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November 12, 2015

Chairman Downey & WMATA Board Members:

This is the Riders' Advisory Council report for November.

Quarterly meeting with Executive Committee:

On October 22, the AAC and RAC Leadership teams jointly met for a quarterly update with the Board's Executive Committee. The RAC presented recommendations from the four work plan initiatives described below, with more detail provided with the meeting's reports on the WMATA website. The Executive Committee was receptive to our proposals, and we expect feedback from Staff very soon.

1. Fare policy: The RAC's Budget and Finance Committee presented its fare policy recommendations for fiscal 2017. Given the current customer climate in response to service disruptions this year, the RAC recommends that fares not be increased, and that that the Board adopt a policy on automatic fare refunds for riders impacted by extreme and unforeseen service delays. The RAC is very interested in collaborating with the Board and Staff to define what situations or issues would trigger a full or partial refund. We believe that taking a fare increase off the table and the introduction of automatic fare refunds would be an acknowledgment of the service issues riders have faced this year, and could aid in the rebuilding of WMATA's reputation with its customers.
2. Mobile applications: The RAC's Programs, Projects and Planning (PPP) Committee presented a recommendation that WMATA be more directly involved in how mobile application developers use the open data provided. Today, riders may attribute to WMATA any broken, misleading or unfriendly presentation of data from third party applications. A certification or partnership program with the most reputable mobile application developers could improve rider perceptions of WMATA.
3. Station Managers: The RAC's Customer Service Committee presented recommendations on several policies and procedures regarding Metrorail Station Managers: greater availability during peak ridership periods; more readily identifiable uniforms; additional transportation options to get to incident locations; and a streamlined process in getting announcements to riders during rail delays. The Station Managers are the face of Metro to the vast majority of rail customers. The RAC consistently hears that riders would be more accepting of service disruptions, as well as any personal experiences that prevent their seamless flow through our rail system, as long as they could count on receiving assistance and clear communications when those disruptions occur.

4. Priority Seating: The RAC's PPP Committee also collaborated with the AAC on developing recommendations for priority bus seating and wheelchair accessibility. These include education for all riders and increased visibility of the areas for wheelchair spaces.

Social Media:

Our PPP Committee presented a proposal at our own November 4th meeting on establishing a RAC presence on social media. This would provide the RAC with direct feedback from riders on our own initiatives, which would bring a broader understanding of rider perspectives on our recommendations to the Board. We believe that the RAC is uniquely positioned to be a trusted liaison between riders and WMATA because of our established relationship and credibility with the Board and our ongoing access to Staff. In the current climate of rising frustrations and diminishing ridership, we think we can improve the perception of WMATA as an organization that cares about the issues facing its riders. The RAC voted unanimously in favor of this proposal, and we are committed to working with WMATA Staff to make this a worthwhile endeavor -- something that is different from what they are doing, and something that complements it. We fervently hope that the detailed plan that results will earn the Board's approval.

Customer Research:

At the full RAC's November 4th meeting, Jason Minser provided research results on Passenger Information Displays, including rider priorities and preferences for information, as well as frustrations when the information provided is not sufficient for the scenario in place. Jason also gave an update on the soft launch of the Amplify Customer Community, which is a development we support enthusiastically. RAC members have already joined the group, and Jason has already shared some of the results. We look forward to how this source will inform all of us in the future, and we feel lucky to have Jason as our direct link to the WMATA Staff.

Thanks:

In keeping with this month's tradition of remembering reasons to be thankful, I'm thankful to the WMATA Staff for all their support every month of the year, and I'm thankful that the Board has given all of us on the RAC the ability to make a difference. And, yes, I am personally very thankful that we have this incredible transportation system that is so critical to the life of this region.

Sincerely,

Barbara Hermanson, Chair
Riders' Advisory Council

cc: RAC Members