide a few answers that would help explain some of it, but with the rest of it take the information that you're providing back and work with it to improve the system. And we're doing that in what I think is a very civil discourse here this evening, and you all know as well that you're not jumping up and grabbing us by the throats because we're trying to make the effort to make this a better system.

And we appreciate that, and we appreciate the comment of an 11-year-old child who puts it all in perspective from a personal behavior point of view.

Thank you.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, Mr. Smith.

Next question from Paul Lee of Cleveland Park in Washington, D.C. And Paul asks: What is Metro's policy on donating advertising space to nonprofits? I recently heard that Metro reversed its policy due to controversial anti-gay ads. How does Metro censor advertising in its public

spaces?

Don't all ask at once. Mr. White?

MR. WHITE: We have most of our advertising is paid advertising. It's an important source of revenue for the authority. There is some amount of advertising space that is made available for nonprofit entities, and there is a basic overall policy and procedure that the Board has that governs how that is done.

MR. LEVY: Anybody else on the Board?

Mr. Graham?

MR. GRAHAM: This has been a hugely controversial area of Metro for a number of years. I can remember when I was at Whitman-Walker Clinic in the 1980s. We had to fight Metro to get HIV/AIDS advertising into the system, and those were my first experiences with this issue.

What we found, though, is that with some of the very controversial ads, and this system, I've got to tell you, has been very courageous in its interpretation of the first amendment to provide as provocative a discussion as you could possibly have, but with some of the very controversial ads, and one that comes to mind is the one that suggested that marijuana leads to better sex lives.

[Laughter.]

MR. WHITE: It was, you had the reaction from people saying, "Oh, my God. Do I have to see this kind of message? Do my children have to see this message?"

But the real clincher in all of this is when you told them that the ad was free of charge. It was a free advertisement, and people just went bonkers, you know, when they had to look at what they found objectionable and also learn that they themselves were paying for the advertising.

And I think that the complexities of this, and you still have all of the First Amendment issues with the paid advertising, but the fact of the matter is that we found ourselves in a position, and for me it was very difficult, to say that, well, we're still going to be allowing advertising space to anyone who had the money, but we had to limit our PSA advertising to local governments.

We're working in the District of Columbia to see how the D.C. government can be sponsors for well-intended charitable events and the like so that we can be a filter for those types of advertisements into the system. But it was a system that became--Mr. Catania has made the point that we were unable to limit the content due to the legal

advice that we were getting, which is still the case in terms of the paid ads. But the fact of the matter, at least now we can say to people these highly controversial ads are not there free of charge.

MR. LEVY: Next question, ladies and gentlemen, from Steve Surney of Reston, Virginia. And Steve asks I think a question that has been on the mind of many of us for years. When will the interiors of the old subway cars be rehabilitated? Anybody? Mr. White?

MR. WHITE: As each car gets rehabilitated, its interior gets an overhaul. You'll notice the new cars that we've bought, they've got a new color scheme to them. So, therefore, all of a sudden, that's a good, instant way of knowing that you've got a new car. You see a new interior color scheme.

As our cars go through car rehabilitation, we have 950 cars in our fleet right now, and some of the oldest of course go way back to the beginning and the opening of the service. And each car is designed to last about 35 years of service before it's got to be sent to the "car happy hunting ground." And to get there, we've got to do what we call a mid-life overhaul.

So about 17, 18, 19 years into car service, we put the car through an overhaul program so it can get that 35-year useful life, and we largely take out all of the sub systems in the car when we do that, and we change out the interior of the car at that time.

MR. LEVY: Anyone else care to comment? Anyone else care to add to that?

[No response.]

MR. LEVY: Next question. This, again, from Jabar Holston, of Bowie, Maryland, who asks: How is it that Metro can supply buses on Sundays at FedEx Field on a regular basis, but the people who live out in that area can only get a C-29 bus only on Saturdays and no service on Sundays at all?

[Applause.]

MR. LEVY: Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: The reality of it is that Mr. Schneider pays for those buses, and he buys the buses for the service of the Red Skins that day. It's a reasonable choice for us to make insomuch that we do not have the funds or the demand of ridership to put that many buses out on the streets. And then he charges, I realize, from our station

to the stadium, to recover some of his costs, but we certainly charge him for those buses as a revenue measure.

MR. LEVY: Anybody care to comment further about this?

[No response.]

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Next question, Anita Cameron, from Connecticut Avenue, Northwest, in Washington. She asks: How will Metro deal with passengers with disabilities in the event of a catastrophe, such as a major disaster or terrorist attack?

MR. WHITE: First of all, we do a regular amount of training on disaster preparedness with local jurisdictions. We bring our handicap community into that training process. We have specially designed carts. They're called INETEK cart, which is a method that has been designed to help safely remove disabled passengers out of a rail car in order to get them safely out of harm's way.

And we know for our disabled customers, who are wheel-chaired confined, getting every assurance from Metro that even in an emergency situation that we're going to retrieve their wheelchair and get it back to them, we make that commitment, but the first priority is to get all the

people out of harm's way, and we do have a special kind of delivery system to help disabled people evacuate trains.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Any comments from any members of the Board on this?

[No response.]

MR. LEVY: Thank you. I've been asked to announce where you can find website information so that you can check up on the results of this evening: www.MetroOpensDoors.com is the place to go.

Thank you.

Next, is another anonymous question: Has Metro ever considered bringing in private investment in a public-private partnership?

Comments from the Board? Yes, Mr. Kauffman?

MR. KAUFFMAN: One of the key elements in making this rail extension to Dulles happen is through working with a public-private partnership to try to find ways to make that happen, to find ways to save on the costs normally encountered in extending rail. So that is certainly something we're working on with construction.

The other thing you'll be seeing more of is that there's three basic ways to pay for your ride. First, is

what you pay, the second is what does the contributing jurisdiction pay, and the third is other revenues from things like advertising. And we, as a Board, have consciously made the decision to roll out some experimental efforts expanding that advertising. You may not like it. You may like it; you may not like it. And we're looking forward to having you let us know. You'll see things like rapid rail cars, partially wrapped buses. We need to hear back from you, once you see those out on the road or on the rail.

MR. LEVY: Thank you.

Anybody else? Mr. Linton?

MR. LINTON: I think one of the other things that's pretty unique about Metro, and many of you may see that in our development, is that we do have what's called joint development projects that are throughout our systems. We're, in fact, working with developers, using our existing land. And in many of those situations, we actually have revenues that come into the Transit Authority as a result of that. And Metro has one of the longest histories of doing joint development in the nation. And that's something that we continue to promote, and you will continue to see a lot

of that going on as both new stations are added, but also in-field stations and existing stations.

MR. LEVY: One more comment from Ms. Mack.

MS. MACK: I was just going to ask for an exception to the rule. Next Saturday, when we open the New York Avenue station, we will have the first station in Metro that is paid for in a partnership with the local landowners in the area with the D.C. government and the federal government. We are very pleased that we were able to get the support of the local landowners to contribute to the development of this station. It is the first for Metro, and there are many other opportunities that we think can be pursued to get this kind of partnership.

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much.

MR. CATANIA: Bob, can I just follow up on that? We've broken our rules a little bit, but this is a recent action that this Board has taken to look at the Hong Kong model, for instance, similar to what Mr. Linton said about the joint development projects, but taking it a step further. We know that the land around, for instance, new Metro sites quickly accelerates in value and a lot of economic activity exists on these sites about a mile as the

crow flies around the site.

And we are looking at ways for Metro to be a joint owner interest, minority interest, in these developments that would create a stream of revenue similar in Hong Kong that actually goes to underwrite and fund the cost of operating the whole system.

So it's a way to capture part of the value of the public investment and to get a return on that investment that goes back into the system. So it's something this Board has been working on over the last year, and I expect in the next year to have substantive progress on this effort.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, Mr. Catania. I just want to urge the Board to play within the rules from now on. I've got this many questions that I want to try to get to.

[Laughter.]

MR. LEVY: Yes, that's funny, I know, but we'll never have a chance at it if we don't hold ourselves to two answers of two minutes each, please.

Next question from Jillian Johnson of Washington, D.C. She asks: Given Metro's longevity, why is this the first town hall meeting?

Mr. Graham, was that a no? No, no, no. He says, no.

[Laughter.]

MR. LEVY: Mr. Smith?

MR. GRAHAM: No, that's all right. That's all right. I don't want to be--no, is it the first?

MR. LEVY: It's the first.

MR. GRAHAM: It's the first. Well, that's outrageous. That's outrageous. Now, it isn't that we haven't been communicating now because I've got to say that we had a public hearing, we have a number of public hearings always in connection with any fare increase, but this year we also had a public hearing in relationship to our paratransit program in this room just a few months ago, but certainly we should have more of this. I've got to say that I'm delighted, I'm sure every member of this Board is delighted, to see the number of people who are here. In fact, you should give yourself a round of applause just for being here.

[Applause.]

MR. GRAHAM: With this type of interest, we've got to keep this going because this will really contribute to

the strength of this system.

Thank you.

MR. LEVY: Who else would care to comment about this?

Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: As I indicated in my opening remarks, I was somewhat stunned that in 30 years there hadn't been this type of meeting, but, as Mr. Kauffman has indicated his interest in continuing them, I think it's critical. And I think probably part of it is the notion that I alluded to earlier that this organization was a let's build it, get it done organization, a construction operation.

Just within the last year, we've finished the 103-mile-system, as it were, the core system that was designed, and now it really needs to shift to be a customer service organization and not a construction organization in large part. We will still have construction going on. Don't think that we're not going anywhere else. We are going to continue to grow. But it needs to be primarily a customer service organization, and I think that's probably part of it. And I am quite certain that, with your response

tonight, that they are going to continue into the future.

Thank you.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Next question from Leslie Sage of Potomac, Maryland, who asks: During rush hour, stops are often too short even to allow people off the trains let alone new ones on. Leslie says the next question quite kindly, I think. Is this timing adjustable?

Panelists?

MR. WHITE: I think we kind of addressed that a little bit earlier with the technical term, the "dwell time." How long are we berthed at the platform to let people on and off? And we have to get more scientific in that, and we have to I think adjust, but we have to provide a little bit more time in certain locations where there are huge volumes of people, particularly transferring from train to train or line to line, and I think we need to do a better job of balancing that out. I've witnessed the situation myself. I know people get very unhappy when they very patiently wait for people to get off the train, and then the doors close in their face, and they can't get on the train. It's an adjustment we have to get better at.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, Mr. White.

Anybody else care to add anything?

[No response.]

MR. LEVY: Thank you, everybody.

Next question from Megan Broom, a resident of Washington, D.C. Her question is: Bus brakes, they are deafening. Are there problems with these or a delay in replacing them? Every busy I ride makes me wonder if the brakes are going to go. Speaking of stopping, Megan writes, please make sure drivers stop at stop signs. My bus regularly runs a stop sign on our route leaving from Brooklyn CUA. They don't even try to fake it. I'm surprised every time it happens.

Comments from the panel? Yes, Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: Yes, I just want to mention to the general manager at this point, on a question like this, if you would feel appropriate to call a member of staff to help give you more information, there is a mike open next to you, please, feel free.

MR. WHITE: That's a cute to Jack Requa to come on up, our chief operating officer for bus. You know, we run about 1,150 buses every rush hour, and we've got a lot of service on the street. We've got a lot of different people.

We've got the vagaries of human beings if everybody is doing everything they're supposed to do all the time with respect to coming to a complete stop. We do have street supervision. We do count on people like you to report a bus number at a time and a location, if you personally witness something, so that we can try and correct behavior if the behavior needs to be corrected. Squeaking, squealing brakes, Jack, maybe you can expand on that and the other issue as well.

MR. REQUA: We'd also like you to report the bus operators using the cell phones. We'd like greatly to have that information.

On the brakes, with the EPA regulations, their use of asbestos, which was the softening material that was used in the past, is no longer usable. The brake linings are harder. We are working diligently to try to get buses within tolerance. Dealing with one of our citizens on the O'Ryan 2s, the smaller buses, they're very loud. We've been back to the manufacturer. I met with chief operating officer of the organization a couple of weeks ago, and we're trying to find the best materials possible.

But we will try to limit the squealing, but it's a

very difficult situation to get them totally quieted. But the smaller buses are our biggest issue right now, and we're working on those as quickly as we can to find the right lining to try to keep the noise down.

MR. LEVY: Thank you.

Next question from Alan Greenberg, of Northwest Washington, who writes: In most stations, there will never be enough parking at current prices to satisfy demand. Even if we tried to provide it, we would overwhelm and perhaps destroy some adjacent neighborhoods with cars and parking structures. Would you support setting aside some portion of parking spaces at each station for market pricing so that patrons have an option to park and ride at any station at any time?

Comments from the panel? Mr. Kauffman?

MR. KAUFFMAN: Well, coming from the land where most folks park and ride, it's interesting, when you look at the past seven years, we talk about the increased ridership we've experienced, and we've seen over a 30-percent increase in ridership, and most of that is from folks parking in an outlying parking structure and coming on in. And what we have found certainly is you have the wonderful

dedication and ribbon-cutting and about a month later the structure is full.

What we have already done is we have set aside a percentage of the parking, and I believe it's up to 15 percent, that is for differentiated parking. It's basically saying that in order to secure that there be a parking place for you up until 10 o'clock in the morning, you can pay extra and get that, and we actually have waiting lists to do it. So that's one idea.

There have been others that suggest, and certainly Mr. Zimmerman, I'll give him credit for this in his absence, that suggests, well, why don't we open it up to more and try to tie into more market rate. The balance against that is, certainly, when it comes to the cost of commuting, for someone coming in from whether it's Shady Grove or from Vienna is a real part of your cost is not only what it takes to ride the system, it's what you have to pay to park, and it's the total cost.

I mean, we can make arbitrary differentiations here, but you, as a customer, what do you have to pay to be able to use the system? So that's what we have to balance it against.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Does anybody else care to discuss this issue--market-priced parking?

[No response.]

MR. LEVY: Thank you. Next question is from Melanie Mazik, I believe her last name is. Melanie lives in Southeast Washington.

Would Metro consider starting a Passenger Advisory Committee to help guide Metro?

[Applause.]

MR. LEVY: Yes, sir?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: It is interesting because just within the last week a group of riders has taken initiative and formed, and that is MetroRiders.org. And already they are up and running on the web. As recently as this morning, we've already got survey data that they have collected and which is very informative and helpful to us.

Not only that, they have a running on-line chat that has an interesting number of suggestions on things that might be done, and I think several of us have tapped into that and are reviewing those as they appear on-line. So, there, without getting into the bureaucracy of WMATA, and dealing with staff and all of these things, the market, in a

sense, has responded in its own way, with riders, forming MetroRiders.org, which I, personally, anyway, am appreciative to have out there as a new source of information.

MR. LEVY: Anybody else on the panel care to comment on this one?

Yes, Mr. Kauffman?

MR. KAUFFMAN: Just very briefly. I would like to know how many folks here this evening are members of this new group?

[Show of hands.]

MR. KAUFFMAN: A good number. I would encourage those folks who don't already belong to make it an effort to belong because, frankly, just as we are trying to reinstill among our employees that sense of ownership that's so vital to giving you a system which you can all be proud of is that we want our riders to have that sense of ownership.

And this group, without the fetters of formality, is, frankly, the best way I can think of to get undistilled comments to us and to share them amongst all riders.

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much.

Next question is from Maria Norton of Herndon,

Virginia.

When will Metro have the in-tunnel holographic advertisements, such as the ones that PATH trains serving New York and New Jersey have in their tunnels?

Mr. White is up.

MR. WHITE: The Board has approved moving forward in conducting a solicitation for that. If I could ask Leona maybe to give us some more updated specifics on when.

MS. AGOURIDIS: The procurement has gone out. We're accepting bids through the end of November, and then there will be a process by which the staff looks at the bids and determines who is the best company for us to work with. And once we do that, that should take about a month, and once that's completed probably about six months or so after that. So, within about the next six to eight months, we'll probably be seeing some advertising in the tunnels.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: Why have it?

MR. LEVY: He said why have it. We'll give him one follow-up.

MR. LINTON: I think, one, clearly, there's been an effort to try to bring more revenues in the system. And I think there have even been some suggestions often because

I know I've gotten, even as a recent Board member, have gotten letters from constituents who raise issues about increase in fares, the other needs we have, in terms of getting revenues in the system, and asking this Board to try to be more creative and using our resources to seek additional funds.

So the ability to be able to procure services, such as advertising, to be able to collect fees for those, apply those to all of the needs that you've identified even today we think is a great use of the system.

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much.

Next one is from Robert Johnson, again. He's from Northeast Washington. When will Metro have customer bathrooms?

[Applause.]

MR. LEVY: Mr. Kauffman?

MR. KAUFFMAN: Well, I don't know whether I have the title of "King of the Restrooms," but one of the things that was certainly raised to me some time ago by folks with continence issues, frankly, people who couldn't ride very far without having to have a rest room break. We revisited a longstanding Metro policy that said that the rest rooms

were only for employees, and we trotted out experimentally opening up those, and now, unless in case of high alert, that those restrooms are open to our riders.

Now, there are certain stations where, based on a review by Chief Hanson, which is, for real security reasons, we can't open the restrooms because of their proximity to key things that keep that system moving. But, again, the majority of the rail rest room facilities are open to the public.

MR. LEVY: Let me just clear up one thing that Mr. Kauffman didn't make as clear as he could have. There are restrooms in every stop, which a lot of people don't know, correct?

MR. KAUFFMAN: That is correct, sir.

MR. LEVY: Who else would like to comment about this?

Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: I'll just say that, yes, there was a great debate last spring on the issue, and we produced new signage, I believe, in the stations that indicate that certain people, on request, if you have an emergency or you have a small child or such, if you go to the station manager

in those stations where they're available--and it is the majority of the system--you'll have access to those restrooms.

We do have some stations where it's physically not possible, and in those stations, for those that have known problems, I think it would be wise to note those stations in your travel so that you know where you have that opportunity.

Thank you.

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much.

Next question from Steven Frank of Rockville, Maryland. He writes: I am a deaf, blind man who uses MetroAccess. If a blind person is waiting for a late pick-up, they can call MetroAccess by cell phone. If I have to call MetroAccess because my ride has not shown up, I need to go back inside to call on my braille TTY, and this takes time. MetroAccess needs to learn more about serving deaf, blind customers.

Comments from the panel.

Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: I agree wholly. As I indicated earlier, my experience last winter in Rockville was

horrifying because had, in fact, Mr. Rick Stevens from our staff and myself not been there, the two individuals we were with, I'm quite confident, would have spent the entire night in the county executive's lobby, in the office building there in Rockville. It's a horrifying problem.

And as Mr. White indicated, we are working. We actually are getting ready to let a new procurement for handicap service within the next month or two, and at that point, we will try to structure the contract to help us provide better service. And we are constantly looking for new ideas at how to do that and welcome the input on this.

MR. LEVY: Would anybody else like to comment about deaf, blind people on the system?

Ms. Mack?

MS. MACK: I was going to make a more general comment, but if you're going to comment, specifically--

MR. LINTON: Mine was going to be pretty general as well. I'll defer.

MS. MACK: Fine. I just want to add to what Mr. Smith said, and that is that we continue to try to address the needs of the Metro Access rides and just to point out that we had an extensive review of our Access services,

pulled citizens together, had a task force, and we agreed that we would continue to provide a greater distance of service on MetroAccess than we are actually required to do by the regulations. And we also agreed that we would charge less for MetroAccess riders than we are authorized to charge.

And it simply was a consensus on the part of the Board that we need to encourage more riders on our MetroAccess and that we need to try to accommodate their needs to the extent that we can.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, Ms. Mack.

For 98 minutes, I have managed not to ask a question about escalators, but all good things must come to an end.

[Laughter.]

MR. LEVY: Thank you to Saul Zaviler for this question. He writes: In the Rosslyn station, one or more of the escalators between the upper and lower levels are frequently out of service and being repaired it seems at least 90 days per year. It seems they are patched up and break repeatedly.

Mr. Zaviler suggests Metro publish an escalator

management plan for public comment. Such a plan, if it doesn't already exist, should include provision for studying the repair histories of each escalator and elevator to see if problems are repetitive and systemic throughout Metro. This could lead to effective diagnosis and treatments, he says.

Comments from the panel?

MR. LINTON: You usually handle that pretty well, Madam, because you're the expert on escalators on the Board. But let me just say that we, on a regular basis, have identified for us, by staff, what we call the difficult list of escalators who have regular service issues. But I would say that those reports most recently have been greatly improved. I understand the gentleman. The Rosslyn station, that was a station that I used all the time. That was my home station when I lived in Arlington, and so I understand those challenges.

But I also want riders to know that sometimes we are actually in rehabilitation. So there are also stations that will be out of service. Unfortunately, they have to be out of service for the rehabilitation, but the purpose of the rehabilitation is to give you reliable performance over

a period of time.

And the third thing that I would mention is that we've identified, and I think there's been a lot of controversial discussions about that, because of the nature of Metro's construction, that you also have areas where the escalators are exposed to weather, and the Rosslyn station, once again, is one of those.

In that situation, you have increased flows of water, other things that continue to create problems in maintaining those escalators on an ongoing basis. That, unfortunately, was something that was created in its design when it was constructed. I will let you know that the Board, with the support of the staff, there are processes underway to get some relief for that as well so that those escalators will be covered, and we will be able to avoid the penetration of water and the like.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, sir. One more comment about escalators. Mr. Catania?

MR. CATANIA: When I first joined the Board, really, we were experiencing the avalanche of concerns and problems with the escalators and elevators, and that led us to look at what the problems were. Among them, we were

having to go to Warsaw, Poland or to Mexico City to recruit the individuals with the technical skills to perform the repair and rehabilitation because there weren't the folks in the region with the technical capacity. So we've been working to increase our own ability to offer job opportunities for residents of the region to promote and to train. I'm pleased to say this year we will begin our \$7-million D.C. Apprenticeship Council approved escalator and elevator apprenticeship program that is a substantial move in the right direction in terms of adding capacity of individuals who can do this job and to recruit them from this region.

Further, as a District representative, and in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee of Public Services on the Council, with jurisdiction over WMATA, we were able to take an additional quarter of a million dollars and allocate it towards Cardoza High School so we can begin pre-apprenticeship programs within D.C. Public Schools to put them on the right track, so upon graduation they'll be able to assume these positions that have very good pay and very good benefits.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, Mr. Catania.

[Applause.]

MR. LEVY: A question from Louis Tuttle, of Northwest Washington. She writes, "We've all heard the reports of Metro employees exceeding bounds of reasonable exercise of their authority in response to perceived bad attitudes on the parts of Metro consumers; i.e., pushing or arresting a Metro customer in a wheelchair who complained of poor service, pushing and arresting a pregnant woman supposedly speaking loudly and crassly. What is being done to retrain them so these abuses stop occurring?

Mr. Kauffman?

MR. KAUFFMAN: This coming Thursday, working with our general manager, we're going to have an unveiling of a lot of the steps on a go-forward basis to make both the changes that you don't see that help toward better performance and also those changes you will see. Also, we're going to take away some things we've learned tonight about what are priority issues for you.

I think what's going to be critical is our workforce. We have to instill that sense of ownership, that sense of pride. We've lost a lot of seasoned veterans in our workforce. We have to find the way to instill in our

new workers, new operators, young men and women, that same sense of pride in ownership. And then, frankly, it comes down to accountability. This is a word that all of us have echoed, are very much committed to as a Board. And to make that happen, not only will this Board be working a step up, not only making certain that the general manager steps up, but we're going to have to rely on our representative workforce to be working closely with us to hold everyone accountable because there have been times, and all of us have seen it, all of us have felt it, concern that maybe when somebody committed what was an unconscionable act and the punishment seemed to be a slap on the wrist.

We need the ability to ensure that the penalties and the offense are more closely linked. And we need to have our representative workforce on board because I can tell you every member of this operating board is committed to accountability for you or riders.

MR. LEVY: Anybody else care to comment on retraining of Metro staff to correct these kinds of behaviors?

Ms. Mack?

MS. MACK: Much of the criticism has come from

our police officers. And just to reiterate, it really is a tough job. There are so many customers with so many needs, and these matters with our officers and our customers are always handled as delicately as possible. But I'm pleased to say that the police chief recently announced a program to create more sensitivity on the part of the police force, and I think that is something that's needed.

I have particularly been concerned about some of the sanctions on customers who have not been obeying our regulations, but I also think that what you've heard about customer service in general is a greater awareness and a greater commitment on the part of the Metro Board and also the Metro staff just to make sure that our customers' needs are recognized and that we are more sensitive, and that we don't have these incidents that we've had recently.

MR. LEVY: All right. Ms. Mack, thank you very much.

Next question, Mr. White, I think you're going to want to solo on this one. It's from Wes Vernon of Silver Spring, Maryland, who says: I will defend Mr. White against those who make him a scapegoat for Metro's problems. But I must ask why did it take him several years to realize that,

in order to understand customer problems, it is necessary that he personally use the system in going to and from work? What took him so long to understand this?

[Applause.]

MR. WHITE: Well, I'm glad I have a chance to provide clarification to what has been reported on. Let me say, I arrived here in 1996, and for about the first four years I used the system all the time. I used the system regularly as my basis of commuting to work.

There became a point in time in the development of my family at home where, for personal reasons, we all have these independent choices we have to make, taking kids to, in my case, hockey and other situations, and picking them up and dropping them off, and working my arrangements out with my wife that I slipped into that situation for a period of time, and I needed to slip out of it, and I have now slipped out of it.

I have recommitted myself after, I guess, about a 3.5-year absence of regularly using the system. I did use it as often as I could. I used it all the time during the day when I was moving about, but I didn't use it all the time to commute to work. So I have recommitted myself to do

that, and I am learning more as I have done that.

MR. LEVY: Thank you, Mr. White.

Next question from Marsha Plater, of Silver Spring, Maryland, who asks: How does Metro establish bus routes in local suburban jurisdictions. Please explain the process.

That assumes there is a process.

[Laughter.]

MR. LEVY: Anybody care to take that one?

MR. WHITE: Well, there is a process. There are a set of criteria that the staff has developed and has worked with the Board to try to define when a route warrants adding service or when it may be in kind of that zone where the utilization, we need to look at the frequency with which we continue to offer that service.

We try to bring that information forward to the Board, to the local jurisdictional staff that we coordinate with, to start saying, hey, maybe somebody's got to consider adding some service on here or maybe we can reorient or redirect certain service here.

So there is a process, but one must understand that the process is governed by the fiscal realities of the

agencies that fund us, and we just can't just go off because we say we ought to be adding a bus here or reducing the frequency or adding service, we can't do that, obviously, unless there is an ability of our funding agencies to be able to support that. So it's a little bit of a mixture of a basis of policy and criteria that the staff has developed that tries to help set the framework for the debate as to whether additional resources should be added to increased bus service.

MR. LEVY: Thank you. I would particularly like to hear from a suburban member here, if any have not commented on bus issues yet. Anybody care to jump in? If not, I'll recognize Mr. Smith again.

Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: I happen to be suburban. I do come in from Shady Grove all the time. That's about as far out as we can get.

I think the question, I'm sensitive to the fact that the question also probably alludes to persons that are interested in finding out process inasmuch as they don't want a route in a particular neighborhood as well. And I think that nuance gets back again to the whole communication

issue, in terms of when we change routes, when we alter routes, and they go into various neighborhoods or new directions. We have public hearings on the route changes, and usually have them very local to the jurisdiction where the change is.

Additionally, the jurisdiction in which the route exists or which is being changed has immense input into that change be it Montgomery County or Prince George's County or the District of Columbia, should somebody wish to change a route.

I think where we can improve on that issue is in the communication to folks on public hearings that affect their neighborhood. It's easy to get out to the people that are actually on the bus-riders--we can give them information. We can also get out to the community organizations, but some of those organizations aren't as networked as you might have hoped they were.

So I think, in the future, as we look to do routes that might go through Neighborhood X or Neighborhood Y, we definitely need to look at doing roadside signs at the entrances to those communities and, if not, particular streets that are affected very directly to deal with a

day-to-day situation, which we haven't done in the past, but I think we're very cognizant of the need to do in the future.

MR. LEVY: Mr. Smith, thank you very much.

Next question is from John Davies of Northwest Washington. He asks: Could WMATA be more forthright about expected single tracking on weekends? I recall at least two instances in which WMATA projected two weekend-long spells of single-tracking which ended up lasting at least twice as long as had been announced. The single tracking associated with the New York Avenue station seems to have been interminable.

Comments from the panel? Ms. Mack? Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: The single-tracking issue is particularly a problem or has been a problem on the red line because of the New York Avenue station. The good news is that we're opening on Saturday morning and single-tracking should be going away for some time in that area. And I'll say we advertise, when we're doing single-tracking, and shutting down the lines and any number of media outlets, including papers, on the television media.

And I've sat here at Board meetings and understood

and been briefed that the tracks were going to close, and just in the normal course of events have gotten on the train myself to come down to a hockey game and find myself sitting on the train wondering why it stood still, and then remembered, oh, yes, we're single-tracking tonight.

So it's a difficulty that I think is going to be tempered, as we open New York Avenue. I would like to say, though, that this system is a two-track system. It is not New York City. We don't have four tracks. We don't have three tracks. We can't express past any station. In any event that we have a difficulty on the line, we are on a fixed two-track system, and we have to deal in a one-track mode at that point, and there is no out of it because that's the way the core of the system was designed and laid out 30 years ago. I wish we could change it, but we cannot.

MR. LEVY: One more comment on this question from anybody who would like to make it.

Ms. Mack?

MS. MACK: I'll just add, somewhat to what Mr. Smith had said, as I indicated earlier, the New York Avenue station was the first jointly funded station, but it also was the first in-fill station that we've had at Metro.

Actually, we've been running a railroad and building a railroad at the same time, and it really has caused a great deal of difficulty, but relief is on the way. Next week, we open the station, and we will have to experience single-tracking only when we have some work-around situation. That's all I have to say.

MR. LEVY: All right. Ms. Mack, thanks.

Pam Bussey, of Seabrook, Maryland, is next. She asks: Why haven't the trash cans been replaced in all of the stations? Without the trash cans, the stations and trains have become garbage dumps.

Comments from the panel?

Mr. Linton, do you have one?

MR. LINTON: The only thing I would say is that during the times of terrorism and security alerts, and this was actually found around the world, that one of the first things that was asked to be removed in most transit stations were, in fact, trash cans, and that was a deterrent against devices and others being stored in trash cans, those kind of things occurring. So that's been applied not just in Metro, but that's been applied around the country.

The other thing I will say, though, I think there

has been another policy and some relief in that regard, and I think we do have coming forth where there will be some additional trash cans.

MR. LEVY: Time for two, and maybe if we're brief, three more questions.

James Reaushau of Oxon Hill, Maryland, asks: What are WMATA's current plans for rail across the Woodrow Wilson Bridge? I believe there's a dedicated lane for rail on the new bridge, and it would be a shame if we couldn't build the purple line there.

Comments? Mr. White?

MR. WHITE: What we, as the engineers, have attempted to do is, as they build that bridge, to make it acceptable, have it to be designed so that it can accept at some later date the ability for Metro to cross that bridge. So we worked very carefully with the Maryland Department of Transportation, the Virginia Department of Transportation that was working on delivering this new bridge to ensure that it could be, at some later date, inserted in so that it wouldn't be precluded. And then I think, obviously, what happens later on is subject to a policy and a funding decision.

MR. LEVY: Mr. Smith?

CHAIRMAN SMITH: Yes. As the Maryland representative or at least one of them--

[Laughter.]

CHAIRMAN SMITH: I can say that it is an MDOT decision, and it is a state funding issue, and it is one of those situations where the answer to all of your questions is money. It is a significant cost to install rail on the bridge. I know that we are analyzing and looking at different means of transit use on the bridge. It may well also be a viable corridor and place to introduce bus rapid transit that I alluded to earlier; that is, providing dedicated bus ways. And these are items that are currently under study in the Maryland Department of Transportation and will be considered for the future.

If you follow the transportation funding situation in Maryland right now, it's pretty tight, and there aren't a lot of extra literally billions of dollars to make these projects all happen. We're working on them as we can go.

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much.

Panel, this is the final question. Let me thank you, first, before I ask it, for an excellent performance

tonight and let you, ladies and gentlemen, know that this is the first in a series. There will be a continuing series of these meetings in the future. There will be another opportunity to speak with Metro representatives on December 11th at Largo Community Day at Capitol Center Mall. And Metro, I am told, will soon be launching an on-line chat--soon meaning in December.

Final question. This one from Tom Metcalfe, of Northeast Washington. After the disastrous snowstorm in January 2003 that crippled the Metro system for several days, Metro released an Inclement Weather Plan. However, this plan was exactly the same as the plan which had already been in place and was ignored. Why was the plan ignored, and if it wasn't good then, why is it good now?

MR. WHITE: I think some of the lessons, I'm not sure about the plan and the plan being ignored. What we do know is that when snow accumulates above roughly 6 to 8 inches, it has a serious impact on the ability of us to keep our trains operating. We have a limited underground service level, where at a certain level we reduce our service to underground-only service to try and sustain the trains, so that when people come back to work and the snow gets

cleared, we're not busy chasing and putting mechanical fixes onto trains that have succumbed to the weather.

There was a lot to be learned in this past year. I sent my team out to go to all of the cold-weather spots in North America to find out what they do that we don't do here, and they've come back, and we've put a plan together. We've worked it out with the Board. We have some new concepts and some new ideas that we're going to bring into place this year.

I can't promise you, I mean, it's tough dealing with 8, 10, 12 inches of snow, but we're going to do a better job, and we're going to be better equipped to try and sustain a lifeline of service during a severe weather event and still try to recover our service so that when people need us most, we have as much capability as we possibly can have.

MR. LEVY: Mr. White, thank you very much. Panelists, thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 8:57 p.m., the proceedings were adjourned.]