

Metro Delegation Roundtable  
Wednesday, June 15, 2011  
Opening Remarks from Richard Sarles  
Metro's General Manager and Chief Executive Officer

Thank you, Senator Mikulski and members of the Metro delegation for the opportunity to be with you today to discuss our number one priority at Metro – Safety. With me today is WMATA Chief Safety Officer James Dougherty.

Let me take this opportunity to say thank you for your unwavering support of our safety initiatives: in particular, we appreciate your most recent efforts in helping us retain our PRIIA FY'11 funding, which is allowing us to continue to improve the safety of our system and comply with recommendations from NTSB, FTA, and other oversight agencies. Senator Mikulski, I want to especially thank you for your personal leadership and stewardship in ensuring that Metro remains on a path of improvement.

Following our meeting in May 2010, at Senator Mikulski's request, I provided you with a list of WMATA's "Top 10" safety priorities. While I will submit a fuller update on each priority, I want to spend just a minute highlighting our progress in a few key areas.

## **NTSB and FTA Recommendations**

Soon after I became General Manager last year, I heard from the NTSB that they were dissatisfied with Metro's rate of progress addressing safety recommendations. I am pleased to report that we have turned that around.

Over the last 12 months, we have closed more than 100 corrective action items and are hopeful that NTSB will agree to close 11 more once they have reviewed documentation we recently submitted.

Among our milestones of the last year, we have installed 148 of 178 total guarded #8 turnouts on the Metrorail system and we are on schedule to complete the remaining 30 by mid-2012.

In 2010 we completed the installation of rollback protection on all of our 1000 series rail cars. Our 2000 and 3000 series cars have also received rollback protection as part of their rehabilitation. We have been working on our 4000 series cars and expect to complete the installation by August of this year.

And we are in the midst of designing new rail cars to replace the 1000 series— at a cost of \$689 million, with the first delivery of cars by the end of 2013.

In addition to the written report we have provided to the delegation, we have received letters from both NTSB and FTA which commend Metro on our safety progress over the last year.

It is noteworthy that since we last met, we have undertaken a \$5 billion 6-year capital program to improve safety and reliability for our customers and move the system to a critically needed state of good repair.

Last week, I announced that we are changing our approach to scheduled construction outages to both accelerate our project schedules – which will allow us to complete NTSB work sooner and minimize the inconvenience to our customers – especially during weekend travel.

It also allows us to more aggressively repair and replace the escalators in our stations. We have 588 escalators on the system, many over 30 years old (which is the life span of an escalator if

properly maintained) made by various companies, some of which are no longer in business, making parts difficult to obtain.

Since the beginning of 2011, on average 14% of our escalators were not running – over half were turned off intentionally to modernize, inspect and make them safe.

As part of our rebuilding program, Metro is investing \$148 million to rehabilitate and replace nearly 153 escalators. This important investment is important for both customer convenience and safety.

Our rebuilding program dedicates the first **one billion** dollars of our capital program to NTSB recommended safety work. These crucial investments are not only making an immediate difference to our current riders, but going forward they will also provide needed support for the Dulles extension.

In addition to our equipment and infrastructure safety progress, I also want to update the delegation on Metro's training and safety culture advancements.

## **Training**

After strengthening our in-house safety department by bringing in expert transportation safety professionals, along with rail operations and emergency management professionals, with decades of experience, we developed a new Roadway Worker Protection manual based on industry best practices.

In fact, although Metro is not subject to Federal Railroad Administration regulation, we based the program on that standard, and we are proud that our program has been recognized as a model for the Transit industry.

I am pleased to report that more than 4,200 Metro employees have received RWP training, including our track workers, train operators, inspectors – virtually everyone in the rail operations and construction area – including me.

And I can tell you first hand that it is making a difference. In fact, the instructor of my class, who has a real passion for helping people understand the value of safe work practices, told me that he is seeing a shift in attitudes among our workforce.

However, safety requires constant vigilance, and training will continue for new hires and contractors, and be refreshed for current employees.

## **Safety Culture**

Safety Culture improvements are sometimes hard to define, because culture change is the result of the cumulative impact of many actions, and it takes place gradually.

I can point to multiple initiatives that show a shift in the way Metro is embracing safety – from our new Board Safety Committee, and its policies and engagement -- to our Memorandum of Understanding and close work with the Tristate Oversight Committee, to our 15 safety officers who have gotten out of their offices and into the field to establish a true partnership with our rail operations personnel.

Tangible evidence of a new safety culture includes the development of new System Safety Program Plan that guides procedures at Metro to ensure we are fully compliant with all FTA and OSHA regulations.

It includes the actions of the local safety committees, area safety committees, departmental safety committees, and the executive safety committee – all of which have been established to address worker safety concerns and advance a safety first culture.

Tangible evidence includes the positive feedback from employees about the *Lessons Learned* circular we distribute to alert employees regarding potential safety hazards. It includes the Champions of Safety employee recognition program that highlights safety success. And it includes the Vital Signs report we put in place to monitor safety metrics and improve transparency.

But sometimes less tangible evidence can also make a statement about safety progress. I want to share such an example with you.

Recently, as you may have heard, we had a number of rules violations in our rail yards that did not result in injuries, but certainly were of concern to us.

In response – we are revising some of our training protocols, increasing field evaluations, stepping up supervision in the yards,

and issuing new standard operating procedures to increase focus between transportation and mechanical groups on yard moves.

We have also been very, very focused on accountability, and in some instances that means discipline that ranges from retraining, to termination of employment.

Last Friday, more than a dozen track workers made an unscheduled appearance on my office doorstep at 8 am to appeal for the reinstatement of one of their colleagues who had been terminated for a rule violation – specifically, he did not fulfill his duties in protecting the movement of a rail maintenance vehicle.

I supported the termination because I and we take very seriously every employee's responsibility to protect themselves and the safety of their coworkers.

A very genuine discussion ensued about the value of this employee -- his coworkers thought he just had a bad day -- and my deep concern for their safety. Together with our deputy general manager for rail operations, we explained very pointedly that we don't want to attend any of their funerals. That we don't



want to inform their families that they're not coming home. And that's what it means to take safety seriously. It's not just talk.

The level of focus we need to have at Metro to prevent accidents means one person's bad day can impact their coworker's lives.

I tell this story because it is an intangible sign of change -- when I first arrived at Metro, this conversation would never have occurred. The fact that these employees were engaging in a passionate dialogue about what it means to be safe and what the right level of discipline is for those who fail in their duties – this indicates a very different level of interest and engagement from our frontline.

These tangible and intangible signs of progress are evidence of an organization in transition – and to be sure Metro has started to turn the corner and lay the foundation for what could become a model system.

Your continued support of the funding that is the lifeblood of this turnaround is absolutely vital to our success. PRIAA funding, together with the local match, underwrites nearly 40% of our capital safety and rebuilding program.

Without PRIIA and federal formula funding, the progress we have made will be at grave risk. In fact we would slide backward. What will happen if we do not receive our federal funding in FY 12? Let me be clear on this point – safety will come first. We will use whatever funds we have available to assure that the system is safe. Everything else will be on the table; unfortunately our customers, your constituents, will bear the burden of cuts through more frequent train delays; less reliable trains and buses; deteriorated station conditions; longer lines and delayed customer information.

On a 35 year-old system that has for too long deferred maintenance, any further deferral will ultimately jeopardize safety. We are trying to dig our way out of a hole – years of equipment and infrastructure neglect have taken their toll and we are working to bring the system to a state of good repair. If that is interrupted, it will ultimately affect both the safety and reliability of the system.

We appreciate this opportunity today to focus on Metro's safety challenges and thank you and the delegation for your continued leadership and support.

I am happy to answer your questions.

