



DC SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION

Adams Morgan Partnership BID ★ Capitol Hill BID ★ Capitol Riverfront BID ★ Coalition for Smarter Growth
Destination DC ★ Downtown DC BID ★ Dupont Circle BID ★ Events DC ★ Federal City Council ★ Georgetown BID
Golden Triangle BID ★ Greater Greater Washington ★ Greater Washington Partnership ★ Mt. Vernon Triangle CID
NoMa BID ★ Rosslyn BID ★ Sierra Club DC Chapter ★ Southwest BID ★ Washington Area Bicyclist Association
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Testimony by Caitlin Rogger, Executive Director

WMATA

FY2023 Budget Hearing

February 8, 2022

Good evening WMATA Board of Directors,

DC Sustainable Transportation (DCST) is a nonprofit organization that brings together business, advocacy, and government entities to make DC a global leader with frequent, rapid, safe, affordable, and reliable transportation to, from, and around DC job centers.

Our members include ten of DC's Business Improvement Districts, the Federal City Council, Events DC, the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the Sierra Club DC chapter, the Greater Washington Partnership, Greater Greater Washington, the Transportation Equity Network, and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association.

DCST supports several elements of the FY2023 budget. By maintaining bus services, improving frequency on some lines, and restoring some of the lines cut during the pandemic, WMATA is ensuring that the essential workers that have held up our economy and services during the pandemic can count on getting where they're going, which is vital to our regional economic and social recovery.

Making bus/rail transfers free for riders is sensible from both an equity and a ridership retention perspective, and we are pleased to see this change made permanent in the 2023 budget.

It's notable that the revenue projections rely on an increase of 135% of rail riders in 2023 (on 2022 ridership), still significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels. While the return of rail riders at this level would bring some comfort financially, not just to WMATA, the uncertainty of the pandemic draws this projection into question and highlights the need for more systemic, regional thinking around how to restore transit ridership. Incentives are nice, but it can't be up to WMATA alone to try and lure riders back.

Having noted these positive features of the 2023 budget, DCST would turn our attention to efforts, which hopefully have started and will ramp up publicly throughout the 2023 budget cycle, to uphold WMATA's financial sustainability in the less immediate but still short term. As for many transit agencies, federal aid has propped up WMATA during this unprecedented period of lost revenue. But as that begins to dry up in 2024, there must be a plan not just in place but fully operational by 2024 to ensure WMATA can survive and, we hope, thrive.

We need not remind those present of the fundamental value of a strong transit system to our economy and society; simply put, the DMV doesn't function as a region without it. But the lack of public dialogue and policymaker attention as to how to deal with this looming issue is of great concern.

Some options include: adjusting the 3% cap on how much DC, Maryland and Virginia's contributions to WMATA's budget can grow (this just makes horse sense given the costs of almost everything rise by more than that). A regional road pricing system that recognizes the great cost that car-based mobility has imposed on the region, from congestion, equity, environmental and health standpoints. Congressional contributions to WMATA's operational budget, as the MetroNow coalition has called for historically. A revitalized plan for raising revenue through WMATA's considerable land ownership. What if each jurisdiction adopted bills similar to the Metro4DC bill currently under consideration in DC, which allocates funding to underwrite residents' transit trips each month?

Most of those options take time to put into place, though adjusting the 3% cap and obtaining Congressional funding for operations might be managed in a year. Shorter-term options that could keep us on a balanced footing while a longer term plan is operationalized could include temporary bailouts from the jurisdictions, or for WMATA to run a pilot or other program that USDOT would fund. These shorter-term ideas are not sustainable approaches. But just last year, WMATA was forced to create a dire "already-off-the-fiscal cliff" budget that took up untold staff hours and created an atmosphere of instability that's no good in a delicate recovery period, only to be called off late in the game by the federal bailout that many expected. Let us show that we can plan more responsibly for the future by not leaving the real plans to the last minute.

Most solutions require a regional lens, and that shows up most clearly for WMATA. We've used this time mainly to focus on 2024 and beyond, because how WMATA uses FY2023 has tremendous implications for its future viability. To plan for that we'll need the region cooperating to its fullest and best ability.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Caitlin Rogger

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DC Sustainable Transportation