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September 28, 2023

Chair Smedberg and Members of the Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Riders' Advisory Council's report for September 2023.

**Better Bus Improvements:**

Our September meeting featured Jewel Bell and Raegan Mathis from the Office of Bus Transportation. They provided an excellent presentation on efforts to improve the bus system. During the discussion, RAC members were particularly interested in the courtesy stop initiative. WMATA notes that courtesy stops are limited to 9 pm through 5 am to "put customer safety first during times of day when it is darkest outside." Citing safety concerns, the RAC questioned why the courtesy stop hours are limited to 9 pm through 5 am when darkness often falls much earlier in the evening, particularly during the fall and winter seasons. Ms. Bell and Ms. Mathis stated that staff continues to collect data and evaluate the program, adding that the initiative's hours are intended to avoid impeding rush hour traffic.

Recommendation: The RAC recommends that staff clarify their decision points and methodology for evaluating data pertaining to the courtesy stop initiative. Subject to the collected data, the RAC believes the courtesy stop hours should be variable to coincide with actual periods of darkness (e.g. sunset to sunrise) where riders may feel unsafe. The RAC further notes that bus drivers have discretion, and can independently assess the merits of stopping (e.g. hazards, traffic, etc.) during periods of darkness.

**Fare Evasion:**

The RAC's rider outreach anecdotally revealed that fewer instances of fare evasion are occurring within the rail system, which appears to be in line with recent WMATA data. Riders also noted instances where Transit Police directly addressed fare evaders in professional, constructive manners. In addition, the RAC applauds WMATA for its efforts to decrease barriers to student riders. However, riders reported that fare evasion on buses appears to be an ongoing problem. For example, riders reported that at least two buses did not have working machines to collect transit fares from Smartrip cards, despite efforts from riders to tap their cards. This includes the F4 route.

Recommendation: The RAC believes staff and bus operators should actively ensure on a daily basis that fare readers are functioning correctly, and staff should consider establishing a quick-reaction maintenance team to fix any faulty machines as expediently as possible. The RAC agreed that faulty fare readers throughout the bus system sends the wrong message to riders.

**IT Security and Rider Data Protection:**

Office of Inspector General (OIG) reporting in February 2023 identified several deficiencies regarding WMATA IT infrastructure, network and data. OIG reporting in June 2023 further indicated that several other cybersecurity vulnerability OIG recommendations originating between 2019 and 2022 have not been resolved, including six that were scheduled for completion in late 2022. This is concerning to riders. Several riders conveyed to the RAC that an unexpected data breach or substantial cybersecurity incident can potentially diminish the hard-earned gains and good will that WMATA has earned over the past year. Riders—including federal employees and military personnel—also questioned whether their data (e.g. Smarttrip purchases and transit history, etc.) has been compromised.

To address these concerns, the RAC has invited Metro's Senior Director of Cybersecurity to speak at its October meeting. The RAC in particular looks forward to learning of steps WMATA is taking to address the vulnerability issues described in the OIG reporting. In the meantime, the RAC believes that WMATA should confirm whether rider data has been compromised.

**FY2025 Budget:**

The RAC continued its ongoing discussion on rider engagement as it explores opportunities for collective impact with other transit-oriented organizations with respect to the FY25 budget. The RAC agreed that it is in riders' interest to facilitate a mechanism where riders from across the transit zone can publicly speak about how the potential budget issues—including the current unknowns—affect them on a personal level. As discussed at the July WMATA Board of Directors meeting, there are lots of metrics and numbers being thrown around about the "fiscal cliff." However, the RAC believes that it may be beneficial for regional leaders and stakeholders to hear directly from riders. After all, behind all the numbers, metrics, and politics are real people and real issues. In conjunction with other organizations, the RAC is currently working to elevate riders' voices on this issue.

**Annual Report Committee:**

RAC member Lucas Habosky was unanimously elected to serve as Chair of the RAC's Annual Report Committee.

As always, thank you for your time and attention, and I remain available for any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

*Mike Lebowitz*

Mike Lebowitz, Chair  
Riders' Advisory Council