

**Special Riders' Advisory Council Meeting**  
**Concerning NH-1 Service Changes**  
**October 20, 2009**

**I. Call to Order:**

Ms. Zinkl called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m.

The following members of the Riders' Advisory Council were present for this special meeting:

Diana Zinkl, Chair, District of Columbia  
Kelsi Bracmort, District of Columbia  
Sharon Conn, Prince George's County  
Frank DeBernardo, Prince George's County  
Penny Everline, Arlington County  
Chris Farrell, Montgomery County  
Carl Seip, At-Large/District of Columbia

Ms. Zinkl provided some background on the issue of the reroute of the NH-1 bus line that serves the National Harbor. She explained that several members of the public came to the Council's September meeting to express their concerns with the recent changes to the NH-1's route and schedule. Ms. Zinkl said that this meeting was for R.A.C. members and members of the public in attendance to learn more about Metro's decision-making process and policies as they relate to changing bus routes and schedules.

Ms. Zinkl then asked Council members and members of the public who were present to introduce themselves.

In addition to the members of the R.A.C. listed above, the following individuals were present at this meeting:

Linda Martin, Local 25 member

- Louis Marshall, Gaylord employee, Local 25 member, Oxon Hill resident and NH-1 bus rider
- Catherine Fulks, Local 25 member
- Jim Hamre, Director of Bus Planning, Metro
- Donald Tapp, Superintendent, Southern Avenue Division, Metro

## **II. Public Comment:**

Ms. Zinkl invited members of the public who were present at the meeting to make any comments, if they wished.

Ms. Martin thanked the Council for having a meeting on this issue and said that the union has had meetings with members of the Prince George's County Council regarding the NH-1. She added that the management of the Gaylord Hotel has agreed to send a letter to Jack Johnson, the Prince George's County Executive asking that the NH-1 be changed back to serve its former terminal at Southern Avenue Metrorail station.

Mr. Marshall said that there wasn't any notice to the public prior to the route change. He also noted that he now has no choice but to walk to work because of the revised route and schedule, and that he is not the only employee that has to do so. He said that some employees have to catch a cab to work now, or ride their bicycles. Mr. Marshall said that the new routing is inconvenient and costs riders more money.

Ms. Fulks said that she didn't understand the logic behind the new routing for the NH-1.

## **III. Discussion of NH-1 Route and Changes:**

Mr. Hamre provided some background information on how Metrobus routes are structured and funded. He explained that there are two types of Metrobus routes:

1. *Regional Routes:* These comprise approximately 70% of Metrobus service; these routes are funded by all of the Metro compact jurisdictions;
2. *Non-Regional Routes:* These routes comprise the other 30% of Metrobus service and are operated at the request of individual jurisdictions. Mr. Hamre noted that the NH-1 is a non-regional Metrobus route.

Mr. Hamre also explained Metro's process for making changes to service. He said that Metro service planners work with operations personnel to make changes to bus service, and that Metro usually makes major service changes two times per year (in December and June) and additional service changes in September and March. Mr. Hamre also explained that the changes to the NH-1 were not included specifically with the changes proposed as part of Metro's FY2010 budget, but rather that the change was made at the request of the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Metro Board members representing Prince George's County. He said that Metro also has a formal study process to recommend route changes, and gave examples of service changes along the 30s and 16<sup>th</sup> Street bus lines as examples of that process.

Mr. Hamre then provided some background on the NH-1 route. He said that the route was initiated as an initial service to the National Harbor development and as the development built out, ridership was expected to increase to approximately 4000-5000 riders/day. He said that there were also longer-term plans to extend service over the Wilson Bridge into Virginia. He added that the NH-1 also served as a placeholder for future improvements to transit service along the Indian Head Highway corridor.

In response to a question from Ms. Zinkl, Mr. Hamre noted that ridership for the NH-1 has not reached the 4000-5000 riders/day level but that the route has decent patronage. In response to an additional question from Ms. Zinkl as to whether the route's on-time performance has improved since it was rerouted, Mr. Tapp noted that he has only been with Metro for about a month and could not directly compare the service before and after the reroute, but that the route has good on-time performance.

Mr. Seip asked if there was any information from the Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD) about crime or other concerns at the Southern Avenue station that could have been a factor in the reroute. Mr. Hamre said that while there had been some reports, there was nothing specific on which the MTPD could take action. He added that MTPD has been asked to increase their presence at the station, though they do not have enough officers to assign an officer there at all times. Mr. Tapp noted that he also has supervisors monitor both the Southern Avenue and Branch Avenue stations.

Dr. Conn asked about the public hearings that authorized the route change and the Board's resolution approving the change. Mr. Hamre explained that the proposed change was included with bus service changes and reductions that were proposed as part of Metro's FY2010 budget and that Metro received approximately 160 comments from riders specifically regarding the proposed changes to the NH-1. In response to a question from Ms. Zinkl as to whether the number of comments received were in line with the NH-1's ridership, Mr. Hamre responded that the comments on the NH-1 represented about 5% of the total received, though the NH-1 carries less than 1% of Metrobus' ridership.

Dr. Conn asked how the Gaylord was able to have this route changed. Mr. Hamre responded that Gaylord made the request for a route change and Metro evaluated its request as part of its normal process.

Dr. Bracmort asked if there was anything that the R.A.C. could do to get the route changed back. Mr. Hamre explained the process to have the service changed and a possible timeline for that change. In response to a question from Dr. Bracmort as to whether the route could be changed sooner, Mr. Hamre said that he would recommend

the last Sunday in March for making any changes to the route, as that would coincide with other Metrobus changes. Dr. Bracmort said that Metro needs to be mindful that other people besides Gaylord workers use the route and are being affected by the reroute.

Mr. DeBernardo asked Ms. Martin about the change in the Gaylord's position on routing service to Southern Avenue. Ms. Martin responded that the issue was brought up in collective bargaining discussions with Gaylord management and that the route change has also had a negative effect on Gaylord's operations.

Ms. Everline asked whether many tourists use this bus route. Mr. Hamre said that Metro doesn't collect information that distinguishes "tourist" riders from other riders, but that the proportion of tourists using Metrobus is low compared with those that use Metrorail. Ms. Martin said that workers haven't seen any increase in ridership on the route since it was changed in August and, in fact, many have noticed that ridership has decreased. Mr. Hamre added that to attract tourists, a route would need to have a better frequency of service (i.e. every 15 minutes) than the NH-1 currently has. Ms. Everline noted that the decline in tourists seemed to disprove the assumptions upon which the route was changed.

Ms. Zinkl said that people who testified at the hearings in the spring said that they had concerns about safety at Southern Avenue. Mr. Hamre responded that there is a difference between riders' perceptions of safety and the number of actual incidents that it's very difficult to address perceptions.

Dr. Conn said that the stations at Southern Avenue and Branch Avenue are somewhat isolated and that many people have a fear of the Southern Avenue because of its proximity to the District of Columbia. She suggested that there are more options near the Naylor Road station and that the NH-1 should be rerouted there instead.

Ms. Zinkl said that she has safety concerns when using suburban stations with large parking lots. Ms. Martin added that the Branch Avenue station is very isolated and that employees are concerned because there is not a lot of pedestrian traffic at the station. Mr. Hamre noted that from Prince George's County's perspective, Branch Avenue may be a better location for the service because it is a hub for "TheBus" routes, which are run by the County.

Mr. Farrell asked whether "TheBus" service was equivalent to other local services, such as Montgomery County's Ride On. Mr. Hamre said that it isn't an equivalent service, as Ride On has over 360 buses and operates with no greater than 30-minute headways, while "TheBus" has only 65 buses and operates on 60-minute headways for most of its

routes. Mr. Hamre noted that Metro, rather than “TheBus” was selected to operate the NH-1 route because it had sufficient buses on hand – “TheBus” would have had to order additional buses to operate the service, which would have delayed its start-up.

Dr. Bracmort asked whether another public hearing would be required to return the route to its original alignment. Mr. Hamre said that he wasn’t sure whether a hearing would be required or not, though he expected that a hearing would be required. Dr. Conn inquired as to whether Mr. Hamre could speed up the public hearing process and any resulting service changes. Mr. Hamre responded that Metro is trying to “regularize” the timing of its service changes. He and Mr. Pasek, the R.A.C. staff coordinator, provided an overview of the required steps in the public hearing process. Ms. Zinkl noted that as winter approaches, the situation of having people walk along the highway to access National Harbor will become even worse from a safety standpoint.

Ms. Everline asked whether there would be additional costs incurred with the NextBus system if the route was changed outside of a regular schedule change. Mr. Hamre said that there wouldn’t be additional costs, but that the route would not work on NextBus until buses were updated when the next “regular” service change occurred.

There was additional discussion as to whether Metro could simply start buses earlier from Branch Avenue on the weekends. Mr. Hamre responded that if buses left from Branch Avenue any earlier than they do presently, they would depart before any connecting transit service had arrived, meaning that NH-1 riders would have no way to access the route except to drive to Branch Avenue, and if that were the case, they would likely just drive all the way to National Harbor.

Mr. Marshall said that since the route change, there are fewer tourists using the NH-1. He also noted that because the bus now travels to Branch Avenue via the Beltway, tourists don’t have the option to take transit to shops and restaurants outside of the National Harbor development. He also reiterated his concern about the safety of employees who are forced to walk to National Harbor because bus service is unavailable, explaining that the road to National Harbor is poorly lit, lacks sidewalks and is, in places, isolated. He described an incident in which a car approached him in a threatening manner when he was walking in an isolated area. and He noted that employees of other businesses at National Harbor have also been affected by this change, and that some employees were quitting their jobs because of transit issues.

Mr. DeBernardo said that by folding the hearings on the NH-1 into the hearings on service reductions associated with the FY2010 budget, it gave the impression that the

changes to the route were being made as part of the budget. He said that it would have been better for Metro to hold separate hearings on the NH-1 service change.

Mr. Hamre gave further information about the timeline required for Metro to make changes to bus service, and Mr. Tapp provided information about the “pick” process for Metro’s bus operators to choose their runs. Mr. Hamre also noted that the Metro Board of Directors, with input from the Maryland Department of Transportation, would have the responsibility for approving any changes to the service.

Mr. Hamre asked attendees how Metro should present these kinds of service changes to the public in the future. Dr. Bracmort suggested that Metro reach out to neighborhood associations and Advisory Neighborhood Commissions and also suggested that Metro make the advertisements it posts in buses brighter and more visible. Ms. Zinkl suggested that Metro should be more proactive in terms of its outreach and that it should go to locations where its riders are already, rather than requiring riders to seek out information about changes in service. Dr. Conn suggested Metro reach out to local politicians and community organizations to publicize its meetings.

Mr. Hamre noted that all of the suggestions would require additional resources to implement and might be difficult in light of Metro’s budget challenges.

Mr. Seip suggested that Metro could place signs providing information on upcoming hearings at visible locations on bus fareboxes.

Mr. DeBernardo asked Ms. Martin if there was anything else the Council could do to advance this issue. Ms. Martin said that she would ask for the Council’s support moving forward and that she would be back in touch once the union heard back from the Prince George’s County Executive.

Ms. Zinkl noted that the Metro Board would make the decision regarding any changes to service and said that she would include information about this meeting in her update to the Board which would occur at its monthly meeting later in the week.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.