

TO: Riders' Advisory Council
FROM: Barbara Hermanson, John Pasek
DATE: May 1, 2013
SUBJ: **Recap of 4/24 Listening Session in Alexandria**

On Wednesday, April 24, the RAC held its first Listening Session at 6:30pm at the Charles Houston Recreation Center in Alexandria. This is a recap of that session.

Outreach:

- Meeting was announced via press release on Metro website and sent out via the @wmata Twitter account.
- Email invitations/notices were sent to members of Metro's Board of Directors, civic associations in the City of Alexandria, the Arlington County Civic Federation, the Transportation advisory commissions in Arlington and Alexandria, and business associations/business improvement districts in Arlington and Alexandria.
- Approximately 150 "take-one" flyers announcing the event were distributed at the Braddock Road and King Street Metrorail stations the day prior to the event.

Participants:

Approximately 25-30 people were in attendance. Riders present were primarily from Alexandria and Arlington, many of whom use Metro to travel into DC and/or Maryland. Also present were several members of the RAC, Mary Hynes from the WMATA Board, 2 representatives from the City of Alexandria, transportation-related individuals from other organizations, and a few members of the press.

Format:

After introductory remarks from Ben Ball, Barbara spoke more about the objectives and introduced the format of the session. We divided up into 3 tables of 7-10 individuals, each with a cross-section of attendees. Each table had 1 or more note-takers, typically from the RAC. We encouraged riders to provide feedback on any Metro subject, big or small. After approximately 45 minutes, we reassembled the entire group, and we shared the comments from each table. The session ended at approximately 8pm.

Information Shared:

The information shared by the teams included a broad range of bus and rail topics, including communication, safety, security, schedules, customer service, fares and finance. The topic that surfaced most often seemed to be communication of all kinds – signs, alerts, emergency updates, schedules, service changes and more.

Recap of Comments:

Table 1:

- Riders raised concerns about Metro's communications – especially its timeliness, noting that they rely on Twitter from other users rather than MetroAlerts
- Concern with the frequency of fare increases.
- Riders felt that weekend and evening single-tracking was an inconvenience, and noted that evening work now seems to begin earlier in the evening.

- Rush+ : Riders said that they didn't think the Rush+ changes were communicated well and that alternative bus service offered doesn't provide a good alternative to Metrorail.
- Riders felt that the ads in the *Express* announcing upcoming weekend trackwork were helpful, and one participant said that the best information she received about trackwork was through an email sent out by her employer.
- Riders also noted that the new LCD screens on station managers' kiosks that use a red screen to highlight rail delays do not help color-blind passengers.
- Participants felt that Metro should enact a "Riders' Bill of Rights" that spells out when Metro should provide refunds to customers for delayed trips and what they should expect in terms of employee/Transit Police response to incidents.
- Participants also raised concerns about Metro's lack of dedicated funding.

Table 2:

- Riders said that there were still issues around Metro's communications – the signage posted alerting riders to weekend trackwork is good, but it's not located in places where riders can easily see it.
- Riders were glad that Metro's Trip Planner shows alternatives
- Riders were concerned that there aren't good bus alternatives to rail service – if there are rail delays, they're stuck without other options.
- Improvements needed to bus lines – specifically the 10B, Y-lines in Maryland.
- Frustration about escalator repairs.
- Riders' also raised concerns about the accuracy of Metro's PIDS (train arrival) displays.

Table 3:

- Riders had concerns about trackwork – that they're not always sure when/where trackwork is happening. They said that if trains are operating on very long headways because of single-tracking, there should be scheduled provided/posted to help passengers plan their trips.
- Riders also felt that off-peak headway were too wide.
- Participants liked the information provided by the LCD displays but felt that they needed to be more of them and in locations where passengers could see them better.
- Safety – Riders felt safe when they were on trains and buses, but less so at outdoor rail stations, especially at night or when there were few people around. They also felt less safe walking to/from stations parking lots and felt that more lighting should be provided around stations.
- One participant noted that the escalator flow at Pentagon City causes crowding because riders stop at the bottom of the escalator.
- Riders said that they also noted more eating/drinking on the system now than in the past and this has degraded cleanliness.
- Participants said that they didn't have concerns with youth behavior – "young people are young people."

What I learned (Barbara):

The session reinforced the idea that opinions and perspectives on Metro are as diverse as its riders. At times, the same rider experience can be viewed by different individuals in a positive, negative or neutral light. What matters to one rider may not matter to others. As members of the RAC, it's essential that each of us finds a way to go far beyond our own personal experience toward understanding the experiences of other riders. This session provided one good avenue for doing that. I suggest that we consider holding these as often as our schedules permit, so we can reach every area that Metro serves.