

Via boardofdirectors@wmata.com

January 6, 2010

Board of Directors
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)
600 Fifth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001-2693

Re: **BOARD ITEM: FY'2010 OPERATING BUDGET GAP**
MetroRiders.Org Urges WMATA Board to Consider Alternatives to General Manager's
Proposed Bus and Rail Service Reductions Through June 30, 2010

Chairman Graham and Members of the Board:

MetroRiders.Org, representing the interests of transit users in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, urges the WMATA Board to consider alternatives to the General Manager's proposed bus and rail service reductions to reduce expenditures by an estimated \$4 million between March 28, when they would take effect, and June 30, the end of WMATA's FY2010, during your special board meeting tomorrow.

The proposed service reductions would seriously impact Metro's rail and bus riders. Metrorail riders across the region are very concerned about the headway reductions to 30 minutes in many areas. This change would make Metrorail one of the nation's least frequent systems off-peak. That's not appropriate for one of the nation's largest and most popular transit systems and the system serving our Nation's Capital.

We understand that you must act quickly to address the budget shortfall for the current fiscal year. However, we are very fearful that this reduction will further depress ridership, especially in outer parts of the system where people often drive and park at Metro stations, by turning Metro into much more of a commuter-only system rather than a subway people can rely on at all times.

At the recent public sessions conducted in the District, Maryland and Virginia to consider WMATA's large anticipated FY2011 operating budget gap, many riders commented that they would much prefer a fare increase during late nights and weekends, preserving ridership choice, to a service reduction. We realize that moderate service reductions can take place quickly without public hearings, while a fare increase requires public hearings. Nevertheless, we urge you to take advantage of whatever opportunities there will be in future weeks to solicit input from riders for proposed changes for FY2011, so as to determine the best and least painful course of action for the greatest numbers of riders.

The proposed service reductions in Metrobus service are equally disturbing and, we hope, avoidable.

-- Consider Imposing the Anticipated FY2011 Fare Increase Also During the Months of FY2010

MetroRiders.Org in our testimony at the recent public sessions anticipated that Metro system users should expect a fare increase in FY2011 -- effective July 1, 2010, in the approximate annualized amount of about \$37.5 million, reflecting the changes in the cost of living since the last fare increase was implemented. This would reflect the Board's policy favoring biennial fare adjustments according to that formula.

To meet the current FY'2010 estimated deficit, why not follow the pattern of the last fare increase and **impose the planned fare increase for FY2011 to take effect early – during the remaining months of the current FY2010** -- hopefully to eliminate the need for the \$4 million in proposed bus and rail service reductions that would otherwise have to be considered for those months?

This would require speedy public hearings and Board decisionmaking after the General Manager presents his full proposed budget later this month to shape one fare increase that could take effect in late Spring 2010 and continue throughout FY'2011 starting in July.

We hope you will consider this or other alternatives to the General Manager's proposed service reductions during the current fiscal year. Further, we urge you to present various alternatives for public consideration during the upcoming public hearings. For example, you could consider a larger Metrorail fare increase but no headway cuts off-peak, and another with the headway cuts and a smaller fare increase.

Maintaining off-peak service should also be a responsibility of our local jurisdictions. We realize that you also represent local governments that are extremely pinched for money in all areas. Nevertheless, maintaining late-night and weekend service will save your jurisdictions money in the medium- to long-term by avoiding costly road maintenance and facilitating development in transit-adjacent areas. Therefore, we hope you will use your voices in your home jurisdictions to advocate for those local governments to step up and maintain a Metro system that residents of our region can depend upon.

Because the General Manager's proposal for meeting the FY2010 operating budget gap was not first considered by the Finance, Administration and Oversight Committee, we hope the Board will allow extended public comment during tomorrow's special Board meeting.

Sincerely,



Jack Corbett
Director



Kevin Moore
Director