Cash-Free Bus Program Update

Catherine Vanderwaart
6/5/2019

Purpose

To brief the Accessibility Advisory Committee on the results of the pilot of cash-free boarding on Route 79 *MetroExtra* that began in June 2018.

Route 79 Cash-Free Pilot: Objectives

- Pilot project was intended to answer:
  - Can cash-free boarding improve service for Metrobus on the street?
  - How would cash-free impact customers and operators?
- Route 79 selected for operational reasons, plus its good alternatives for cash customers (route 70, retail locations, rail stations)
- Known limitations:
  - Cash-free only one part of the strategy to speed boarding
  - Low baseline cash use also limited potential benefits
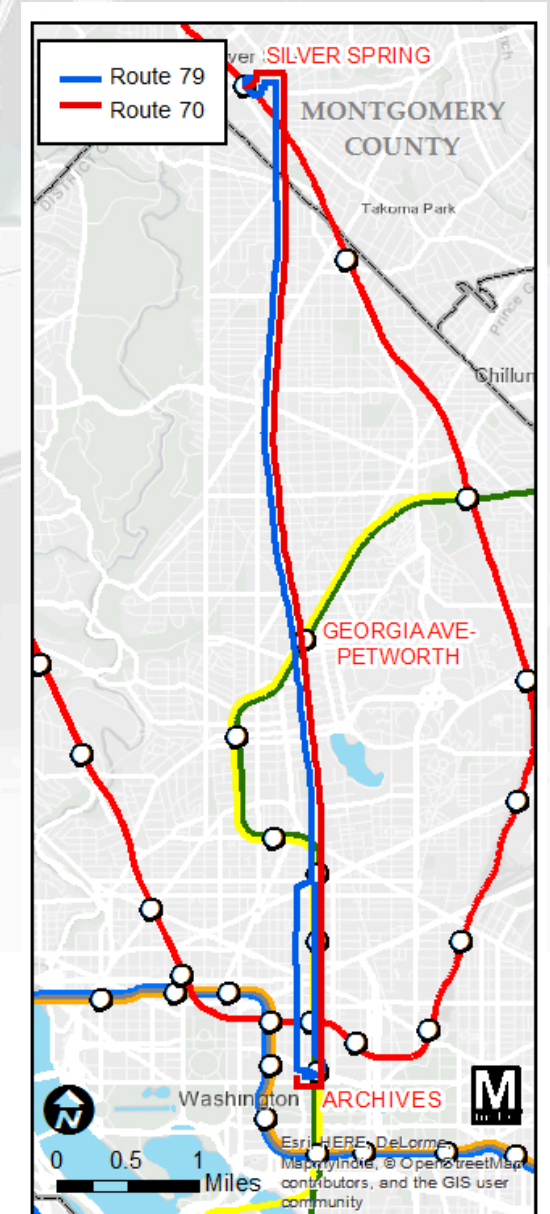
# Customers and operators on Route 79 liked the pilot

- **Customers support the pilot**
  - 62% of surveyed riders say the pilot should be permanent, including 58% of low income riders
  - 80% of respondents report that their trip is faster with the pilot
- **Bus operators support the pilot**
  - 60% think the pilot should be permanent; 19% are neutral

"Since the option of using cash on the 79 bus was removed, it takes me to where I'm going in less time"

- Agree
- Neutral or disagree
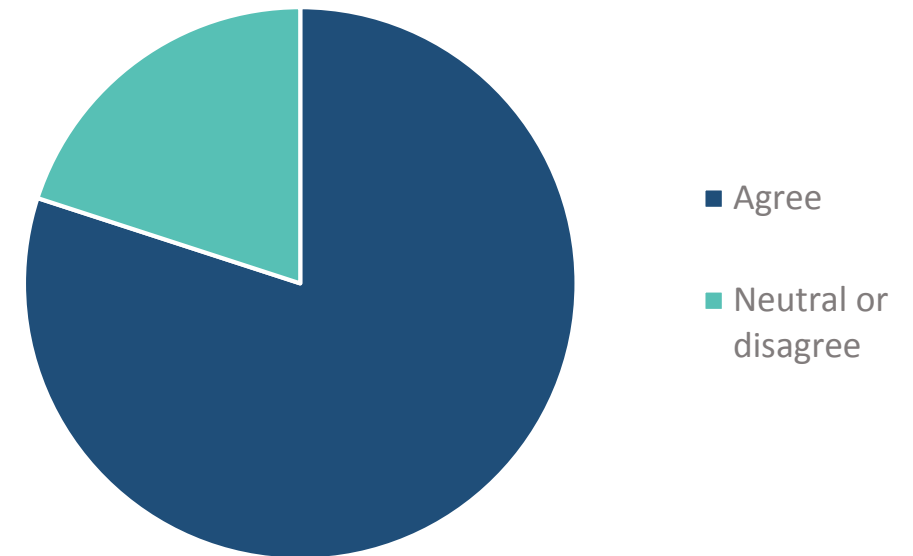
Survey results from cash customers

▪ Most customers did not report difficulty adapting

- Surveyed both Routes 79 and 70 to capture riders who switched to the local route

- 79 – 85% of customers report that it was "easy" or "neutral" to adapt to the pilot, depending on whether they paid cash or loaded cards

- Favorable rates for low-income customers were 2 – 7% below overall results

▪ Cash fares were 3% of boardings on Route 79 prior to the pilot; value add transactions were 6%

Systemwide, customers are more cautious

- Customers are hesitant about expansion: 32% are in favor and 54% disagree with eliminating cash on MetroExtra, Metroway and other limited-stop routes
  - Concern about impact on low income and unbanked passengers
  - Desire for more methods and locations for adding value
  - Lack of awareness of existing SmarTrip® reload options

Technical Evaluation: Summary

Metric		Impact of the 79 Cash-Free Pilot
Ridership	✖	Mildly negative. Some shifting from Route 79 to Route 70?
Fare Evasion	🟠	Fare evasion did not increase as a result of the pilot
Dwell Time	✔	Dwell time per person fell (less than 30 seconds per bus trip)
Running Time	🟠	No discernable running time savings
Cash Customers' Response	🟠	Shifted to Route 70, rail stations, and other sales outlets
Operating Cost Savings	🟠	Minimal difference

WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Running times did not improve when dwell times did

- Analyzed by direction, time of day, etc.
- Did not find any significant running time changes
- Possible explanations:
  - Low cash use beforehand
  - Normal variation in running times overshadowed dwell time savings

Route 79 Southbound Average Running Time By Hour
(excluding terminal segments)

WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY
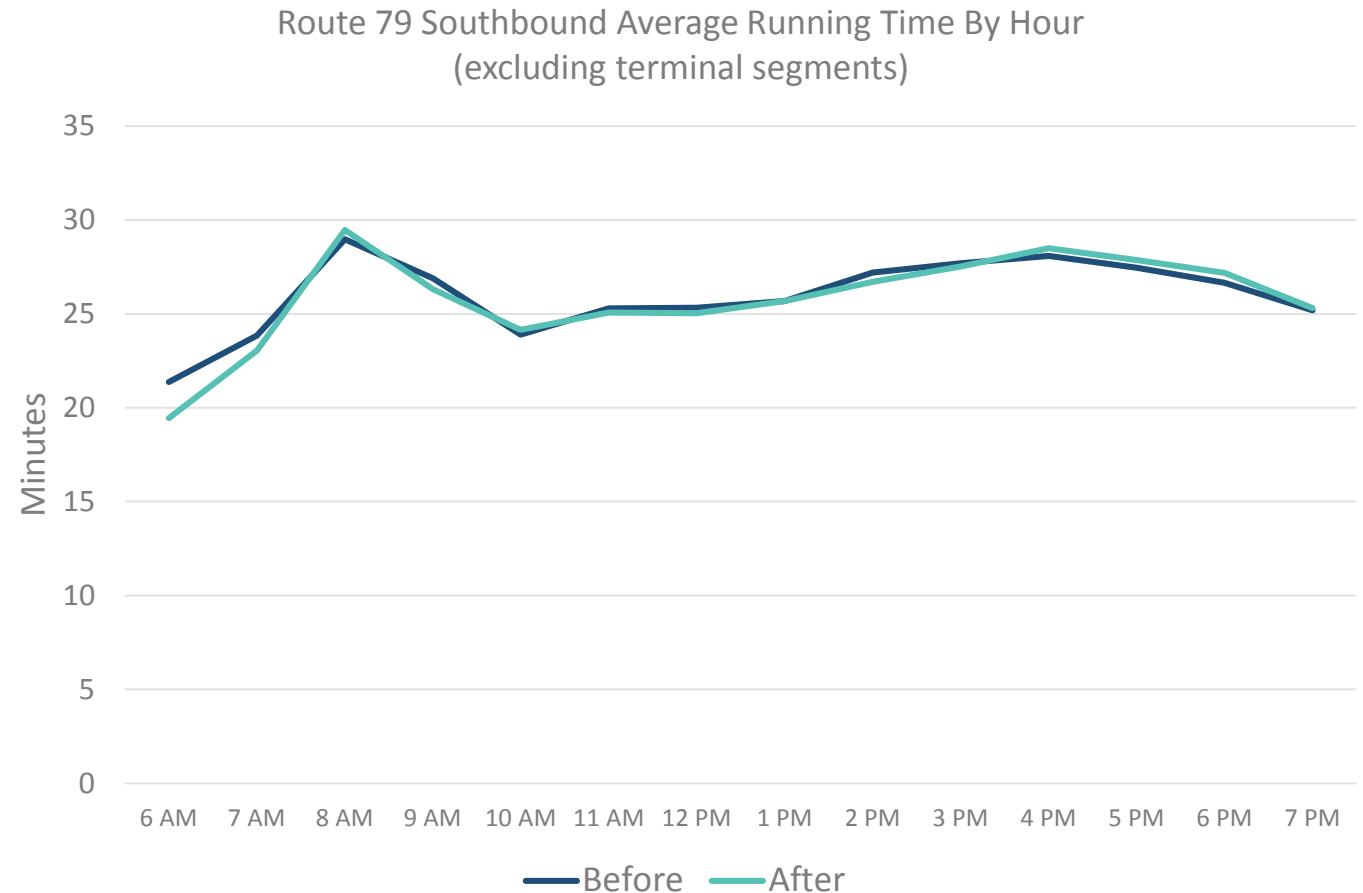
Conclusions

- Due to the lack of running time savings, the pilot will be allowed to lapse in June 2019

- Customers generally liked the pilot and adjusted with little difficulty. Cash-free boarding should be considered a feasible option where the available alternatives are sufficient if the question arises in the future (e.g. all-door boarding)

- More education is needed about where SmarTrip® card loading is available and what the options are for unbanked customers

Questions?

WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY