

**Riders' Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes**

September 5, 2007

I. Call to Order

Mr. Snyder called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m. He noted that the RAC didn't have a quorum for the meeting but that it could take care of some administrative items until additional members arrived.

Present:

Michael Snyder, Chair, Montgomery County
Dr. Kelsi Bracmort, District of Columbia
Steve Cerny, Fairfax County
Dr. Sharon Conn, Prince George's County
Armando Cortinez, At-Large/District of Columbia (arrived at 6:48 p.m.)
Patricia Daniels, District of Columbia
Susan Holland, Prince George's County (arrived 6:58 p.m.)
Nancy Iacomini, Arlington County (arrived at 6:48 p.m.)
Cesar Maxit, District of Columbia
Kevin Moore, At-Large/District of Columbia
Kaiya Sandler, Montgomery County
Aline Stone, District of Columbia
Lillian White, City of Alexandria

Not Present for any part of the meeting:

Denise Brown, Prince George's County
Justin Chittams, District of Columbia
Dennis Jaffe, District of Columbia
Nardra Johnson, Montgomery County
Pat Sheehan, At-Large/Elderly and Disabled Committee

II. Public Comment Period

Mr. Snyder noted that there was no one from the public present who wanted to make public comments.

III. Approval of July 11, 2007 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Snyder said that, because a quorum was not present, approval of minutes from the previous meeting would have to wait until additional members arrived.

IV. Approval of Agenda:

Mr. Snyder then asked for a motion to approve the agenda. He said that he would like to switch Items VII (Communications Subcommittee report) and VIII

(Budget Subcommittee report) because there was a resolution from the Budget Committee that he would like the RAC to address.

Mr. Snyder then took a vote on the agenda, as amended.

In favor: Mr. Snyder, Mr. Cerny, Dr. Conn, Ms. Daniels, Mr. Maxit, Mr. Moore, Ms Sandler, Ms. Stone, Ms. White

Opposed: None

Abstentions: Dr. Bracmort (out of the room)

The agenda was approved (9-0-1)

V. Introduction of Deputy General Manager

Mr. Snyder then moved on to introduce Gerald Francis, Metro's Deputy General Manager. Mr. Francis thanked Mr. Snyder for the opportunity to address the RAC and apologized for not being able to attend a RAC meeting prior to this one due to scheduling conflicts. He told RAC members that he wants to work with the RAC because he knows that Metro needs to improve the job that it does at informing its passengers.

Mr. Francis told the RAC that transit agencies are measures on their quality of service and that what's most important to him is to deliver consistent and reliable service to passengers. He said that, on August 26th and 27th, Metro didn't provide that level of service and apologized for not having done so.

He said that he would also ask Mr. Snyder and other RAC members to assist Metro in improving its processes. He said that the biggest challenge the Metro faces is "response and recovery" to an incident. He said that Metro also needs to communicate to its customers what is happening during incidents, and that getting this information out quickly is very important. He said that it sometimes takes Metro some time to "ramp up" this communication.

He said that, last week, he put together a subcommittee and would like to have some RAC members serve on the subcommittee to help Metro determine what kind of communication is helpful to passengers during a service disruption and what passengers' expectations are in such a situation.

VI. Power Problems and Solutions

Mr. Francis then provided a timeline of the events that occurred on Sunday, August 26th that disrupted service. He said that the first event occurred at around 5:45 p.m. and that, in addition to trying to provide service for Sunday evening's customers, Metro was also focused on restoring the system in time for the Monday morning rush hour.

Mr. Francis then paused to introduce his staff – Linda Stoffregen and Monic Morgan, and provided his contact information in case RAC members needed to get in touch with him.

He then continued his description of the events that took place the evening of August 26th:

- 5:45 p.m. – Report of smoke in the tunnel at Mount Vernon Square station
- 5:54 p.m. – Fire in the control room at the Reagan National Airport station
- 5:54 p.m. – Loss of power at Braddock Road station
- 5:54 p.m. – Stranded train at King Street station with passengers needing to be offloaded
- 6:21 p.m. – Train lost propulsion power between Pentagon and Pentagon City stations
- 6:32 p.m. – Report of a smoldering insulator at Farragut North station

He said that this was 7 incidents within a 30-minute time period and that

- 6:35 p.m. – Report of smoldering insulator at Huntington station
- 7:40 p.m. – A bus running rail shuttle service caught on fire due to a loose cable in the engine compartment.
- 8:25 p.m. – Brake smoke in the tunnel between Farragut West and Foggy Bottom from a train that was being towed after being taken out of service.

Mr. Moore asked how long after the first event and after subsequent events that information was provided to the public, such as through updates to Metro's website or other methods. Mr. Francis said that he couldn't answer Mr. Moore's question about the website update, but that, from the Operations Control Center (OCC), Metro is able to immediately begin recording announcements, which can then be played back at regular intervals throughout the system.

Mr. Moore asked if Metro has the capability to update the website on nights and weekends. Mr. Francis said that Metro does have that capability and that Metro also has an emergency hotline for operating personnel and a media hotline for local media outlets which is updated by Metro's Media Relations staff.

Mr. Francis said that Metro also needs to disseminate information to customers at stations throughout the rail system whose trip may be affected and to employees and supervisors who are trying to provide alternative service.

Mr. Cortinez and Ms. Iacomini arrived at 6:48 p.m.

Ms. White asked if the smoldering insulators are related or if they were isolated incidents. Mr. Francis said that, currently, Metro is treating the insulator fires as isolated incidents, but that all of the disruptions are still under investigation. Mr. Francis then described the conditions that could result in a smoldering insulator or

an insulator fire and the process that Metro and fire department staff need to go through to correct such a problem.

Dr. Conn asked about the cause of the events and the probability of so many isolated incidents occurring in such a short timeframe. Mr. Francis said that these events occur occasionally, but that he had never seen them occur all at once like they did that evening. He said that Metro was looking at what triggered the power problems – if it was a power surge, a lighting strike or some other unusual event. In response to a second question from Dr. Conn, Mr. Francis said that Metro Police did investigate to see if it was possibly sabotage, but found no evidence to support that.

Ms. White asked about the redundancy of Metro's substation. Mr. Francis responded that each substation can generally act as a back-up of itself, and if a substation completely fails, that substation can be bypassed and power can come from nearby substations. Mr. Francis continued that, during the incident on August 26th, multiple substations shut down, preventing them from serving as back-ups to other substations.

In response to a question from Mr. Maxit, Mr. Francis said that three of the ten incidents were burning insulators. Mr. Maxit asked how often Metro experiences burning insulators. Mr. Francis said that these occur on a fairly regular basis. Mr. Snyder asked whether or not trackbed cleaning to remove debris could have prevented these incidents. Mr. Francis said that cleaning debris can reduce the incident of fires, but it's also possible for stud bolts to catch on fire. He added that Metro staff performs track inspections two to three times per week to look for problems.

Ms. Iacomini asked if removing debris was part of the track inspection routine. Mr. Francis replied that it was.

Ms. Iacomini also asked about how fires can start from metal objects such as bolts and steel rebar. Mr. Francis replied that these objects can rub together, causing sparks, and then either smoke or ignite debris.

Ms. Holland arrived at 6:58 p.m.

Mr. Francis then gave an overview of the incidents that occurred on August 27th. He said that Metro was able to restore the system prior to Monday morning's rush hour and had a normal A.M. peak. However, problems began in the early evening, after the P.M. peak period:

- 7:03 p.m. – Report of smoke in the tunnel at Pentagon City
- 7:05 p.m. – Train lost power between Braddock Road and Reagan National Airport
- 7:14 p.m. – Interlocking at Huntington station out-of-service

- 7:15 p.m. – Smoldering insulator/stud bolt at U Street/Cardozo station
- 7:20 p.m. – Train offloaded at Braddock Road station
- 7:53 p.m. – Fire in the control room at Reagan National Airport station
- 8:12 p.m. – Train lost power at Pentagon station
- 8:19 p.m. – Train lost power at Pentagon station
- 10:05 p.m. – Fire in the communications room at Reagan National Airport station.

Mr. Francis said that there was an issue with restoring service because there was still smoldering being detected near Pentagon City, possibly caused by stray current, which delayed the restoration of service. He said that there was no rail service between Pentagon and Huntington after 7:05 p.m. He added that Metro established shuttle service, but there were several hundred people that needed to be provided with alternate transportation.

Dr. Conn asked why trains were allowed to run on this section of track on August 27th if an exact cause had not been determined for the issues that occurred on the 26th. Mr. Francis said that Metro successfully ran test trains on the late evening of August 26th and was able to operate without incident during the A.M. peak and for most of the day on August 27th.

Ms. Iacomini said that it was interesting that there was a problem on the Green Line which is relatively new compared to the portions of the Yellow and Blue Lines where most of the problems occurred. Mr. Francis said that Metro is tracking this information, looking at the insulators, looking at items supplied by various manufacturers, the history over the last three or six months, looking at the rails using thermal imaging cameras. He said that Metro is also in the process of upgrading its substation

In response to a question from Ms. Iacomini, Mr. Francis said that Metro is also looking the types of cars that were being run when the incidents occurred and whether or not those contributed to the incidents.

Mr. Cerny asked if other systems have the same problems with insulators and stud bolts that Metro does. Mr. Francis replied that both New York and Chicago have insulator problems as well. He added that the unique aspect of the failures was that they happened two days in a row. Mr. Francis also said that Metro is looking at the manufacturers of the insulators to see if that was a contributing factor in the service disruption.

Ms. Daniels asked if the situation was possibly caused by a disgruntled employee. Mr. Francis said that he didn't think that was the case.

Ms. Stone noted that Mr. Francis had said that substations are able to provide back-up when another substation goes down, but that this incident may have shown that isn't the case. Mr. Francis replied that substations can generally

provide back-up if one substation shuts down, but the situation in August consisted of multiple substations shutting down. He said that he thinks that there was some trigger that took out several substations at once.

Mr. Francis added that many substations have been upgraded to handle 8-car trains as part of Metro's capital improvement process.

In response to a question from Ms. White, Mr. Francis said that there were no warning signs of impending problems with insulators prior to these incidents. Ms. White noted that she has noticed the smell of smoking brakes and asked if that was a sign of possible problems. Mr. Francis said that the smoking brakes occur when new brake pads are being "broken in." He added that, based on the pattern of where the incidents occurred, Metro needs to look at the sequence of events to see if they are interrelated.

Dr. Conn asked whether this portion of the system was outdoors. Mr. Francis said that south of National Airport, the tracks are outside. Dr. Conn also asked if the damaged insulators and bolts from August 26th were replaced prior to beginning service on August 27th, to which Mr. Francis replied that they were. Dr. Conn commented that if those things were repaired, the disruptions may have been caused by other things, such as the railcars. Mr. Francis said that Metro is looking at all possible causes. He added that a transformer went out and Metro is trying to determine the cause of this failure to determine whether or not that may have caused a power surge.

Dr. Bracmort asked if there was information on Metro's response time as to when passengers were alerted to the disruptions, when the stations were shut down, when shuttle buses arrived to transport passengers. Mr. Francis replied that Metro's Public Information system was sending out information, but Metro has to do a better job at getting information out to its customers. He said that Metro also needs to set realistic expectations as to what it can do to restore service or provide alternate service, since it only has so many technicians and other employees on duty and it takes a certain amount of time to contact bus operators and establish shuttle service. Dr. Bracmort said that she appreciates the complexity of establishing a response, but knowing how long it took to establish a response is also important information. Mr. Francis said that this information can be made available.

Mr. Snyder said that Metro needs to have additional staff on hand to help with directing passengers during service disruptions and that additional police officers may be most effective in controlling crowds and directing traffic, and may also be able to reach a station more quickly than other Metro personnel.

Mr. Francis said that he needs that kind of feedback to help Metro improve its procedures during service disruptions.

Ms. Holland asked if Metro has a specific protocol to direct its response during service disruptions or other emergencies. Mr. Francis said that Metro does have such a protocol. Mr. Snyder said that Metro does have a protocol to respond to emergency events but that informing riders is not part of that protocol. Ms. Holland said that she was asking about what Metro does to keep its customers informed and Mr. Snyder's response answered that question.

Mr. Moore said that the cause of accidents is always different, but the response should always be similar in terms of setting up a bus bridge or powering down stations, etc. He said that Metro can perfect its response and said that he would like to get information about the timing of when information was sent out to customers via the webpage.

Mr. Snyder said that Mr. Catoe had mentioned that he wanted Metro to become an organization focused on operations and added that Metro needs to focus on customer service, not just on its operations.

Mr. Francis said that he agreed and that Metro needs to improve its getting information out to customers when there are service disruptions. He told RAC members that service disruptions aren't new or unique to Metro, but that everyone has a part in improving its recovery operations. He reiterated that he needs to hear from riders about their expectations to help Metro improve. He said that he promised RAC members that Metro will work on improving this.

Ms. Iacomini said that Metro is selling off some of its properties and provided the example of the Arlington bus garage. She said that she wondered if Metro was looking at placing its assets strategically to best respond to events. Mr. Francis said he is looking that Metro needs to put together a book that details information about bus bridges.

Ms. Sandler said that passengers need to take responsibility to learn alternate routes and the RAC can help with this effort. She said that Metro can also help passengers plan alternate routes by putting bus schedules in rail stations. Mr. Francis said that Metro will be providing its customers with a pamphlet that details what to do in an emergency.

Dr. Conn said that Metro needs to survey passengers involved in the incident to see how long it took them to complete their trips. She also suggested that Metro identify a team of operators who would be able to assist in an emergency. She said that Metro needs to have an emergency evacuation plan that encompasses buses and bus drivers along with rail passengers.

Ms. Daniels described her experience with delays on the 42 line as the result of a suspicious package at Dupont Circle and said that Metro also needs to worry about its bus riders in the event of service disruptions.

Mr. Francis said that Metro is going to get out and ask its customers about their expectations in the event of a service disruption. He said that Metro's focus is on the customer and reiterated that he is truly embarrassed about what happened with these service disruptions. Mr. Francis said that Metro will be making some changes to some of its internal practices and he'll be soliciting feedback from any- and everyone on those changes. He said that, as Chief Operating Officer, it's his responsibility to ensure that customers have a seamless and consistent ride. He said that he always viewed Metro as the "nation's best system" and Metro's customers come first because they provide feedback on whether or not Metro is meeting their expectations.

Mr. Francis thanked RAC members for the opportunity to come talk to them and told them that he would be back to attend future meetings. He also urged them to consider serving on Metro subcommittees that were being created and provided them with his contact information in case they wanted to share anything with him.

Ms. White asked if there were any activities planned for National Emergency Preparedness Month. Mr. Francis said that Metro would be distributing emergency preparedness brochures and urging passengers to develop alternate plans.

VII. Approval of Minutes:

Mr. Snyder said that, now that the RAC had a quorum, he would entertain a motion to approve the July minutes. Ms. Stone moved to approve the July minutes as presented. Mr. Cortinez seconded her motion. Mr. Snyder noted that some edits needed to be made to page 15 and Ms. White clarified her comments about dedicated bus lanes which was on page 6 of the July minutes.

In favor: Dr. Bracmort, Mr. Cerny, Dr. Conn, Mr. Cortinez, Ms. Holland, Ms. Iacomini, Mr. Maxit, Mr. Moore, Ms. Sandler, Mr. Snyder, Ms. White

Opposed: none

Abstentions: Ms. Daniels, Ms. Stone

The minutes were approved (11-0-2).

VIII. Budget Committee Report:

Mr. Snyder then moved to the Budget Committee report.

Mr. Moore noted that he had put forward some language in case the RAC wanted to take a stand on the budget and fare proposal that would soon be coming out.

Ms. Iacomini said that she had some questions and comments on some of the "whereas" clauses. She asked to clarify the statement about the lack of public comment on Metro's budget and suggested that the RAC may want to ask Metro to provide "timely public comment" on the budget. She added that she agreed

that Metro's proposal for automatic fare increases has had little or no public review.

Mr. Moore gave a gave information on Metro's recent budget processes and the lack of the public's ability to comment during those processes. He said the Metro needs to get its act together before the RAC grants Metro the ability to have automatic annual fare increases.

Ms. Iacomini also asked about the synching of fiscal years. Mr. Snyder said that the District of Columbia is the only jurisdiction that doesn't share a fiscal year with WMATA. Mr. Moore said that, while it's his understanding that Metro's budget is developed in parallel with jurisdictions, last year, Metro's budget was unveiled after the jurisdictions could have provided comments or changes.

Mr. Moore added that, since the jurisdictional contributions for Metro's current fiscal year have already been approved, any fare increase that takes effect mid-year will not draw additional money from the jurisdictions, only from Metro riders. In response to a question from Dr. Conn, Mr. Moore clarified that a fare increase that would take effect in January is in the middle of Metro's fiscal year.

Mr. Snyder said that, on September 13, Metro would ask the Board for approval for a fare increase. He said that Mr. Catoe told him that the money would not be used to balance the FY08 budget but that enacting an increase in January would allow the increase to be smaller because higher fares would be spread over 18 months, rather than 12.

Ms. White asked if one of the points of the budget workshops was to look at other sources of revenue other than fares. Mr. Snyder said that Metro balanced the budget in FY08 by finding additional sources of revenue but that Mr. Catoe has said that the FY09 budget is going to be precarious and, if Metro raised fares in January, rather than waiting until the new fiscal year, it could lower the amount of the increase.

Ms. Iacomini said that, if Metro uses the money raised by a fare increase enacted in January 2008 to help with the FY08 budget that money couldn't help with the FY09 budget. Mr. Pasek said that it isn't clear whether or not the additional revenue would be held in reserve until FY09 begins or spent as it is received.

Mr. Snyder said that people have asked whether Metro will be receiving additional buses or railcars or other physical improvements, but that those purchases are funded from its capital budget, not its operating budget.

Ms. Bracmort asked whether there was anything in Metro's proposal about bus fares and discussion about different fares for cash and SmarTrip. She added that she had a problem with charging more for cash fares because that may disproportionately affect certain groups of people unless Metro made SmarTrip

fares more easily available. Mr. Moore said that there have been many things long-promised by Metro that the RAC would hope would occur as part of any fare increase, such as the ability to load passes onto SmarTrip cards.

Ms. White mentioned that she went to a meeting on SmarTrip at Metro in August as it related to employee benefits. She said that the City of Alexandria's buses also all use SmarTrip.

Mr. Snyder asked for a second on his motion. Mr. Moore suggested going through what was presented to see if there was consensus among the RAC about what was presented.

Ms. Sandler raised concerns about the amount of time that the RAC has to discuss this proposed resolution and suggested that this should have been distributed ahead of time. Mr. Snyder said that this issue has come up very recently and, if the RAC wants to go on record prior to the Board's discussion, it needs to speak out now.

Ms. Sandler said that she is also concerned about the RAC making statements that are inadequate. Mr. Moore described instances where the RAC hasn't had an opportunity to provide comment on the budget.

Mr. Cerny said that the RAC should distill the resolution down to a few main points, such as opposition to automatic fare increases or to a mid-year fare increase.

Ms. Iacomini proposed a resolution that said that the RAC, with the limited information now available, doesn't support a mid-year fare increase.

Mr. Pasek said that what will happen on September 13th will be the beginning of the public process.

Ms. Holland said she is concerned with distilling the motion because it misses the point that the RAC isn't included in the budget process.

Ms. Iacomini said that it may not be possible for one resolution to relay all of the RAC's concerns about the budget process and a possible fare increase.

Ms. Iacomini asked Mr. Pasek for his opinion as to whether or not he had concerns with the resolution presented. Mr. Pasek said that he had concerns that, if the RAC passed a resolution opposing fare increases, the Board wouldn't see any need to have additional dialogue with the RAC. Ms. Iacomini replied that her inclusion of the phrase "...with the limited information available" might be a signal for WMATA staff to come and talk with the RAC.

There was further discussion among RAC members about the effects of the RAC passing a resolution and whether or not that would foster dialogue between the RAC and WMATA staff.

Mr. Snyder said that he wanted to get consensus from the RAC as to its views on a mid-year fare increase.

Ms. Iacomini said that she isn't in favor of a mid-year fare increase because there isn't any information yet on what the money would be used for. She said that she wants to signal that it's very disconcerting to RAC members to have a mid-fiscal year fare increase.

Mr. Moore said that he didn't include some figures in his resolution, such as Metro's overtime costs and how that number may be greater than a proposed fare increase.

Ms. Iacomini said that the question is whether or not the RAC wants to make a statement on the proposed fare increase prior to hearing information on the budget or whether it wanted to wait until after information is presented.

Mr. Snyder reiterated Ms. Iacomini's point and asked for a show of hands as to whether or not the RAC wanted to raise its concerns prior to the Board's September 13th Finance Committee meeting.

In response to a comment from Ms. Sandler, Mr. Snyder said that there is an opportunity for the RAC to refine its position at subsequent meetings as more information is made available. Mr. Moore said that, the way Metro's public process works, once a proposal is put forward, there's little opportunity for real public input. He said that if the RAC says something before the proposal is put forward, its statement would have more effect than if it waited until afterwards.

Ms. White said that the RAC can say something that it agrees on in a simple manner.

Mr. Snyder asked that members raise their hands to vote on whether or not they want the RAC to put forward a statement prior to September 13th.

In favor: Dr. Bracmort, Mr. Cortinez, Ms. Daniels, Ms. Holland, Ms. Iacomini, Mr. Maxit, Mr. Moore, Ms. Sandler, Mr. Snyder, Ms. Stone, Ms. White

After: none

Abstentions: Mr. Cerny, Dr. Conn (out of the room)

Mr. Snyder said that, now that the RAC had decided that it wanted to put something forward prior to September 13th, it could put forward some simple language.

Ms. Iacomini put forward proposed statement: “The RAC, on behalf of riders, finds the proposal of a mid-fiscal year fare increase to be very disquieting and urges the Board to not consider any request without full and adequate public hearing.”

Ms. White seconded Ms. Iacomini’s motion.

Ms. Daniels said that she read in the Examiner that “the public cannot stop a fare increase.” Ms. Daniels said that she believes that this is already in the works and that nothing that the RAC says can stop it. Mr. Snyder said that the RAC functions to advise the Board of Directors and that the Board can stop a fare increase.

Mr. Snyder said that the Board, on numerous occasions, has asked the GM whether or not he has run proposals by the RAC. He added that such a suggestion to run this by the RAC could be added to Ms. Iacomini’s motion.

Mr. Moore said that he would like to hear Ms. Iacomini’s language again and said that he would also forward to RAC members the language that he proposed earlier in the meeting.

Ms. Bracmort asked if it the RAC might want to add language that called for information to be shared with the RAC by the General Manager or imply that the RAC would be following up.

Ms. Iacomini asked to clarify her motion, and read the following:

“The RAC, on behalf of riders, finds the proposal of a mid-fiscal year fare increase disquieting. The RAC does not feel any such proposal should be considered without full public hearing, including consultation with the RAC.”

Mr. Snyder said that he would like for the RAC to express its concern that the information was not presented to the RAC before it was brought to the Board of Directors.

Ms. White said that the RAC should advocate for greater openness in the budget process. Dr. Bracmort said that the Board would gather that information from the resolution presented. Dr. Conn said that the RAC should also stress the need for inclusiveness.

Mr. Moore asked whether it would be possible to add in a statement opposing the automatic fare increases. Ms. Iacomini said that she didn’t think that should be added.

Ms. Holland called the question and Mr. Pasek read the text of the motion.

The RAC then voted on the motion put forward by Ms. Iacomini:

In favor: Mr. Snyder, Dr Bracmort, Mr. Cerny, Dr. Conn, Mr. Cortinez, Ms. Daniels, Ms. Holland, Ms. Iacomini, Mr. Moore, Ms. Sandler, Ms. Stone, Ms. White

Opposed: none

Abstentions: Mr. Maxit

The motion was approved (12-0-1)

IX. Additional Items:

Mr. Pasek polled RAC members for their availability for an upcoming railcar tour.

There was also discussion among RAC members on scheduling an upcoming Budget Committee meeting. Mr. Moore suggested that the meeting be held on Tuesday, September 18th.

X. Adjournment:

Mr. Snyder adjourned the meeting at 8:35 p.m.