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May 11, 2016

To Chairman Evans & WMATA Board Members

Re: RAC recommendation on SafeTrack fares

As a body representing Metro customers, the Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) agrees that rider safety must be WMATA's highest priority. As such, the RAC applauds WMATA's decision to implement the SafeTrack program, an intensive effort to restore the Metrorail system to safe operating levels. While such a decision cannot be made lightly, given its significant impact on timely service, years of neglect and failure to properly maintain Metrorail have made it necessary to shut down and repair large portions of the system. We understand fully that these necessary repairs cannot be done in a timely manner during the regular track work schedule.

WMATA has indicated that it plans to charge customers peak fares during SafeTrack periods when service will be significantly reduced and travel times increased. WMATA has already seen a decline in ridership as a result of safety concerns, unreliable service, and subpar customer service, as well as some external influences. Moreover, many riders are likely to seek alternative forms of transit during the periods that their commutes are affected by the SafeTrack program. In order to retain ridership in the long term, we believe WMATA should make every effort to build good will with its ridership, especially during these periods of intensive maintenance. Charging peak fares to customers while experiencing continuous track outages for long periods of time only serves to further diminish customers' trust in WMATA.

The RAC has long called on WMATA to improve its interactions with riders, not only through a safer and more reliable system, but also through its customer service policies. And while the RAC is optimistic about General Manager Wiedefeld's stated goal of improving WMATA's customer service, the RAC thinks that this philosophy should be visible over the coming months, within the SafeTrack program.

For the many reasons cited above, the RAC membership has voted to recommend eliminating peak fares for riders impacted by SafeTrack work. While we understand that reducing fares during these rebuilding efforts could negatively impact revenues in the short term, we believe that treating customers fairly will serve WMATA as it aims to regain customers in the coming months and years. We also understand there may be some complexity in determining which specific periods or trips during this rebuilding effort warrant fare adjustments. The RAC is offering to collaborate with WMATA staff to find a feasible path through the complexity that would acknowledge the riders' pain during this unprecedented reduction in service. We have also come up with some ideas for helping riders as they search for alternative travel options, and would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with staff on those as well.

Thank you for considering our recommendation. I want to express my sincere appreciation to the Board for always encouraging us to voice our opinion.

Sincerely,

Barbara Hermanson

Barbara Hermanson
Chair, Riders' Advisory Council

cc: Paul Wiedefeld
Lynn Bowersox