

Riders' Advisory Council

February 4, 2026

Members Present:

Cole Staudt, Chair, District of Columbia
William Way, Vice Chair, Virginia
Solomon Chen, Virginia
Matthew Clark, Maryland
Eli Craveiro Frankel, At-Large/District of Columbia
Lucas Habosky, At-Large/District of Columbia
Brian Mayer, Virginia
Alex Mendelsohn, At-Large/Virginia
Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/AAC Representative
Thomas Shepard, At-Large/District of Columbia
Irene Stephens, District of Columbia
Hendeke Tafesse, Virginia
Brandon Wu, District of Columbia

Metro Staff Present:

Alex Block, Director, Rail Automation
Mark Irvine, Senior Director, Strategy and Policy
John Pasek, Deputy Board Affairs Officer
José Reyes, Board Program Manager

Call to Order:

Mr. Staudt called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

Approval of Agenda:

The agenda was approved without objection.

Approval of Minutes:

The minutes of the January 7, 2026 Riders' Advisory Council were approved as presented.

Public Comment

Steve Kaffen, a member of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, made comments in response to the recent winter weather and need for snow removal at bus stops. He said that Metro and the jurisdictions need to review their snow removal policies to confirm which agency is responsible for clearing snow at certain locations. He also asked about Metro's process to verify that jurisdictions are complying with their responsibilities in terms of snow clearance. He said that there needs to be a better process to quickly resolve issues.

Mr. Kaffen also told the RAC that the D90 bus, which runs down Massachusetts Avenue, NW, should run more frequently than every 30 minutes, especially because it's the only bus line along Massachusetts Avenue serving various embassies and it's also the only bus line that connects American University to Metrorail stations at Tenleytown and Dupont Circle.

Finally, Mr. Kaffen cited his ridership statistics from "Metro Rewind" and suggested that Metro should create awards for its most frequent riders and offer free trips to encourage ridership.

Rail Modernization

Alex Block, Metro's Director of Rail Automation, provided the Council with an overview of Metro's Rail Modernization plan. He explained how the proposed modernization would address challenges of safety, reliability, capacity and efficiency, and provided an overview of the classifications of Grades of Automation (GoA) used by the world's rail systems. He reviewed the different elements of the program, including signals, rail fleet, stations and platforms and operations. Mr. Block also discussed the business case for modernization and how rail modernization can more efficiently address capacity issues than building a new rail line. He also reviewed the benefits of modernization in terms of customer satisfaction, capacity, reliability, efficiency and safety and its potential to achieve savings on capital costs.

Mr. Block then provided an overview of the proposed project for modernizing the Red Line, which would install Communications Based Train Control (CBTC) along the length of the Red Line and install Platform Screen Doors (PSD) at all stations between Grosvenor and Silver Spring, with track intrusion sensors at all other stations. He said that part of the project is included in Metro's Proposed FY2027-2032 Capital Improvement Program. He noted that future programs to modernize the Yellow/Green and Blue/Orange/Silver Lines would take around five to six years each, assuming funding levels recommended by DMVMoves are approved, meaning that the total timeline for modernization is roughly fifteen years. He said that Metro will be applying for federal grants for the project and expects those to cover around 40% of the cost.

Mr. Staudt opened the floor to comments and questions from RAC members.

Mr. Staudt noted that the RAC has had discussions about how Metro's current system won't meet its future reliability needs and asked if Mr. Block could provide more information about track intrusion sensors and other systems that would work in conjunction with PSDs to keep the tracks clear. Mr. Block said that there are a variety of technologies for intrusion detection sensors – some are weight-based, others use lasers or radar or video monitoring. He explained that these sensors are generally reliable, but often subject to false positives, and that the general consensus is that PSDs are the most reliable system of keeping intrusions off of the track. He noted that video detection technology is rapidly evolving and Metro is keeping an eye on that as a possible solution, as well.

In reference to information in Mr. Block's presentation about the cost-benefit analysis of modernization versus adding a new line, Mr. Way asked whether there were plans for a new Metro line and also asked Mr. Block to clarify what he meant by "outdated concept of operations" in his presentation.

Mr. Block said that "outdated concept of operations" referred to Metro's current practice of requiring an operator on every train, which is a significant cost. In response to Mr. Way's question about an additional Metro line, Mr. Block noted that Metro had conducted a study on options to address capacity challenges on the Blue/Orange/Silver line, which recommend the construction of a new line through the system's core. He noted that while Metro still wants to pursue system expansion, the proposed modernization will more efficiently allow for the same number of trains as constructing a new line. Mr. Way added that he has seen platform screen doors (PSDs) overseas and feels that they would contribute to safety.

Mr. Chen said that he thought PSDs would be a benefit to rider safety but said that he had questions about their maintenance requirements and effects on train speeds. Mr. Block explained that, in the past, Metro frequently had incidents where debris on the tracks would come into contact with the third rail and catch on fire; he noted that PSDs would help eliminate that issue by keeping trash and debris off the tracks. He added that PSDs also prevent people from fouling the track, such as to retrieve a dropped cell phone. Mr. Block noted that automation and PSDs would remove variables in service, like an operator having to approach a station extra slowly if someone is standing too close to the edge of the platform, or if the platform is crowded. He explained that existing schedules have to build in time to account for variations by both customer and operators, such as how long doors stay open at each station. Mr. Block noted that, similarly, Metro has realized improvements in reliability and speed with its recent return to Automatic Train Operation (ATO) and expect to see additional improvements with automation.

Mr. Chen also asked what Metro's plans are to implement this project if federal funding doesn't materialize. Mr. Block said that while Metro receives federal funding through what are called formula funds, which are distributed based on system size or ridership, or other similar factors, the funds for the rail modernization program would come from the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts/Core Capacity Grants program, and Metro is confident that this program is a strong candidate for funding based on the program's criteria. He noted that BART in the San Francisco Bay area received funding through this program for a similar project, with a federal grant covering approximately 40% of project costs and Metro is using this and other similar projects as a benchmark.

Mr. Sheehan noted the General Manager has explained that this is the most critical of Metro's capital projects and that this project would represent a win-win for Metro in terms of improving safety and performance. He asked about Metro's plans for PSD installation. Mr. Block explained that while Metro's long-term plan is to automate the entire system and install PSDs at all stations, the specific project proposed for Metro's FY2027-2032 Capital Improvement Plan calls for installing PSDs at 20 out of 27 Red Line stations. He explained

that other systems have also phased the implementation of PSDs and provided the example of Copenhagen's phased implementation of PSDs. Mr. Shehan said that PSDs would enhance safety in several situations, and that the Accessibility Advisory Committee is a strong proponent of this project.

Mr. Staudt asked how operator-less systems handle the door opening and door closing functions currently performed by operators. Mr. Block responded that Metro hasn't decided on a specific system yet, so the process will vary depending on the system chosen. He noted that all systems verify that train and platform doors are closed before allowing trains to depart and have other features to ensure safe operation. He said that Metro will develop performance specifications and then work with manufacturers to develop the system.

Mr. Meyer asked whether Metro's fleet of 6000-series railcars are compatible with automatic operation (GoA 3 or 4). Mr. Block said that Metro's current plan is to not convert 6000-series railcars to be compatible with Communications Based Train Control (CBTC), and that instead, Metro would convert 7000-series and the new 8000-series railcars to operate on both signaling systems and run 6000-series cars on lines that aren't yet running on CBTC. He added that, because of the length of time that it will take to complete the upgrades, by the time Metro is converting the last line to automatic operation, the 6000-series railcars will be getting close to retirement. Mr. Meyer noted that the ability of 8000-series cars to run on both systems is a good reason for Metro to procure more of these railcars.

Mr. Mendelsohn said that he is glad that Metro is being flexible with the installation of PSDs and felt that the benefits of automation are such that Metro should move forward with CBTC/automatic operation even if it can't fully install PSDs. He asked whether the new 8000-series trains will be compatible with CBTC/automatic operation when delivered. Mr. Block said that the 8000-series trains are designed to be compatible with CBTC/automatic operation and will have space reserved on the railcars for the necessary equipment, but will not have the equipment installed because Metro has not yet decided on the system it will use for automatic operations, so they will need to be retrofitted. In response to a follow-up question from Mr. Mendelsohn, Mr. Block explained that Metro's 7000-series cars were not designed with provisions for equipment to support CBTC/automatic operations, but that other transit systems have experience with retrofitting railcars to support automatic operations, so that could be done with the 7000-series.

Mr. Simone asked how much platform space the PSDs would take up, noting the narrow platforms at Gallery Place as shown on one of Mr. Block's slides. Mr. Block explained that PSDs are generally about the same width as the existing granite platform edge at around one foot wide, and Metro still needs to do additional design work on how to incorporate PSDs into its existing station architecture. Mr. Block also responded to a question from Mr. Simone about project phasing and how CBTC/automatic operation would integrate and work together with PSDs. He said that Metro is hoping to learn how to best implement this project by studying other transit systems that have implemented similar projects.

Mr. Staudt asked if Mr. Block could clarify the difference between a “Train Operator” and a “Train Attendant,” and asked what service looks like under different levels of automation. Mr. Block explained that Metro currently employs two different Grades of Automation (GoA): GoA 1 (Metro in manual mode) and GoA 2 (Metro using Automatic Train Operation), which require train operators. He said that for GoA 3, which has train attendants, those individuals are required to be on board the train, but not in the operator’s cab, and instead can roam the train. He noted that there aren’t many GoA 3 systems in the world, that most are GoA 4, which don’t require any personnel on board. He said that Metro hasn’t yet made a decision on its future operating model and has a host of options in terms of GoA and personnel decisions.

Mr. Simone noted that he first rode an automated train at the Atlanta airport forty years ago.

Mr. Staudt thanked Mr. Block for his presentation, as well as members of the RAC for asking good questions and having a good discussion on this topic.

Winter Weather Report-out

Mr. Staudt then asked members for their observations and comments on Metro’s response to the previous week’s winter storm.

Mr. Mendelsohn said he thought that Metro’s response to the winter storm was pretty good and noted that service kept running throughout much of the winter weather, especially rail service. He said that there may be a need to increase coordination with jurisdictional bus operators regarding snow detours – some routes from one operator were running on streets that operators were detouring off. He also noted that the website showing snow detour status for individual bus routes wasn’t kept fully up-to-date, but that, overall, he was happy with the snow response.

Mr. Wu said that Metro rail service during and after the storm was good, but that for Metrobus, the snow route detour maps aren’t totally clear on what specific streets are being used for snow detours and whether there would be stops on the detour routes. He said it would be helpful for Metro to list stops served on the detour routes. He also noted that there was confusion about responsibility for clearing snow at bus stops. He added that it would be helpful for WMATA to highlight instances when it’s engaging with jurisdictions to help clear snow at bus stops so riders would have a clear idea of when their specific bus stops might be cleared.

Mr. Habosky noted that the communications around disruptions, delays and detours were much better this year compared with the snowstorm that hit DC in January 2025, and that Metro’s communications were more proactive. He noted that most of the bus stops he uses are still impassable, and that there are still delays because roads haven’t been fully plowed yet.

Mr. Mendelsohn said that it would be helpful to get more information about the stops served when bus routes are on detour, and that it would be helpful, as technology improves, to integrate information on snow detours into transit apps.

Mr. Shepard noted some bus stops are still only partially cleared. He said that, while Metro did the best it could in terms of delivering service, there were still opportunities to improve communications, and cited the example of a friend who was caught in a weather-related rail disruption.

FY2027 Budget Public Hearing Report-out

Mr. Staudt then asked members if they had any thoughts or comments on Metro's recent budget hearings that they wanted to share.

Mr. Wu told the group that he had attended the previous day's public hearing and there was only one comment from a member of the public. He said that, while Metro does a good job with outreach, but it would also be helpful to break down information in the public hearing proposal into smaller pieces that could be shared through social media, for example, to encourage feedback.

Ms. Stephens noted that she watched the virtual hearing that took place earlier in the day and that there were some Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) representatives that testified and that some ANCs have committees that address transit-related issues. She thought that this would be good groups for the RAC to engage with to get their feedback, and asked if Metro had any social media posts about the hearings that she could share to encourage participation. Mr. Pasek said that Metro put something about the hearings on Facebook and he would search for that post following the meeting. Mr. Simone noted that, based on his experience, ANC transportation committees are generally focused on DDOT/roadway issues.

Mr. Reyes noted that the deadline for video participation for the next day's hearing had passed, but individuals are still able to call into the hearing if they want to provide comments.

Annual Report Committee Update

Mr. Staudt thanked Mr. Shepard and Mr. Craveiro Frankel for their work on the RAC's Annual Report and asked if they had any successes or challenges that they wanted to report out.

Mr. Shepard said that he had received 230 English-language submissions, along with four submissions in Spanish, with 60% of the responses coming from DC residents. He said that he would appreciate members spreading information about the survey their networks outside DC to improve responses from Maryland and Virginia.

Mr. Wu noted that he reached out to the Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions last year when he was heading up writing the report, and that when he reached out again this year, the Office provided him with a list email addresses for all of the ANCs in the city. He said that he would be happy to work with other RAC members to email ANCs and also suggested reaching out to local elected officials around the region to help spread the word about the RAC's survey. Mr. Staudt suggested using the RAC's email address to send out information to ANC commissioners to increase the number of responses. Mr. Pasek said that there would be a need to frame the email to ensure that it's clear that it's from the RAC rather than Metro itself, but that would be a good way to solicit feedback.

Mr. Staudt encouraged members to continue to solicit feedback to include in the Annual Report over the coming weeks.

New Business:

Mr. Staudt noted that the RAC's annual leadership elections would be occurring in April and said that he would be happy to answer questions about the roles of chair and vice chair if any members were interested in running.

Mr. Wu said that, before he left the meeting, Mr. Craveiro Frankel had put a comment in the meeting chat about the coordination between the Metro Transit Police and the federal law enforcement and asked if that could be a topic for an upcoming RAC meeting. He said it would be helpful to understand how Metro is working within federal law enforcement ecosystem and noted that the RAC had a productive conversation with the MTPD Chief the previous fall.

Mr. Mendelsohn shared that he had received concerns from riders about the information provided in advance of the December Metro Bus service changes, specifically that maps for routes that were modified or extended weren't available until immediately before the changes when into effect. He also asked if Metro could be more specific in its description of proposed schedule changes, rather than relaying on the phrase "schedule adjustments," which doesn't explain what is changing or the reason that the proposed change is being made.

Adjournment:

Mr. Staudt thanked members for a good discussion at the meeting and noted that the RAC's next meeting would be March 4th and would be all virtual. The meeting was adjourned at 7:47p.