

**THE WASHINGTON
METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT
AUTHORITY
RIDERS' ADVISORY COUNCIL
ANNUAL REPORT TO THE WMATA
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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Report prepared by the Riders' Advisory Council, Annual Report Committee

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Executive Summary</u>	3
<u>Introduction</u>	4
<u>Top Rider Concerns</u>	5
<i>A. <u>Smoking on Trains, Buses, and in Stations</u></i>	5
<i>B. <u>Fare Evasion</u></i>	7
<i>C. <u>Parking Lots & Costs</u></i>	9
<i>D. <u>Card Reader Issues</u></i>	10
<i>E. <u>Bus Frequency/Crowding</u></i>	11
<i>F. <u>Long-Term Health of the Metro System & Consistency of Operations</u></i>	12
<i>G. <u>Personal Safety</u></i>	14
<u>MetroAccess Concerns</u>	14
<i>A. <u>Fare Structure</u></i>	15
<i>B. <u>Paratransit Rides</u></i>	15
<i>C. <u>Additional Proposals</u></i>	15
<u>Positive Observations</u>	16
<u>Conclusion</u>	16

I. Executive Summary

Purpose: The founding mission of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) is to “serve in an advisory role and recommend possible solutions to the Board and staff, based on public input, so that WMATA can effectively address the diverse concerns of the riding public . . .”¹

To fulfil this mandate, the RAC must engage in the following activities:

- 1) Endeavor to collect relevant data and information from a diverse cross section of the riding public regarding matters and issues affecting riders and rider satisfaction;
- 2) Glean from the collected information possible solutions to resolve issues affecting riders and rider satisfaction; and
- 3) Effectively convey this information and proposed solutions to the WMATA Board of Directors, WMATA staff and relevant stakeholders.

Authority: Production and dissemination of the Annual Report is consistent with the Bylaws of the WMATA RAC. The Bylaws Mission Statement articulates that “[t]he RAC exists to actively seek input from a broad range of riders and organizations with an expressed interest in public transit on operational and budgetary issues that affect Metrorail, Metrobus, and MetroAccess; advise the WMATA Board of Directors [] on ways to resolve such issues in order to improve Metrorail, Metrobus and MetroAccess services; and recommend possible solutions to the Board, based on public input and informed deliberation, so that WMATA can effectively address the diverse needs of the riding public.”² The Mission Statement is further codified in the Bylaws Roles and Responsibilities section.³

Scope: In accordance with the RAC’s founding mandate and bylaws, between November 2022 and February 2023, members of the RAC Annual Report Committee gathered public input from more than 100 Metrorail, Metrobus, and MetroAccess riders from across the Transit Zone. RAC Annual Report Committee members discerned riders’ top three concerns as it pertained to public transit, and solicited proposed solutions from riders that addressed rider concerns. For purposes of informed deliberation in proposing and vetting solutions contained in this report, RAC Annual Report Committee members also engaged with WMATA staff—including those involved with rail, bus, and safety—during regular RAC meetings.

Findings: A majority of the more than 100 rail riders who provided input to RAC Annual Report Committee members (apart from those affected by the Yellow Line shutdown) noted that the overall train system appeared to be improving compared to previous years. However, most riders tempered their praise by noting skepticism that the rail system will revert to what one rider referred to as “the bad old days of catastrophic issues, frequent single tracking and shutdowns.”

¹ See 2005-44, Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (September 22, 2005)

² See Bylaws, Article II, ¶ A.

³ *Id* at Article II, ¶ B.1.a-e.

With respect to rail and bus service, a percentage of riders providing input to the RAC Annual Report Committee identified the following issues as their top three concerns:

- Long-term Health of the Metro System & Consistency of Operations 60%
- Fare Evasion 39%
- Smoke/Marijuana/Invasive Customer Behavior on Trains/Buses/Stations 27%
- Bus Frequency/Crowding 26%
- Safety 24%
- Parking Lots & Costs 14%
- Metro Card Reader Issues 12%

With respect to MetroAccess, riders (through input primarily provided by the WMATA Accessibility Advisory Committee) identified the following as the most critical issues of concern:

- Fare Structure is too Complicated for MetroAccess Riders to Understand
- Paratransit Rides Take too Long, and Are Subject to Suspension

II. Introduction

Riders are concerned about the long-term health of the Metro system. Sixty percent of riders who contributed to this report specifically expressed concern that the system will gradually cease being a viable source of regional public transportation. Although many riders indicated that they believed the Metro system (particularly rail) improved in late 2022 and early 2023 compared to previous years, nearly all believed the overall system is destined for significant decline. The primary reason for this skepticism appeared to be rooted in what the majority of riders identified as 1) inconsistent system performances over the course of many years; 2) the deficit between revenue and expenses, including an unsustainable reliance on taxpayer funding; and 3) increased degradation of the customer experience in terms of safety and invasive behavior (e.g. smoking on trains, buses, and in stations). More than a quarter of bus riders expressed ongoing concerns over the frequency of buses and bus crowding.

Profound rider skepticism of the Metro system's future must be addressed by the WMATA Board in tangible and intangible ways. Rider apathy will result in commuters choosing cars over public transportation. Rider apathy will degrade regional leaders' ability to advocate for increased taxpayer funding. In short, if riders do not feel that the Metro system has a viable future, riders will be increasingly reluctant to invest their time, energy, and money into what they perceive to be a failing system. This skepticism was extremely evident during the RAC's preparation for this report.

The other top concerns cited by riders also appear to contribute to riders' overall concerns for the system's long-term health. For example, 39 percent of riders identified fare evasion as a top concern. According to riders, fare evasion is a frustratingly visual reminder of the system's budgetary issues and the deficit between revenue and expenses. The RAC also was surprised that 27 percent of riders expressed concern for what riders observed as near-daily exposure to

tobacco and marijuana smoke in contained spaces such as trains, buses, and stations. Like fare evasion, riders were particularly passionate about the smoking issue. They expressed frustration that WMATA leadership was not appearing to take this concern seriously. A common theme was that riders wanted to see significantly greater resourcing and investment in the Transit Police. With respect to MetroAccess, riders overwhelmingly noted that the fare structure is unnecessarily complicated, and anticipated changes to that structure are welcomed.

This report is intended to serve as a voice for the riders. The diverse sample of riders who contributed to this report is a direct reflection of the concerns and thoughts of the people who rely on WMATA to move around the region. Although riders are exposed to periodic surveys from WMATA staff, most riders expressed appreciation that their individual thoughts and concerns were being directly conveyed to the WMATA Board by independent rider advocates. As such, the Board, staff, and relevant stakeholders can use the RAC Annual Report as a resource for addressing rider concerns in a meaningful and practical manner.

III. Top Rider Concerns

A. Smoking on Trains, Buses, and in Stations

The Issue: Despite prohibitions against smoking on Metro trains and buses, 27 percent of respondents identified this customer behavior as among their top three concerns. Riders explained that they are forced to ingest smoke—typically tobacco or marijuana—on a frequent basis. Riders believed that WMATA is not investing enough resources into the Transit Police to help address the problem.

According to the respondents, smoking in trains, buses and in stations occurs across the Transit Zone at all hours of the day. Many riders stated that ingesting second-hand smoke is more than just a daily nuisance as it contributes to health concerns. Several riders specifically cited their desire to avoid smoke inhalation in enclosed spaces as a major factor in attempting to reduce the number of days per week they use Metro (e.g., alternative modes of transportation or increased work from home).

When this concern was raised during the December 2022 WMATA Board of Directors meeting, some online transit-oriented pundits opined that there should be more important things for the RAC to focus on. The RAC disagrees. Riders made it crystal clear that forced smoke inhalation in enclosed spaces is among their highest concerns with the Metro system. Riders expressed their belief that nothing was being done to address the problem. Nearly all riders provided anecdotal evidence that instances of smoking has increased and continues to get worse.

Rider Quotes:

“It’s every single day. Everyday someone’s smoking.”

“The smoke is driving me nuts . . . Makes me want to drive.”

“I get drug tested for work. There’s nothing like smelling like pot after getting off the train.”

“I have respiratory problems . . . My mask doesn’t stop the smoke and I feel it.”

Big Picture Ramifications: Riders indicated that incessant smoking on trains, buses, and in stations is one of the most visible (and literally in-your-face) justifications riders can make for choosing alternatives to public transportation. Riders tolerate numerous nuisances and inconveniences on public transportation, but concerns over health and physical discomfort may become more of a deal breaker. Incessant smoking also contributes to rider perception that the system is increasingly lawless.

Riders’ Proposed Solutions:*

1. Enforcement*: Riders requested increased enforcement of the smoking rules. Riders suggested this be done through various changes in Transit Police tactics and resourcing designed to directly address the problem. For example, riders recommended that Transit Police officers surge in stations where frequent smoking is known to occur. In addition, riders suggested that officers patrol trains and ride buses to deter smoking and enforce the rules, as appropriate. Riders believe citations are warranted for observed offenses and that repeat offenders should be banned from the Metro system. At a minimum, riders recommended that police intervention—regardless of any issued citations—could help improve the issue. However, many riders noted that officers should be equipped with body cameras and properly trained to avoid escalations between law enforcement and customers.
 - a. During the regular RAC meeting on March 3, 2023, Chief Michael Anzallo informed the RAC that Metro Transit Police do enforce smoking rules through citations and responses to rider tips. While Chief Anzallo’s comments were encouraging and appreciated, the problem still remains prevalent and a top concern for many riders. Among other items, Chief Anzallo cited a hiring shortfall in onboarding qualified Transit Police officers that lessens the number of available officers at any given time.
 - b. From a rider perspective, WMATA should make a concerted effort to effectively resource the Transit Police, including areas such as competitive pay for new hires and retention bonuses to facilitate the hiring process. The RAC recognizes that law enforcement hiring shortfalls is an issue among virtually all agencies—not just the Transit Police. But a combination of competitive recruitment efforts and memorandums of understandings with local jurisdictions can assist in boosting the number of officers operating within the system at any given time.
 - c. Chief Anzallo also informed the RAC that as of March 2023, body cameras were not in regular use among Transit Police officers. Chief Anzallo stated that video surveillance throughout the system was an effective alternative until body

* Indicates that the RAC endorses the riders’ proposed solution.

cameras can be issued. However, riders made it clear that they preferred officers to have body cameras. Video surveillance is purely visual. As such, video surveillance is inferior to body cameras that are capable of capturing sound, meaning that body cameras provide more detailed context surrounding police/rider interactions. The RAC acknowledges that body cameras are scheduled to begin being resourced in April 2023, which is a welcome development.

2. Announcements:* Riders expressed a belief that current announcements reminding customers not to smoke within the transit system is insufficient. Instead, riders proposed that WMATA make frequent announcements regarding the consequences for smoking on trains, buses, and in stations. Riders also suggested that WMATA publicize the fact that increased enforcement are being planned or occurring to help deter the behavior. Much of Chief Anzallo's comments and statistics to the RAC regarding smoking enforcement was news to the RAC members, and likely hasn't been effectively conveyed to the general public in an effective manner designed to deter such behavior. More forceful announcements could serve as a deterrent.
3. Rider Reporting Campaign:* Riders stated they were willing to report smoking (and other inappropriate or illegal behaviors) so long as their reporting to Transit Police was discreet. As such, riders proposed a system-wide campaign encouraging riders to report inappropriate and illegal behaviors, particularly smoking, to the Transit Police. Riders also suggested that these announcements, along with the Transit Police text message number, be positioned on trains and buses in areas where it would not be obvious that a rider is issuing a report (e.g., on the back of seats and/or on the electronic informational boards located in the 7000 Series trains). The proposal aims to deter such behavior because potential smokers on trains and buses would understand that anybody could discreetly report their activities and location.

B. Fare Evasion

The Issue: Fare evasion has been on WMATA's radar for quite some time. However, few issues invoke the ire and passions of riders than daily observances of customers hurdling over fare gates without paying. Thirty-nine percent of respondents identified fare evasion as among their top three concerns. Notably, most riders view fare evasion beyond the lens of fairness (e.g., why should I pay if they're not paying?). Instead, respondents viewed fare evasion as a direct threat to the financial health of the system and gives riders a sense that Metro doesn't have control.

According to riders, fare evasion occurs across the Transit Zone at all hours of the day. Riders observed fare evasion at train stations and on buses where customers simply walk onto the bus without paying. According to riders, fare evasion is a daily, visual reminder of the deficit between revenue and expenses.

Rider Quotes:

“Fare evaders are very blatant. It’s infuriating.”

“Fare evasion is almost daily and across all demographics.”

“People are so nonchalant about jumping the gates.”

“It’s a concern from a financial/revenue standpoint.”

Big Picture Ramifications: Riders indicated that witnessing fare evasion on a frequent basis made them feel insulted and is a constant reminder that Metro is not in control of its system. Riders recognize that each instance of fare evasion is lost revenue that adds up. As such, fare evasion diminishes riders’ attitudes toward WMATA and contributes to a sense of apathy and skepticism in the system’s long-term financial health. Fare evasion also contributes to rider perception that the system is increasingly lawless. Taken together, rider apathy and skepticism in the system makes it easier for riders to justify alternatives to public transportation and diminishes riders’ motivation to support increased funding.

Proposed solutions:

1. Enforcement*: Like other areas of this report, riders provided overwhelming support for resourcing and investment in the Transit Police to specifically address fare evasion. Riders suggested this be done through periodic surge operations where officers are dispatched to targeted areas of enforcement so that they are present at locations/times of frequent fare evasion. The purpose of these surge operations is to deter fare evasion and issue tickets, as appropriate. Most riders stressed that the purpose of this proposed solution is to deter, not punish. Riders recommended that officers ask suspected fare evaders to simply return to the gate and pay before issuing tickets. Many riders also noted that officers should be equipped with body cameras and properly trained to avoid escalations between law enforcement and customers.
 - a. WMATA recently outlined a plan to install “saloon doors” at fare gates across the system. Because the “saloon doors” will take some time before being implemented across the Transit Zone, riders believe that an emphasis on enforcement should continue until the “saloon doors” are viable enough to make an impact.
 - b. During the regular RAC meeting on March 3, 2023, Chief Michael Anzallo informed the RAC that Metro Transit Police has engaged in fare evasion enforcement in D.C., Maryland and Virginia through citations and deterrence efforts (e.g., officers located near faregates). While Chief Anzallo’s comments were encouraging and appreciated, the problem remains prevalent and a top concern for many riders. As referenced elsewhere in this report, among other items, Chief Anzallo cited a hiring shortfall in onboarding qualified Transit Police officers that lessens the among of available officers at any given time.
 - c. From a rider perspective, WMATA should make a concerted effort to effectively resource the Transit Police, including areas such as competitive pay for new hires and retention bonuses to facilitate the hiring process.

- d. Chief Anzallo also informed the RAC that as of March 2023, body cameras were not in regular use among Transit Police officers. Chief Anzallo stated that video surveillance throughout the system was an effective alternative until body cameras can be issued. However, riders made it clear that they preferred officers to have body cameras. Video surveillance is purely visual. As such, video surveillance is inferior to body cameras that are capable of capturing sound, meaning that body cameras provide more detailed context surrounding police/ride interactions.
2. “Name-and-Shame” Enforcement: Some riders proposed tougher remedies to help deter fare evasion. The most common of these tougher remedies was for Metro to use surveillance cameras to collect photographs of fare evaders based on available metrics, such as the audible alerts triggered by someone hopping a fare gate. Riders proposed that photos of repeat fare evaders be posted either physically in stations where such repeat offenses occur, or online. To the extent Metro is able to identify repeat offenders, some riders proposed that Metro declare these individuals *persona non grata*.
3. Loyalty Program:* One rider (a RAC member) proposed the establishment of a loyalty program similar to a frequent flyer structure where riders can earn “points” for riding on the system. Under this proposed program, those points could later be redeemed for prizes or additional benefits, e.g., free trips. The benefit of this proposed program is that it creates an incentive for using the Metro fare card and encourages rider use of the cell phone application.

C. Parking Lots & Costs

The Issue: Many weekday riders commuting from suburban jurisdictions raised concerns about parking at or near Metro stations. In fact, 14 percent of respondents cited parking issues as one of their top three concerns. Those concerns generally involved two sub-issues: 1) parking costs, and 2) crowding or difficulty in finding parking spaces. Riders conveyed that they believe daily parking fees are too expensive, particularly since most transit subsidies do not cover parking. Riders noted that many of them do not live within walking distance of train stations, and that local buses are either not frequent enough, are not easily accessible, or both, to make the extra time commitment. As such, riders believed that parking issues dissuaded them from commuting via Metro every day.

Rider Quotes:

“Parking at East Falls Church is back to being at capacity, which I guess is good, but also bad.”

“Nobody’s talking about parking fees . . . If they made it cheaper, it would encourage people to take the Metro.”

Big Picture Ramifications: Riders indicated that parking issues at suburban stations, particularly far-flung stations such as Vienna and Ashburn, ultimately deters riders from taking public transportation. Because local buses are not always practical for getting potential commuters to these locations, riders are disincentivized to take Metro due to the costs and hassle associated with parking.

Proposed solutions:

1. Reduce Parking Fees:* Riders proposed reduced (some suggested free) parking at select suburban stations where Metro wants to encourage ridership growth (e.g. Vienna, Herndon, and Ashburn). Although riders acknowledge that reduced fares could exacerbate crowding issues, riders believed that the benefits of reduced fares would outweigh other issues as riders adjusted their commuting patterns. Overall, riders stated that reduced fares would entice ridership instead of being a deterrent. Accordingly, it is recommended that Metro conduct a cost/benefit analysis on the impact of reduced parking fees.
2. Encourage Parking Subsidies:* Many riders receive transit subsidies from their employers, including those working for the federal government. Riders proposed that WMATA make a concerted effort to support and lobby employers to allow transit subsidies to be used at Metro parking lots located at select suburban stations. In this manner, commuters from some of the far-flung suburban areas will be incentivized to use Metrorail for the bulk of their commutes while Metro will not experience a significant financial loss due to lost parking revenue. In fact, such incentives could increase parking revenue if more riders are incentivized to park and ride.
3. Adjust Reserved Parking Spots:* Riders propose that Metro evaluate whether the number of reserved parking spots at Metro stations (where spots are reserved until 10 AM) is in line with the actual number of people who pay for reserved, monthly parking. If there are significantly more reserved spots than people who pay for the convenience, then riders suggest that an appropriate number of reserved spots be opened up to commuters who park at Metro stations prior to 10 AM. This can help alleviate crowding issues for rush-hour commuters who drive to Metro stations to take Metrorail.

D. Card Reader Issues

The Issue: About 12 percent of riders noted that their SmartTrip cards and/or phone apps do not consistently register with the faregates when attempting to pay and move through the system. These riders listed card reader issues as among their top three concerns due to the additional stress and hassle it causes. For example, riders reported that faregates do not always recognize fully funded SmartTrip cards and/or phone apps—particularly on the first attempt to pay—causing gates to remain closed or requiring riders to see a station manager. This is stressful for riders during crowded periods when numerous people are closely lined up behind a rider who is delayed at the faregate, and it is consequently difficult to back up against the flow of hurried commuters and pressure-filled for some who attempt to swipe their cards or phones multiple

times. Riders also reported instances where station managers are not at the kiosk, leaving riders to fend for themselves. In these scenarios, many riders indicated that they chose to hop the gate rather than 1) wait for a station manager; 2) be forced to navigate against the flow of commuters lined up behind them; or 3) hold up the line by attempting to get the card reader to work.

Big Picture Ramifications: Frequent failures to recognize SmartTrip cards and/or phone apps at faregates may result in revenue loss as riders who otherwise would pay their fare opt to jump the gate rather than take the time or energy needed to have their trip registered by the faregate card readers. Inconsistent card readers also contribute to riders' skepticism toward WMATA's technological infrastructure.

Proposed solutions:

1. Address Card Reader Sensitivity:* Riders who raised card reader issues as a top concern almost universally recommended that WMATA adjust the sensitivity of its card readers to better read SmartTrip cards and/or phone apps on the first pass through.

E. Bus Frequency/Crowding

The Issue: Twenty-six percent of respondents raised bus frequency and crowding as among their top concerns with the Metro system. Most of these riders reported that lengthy wait times—including during peak hours—caused buses to be overcrowded. Customers' smoking and "rowdy" behavior on those crowded buses and at bus stops further exacerbated those concerns, causing many riders to express discontent with WMATA bus operations overall. Riders reported long wait times and buses that were essentially bunched together, creating inefficiencies. For special shuttle buses (e.g., Yellow Line Shuttle Bus #3), riders reported that the app was occasionally unreliable, noting that the "ghost bus" problem was still persistent on special shuttles.

Rider Quotes:

"Long wait times for buses . . . even during peak hours."

"Buses don't come when you expect them to."

"The app is unreliable . . . We waited 50 minutes before giving up and getting a car ride"

Big Picture Ramifications: Rider dissatisfaction with buses and concerns over bus reliability will result in Metro failing to serve the maximum number of riders who want to ride the buses. This ultimately stunts Metro's growth and diminishes its revenue. As many riders stated that they have sought alternatives to buses under certain scenarios (e.g. ride sharing, Uber), it creates something of an equity issue between people who can afford to seek other forms of transportation and those who rely on public transportation without any alternatives.

Proposed solutions:

1. Investment in Buses and Bus Lanes:* Riders appeared to be particularly vexed on detailed solutions for resolving their concerns regarding bus frequency and crowding. To that end, the most common refrain from riders was to see more investment in buses and bus lanes. Riders noted that more dedicated bus lanes could help alleviate some traffic issues that often cause the bus schedules to cascade. Similarly, riders believed that WMATA could do a better job at spreading out buses so that the times are more consistent.

F. Long-term Health of the Metro System & Consistency of Operations

The Issue: Sixty percent of respondents informed the RAC that they feared for the long-term financial and physical health of the system. Most riders lumped concerns over WMATA's long-term health with their impression that train and bus rides have been inconsistent in terms of reliability and safety over the course of many years. Riders conveyed the sense that they were always waiting for the next "Metro meltdown," "fire," "bus shooting," or "single tracking" incident. Indeed, riders took notice of various reports citing to a lack of appropriate training and/or credentialing of Metro staff that periodically popped up in 2022.

Notably, rail riders reported perceived improvements in terms of less instances of single tracking and major delays starting in fall 2022 through February 2023. To a lesser extent, bus riders also cited improvements. During the holiday season, one rider noted that the F4, 86 bus and Green and Red Line trains "were surprisingly reliable over the holidays." However, riders cite to numerous issues that they believe are unsustainable in the long term. For example, riders using the expanded Silver Line reported rides that took much longer than expected. Others noted inconsistencies in service. Nearly all riders outside of the system's core cited wait times/headwinds as a major concern. Coupled with other concerns such as safety and invasive customer behavior on trains and in stations (e.g., smoking), riders feared that Metro is increasingly becoming "not worth it" in the long term. Riders also noted that future financial constraints may lead to further service disruptions, which in turn could lead to a gradual exodus from the system.

It was striking to RAC members that so many respondents expressed what appeared to be diminishing loyalty to the Metro system, and mass transit in general. Many riders stated that they were open to alternatives to train and bus service, which seems somewhat backward in this age of climate change and fuel costs. Riders overwhelmingly expressed skepticism that the Metro system will maintain a feasible level of consistency in the long term both financially and functionally.

Saying that, riders conveyed to the RAC that they want the system to succeed. But they expressed little trust in the system. Service has been inconsistent for too long, and continues to teeter on inconsistency. For purposes of this report, riders expressed hope that WMATA leadership would acknowledge their concerns. Riders stated that they did not want—or need—

unnecessary bells and whistles and costly aesthetic improvements. Riders stated that the system would succeed so long as bus and train rides are safe, consistent, and frequent.

Rider Quotes:

“I like the new [General Manager] and think things are looking up . . . But we’ve been fooled before. The last three—at least—were utter disasters . . . I hope [GM Randy Clarke] can finally get the house in order.”

“Remember when [Metro] wrapped the older train cars to look like the new ones? What . . . was that all about? I mean . . . why?”

“I’m concerned that lax internal processes will lead to more safety violations, which will lead to more shutdowns . . .”

“The system seems better these days . . . Just waiting for it all to implode.”

“Train speeds are inconsistent . . .”

Proposed solutions:

1. Smart Resourcing and Advertising Revenue:* Overall, riders acknowledged that there is no easy solution to steadying the long-term health of the system. Instead, most riders suggested broad arrays of ideas that generally amounted to recommending that WMATA invest in root issues and forgo additional expenses that fall into the category of aesthetics and luxuries (e.g., phone chargers). Riders generally described root issues as consistency/headwinds, safety, maintenance, and employee pay and benefits. The general belief was that if WMATA could provide some tangible long-term stability by focusing on the issues that affect daily rides.

Riders also stated that they were ok with a system that is “inundated with [advertisements].” Riders recognized the potential for added income for the transit system, suggesting that buses and trains be wrapped with advertisements so long as riders of all physical abilities can easily identify their stop or station.

2. Invest in Automatic Train Operation (ATO):* In terms of train consistency, numerous riders suggested that WMATA invest in ATO. WMATA leadership recently announced that ATO may return in late 2023 for the Red Line—about 14 years after ATO was suspended due to the fatal 2009 accident. However, riders on the Silver and Orange Lines suggested that ATO—assuming it can be implemented safely—should also be prioritized on those lines. The Silver and Orange Lines travel extensive distances, and many riders reported to the RAC that their rides are often inconsistent. As such, riders believed that ATO could help alleviate the inconsistent rides and establish quicker, more predictable commutes.

G. Personal Safety

The Issue: About 24 percent of riders reported that personal safety was among their top concerns. Anecdotally, this appears to be a change from past years where safety in terms of mechanical, technical, or accidental deficiencies on trains and buses were of prime concern. Now, riders expressed concern about becoming victims to crimes while within the Metro system. Riders reported concerns about what they described as “rowdy” bus and train passengers who crossed the line into physical contact or abusive comments directed toward riders. Among other items, riders reported to the RAC instances of 1) open heroin use on trains; 2) sexual harassment; 3) passengers getting in riders’ faces to try and spark a confrontation; 4) fights and/or brawls on buses, trains, and in stations; and 5) passengers deliberately coughing or blowing smoke on other riders while taunting them. Riders also are very aware of recent shootings and other violence that have occurred within the system. All of these events appear to have an ongoing cumulative effect on riders’ impression that the Metro system is increasingly lawless.

Rider Quotes:

“I wear ear buds even if I’m not listening to anything . . . to avoid being approached or accosted.”

“Just last week, I watched a dude beat the [] out of a guy at Tysons.”

“I hardly ever see police . . . Like, almost never.”

Big Picture Ramifications: Riders are concerned that they will be victims of a crime while using the Metro system. Riders made it clear that if they no longer feel safe, or if they experience constant harassment, they will explore alternative modes of transportation.

Riders’ Proposed Solutions:

1. Emphasis on Transit Police Resourcing:* Riders’ proposed solutions for personal safety essentially mirror their general thoughts with respect to fare evasion and smoking concerns. Specifically, riders recommended that WMATA commit resources to narrow the current hiring gap by offering more competitive pay to qualified officers. Riders believed that seeing more police officers on trains, buses, and in stations will go a long way to deterring crime and the sense of personal security. Riders also expressed support for WMATA leadership continuing to secure agreements with other area law enforcement agencies to help bolster security and physical police presence throughout the system.

IV. MetroAccess

Thanks to the assistance of the WMATA Accessibility Advisory Committee—particularly Patrick Sheehan—the RAC was able to identify the most critical concerns identified by MetroAccess riders. Specifically, MetroAccess riders noted that 1) the MetroAccess fare structure is too complicated for riders to understand; and 2) paratransit

rides take too long and are often less prioritized than fixed bus routes. MetroAccess riders also provided some additional thoughts for the WMATA Board of Directors to consider.

A. Fare Structure

MetroAccess riders reported that the fare structure is too complicated, and until the Board implements its stated plans to resolve the issue, it will remain complicated. For example, MetroAccess Card (MAC) fares are currently calculated at twice the fare on the fastest fixed route trip (e.g., bus, rail, or combination) at the time of the MAC trip. Calculating fares at given times is extremely confusing. According to the WMATA Accessibility Advisory Committee, because fares on buses differ from those on rail, and it remains in flux which mode of transportation is faster per respective schedules, there may be up to 200,000 potential combinations over a one-hour period depending upon the trip requested. As such, the MetroAccess fare structure is unnecessarily complicated and the Board's stated intention to streamline the structure is greatly anticipated.

B. Paratransit Rides

Paratransit riders reported that they spend way too much time on vehicles. Riders expressed that they would like a more streamlined process that is safe and efficient. In addition, paratransit riders noted that their rides are not prioritized. For example, when fixed bus routes are shut down, paratransit access to that area can be suspended because there is no fixed route service in the region. That scenario does an extreme disservice to paratransit riders.

C. Additional Proposals

1. MetroAccess riders suggest that WMATA keep the proposed equity and accessibility enhancement plans, and to continue the Better Bus Project enhancing surface routes and service. This is especially important in Prince Georges County where there is insufficient bus service;
2. Include accessible bus stops replacing those that do not currently meet accessibility standards including curb cuts, signage and shelters. Floating bus stops must provide safety for low vision, low hearing and low mobility passengers as well as all others;
3. Simplify fares for all transit modes especially MetroAccess which is currently the most complex and inconsistent. A simple fix would be to extend the current flat fare on weekends and after 9:30 to 24/7 (hours/days); and
4. Extend discounted fares on all transit modes to all low-income people, not just those receiving SNAP benefits. These might include but not be limited to MAC riders who receive SSI and/or SSDI benefits.

V. Positive Observations

This report generally focuses on the primary issues and concerns that riders reported to the RAC. However, it is important to note that many of these same riders also volunteered positive observations—indicating that most riders do not have solely negative views toward the Metro system. That positivity is an important indicator that riders continue to have faith in the system and want it to succeed.

Most riders who volunteered positive observations stated that the Metro system overall appears to be functioning better than it did prior to the pandemic in 2020. While this report identifies their concerns, riders noted that they feel like Metrorail is currently a safe mode of transportation that is reasonably comfortable. Riders also stated that Metrorail—and to a lesser extent, Metrobus—were more reliable on a consistent basis than in past years. Moreover, some riders remarked that it appeared as if station managers were more visible and available than in the past. While anecdotal, these unprompted positive comments help validate the riders' concerns and issues because it confirms their open minded and unbiased approach toward the system's long-term health.

VI. Conclusion

The RAC Annual Report is intended to be a direct conduit between riders and WMATA leadership through a sampling of rider concerns and their proposed solutions. Riders have diverse opinions. They want to be heard. They want their concerns to be taken seriously. Quite simply, riders want to get from Point A to Point B safely and in a timely manner without fear of harassment or delay. Riders recognize that no transit system is going to be perfect. But it must be functional and consistent.

As the sole organization officially chartered to serve in an advisory role on behalf of riders, the RAC looks forward to presenting riders' concerns to WMATA leadership and other relevant stakeholders through this report, and to further the RAC's mission to highlight matters of interest to riders and possible solutions.