

Riders' Advisory Council

March 6, 2019

Members Present:

J. Clarence Flanders, Vice Chair, At-Large
Lorraine Silva, Vice Chair, Virginia
Rob Cavese, At-Large
Valerie Cook, District of Columbia
Andrew Kierig, Virginia
Rebekah Mason, Maryland
Colin Reusch, At-Large
Pat Sheehan, At-Large/Accessibility Advisory Committee representative
Yvette Washington, Maryland
Wil White, Maryland

Other Individuals Present:

Danise Peña, Board Secretary's Office, WMATA

Call to Order:

Mr. Flanders called the March meeting of the Riders' Advisory Council to order at 6:03 p.m.

Approval of Agenda:

Mr. Flanders, seconded by Ms. Silva, moved approval of the agenda. Mr. Flanders noted that the agenda was ordered to allow Mr. Dorsey to listen to as much of the budget conversation as possible. The agenda was approved without objection.

FY2020 Budget Recommendations:

Mr. Flanders explained that the focus of the discussion was to develop priorities regarding Metro's FY2020 budget, specifically related to the new service initiatives that was included as part of the General Manager's Proposed Budget. He noted that the four initiatives were:

- Expansion of rush hour service periods
- Extension of all Yellow Line trains to Greenbelt
- Extension of all Red Line trains to Glenmont
- Expand all trains to eight cars

Ms. Cook noted that expanding all trains to eight cars could alleviate crowding during rush hours but would not result in increased cost to customers. Mr. Flanders said that while this would not cost riders any more money, it will cost the system additional money. He noted that, in speaking with Mr. Dorsey, this proposal is less likely, because it requires more work to implement than other proposals.

In recognition of the newly-appointed members at the meeting. Mr. Flanders asked all members to introduce themselves and the jurisdiction that they represented. Ms. Cook noted that RAC members were eligible for transit subsidies to cover the cost of getting to and from meetings.

Mr. Flanders then explained that the meeting would start out with discussion on the budget and then, once discussion had concluded, the group would vote to rank its recommendations.

Mr. Kierig asked why there wasn't discussion on the capital budget at this meeting. Mr. Flanders said that there is less flexibility in the capital budget, while the operating budget recommendations are .

Mr. Kierig noted that it's his understanding that electrical and other work that will take a significant amount of time is required to allow for operation of all eight-car trains, and that work would take several years, so he's not sure how the budget proposal to run all eight-car trains would be implemented. Mr. Flanders said that the RAC was being asked to prioritize the proposals put forward, and that if running all eight-car trains was deemed a priority, that would inform Metro's plans moving forward. Mr. Reusch noted it was difficult for the RAC to make recommendations about running all eight-car trains without a more detailed understanding of the capital budget requirements to make that happen. He noted that while expanding all eight-car trains would increase capacity, he supports proposals that would improve headways, which the other proposals would do.

Ms. Mason said that the group needs to decide whether it will advocate for proposals that will benefit all riders or for proposals that would increase ridership.

Ms. Cook said that she was personally in favor of the Yellow Line extension, given that it would give her more commute options. She noted that while implementation of all eight-car trains requires work to implement, that shouldn't necessarily be a constraint on the RAC's recommendations. She also noted that she has heard from people, including some of her colleagues, who are very interested in Metro implementing all eight-car trains to address crowding.

Mr. Cavese said that it's important for the RAC to consider, when evaluating proposals that could increase ridership, how these changes could be communicated, especially in ways that would attract new riders. Mr. Flanders suggested that the RAC should develop its recommendations first, and then can discuss ways that those can be communicated.

Mr. Sheehan gave the group some background on the Accessibility Advisory Committee's (AAC) thoughts on the budget proposals. He noted that the AAC is in favor running all eight-car trains and of lengthened rush hour service periods, but not in favor of increased rush hour fare periods, since that would increase the fares charged to MetroAccess customers during those periods. He added that, if Metro adopted its proposed \$2 weekend Metrorail flat fare, the AAC is interested in weekend MetroAccess fares being capped at \$4, and is also supportive of

proposals put forward to expand Metro's pass offerings. He added that the AAC is interested in the development of passes for MetroAccess users. He also noted that the AAC is also in favor of the proposals that would extend Red and Yellow line service.

Mr. Keirig said, based on the information provided in both the budget presentation and in the report from last year on ways to increase ridership, he thinks that it is in the system's long-term interest to extend rush hour service periods. He noted that keeping eight-minute headways later in the evening would reduce the amount of waiting that riders would need to do and could also increase ridership, which could ease some of the financial pressure on Metro.

Ms. Silva expressed interest in Metro running all eight-car trains, and noted that because of the interlining of Blue and Yellow line trains, eight-car trains are helpful in reducing crowding. She also said that the extension of rush hour service periods, would provide more opportunities for people to attend social or cultural events.

Mr. Flanders noted that the RAC would be going through the proposals to develop its preferred ranking of initiatives. He noted that there is a tension between initiatives that would draw in new riders versus those that would be helpful to existing riders.

Mr. Reusch asked why the Council wasn't being asked to weigh in on the other proposals outlined in the budget, such as the late night service partnerships and the weekend \$2 flat rail fare. Mr. Flanders said that those proposals are already included in the budget, so the Board was specifically looking for the RAC's input and ranking of the four proposals not already included in the budget. Mr. Reusch said that he felt that the RAC should weigh in on all of the proposals, including those already included in the base budget, because some of those proposals are less effective than other things ways that Metro could spend its money. He gave the example of the \$2 weekend flat fare, which he said wouldn't increase ridership, because weekend riders are largely deterred by service levels, not cost, and that more effective ways to increase ridership were laid out in the report, such as mitigating the impacts of trackwork through better headway adherence and improving customer/staff interactions. He said that he wasn't sure why some proposals made it into the proposed budget, as opposed to others that Metro staff thinks would be more effective in stabilizing ridership.

Mr. Cavese noted that only some riders would benefit from the implementation of a \$2 weekend flat fare, and that riders taking shorter trips wouldn't see any reduction in fares.

Ms. Mason noted that Metro's largest union recommended reduced fares for certain riders based on income, and suggested targeting the \$2 flat fare to low-income individuals or students or senior citizens, which may be more effective increasing ridership. Mr. Reusch noted that subsidized fares for low-income individuals what put forward in the planning document from last year that was circulated, and might be more effective use of funds than to provide an across-the-board weekend \$2 flat fare for all riders.

Dan Palmeri, a member of the public, discussed various proposals for passes as well as passes for shorter trips. Mr. Flanders said that he thought Metro could expand on its pass options, such as by offering weekend-only passes. Mr. Palmeri noted that Metro has a “Short Trip” pass, but his travel is reimbursed by the federal government, so it’s not clear to him whether or not he’s able to apply those funds to purchasing a pass. There was further discussion of the ability to use transit benefits to purchase passes. Mr. Flanders said that Metro’s pass structure is very confusing and puts people off from using them.

Mr. Palmeri also told the Council that he will be affected by the upcoming closure of Blue and Yellow line service south of National Airport and that he was not aware of any public meetings on this project. Ms. Peña provided information about the outreach and notification process for the public hearing process for the FY2020 budget. There was further discussion about the most effective ways to provide individuals with information. Ms. Peña further explained that Metro has made a concerted effort to capture all of the comments from members of the public, not just those received at public meetings. Mr. Flanders said that a discussion around the best way to communicate with riders may be a good follow-up discussion.

Mr. White gave an example of a woman he encountered who uses three separate buses for her commute, rather than taking a faster trip on Metrorail, in order to save money. He noted that a \$2 flat fare would allow her to take the same trip on Metrorail for the same cost as the bus, and would provide significant time savings.

Mr. Kierig noted that it’s complicated to get a pass loaded onto one’s SmarTrip® card and suggested that the RAC may want to recommend making this process easier. He noted that Metro is proposing to include bus rides in all passes.

Mr. Reusch noted that he was keeping track of all of the suggestions mentioned, including simplifying the process to purchase passes, subsidies for low-income riders along with making bus-to-rail transfers free. He added that the ridership report also included suggestions to minimize the impact of major trackwork and said that the RAC should point the Board to these suggestions. He noted that all of these suggestions cost money, and that the Board should prioritize some of the recommendations from the ridership study, rather than on the \$2 weekend flat fare.

Mr. Reusch also noted that he was opposed to subsidizing late-night Uber and Lyft trips, and said that if Metro was going to be spending money, it should be spending money within the system, rather than giving money to its competitors.

Mr. Flander then asked members to rank, by order of priority, the four proposals put forward that were not funded in the General Manager’s proposed budget (extension of Red/Yellow line service, expansion of rush hour service periods, expanding all trains to eight cars).

Proposal:	1 st Priority	2 nd Priority	3 rd Priority	4 th Priority
Extend rush hour service period	4	2	2	2
Extend Yellow Line to Greenbelt	2	4	3	1
Extend Red Line to Glenmont	1	2	4	3
Operate all trains with eight cars	3	3	1	3

Mr. Flanders explained that, in terms of priorities, the RAC recommended:

1. Extension of rush hour service periods
2. Operate all trains with eight cars
3. Extend Yellow Line service to Greenbelt
4. Extend Red Line service to Glenmont

He said that the Council now had the opportunity to add supporting information to explain its ranking to the Board, as well as to raise questions or other points.

Mr. Sheehan said that it wasn't clear whether or not the RAC's ranking on the extension of rush hour service included charging rush hour fares during these periods or not. Ms. Peña noted that what the Board took to public hearing was the option to both increase service levels from 9:30 – 10 a.m. and 7 – 8:30 p.m., and to charge peak fares during those periods. She explained that what the Board ultimately decides to implement could have a reduced customer impact, i.e. providing peak levels of service during the times listed above, but still charging an off-peak fare. Mr. Sheehan said that it wasn't clear to him why certain initiatives were included in the base budget and others put forward weren't included.

There was discussion among members as to whether the proposal put forward as part of the public hearing process and members' ranking of the extension of rush hour service included charging peak fares or not.

Ms. Mason noted that she often commutes later in the morning to avoid paying the higher fare and noted that charging the higher fare for extended peak service would have changed the way she ranked proposals as part of her vote.

Mr. Sheehan said that he would not, be in favor of extending the times that peak fares are charge and the AAC is not in favor of that, either.

Ms. Mason noted that the confusion over this policy shows the flaws in Metro's marketing and communications, since she thought the proposal to extend peak service didn't include extending peak fare periods, which is not necessarily the case. She added that this would also impact individuals with disabilities who would have to pay higher fares during these periods.

Ms. Peña noted, that while she hadn't seen the final outreach report, she had seen information from the survey of riders regarding proposals put forward as part of the budget. The survey asked whether certain proposals would make riders more likely to increase their Metro ridership. The results were as follows:

- Extending Yellow line to Greenbelt – four in ten riders said they would likely ride more
- All eight-car trains – four in ten riders said they would likely ride more
- Extending Red line to Glenmont – three in ten riders said they would likely ride more
- Extension of rush hour service – two in ten riders said they would likely ride more

Ms. Peña said that she thinks that respondents were less inclined to support increased rush hour service because they felt it would also require them to pay peak fares.

Mr. Flanders noted that charging peak fares for additional service runs the risk of alienating riders further by requiring riders to pay more.

Mr. Kierig said that he is still in favor of expanding peak service, even if it involves charging higher fares, because this could help stabilize or grow ridership which would result in an improved long-term financial picture for Metro, which could ultimately obviate the need for future fare increases. He said that the reason people are choosing ride-hailing services is because of the time savings they offer, even though they are more expensive than Metro. Mr. Kierig said that he would still be in favor of extending rush hours because of the long-term benefit to Metro.

Mr. Cavese said that he could understand how charging higher fares during these additional periods could frustrate riders, and questioned whether providing additional service even made sense given the number of riders in the system during these times.

Mr. Flanders asked members to rank their priorities again, explicitly noting that the proposal to extend rush hour service would include an extension of the period during which peak fares would be charged.

Mr. Flanders asked whether there were additional items that members wanted the Board to consider.

Mr. Reusch listed the possible initiatives contained in last year's Metro report:

- Free bus-to-rail transfers
- Streamlined pass purchasing process
- Added late-night bus service paralleling Metrorail lines
- Mitigating impact of significant trackwork on riders
- Implementation of subsidies for low-income riders

Mr. Reusch suggested that the RAC should come out strongly against subsidizing ride-sharing service and said that he felt that there were better things for Metro to spend its money on that would more effectively stabilize and increase ridership subsidized ride-sharing rides or \$2 weekend flat fares.

As a counter-point, Mr. Sheehan provided the example of the AbilitiesRide program which provides subsidies for MetroAccess users to take taxis, at a lower overall cost to Metro, as opposed to taking traditional paratransit. Mr. Reusch said that he wasn't opposed to AbilitiesRide but was not in favor of subsidizing late-night ride-sharing service. In response to a question from Mr. Sheehan, Mr. Reusch said that Metro should run buses during those times.

Ms. Mason said that she agreed with Mr. Reusch and felt that the RAC should specifically note its strong disagreement with some of the proposals put forward, such as the \$2 weekend flat fare and the subsidies for rideshare services. She said that the RAC could provide the feedback the Board requested on the four budget proposals identified, but could additionally provide input on other items, as well.

Mr. Sheehan noted that he would likely need to abstain on such a vote, since the AAC is already on record about many of the proposals. He also asked whether the RAC felt it had enough information to take a position on some of these proposals.

Ms. Silva said that the \$2 weekend flat fare was put forward as a way to increase ridership on the weekends. She noted that her issue with weekend ridership isn't so much the cost, but rather weekend headways and the long wait for trains.

Mr. Cavese said that he's confused about the proposal to subsidize ride-share trips in the context of increasing ridership. He noted that, when people leave the system to use ride-share services, they won't come back.

Ms. Cook encouraged the Council to recommend allowing unfolded strollers on buses to the list of recommendations to increase ridership.

Ms. Mason asked whether the RAC could acknowledge that it isn't opposed to initiatives such as a \$2 flat fare, but that there are other, more-effective ways to increase ridership. Ms. Mason moved, seconded by Ms. Cook to state that the RAC wasn't opposed to the \$2 weekend flat fare, but that Metro should see if there are other actions it can take to increase ridership that would have greater impact. Mr. Reusch suggested that this be framed as prioritizing frequency and reliability of weekend service over offering lower fares. This motion was approved without objection, with Mr. Sheehan abstaining.

Ms. Mason then moved that Metro prioritize providing subsidies for low-income riders over implementing a \$2 weekend flat fare as a way to increase ridership. Mr. Flanders seconded this motion.

Mr. Reusch suggested that it may be simpler for the RAC list all of the proposals that it would suggest over the rideshare subsidy and the \$2 weekend flat fare.

Ms. Silva reviewed the listing of items the RAC would recommend to increase ridership:

- Late night bus service paralleling rail
- Free bus-to rail transfers
- Easier process to purchase passes
- Mitigating the impacts of weekend trackwork
- Exploration of reduced fares for low-income riders

Mr. Reusch said he didn't think that the RAC should recommend a specific implementation plan on how to establish reduced fares for low-income riders. There was further discussion on the how this program could be implemented.

Mr. Flanders reviewed the results of the second ballot on the four proposals put forward as part of the FY2020 budget; he said they were ranked as follows:

1. Extend the Yellow Line to Greenbelt
2. Extend the Red Line to Glenmont
3. Expend all eight-car trains
4. Extend rush hour service periods

Mr. Reusch moved to send the recommendations (shown at the top of the page) to the Board as suggestions to increase ridership and as strategies the RAC supported over weekend flat fares and subsidies for ride-sharing service. Allowing unfolded strollers on buses was added to this list. This motion was seconded by Mr. Flanders and was approved without objection.

Approval of Minutes:

The minutes of the February 6, 2019 Riders' Advisory Council meeting were approved without objection.

Announcements:

Mr. Flanders reminded members that elections for RAC leadership positions would be held at the April meeting.

Ms. Silva explained to new members that the Bylaws, which are available on the RAC's website, provided an overview of the election procedures.

Adjournment:

Without objection, Mr. Flanders adjourned the meeting at 8:01 p.m.