

Riders' Advisory Council  
Meeting Minutes  
January 9, 2008

I. Welcome by Board Chair and General Manager:

The January meeting of Metro's Riders' Advisory Council began at 7:07 p.m.

Elizabeth Hewlett, the Chair of Metro's Board of Directors provided a brief welcome and thanked Riders' Advisory Council members for their service.

John Catoe, Metro's General Manager, then provided another brief welcome and told RAC members that he appreciated the service that they provided to the Authority. He said that the RAC's input helped Metro provide better service to its customers and cited the example of Metro's clearing trash on the subway tracks in response to comments from the previous RAC Chair that has helped Metro reduce the number of fires in the subway system. Mr. Catoe told the RAC that he appreciates their providing suggestions on how Metro can make improvements and thanked them for inviting him to the meeting and earlier Meet-and-Greet session that evening.

Dr. Bracmort arrived at 7:11 p.m.

Mr. Maxit asked if he would have the opportunity to address Mr. Catoe. In response to a request from Mr. Cerny, Mr. Catoe said that he would be able to stay to answer some members' questions.

Mr. Maxit then read a statement which outlined his concerns with Metro's recent fare increase and its response to opposition to the fare increase from both the public and the RAC. He added that Metro's raising fares was an "attack on the poor in the Metro D.C. area" and announced his resignation from the Riders' Advisory Council in protest of Metro's decision. Mr. Maxit recommended that the RAC should demand that two of its members have voting seats on Metro's Board of Directors and that RAC members receive should a small stipend from the transit authority for their service. Mr. Maxit added that the RAC should also have approval authority over all of Metro's outreach efforts.

Mr. Sheehan said that he wanted to state on behalf of the E&D Committee that he appreciates the resources provided to Metro's Office of ADA Programs and to MetroAccess under Mr. Catoe's leadership. He added that these programs offer significant improvements to individuals' mobility. Mr. Catoe thanked Mr. Sheehan for his comments and said that, in order to provide service, Metro needs resources and funding. He said that he would prefer that Metro have a dedicated source of funding rather than having to rely as much on fare increases. Mr. Catoe noted that without a dedicated revenue source or other funding sources, he said that there weren't options besides raising fares or cutting service. He said that he will be working with the Board of Directors over the next year on finding other sources of revenue for Metro.

Lillian White said that she has been extremely disappointed with recent Metrorail performance, including issues such as door problems and heating/air-conditioning issues on trains. She said that she is hopeful that Mr. Kubicek will address some of these issues but that she remains disappointed with Metro service. Ms. White also recommended that Metro develop an internal program to promote improved customer service by its employees. Ms. White also raised concerns about Metro's maintenance procedures.

Mr. Catoe said that there are some employees who are not working up to Metro's standards of customer service.

Dr. Conn said that she wanted to commend Jim Hamre and his staff for the wonderful job that he did with the 30-Line project, listening to customers and implementing their and said that she hopes that the proposed changes to the line go forward on schedule. She added that she remains concerned about the availability of schedules on buses and the condition of schedules posted at bus stops.

Dr. Conn said that she was also disappointed with the public hearings. She asked if Metro knew if it was going to have to increase fares, why did it bother holding hearings?

Mr. Catoe responded that Metro had a budget shortfall that needed to be made up. He said that he took a proposal to the Board and his proposal was not what was eventually approved, even though what was initially proposed and what was approved raised almost the same amount of money. He noted that the purpose of the hearings was not to determine whether or not the fare increases were necessary, but rather to get comments on the structure of the proposal. Mr. Catoe noted that he and Board members attended the hearing and heard a great deal of feedback on customer service and the need for improvements. He said that there are actions underway to respond to the concerns that customers raised at the hearings. He discussed the Board's decision on whether to raise fares or cut service to make up for lost revenue.

Dr. Conn said that she felt that people were misled because they thought that their testimony would impact whether or not Metro would have a fare increase, and therefore were disappointed at the results of the hearings.

Mr. Cerny noted that the meeting hadn't yet been officially called to order and that there would be time for a few more questions. He asked Mr. Catoe if he could come back to the RAC in February to have additional discussion with the RAC.

Ms. Holland thanked Mr. Catoe for his continued support of the Metro is Accessible program.

Ms. Zinkl asked for information on when the next fare increase would occur and what services would have been cut if fares were not increased.

Mr. Catoe responded that the service would have been reduced by about 5-10% to make up for

the \$109 million shortfall. He said that there wouldn't be for another two years and that increases in fares would be tied to some cost-of-living indicator. Mr. Catoe said that he would be working with elected officials to find other sources of revenue, though that is a policy decision that needs additional discussion.

Lillian White talked about alternative sources of revenue such as additional advertising, that Metro didn't incorporate into its revenue projections when looking to raise fares. She asked if Mr. Catoe was still interested in finding alternative sources of revenue. Mr. Catoe responded that the Board approved expanding Metro's advertising inventory, however, Metro's advertising contractor has been unable to sell all of its advertising space, and, when Metro's advertising contract is up for renewal in 2010, the revenue Metro receives will likely be reduced. He noted that expanded advertising has been installed at the Gallery Place station.

Ms. Wilson, Metro's Assistant General Manager for Corporate Strategy and Communications said that Metro makes approximately \$37 million per year from advertising revenues.

Mr. Cerny thanked Mr. Catoe for coming and said that he looked forward to having him back next month.

## II. Roll Call:

Mr. Cerny then called roll. He said that, since there are new members, he asked people to introduce themselves and state the jurisdiction that they represented and, if they wished, to state why they wanted to join the RAC.

The following RAC members were in attendance:

Kelsi Bracmort, District of Columbia  
Denise Brown, Prince George's County  
Steve Cerny, Fairfax County  
Sharon Conn, Prince George's County  
Patricia Daniels, District of Columbia  
Penny Everline, Arlington County  
Susan Holland, Prince George's County  
Nancy Iacomini, Arlington County  
Rachelle Olden, District of Columbia  
Kaiya Sander, Montgomery County  
Patrick Sheehan, At-Large/Elderly and Disabled Committee  
Lillian White, City of Alexandria  
Robin White, Fairfax County  
Diana Zinkl, District of Columbia

Dr. Bracmort said that she wanted to discuss how the RAC can be more effective and better make its voice heard.

Mr. Cerny noted that he is RAC chair temporarily, until the RAC holds elections for a new chair later in the evening.

III. Public Comment Period:

Mr. Cerny then asked if there were any members of the public who wished to address the RAC.

Devon Brady from Oakton that he has used Metrorail and Metrobus for the past 20-25 years and that he is impressed by the system. He said that his round-trip is around \$10/day and, while he is on the Metrocheck program, the \$110 that this provides only covers ½ the cost of his commute. He said that what brought him here this evening was Metro's plan to eliminate paper transfers in January 2009. He said that he wants to make sure that Metro would keep the weekly flash passes to allow riders to make full use of the Metro system without requiring a SmarTrip card.

Chris Otten said that he is a 10-year DC resident and ran for mayor in 2006. He said that he came to support friends who were on the RAC. He said that has concerns that Metro created the RAC as a "rubber stamp body" and urged the RAC to take a critical look at Metro's operations.

He suggested that Metro look into using alternative energy as a way for Metro to be more environmentally-friendly and to save money, and asked that the RAC look into the salaries of Metro's corporate executives. Mr. Otten also raised concerns about air quality in Metro stations caused by brake dust in the subway tunnels. He urged the RAC to pressure Metro to present it with a sustainable plan for the future.

Mr. Cerny thanked Mr. Otten for his comments and said that the RAC would be electing new leadership and that his comments provided something for the RAC's new leadership to think about as they look ahead.

IV. Approval of Minutes

Dr. Conn moved to approve the minutes as presented. Ms. Daniels seconded this motion.

*In favor:* Mr. Cerny, Dr. Conn, Ms. Daniels, Ms. Iacomini, Ms. Olden, Ms. Sandler, Mr. Sheehan, Robin White, Ms. Zinkl

*Opposed:*

*Abstentions:* Dr. Bracmort, Ms. Brown, Ms. Everline, Ms. Holland, Lillian White

The minutes were approved (9-0-5)

V. Approval of agenda:

Mr. Cerny then asked for approval of the agenda. He asked that Ms. Wilson's presentation on plans for 2008 be moved up in the agenda.

Ms. Holland moved approval of the agenda as amended. Mr. Cerny seconded this motion.

*In favor:* Ms. Brown, Mr. Cerny, Ms. Daniels, Ms. Everline, Ms. Holland, Ms. Iacomini, Ms. Olden, Ms. Sandler, Mr. Sheehan, Lillian White, Robin White, Ms. Zinkl

*Opposed:* Dr. Bracmort

*Abstentions:* Dr. Conn

The agenda was approved as amended (12-1-0).

VI. Plans for 2008:

Sara Wilson, Metro's Assistant General Manager for Corporate Strategy and Communications thanked the RAC for being flexible with its agenda and said that she wanted to talk about Metro's plans for 2008. She said that she wanted to get in front of the RAC early in 2008 because there are a lot of issues where she feels that the RAC can be helpful.

Ms. Wilson noted that, in 2004, she was the primary staff liaison working on the creation of the Riders' Advisory Council.

She said that she wanted to bring up a few issues with the RAC this evening and start a dialogue both this evening and into the future as Metro works to improve communication with its customers and increase the revenue it receives from advertising.

Ms. Wilson discussed advertising in Metro stations and said that there is no right answer for the amount of advertising that should be permitted. She added that the Metro Board has approved additional advertising on Metro but that the response from advertisers hasn't been as vigorous as Metro was hoping for. She said that Metro is looking at additional ways to raise revenue. Regarding retail opportunities in Metro stations, Metro explored allowing this in 2004 and that the reaction was lukewarm, largely because Metro wouldn't allow the sale of food or beverages at its stations.

Ms Wilson continued that Metro will be looking at new ways to communicate with customers using new technologies. She said that Metro is exploring technology using flat-screen televisions and that Metro is trying to determine whether or not to outsource this kind of communications and how to use this technology to provide additional information to customers. She said that Metro is looking at several possibilities to increase advertising opportunities throughout Metro.

Ms. Wilson also noted that Metro is making changes to the SmartBenefits program as it converts from Metrochek to SmartBenefits, reducing administrative cost and workload. She added that Metro is also continuing to conduct its monthly customer satisfaction surveys which will be compiled into an annual report.

Ms. Wilson added that she is now responsible for Community Relations and said that Metro will

be making more of an effort to reach out to communities, especially underserved communities. She said that she wanted to get the RAC's input on which stakeholders to target and how to reach out to the community. She said that she also oversees Metro's Government Relations office and that while Metro has a good relationship with the region's Congressional delegation, Metro will be reaching out to Congressional committee chairs and other members. She noted that Metro receives a significant portion of its capital funding from the federal government. She added that Metro is also working to help shape the reauthorization of the transportation funding bill.

Ms. Wilson said that she is also responsible for Metro's Office of Media Relations which responds to media requests and provides information on Metro service. She said that, beginning this year, Media Relations staff have been sitting in on staff meetings for operations staff, so that information about projects that Metro is working on can be better disseminated to the public.

Ms. Wilson then said that she would take questions from RAC members.

Dr. Bracmort asked about SmarTrip card distribution as part of the fare increase. Ms. Wilson said that SmarTrip cards (50,000) were distributed to social service agencies throughout the region and were distributed by a formula and that social service agencies in each of the jurisdictions would establish the criteria as to who would be eligible for the free cards. She said that Metro felt that it should leave distribution of the cards to the experts.

In response to another question from Dr. Bracmort, Ms. Wilson said that cards were allocated according to the same formula as used for subsidy allocation, which didn't take into account ridership mode (bus or rail).

Mr. Sheehan said that it was his understanding that Congress was looking at a budget stimulus package and that this may include money for infrastructure. Ms. Wilson said that she isn't aware of any new initiatives for transportation funding from the current administration.

Mr. Cerny said that he could respond to this question. He said that he didn't think that there was much hope for additional monies for transportation under the current administration.

Dr. Conn said that she is opposed to the SmarTrip card being given to bus riders because they will end up paying more for service than if they used the \$11 unlimited bus pass. She said that she's also concerned about where bus riders would be able to add money to their SmarTrip cards, since the only options now are to load the cards on the bus or at a rail station.

Ms. Wilson said that, when the cards were distributed, Metro gave out information on how to use the cards. She said that Metro is working with Giant and CVS to allow individuals to reload their cards at these locations and that Metro is working to allow for the ability to increase the value of SmarTrip cards online.

Ms. Everline asked about outreach to non-English speakers Ms. Wilson said that all materials distributed to social service agencies were also distributed in Spanish. She said that Metro also

did on-site SmarTrip sales at high-volume stations and that a Spanish-speaking employee was present for these sales. Ms. Everline asked if there was any instruction provided to customers on how to use the cards. Ms. Wilson said that Metro hadn't provided any training, but would be willing to do so if asked. She said that she would also reach out to social service agencies to see if there's anything Metro can do to facilitate training for non-native speakers.

Dr. Bracmort asked about when Metro would make reduced transfers available from bus to rail. Ms. Wilson said that she isn't sure if this is currently possible or if it is being worked on, though she noted that SmarTrip technology is continuously evolving.

Ms. Olden asked how Metro determined the # of cards needed to be distributed and how social service agencies will be held accountable for distributing the cards. Ms. Wilson said that the number of cards distributed was based on the number of bus riders who earn less than \$70,000/year. She said that Metro is requiring that SmarTrip card recipients sign a form stating that they have received a card, but that Metro didn't want to impose criteria on the social service agencies.

In response to a question from Ms. Olden, Ms. Wilson said that this card distribution is a one-time event.

Ms. Wilson thanked the RAC and said that she would leave her card so that members could contact her if they had any additional questions.

## VII. Report on Fare Increase

Mr. Harcum said that he was asked to come to discuss the difference between the fare increase that was advertised as part of the public hearing process and what was ultimately approved by the Board of Directors. He noted that what was approved was lower than what was initially advertised and passed out a document that showed the docket of fare changes.

Mr. Cerny opened the floor up for questions.

In response to a question from Dr. Conn, Mr. Harcum explained the change in the per-mile charge that was adopted by the Board for rail fares and also explained which customers would continue to be able to buy tokens. Dr. Conn also asked about the potential for fares to rise again in six months. Mr. Harcum responded that, if Metro wasn't meeting revenue targets, parking rates would raise another 25¢ in July but that there would be no other increase until FY2010.

Ms. Everline asked how much money the 10¢ bus fare increase would raise. Mr. Harcum said that it is estimated that it would raise approximately \$1 million. He noted that Metro's research showed that most bus customers already have a SmarTrip card but don't use it, and that Metro is trying to encourage riders to use their SmarTrip card.

Ms. Bracmort noted that people have difficulty recharging the cards which may be a reason that

they don't use them. Mr. Harcum said that Metro is developing a "point-of-sale" device that would allow customers to reload their SmarTrip cards at locations such as Giant and CVS.

Ms. Everline said that people with disabilities, especially those with visual impairments, have trouble recharging the cards and she is concerned that those people are being penalized by the SmarTrip/cash fare differential.

Mr. Sheehan noted there have been lawsuits in the disability community regarding point-of-sale devices and that Target and Wal-Mart have had issues with these devices but that they have designed accessible point-of-sale devices. Mr. Harcum said that he would mention this to Greg Garback, Metro's SmarTrip program manager.

Mr. Sheehan added that allowing SmarTrip cards to be used on MetroAccess vehicles could provide additional information about trip patterns that Metro could use in service planning.

Mr. Sheehan also said that he thinks that the Metro Center sales office should open earlier in the morning, as it currently doesn't open until 7:30 a.m. Mr. Harcum said that he thinks that there is a proposal in next year's budget to expand the hours of sales centers.

Ms. Olden asked why Metro wanted customers to increase their use of SmarTrip cards. Mr. Harcum said that handling cash is very expensive and labor-intensive. She said that she has concerns about the number of D.C. residents that don't have checking or credit card accounts and couldn't use electronic fare media and added that Metro needs to do additional outreach and to look at customers' needs and values in its decision-making. She said that Metro needs to show customers the benefit of using a SmarTrip card.

Dr. Bracmort said that Metro needs to look at having point-of-sale devices at CVS or other stores that are present in the District.

Ms. Brown said that she wanted to know what would happen to paper passes and transfers, especially passes and transfers for senior citizens. Mr. Harcum said that SmarTrip cards would have the same function as paper fare media. He said that the earliest paper products would be phased out would be in one year, and that there would be an overlap period to allow people to get used to the new fare media before phasing out the old.

Dr. Conn said that she is concerned about tying the SmarTrip card to checking accounts because of the possibility of overdrafts when recharging the card.

Mr. Harcum suggested that because of the RAC's interest with the SmarTrip card, the RAC work with Greg Garback, Metro's SmarTrip program manager to discuss issues related to SmarTrip cards.

Robin White asked about Metro's budget planning, specifically the kind of budget forecasting the Metro uses. In response, Mr. Harcum discussed Metro's strategic planning and how capital

funding can impact operational funding. He said that the strategic planning is most closely tied to the capital budget. He noted that Metro is doing strategic planning for the next capital budget cycle, as the capital budgets are generally approved in five-year increments. He recommended talking to Nat Bottigheimer, Metro's Assistant General Manager for Planning and Joint Development.

Ms. Zinkl asked about the linkage between the capital and operating budgets. Mr. Harcum said that, while the budgets are linked, the operating budget is not locked in to the same five-year cycle as the capital budget. He noted that the operating budget does react to items coming on-line from the capital budget. Mr. Harcum said that these changes in the operating budget are not necessarily surprises – Metro staff had planned for these changes.

#### VIII. Elections of 2008 Riders' Advisory Council Officers:

Mr. Cerny said that the RAC elects a new chair every year, and that the chair position rotates among the jurisdictions every year. He said that for 2008, the new chair will be from Virginia. He noted that the RAC would also elect a 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chair, which also rotate among jurisdictions, and for 2008, the 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chair will be from the District of Columbia and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chair will be from Maryland.

In response to a request from Dr. Bracmort, Mr. Cerny explained the responsibilities of the Vice Chair positions.

#### *Chair:*

Mr. Cerny opened the floor for nominations.

Dr. Conn nominated Ms. Iacomini to serve as Chair. Ms. Everline seconded this nomination.

Ms. Holland nominated Mr. Cerny for Chair. He declined the nomination and there was no second made to Ms. Holland's motion.

All members present voted *In favor*, of Ms. Iacomini's nomination with no members opposed or abstaining.

(14-0-0)

Mr. Cerny asked Ms. Iacomini, to make a short statement if she wished.

Ms. Iacomini said that she hoped that RAC members would think about the issues that they would like to address over the coming year. She said that she felt that the RAC has given the Board good advice, even if the advice hasn't always been taken. She said that the RAC has had two years of research and now can focus on specific areas to make recommendations. She noted that the RAC should consider focusing on SmarTrip, since it is such an important and far-reaching issue for Metro riders.

Ms. Everline encouraged RAC members give praise as well as criticism as part of their guidance.

Ms. Iacomini said that she would like the RAC to begin holding Subcommittee meetings next month and asked that anyone who is interested in chairing a Subcommittee to contact her.

Mr. Cerny noted that there are Subcommittee meetings scheduled for next week. After discussion, it was determined that Subcommittee meetings would not meet in January.

Ms. Brown suggested holding an additional full RAC meeting to discuss Subcommittees. Ms. Iacomini said that she wouldn't be available next week for a meeting and there was discussion about going over Subcommittee business at the February RAC meeting.

Mr. Cerny said that the RAC needed to decide whether or not it would elect Vice Chairs at this meeting. There being agreement that the RAC should elect Vice Chairs at this meeting, he then opened the floor for nominations for 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chair, who would need to be a District of Columbia representative.

Ms. Olden nominated Dr. Bracmort to serve as 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chair.  
Ms. Iacomini seconds Dr. Bracmort's nomination.

Dr. Bracmort said that, if elected, she would do her best to support the chair and ensure that the RAC is effective in its mission.

Everyone present voted *In favor*, of Dr. Bracmort's nomination, with no opposition or abstentions. (14-0-0).

Mr. Cerny then opened the floor for nominations for 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chair.

Ms. Holland nominated Mr. Sheehan to serve as 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chair.  
Lillian White seconded Mr. Sheehan's nomination.

Mr. Cerny closed the floor for nominations and then took a vote.

Everyone present voted *In favor*, of Mr. Sheehan's nomination, with no opposition or abstentions. (14-0-0)

Mr. Cerny said that there wasn't time for Subcommittee reports and that he would move on to New Business.

IX. New Business:

Ms. Iacomini suggested that, because of schedule conflicts, since the RAC meeting was taking place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month, that there no Subcommittee meetings be held in January. She suggested that the RAC may want to look at rolling the Communications Subcommittee back into the various Bus/Rail subcommittees and that she would like to hear from RAC members about their interest in serving on the various Subcommittees.

Ms. Zinkl said that she feels very strongly that the Communications Committee should be kept around because Metro some of Metro's greatest challenges are with communications issues that are distinct from rail and bus service. Lillian White said that she would agree. Ms. Iacomini said that the RAC would look into the attendance history of the Communications Subcommittee and whether or not members are interested in serving on the Communications Subcommittee.

Mr. Pasek told members that he had copies of "Robert's Rules of Order in Plain English" available for them if they were interested. Ms. Iacomini asked members to please turn in their financial disclosure forms to Mr. Pasek as soon as possible.

X. Adjournment

Ms. Iacomini adjourned the meeting 8:59 p.m.