



March 2, 2020

Office of the Board Secretary
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
600 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
VIA EMAIL at wmata.com/budget

Re: Docket B20-02: Proposed FY2021 Operating Budget and Related Service and Fare Proposals

Dear Sir/Madam:

I write on behalf of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association. CPCA is a non-profit, membership organization of Cleveland Park residents, founded in 1911. The mission of CPCA is to enhance the quality of life in Cleveland Park by addressing issues of broad-based concern and relevance to support a diverse, thriving, forward-looking neighborhood while preserving its character. Consistent with this mission, CPCA promotes the community's interests in matters affecting Cleveland Park and other parts of the District of Columbia. The availability of reliable, efficient, and comprehensive public transportation is among the most important public services to the well-being of Cleveland Park and the city as a whole. Accordingly, we appreciate WMATA's efforts to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the public transportation system and welcome the opportunity to comment on WMATA's proposals.

1. Multi-Faceted Objectives for WMATA's Mission

Public transit systems are deployed widely to serve as a public good, and should not be treated like a private enterprise. When serving as a public good, the revenue needs to be seen as a constraint rather than an objective. The goal should be to get as much ridership as possible. For public goods, and specifically public transit systems, research has shown that increasing access and frequency will lead to increased revenue.

WMATA should emphasize increasing all ridership as the primary criterion in service planning. For example, in planning services for neighborhood needs, a negative short-term impact on revenue might be necessary to meet the needs for neighborhoods that cannot be met otherwise. Evidence shows that

meeting this need would lead to long-term increases in revenue as well, through increased farebox recovery.¹

External benefits of transportation should be considered in conjunction with ridership and revenue in planning decisions. Investment in public transportation systems leads to external benefits beyond the transportation system, including reduced traffic, reduced air pollution and carbon emissions, and overall increased sustainability for the DC region.

2. Proposed Fare Changes

We are against the imposition of the rail surcharge of \$1 for entries and exits at the new Dulles

Airport Metrorail Station. While we all look forward to the extension of the Metrorail Silver Line to Dulles Airport, the imposition of this surcharge diminishes the benefits of the Metrorail service to Dulles Airport. Further, it is more important for WMATA to encourage the use of Metrorail to Dulles Airport so as to reduce the use of private automobiles with associated environmental costs, consistent with WMATA's environmental mission. Other cities with successful transit systems do not impose such charges. Boston, for example, offers free transportation from Logan airport to anywhere in the city.

We support pricing strategies with the potential to help improve services and increase ridership.

There are helpful elements such as extending off-peak discounts for Metrorail fare to senior/disabled customers to help reduce the load on Metrorail during peak hours. The increased discount for transfers between Metrorail and Metrobus also encourages riders to make full use of the Metro system, combining both Metrorail and Metrobus.

3. Proposed Service Changes

3.1. Metrorail

3.1.1. Improve Service Availability for Early Birds on Weekends

We find it inadequate that Metrorail provides no early morning service on weekends before 7AM on Saturdays and before 8AM on Sundays, ignoring the needs of many "early birds", such as supermarket workers, medical professionals getting off night shifts or getting on early morning shifts, caregivers, travelers taking early morning trains or flights, etc.

It is understandable that the operation of early morning Metrorails on weekends might not be profitable in its own right as the ridership might be relatively low. However, the availability of this service, maybe at a reduced frequency, will provide an essential service to those in need during those hours, as well as reduce the use of private automobiles and the associated environmental costs. Further, not having such service creates incentives for those with early starts or late ends to their work days to use alternative modes of transport rather than public transportation. Not having public transportation available at the time it is needed for them to travel in one direction can be expected to discourage or preclude its use in the other.

¹ See, e.g., <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0965856499000099>,
<https://www.minnpost.com/minnesota-blog-cabin/2013/06/farebox-recovery-economics-public-transit/>

3.1.2. Further Improvements to Service Availability for Late Birds

We support the proposed extension of late night Metrorail service to improve service availability for "late birds". However, the availability of late night service is still compromised. For example, the extension (restoration) of Metrorail service to midnight Monday-Thursday helps meet the needs for many "late birds" but still leave behind many with transportation needs after midnight. Similar considerations apply as for "early birds" discussed above.

3.2. Metrobus

3.2.1. Adjust frequency and hours of service/ Eliminate "lifeline" late night and early morning service if Metrorail hours change

The proposed service change will eliminate early morning/late night trips for bus 96, which provides important service connecting Cleveland Park to Adams Morgan, U Street/14th Street, Union Station, Stadium Armory, Benning Road, and Capitol Heights. **We recommend that bus 96 be removed from this proposed service change as there is no alternative Metrorail or Metrobus service available along much of this route,** therefore, this proposal would create a void in service for customers.

It is not clear from the description whether there will be any reductions to the service frequency for bus 96 during times outside the early morning/late night period. We recommend that no reductions in service frequency be imposed on route 96 as the service frequency is already low (every 24 minutes during daytime outside of rush hours) and, therefore, inconvenient to riders for this route whose travel in one direction or the other would be during this time of day.

3.2.2. Restructure service for efficiency and simplicity

The proposed service change will eliminate routes 30N, 30S and 37. Routes 30N and 30S will be replaced with additional 31, 33 trips between downtown, Georgetown and Friendship Heights Metrorail Station, and additional 32, 36 trips between downtown, Capitol Hill and Naylor Road/Southern Ave Metrorail stations. Routes 32 and 36 would be coordinated with Routes 31 and 33 at major downtown transfer stops to minimize wait times for customers making crosstown trips.

We have concerns about the assumption that connections can be made reliably consistently, especially during the high traffic commuting hours if routes 30N and 30S are consolidated into routes 31/33 and 32/36. In addition, it is important to recognize that making an extra connection is not only time consuming, but also further exposes riders to the weather (wind, rain, snow, chill, heat...), even if the connections are coordinated successfully to minimize wait times.

We urge WMATA to reconsider the proposal to replace routes 30N/30S with 31/33 and 32/36. This change is likely to impose significant inconvenience to riders, and could be expected to result in lost ridership as riders abandon the transit system for more convenient commuting options such as private automobiles.

If such consolidations were to be made for any hours, we agree that WMATA should augment the service frequency for routes 31/33 and 32/36 to match the combined service frequency currently available with routes 30N and 30S, so that the consolidation does not result in an overall reduction in service frequency for this important corridor.

We also recommend that route 37 be retained as this is the only continuous service, express or otherwise, available along the Wisconsin Ave/Mass Ave corridor, where no Metrorail is available.

This route provides important service to commuters during peak hours in the absence of Metrorail service. The alternative non-express routes, which also require transfers, cannot replace the important service provided by this express route. Again, the elimination of route 37 may result in lost ridership as riders abandon the transit system for more convenient commuting options.

3.3. Release of Data and Methodology, Embrace Public Input and Participation throughout Study Phases

WMATA states it is making its decisions based on ridership and customer survey data collected. While some summary data have been presented in the docket, we request the underlying data, de-identified as appropriate, be made available to enable more complete analysis by the public. In addition, we request that the methodology used to design the surveys be made available to allow the public to evaluate the quality of the methodology and the validity of the data obtained. **Public release of data and methodology information is necessary to allow the public to make independent assessments of whether the proposed changes are supportable from these data.**

Further, the purpose of public transportation demands consideration of factors other than current ridership and customer survey data. As discussed above, decisions for the system should be based primarily on how best to encourage greater use of the system, which includes taking steps to ensure the system is sufficiently reliable, efficient, and comprehensive to encourage the public to embrace it instead of other transportation modes.

For future service planning, we encourage WMATA to engage public input and participation throughout the entire study period, starting from conceptualization, through study design, implementation and analysis, to the development of a planning proposal. As a public transportation agency, it is essential for WMATA to act as a partner with the public, working together with, and for the benefit of, all stakeholders who depend on the vitality of public transportation in the District.

There is much more to be done to ensure public transportation successfully serves its multiple, critical objectives for our community. We look forward to further engagement with WMATA and other relevant DC government entities to achieve this goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Barlow Weiner', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

John Barlow Weiner

President

Email: president@cpcadc.org

www.cpcadc.org