

# WMATA Riders Advisory Council Signage Presentation Feedback

Drafted by Customer Service Committee  
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**Overview:** In July 2014, Michael McBride, Manager of Public Art and Environmental Graphic Design for WMATA, presented the Riders' Advisory Council with an overview of concepts for revised station signage. He explained that these are early ideas in the process of designing and installing improved signage throughout the Metrorail system. WMATA is trying to increase standardization of its signage and prioritize the information presented to riders. Examples of existing signage and proposed concepts for new station signs were shown. (The presentation slides are available on the RAC portion of the WMATA website, under the July 9 meeting.)

Mr. McBride asked the RAC for feedback on the new signage concepts. The RAC Customer Service Committee has taken the comments gathered from the meeting and later emails, compiled and analyzed them, and are presenting some recommendations for WMATA to consider going forward. In addition, we also raise some questions which will be relevant as WMATA moves forward to finalize and approve any changes to signage.

**Analysis of Feedback:** Twelve RAC members actively participated in the Signage discussion. Two topics received the bulk of the comments:

- The proposed move to utilize "Cardinal Directions" for each Metro Line, based on the approximate location of each line's termini relative to each other, and
- Changes in readability and understanding of proposed new signage

Other topics that each triggered a few responses included SALs (Station Ahead List signs), ADA compliance, and Maps. Some general comments and issues for the future were also mentioned.

Cardinal Directions. Virtually all RAC members expressed serious concerns about the proposed move to cardinal directions; only two noted a positive response. Among the concerns expressed:

- People don't conceptualize the region in terms of cardinal directions
- The directions do not match the geography
- Riders tend to be destination-based, not direction-based

Signage Readability. Many RAC members mentioned positive aspects to the proposed changes. Two additionally expressed some concerns. Among the positive points, two were most often expressed:

- Use of more universal signage
- Simplification/standardization, larger print size and color contrast

Readability concerns included the use of all capital letters (e.g., with proposed Accessible Entrance signage) and the need for more spacing on and between signs.

**Other Comments:** Other comments were that the signage changes would not provide significant improvements for the following scenarios:

- Riders with limited English skills or impaired vision
- Riders trying to quickly understand what station they are in, which platform has the train going to their destination, and which of the multiple lines stops at which stations.

Others expressed fundamental concerns, questioning whether the benefits would be worth the expense. One suggested a preference for increased spending on station manager training instead.

**Recommendations:**

1. Cardinal directions: Do not use cardinal directions on any sign unless the sign includes some other description as well. It is more critical that signs include a direction widely understood, such as the name of the last station on the line, or “toward” DC, Maryland or Virginia, or “to downtown DC,” or “via” a landmark station.
2. For platforms serving 2 or more lines, consider displaying a portion of the System map instead of the parallel horizontal lines used in current and proposed SAL designs.
3. Include more Station Name signs along the platforms.
4. Make signage as clear as possible to Metro’s multiple audiences served by maximizing the use of universal signage and dual language signs for critical sign categories (e.g., emergency).
5. Improve signage readability:
  - Add space between sign text (e.g., between yellow & green line info and between days of the week for operating hours).
  - Minimize the use of upper case lettering.
6. Consider ways to supplement signage space limitations by including multiple reference points in arriving train announcements (direction, landmark stations, terminus station, state, etc.).
7. Research signage of other rail systems (if not done already).
8. As always, look for ways to maximize the benefit of new signage at minimal cost. Suggestions include:
  - Pilot options prior to broader adoption.
  - Limit replacements to when/where there is a compelling need, such as station additions and terminus changes.
  - Use modular sign components, to make updates more quickly and inexpensively.

**Next steps:** RAC members are interested in understanding the next steps for WMATA to generate additional ideas and refine the options into a proposal for Board action. We are also interested in the timeline and decision points, as well as the response from internal WMATA reviews, so we can continue our involvement in this process. One RAC member suggested that at one level, there was too much information in the concept presentation, while at another level, there was not enough context, making more detailed input difficult at this time. We look forward to additional opportunities to learn more about both the concepts and details.

**Conclusions:** The RAC membership is very appreciative that WMATA is looking ahead to the next generation of signage and is seeking our input. Despite some concern that an overhaul of rail station signage would be extremely costly, we recognize that it is a significant element in WMATA’s communications to Metrorail riders. We are happy to provide our feedback on the signage proposal and look forward to further involvement as the planning continues.