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January 25, 2024

Chair Smedberg and Members of the Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Riders' Advisory Council's report for January 2024.

### **FY2025 Budget and Outreach:**

With drastic service cuts now officially on the horizon, the RAC intends to educate legislators, regional leaders, and the public about how the budget situation will upend riders' lives. Last week, the RAC submitted more than 20 letters to regional leaders in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, highlighting the rider perspective in the current Metro budget crisis and why timely funding is necessary. The letters linked to a version of the RAC testimonial video presented to the Board in November 2023. The video can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XIOiiXAcY>

Specific letters submitted by the RAC last week went to the following:

- *District of Columbia* – sent to Mayor Bowser, with cc: to all thirteen Council members
- *Maryland* – sent to relevant House and Senate Committee and Subcommittee Chairs as follows:
  - Del. Ben Barnes, Chair, House Appropriations Committee
    - Del. Courtney Watson, Chair, Transportation & Environment Committee, House Appropriations Committee
    - Sen. Guy Guzzone, Chair, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
    - Sen. Sarah Elfreth, Chair, Transportation & Environment Subcommittee, Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
- *Virginia* – sent out today to relevant House and Senate Committee and Sub-Committee Chairs as follows:
  - Del. Luke Torian, Chair, House Appropriations Committee, with cc: to all committee members
  - Del Paul Krizek, Chair Transportation & Public Safety Sub-Committee, House Appropriations Committee, with cc: to all sub-committee members
  - Sen. Louise Lucas, Chair, Senate Finance Committee, with cc: to all committee members
  - Sen. Jeremy McPike, Chair Capital Outlay & Transportation Sub-Committee, Senate Finance Committee, with cc: to all sub-committee members

## **Fare Increases:**

In light of the proposed service cuts and corresponding budget scenarios, the RAC focused much of its January meeting on the issue of potential fare increases. Mark Irvine and Macpherson Hughes-Cromwick from Metro's Office of Strategic Initiatives gave RAC members a detailed presentation regarding the potential service cuts and how fares fit into the proposed scenarios. The RAC asked numerous questions and engaged in a dynamic discussion as the RAC studied, among other items, the correlation between fare increases and decreased ridership, and comparisons with fares from other jurisdictions. RAC members also considered equity and long-term effects.

Recommendation: The RAC recommends that the Board consider fare increases up to 20 percent above current fares. As a caveat, the RAC encourages the Board to pursue additional data points beyond the immediate service cut paradigm currently being considered due to the funding issue. Instead, the Board should consider a long-term view of potential fare increases—capped at 20 percent—where the system is reasonably funded and the budget is stabilized.

The RAC's 2023 Annual Report identified the long-term health of the Metro system and consistency of operations as top concerns among riders. Apart from fare evasion, most riders did not list fares among their top three transit concerns. It appeared that riders generally were willing to pay a small amount more to have a safe and reliable transit system. Metro initiatives (e.g., Metro Lift) and fare structures appear to appropriately alleviate some equity concerns involving potential fare increases. Accordingly, the RAC believes the Board should take a long-term view of potential fare increases to help ensure the system's financial health and overall longevity. To help the Board in its deliberations, the RAC suggests that Metro staff develop a more fully articulated model predicting how ridership will be affected in the long term in correlation to increased fares capped at 20 percent. These data points should include additional demographic data of riders from across the transit zone to the extent such data is available.

Finally, the RAC does not believe that the Board should consider fare increases beyond 20 percent of current rates, and respectfully disagrees with the WMATA Finance Committee's consideration of potential fare increases up to 25 percent. Although more data is needed, the RAC believes potential fare increases capped at 20 percent straddles the line between what riders are willing to pay and a spiraling disincentive to use Metro. For example, the RAC's outreach indicates that Virginia Silver Line riders beyond East Falls Church, and Orange Line riders originating from Vienna, will balk at one-way trips costing \$7.50—particularly when the costs of parking are factored in. Ultimately, the RAC is concerned that fare increases above 20 percent will be counter-productive to the long-term health of the system.

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

Sincerely,

*Mike Lebowitz*

Mike Lebowitz, Chair  
Riders' Advisory Council