



RE: FY 2018 Budget Proposal

February 5, 2017

Dear Chairman Evans:

The Riders' Advisory Council (RAC) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the FY 2018 budget proposal submitted by General Manager Paul Wiedefeld last fall. The RAC's Budget and Finance Committee, followed by the full RAC, has deliberated on the proposed budget and submits these comments for your consideration.

First, we wish to commend WMATA on its proposal to increase the frequency of Blue Line rush hour service from every 12 minutes to every 8 minutes. Poor Blue Line service during weekdays has been a significant and persistent source of frustration for many riders who have complained to the RAC. We strongly urge the Board to keep this particular proposal in the final budget. In addition, the RAC supports the proposal to turn some local bus routes (such as the S2 and S4 routes) into limited-stops during periods of low ridership. We believe this will make these bus trips quicker and more convenient for most riders.

On the other hand, there are aspects of the budget that concern us. Broadly speaking, we are troubled by WMATA's proposal to eliminate numerous bus routes entirely. As highlighted during the public hearing on January 30, 2017, thousands of riders in aggregate rely on these bus routes to commute to and from work on a daily basis or to access vital health care. Many residents shared that, without these bus routes, they would simply have no alternative or affordable option of getting to their jobs, jeopardizing their financial livelihoods. We strongly urge WMATA's Board to spare as many bus routes as possible from elimination, even if this requires a modest fare increase from \$1.75 to \$2.00.

The RAC respectfully requests that WMATA prioritize ridership numbers above cost recovery or subsidy-per-rider when calculating which, if any, bus routes to cut. Ultimately, these decisions will affect riders' livelihoods in a highly significant way. Thus, we feel it is important to weigh the impact of the various budget proposals in human terms rather than just in financial terms.

Given the many concessions that riders will have to make—with regards to both fares and service—the RAC would also like to propose an addition to the FY 2018 budget plan. We request that the discounted bus-bus, rail-bus, and bus-rail transfer windows (currently 2 hours) be restored to their former length of 3 hours. Not only will this help build goodwill with riders at a minimal cost to WMATA, but this will also help riders catch transfers more easily once trains and buses begin running less frequently.

While the RAC understands that tough decisions and sacrifices must be made as a result of WMATA's current budgetary constraints, riders have repeatedly borne the consequences of lax maintenance

and oversight. The service cuts proposed under the FY 2018 budget are in addition to sacrifices (such as late night service elimination) that the Board has already enacted. As such, we urge any service cuts or fare increases in the approved version of the budget to be accompanied by the requirement to establish a public plan to improve customer service, transparency, and accountability at all levels of WMATA in order to ameliorate and prevent the conditions now forcing us to make such tough choices.

Furthermore, we strongly encourage the Board and management to continue pushing jurisdictions to increase their contributions to WMATA as a way of mitigating possible service reductions. We applaud the advocacy efforts undertaken so far by the Board and management in this regard. The RAC would be glad to help support this endeavor in the year ahead.

Finally, the RAC has certain questions that we believe remain unanswered in the budget proposal. We respectfully submit the questions below to the Board and WMATA's staff and request a response in writing by Friday, March 3rd:

1. How much additional revenue per year does WMATA expect from the proposed fare increases? Could WMATA staff share their fiscal projections with the RAC?
2. Will senior fares also increase under the proposed budget and, if so, by how much?
3. What was the process for selecting the bus routes that were proposed for elimination? Why were certain bus routes that passed all five threshold criteria still considered for elimination?
4. If certain bus routes are ultimately eliminated, what is WMATA's plan for responding to all riders who said they would be affected by those cuts during the public comment period?
5. What is WMATA's long-term strategy for increasing ridership on the system and boosting the number of riders who purchase SelectPass?
6. In light of the announcement that about 1,000 positions at WMATA will be cut, could the General Manager elaborate more on where those positions will fall and how those cuts might impact customer service?
7. Recently, WMATA announced that it has identified two new sources of money that could be used to help limit fare hikes and/or service cuts. How will the Board factor those new funding sources into the FY 2018 budget?

Thank you very much for considering our feedback. We truly appreciate the opportunity to contribute our comments. We look forward to hearing from you soon and continuing our work together during the year ahead.

Sincerely,

Sietse Goffard, RAC Budget and Finance Committee Chair  
Katherine Kortum, RAC Chair  
Members of the WMATA Riders' Advisory Council (RAC)

cc: General Manager Paul Wiedefeld  
WMATA Board of Directors