WMATA: FUND IT, FIX IT, MAKE IT FAIR

ATU LOCAL 689
Introduction

“This train is now out of service. Please exit the train.” It’s another track problem. If you are a regular Metro rider, this has become an all too familiar phrase. So is the collective groan from passengers who will be late for work for the third time in a week. The train operators who must deliver these dreaded messages to hard-working Washingtonians are members of our union. So are the workers who are up at 3:00 a.m. fixing the tracks. Like the riders, we are fed up as well, and agree that we are at the breaking point. Metro, once seen by residents and millions of annual visitors as one of the greatest creations of the 20th Century, has tumbled so far that it is beyond recognition.

If you don’t stay on top of things, transit can spin out of control very quickly. One minute you’ve got a track problem, leading to delays on all inbound trains. Before you know it, the inevitable single tracking leads to problems in the other direction. If all of this happens during peak service hours, the whole system goes into chaos in the blink of an eye. People start getting wedged together like sardines and you’ve got the backpack of a total stranger jabbing you in the stomach. That’s when you say to yourself that you’re going to start driving to work instead. It’s totally understandable and justified.

Here’s the problem in the D.C. area: many of us don’t have a choice. There are thousands of people in this region who have no automobile and rely on the train or the bus. Others just prefer transit. And for those of us that do have a car, the Beltway is no picnic either.

Giving up on Metro, or privatizing it as some have suggested, is not the answer. This will only lead to even worse service quality and encourage our remaining customers to permanently abandon the system.

Blaming the workers, or claiming that they make too much money, is also ridiculous. This system, which weaves its way through some of the nation’s most wealthy communities, is not being brought down by $52,000 janitors or bus operators who work long and hard in grueling conditions to earn a living wage. Search higher up the food chain at WMATA’s current or former non-union employees to determine the reasons for the agency’s fall from grace. But don’t stop there. Look at current and previous elected officials at all levels of state, local, and federal government that have ignored every red flag and starved Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA) of adequate funding for decades.

Metro Salaries: Who earns the most?

Remaking the board, or having the federal government takeover the system, would not change anything for WMATA riders. It would be a case of new players dealing with the same old issues.

While we never should have reached this embarrassing and dangerous situation, here we are. Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689, representing more than 10,000 WMATA employees, is pleased to present this proposal to immediately save, stabilize, and ultimately improve WMATA. Our plan contains specific ideas -- some new, some borrowed from other areas where ATU represents transit workers -- to fund Metro, fix it, and make it fair. While some ideas need legislative action from state, local and federal lawmakers, others can be done by the agency on its own.
SUMMARY OF ATU RECOMMENDATIONS

FUND IT

1) Establish WMATA Assessment Districts (WADs) to generate prediciable transit funding in a far more equitable manner.

2) Dedicate nominal rental car taxes from current Metrorail stop Reagan National Airport and future Metrorail stop Dulles Airport for WMATA operations.

3) Amend federal law to allow larger transit systems, including WMATA, to use their FTA funds for operations in crisis situations.

4) Use the maximum amount of FTA funds for paratransit operating assistance under new federal law.

5) Flex FTA funds for preventive maintenance costs to fullest extent possible.

6) Pass legislation (MD and VA) recently adopted in D.C. requiring employers with 20 or more employees to offer pre-tax or subsidized commuter benefits for use on WMATA.

FIX IT

1) Establish labor-management partnerships on all safety matters.

2) Adopt safety recommendations of the TRACS Committee.

3) Bring MetroAccess operations in house and deal with scheduling, qualifications, training, equipment, deadheading, etc.

MAKE IT FAIR

1) Reject service cuts and fare increases.

2) Implement modified flat fare system.

3) Allow free transfers from local bus-to-rail, rail-to-local bus or local bus-to-local bus within two hours of the time you paid your fare.

4) Implement a system that takes into account passengers’ ability to pay, rather than simply on their ages.

5) Expand hours of operation.

FUND IT

Even after the District, Maryland and Northern Virginia recently agreed to give Metro the extra money it has requested for its next budget, WMATA's massive long-term financial crunch remains, and service cuts and fare increases loom large.

The agency’s capital needs are staggering. The system operates and maintains approximately $40 billion in physical assets. WMATA’s Capital Needs Inventory (CNI), which aims to capture and quantify Metro’s existing and anticipated capital needs over a 10-year period to advance or maintain state of good repair of its assets and invest in necessary enhancements, is approximately $2.5 billion annually in year of expenditure dollars from 2017 to 2026. The total for these 10 years includes just over $17 billion in state of good repair needs, $7 billion in new investment needs, and $800 million in unallocated needs. Of the total needs, approximately $1.7 billion of state of good repair needs and $1.6 billion of new investment needs are necessary to address safety or compliance-related requirements.¹

Metro’s staggering funding needs for basic replacements and rehabilitation have been known for decades. Former WMATA Board Member Kirk Wineland’s incredibly prophetic op-ed from 20 years ago is now haunting us all:

“Unless this shortfall is addressed, people will see more delays as trains and buses break down, and fewer will be in service because they will be in repair. Reliability and service will suffer, ridership will decline, revenues will fall and fares will increase, leading the whole spiral to spin further out of control.”


¹ 10-Year Capital Needs, Inventory and Prioritization, WMATA, November 2016.
Rail revenue is currently coming in 17 percent below projections. Without question, WMATA needs increased, reliable, dedicated funding to not only survive, but expand.

Major Transit systems survive on dedicated funding.¹

But what kind of dedicated funding is best? Gas taxes are losing their punch because new cars are (thankfully) more fuel efficient, and we will likely see more and more alternative fuel vehicles on the roads in the near future. During the recent economic crisis, we learned that property taxes are too volatile, generating far too little money for transit systems to continue operations. Sales taxes, the preferred dedicated revenue source for many systems nationwide, are regressive -- taking a larger percentage of income from low-income earners than from high-income earners. Oil barrel taxes, while tapping into the seemingly bottomless pit of petroleum company profits, may very well get passed along to consumers at the pump. While some places are experimenting with vehicles-miles-traveled taxes, (charging motorists based on how much they drive) privacy concerns may ultimately prevent full implementation.

Assessment Districts – A Fair Way to Fund WMATA

Rather than taxing citizens and businesses not connected to WMATA bus or rail lines, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia should create WMATA Assessment Districts (WADs) in an effort to generate predictable transit funding in a far more equitable manner. Land is more valuable when located near high-quality public transit infrastructure, and WMATA has in fact reported on the numerous economic benefits of the system to the entire region.² WMATA should be recognized as an asset, specifically a public good, and funded from other assets’ appreciation.

Assessment districts are commonly used to fund public services or facilities that enhance the value of real property. This is not a new concept. About one in three properties in California is part of an assessment district, funding water, electrical, gas and lighting infrastructure, public transit and other facilities.³ While taxes are paid whether or not services or facilities are used, assessments are determined based on a property’s relative benefit, principally its enhanced market value. Assessments are not taxes and are therefore assigned to tax-exempt as well as tax-paying properties whose property value is enhanced by services or facilities. Given the number of tax-exempt properties located adjacent to WMATA stations (especially in D.C.), the revenue generated could be significant.

Properties not benefiting from services or facilities enhancing their value are not assessed, minimizing opposition outside assessment districts. A transit assessment district’s scope depends on where transit service and facilities deliver employees and customers to enterprises that own or rent a property.

A transit assessment district shifts transit funding from lower-income households - that pay a disproportionately large share of sales, income, gas, license fees as well as fares - onto wealthier property owners whose properties’ values are enhanced by transit services and facilities delivering

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³ How does Metro’s funding compare to other cities’ systems? Greater Greater Washington, March 25, 2016.  
⁴ WMATA Regional Benefits of Transit, November 2011.  
⁵ What is an Assessment District? California Tax Data.  
customers, employees and others to their doors. Special
assessment district revenues are highly stable and can be
expected to generate large sums of money.\textsuperscript{6}

WMATA has already tapped into assessment financing
on the Silver Line. Phase 1, consisting of 11.6 miles of rail
and five stations in Fairfax County and Phase 2, adding
more rail stations in Fairfax and Loudoun Counties, were
both made possible by value capture elements. Fairfax
County established a special tax district on commercial
and industrial properties in 2004 to fund the county’s
portion of Phase 1 of the project. In 2009, the county
established a special tax district consisting of the area
around its Phase 2 stations. Loudoun County also
implemented a Metrorail Service District to pay for its
portion of Phase 2 of the project.\textsuperscript{7}

Given this success, WMATA needs to expand beyond
WAD funding for both capital and \textit{operating} needs
throughout the Metro system (bus and rail).

In order to make such assessments fair, ATU supports
amending federal law to allow transit district assessments
to be tax deductible on property owners’ federal
income taxes.

Other Revenue Ideas

\textbf{Rental Car Fees} -- Nominal rental car taxes from current
Metrorail stop Reagan National Airport and future
Metrorail stop Dulles Airport can generate significant
revenue for WMATA operations, negating the need for
a fare increase. While states have enacted more than 100
rental car taxes nationwide, only five states currently dedicate
even a portion of rental car taxes to public transit,\textsuperscript{8}
despite its obvious connection to local infrastructure, especially
here in our nation’s capital. Millions of annual tourists get
to the National Zoo, the Smithsonian, Congress, and all of
our other attractions either via Metro or by putting stress
on our roadways by renting a car. Either way, these visitors,
who would not be deterred from booking their trips due
to a nominal rental car tax, should be subject to a user fee
which reinvests in Metro. It is only fair that our visitors
pay into America’s Subway, just like those of us who use
the system daily. As a bonus, state legislators in Maryland,
Virginia, and D.C. Council members will be comforted to
know that out of town visitors are not voters.

\textbf{Federal Operating Assistance}

\textbf{Flexibility Needed} -- With few exceptions, only transit
systems located in urbanized areas under 200,000
in population may use their federal transit funds for
operating purposes. As a result of this policy and the
continued shortage of state and local revenues, nearly all
transit systems across the U.S. have cut or eliminated vital
transit service or raised fares in recent years. WMATA is
about to take this to the extreme. Large transit systems
like WMATA need the flexibility to use their FTA funds
as they see fit. If an old bus needs to be replaced and is
beyond repair, WMATA should use their federal funds to
purchase a new vehicle. But if the agency is in a budget
crunch and cannot even afford to put such vehicle into
service, it should have the ability to use such funds for
operations and avoid raising fares on working people
or slashing service. Moreover, such flexibility is helpful
not only in tight budgetary climates but also in times of
skyrocketing ridership (usually caused by high gas prices).
When WMATA gets inundated with new riders trying
to escape fuel spikes, it traditionally lacks the resources
to put more service on the street. Federal transit money
flexibility, currently enjoyed by smaller transit systems
only, is invaluable in these situations. Congress needs
to amend federal law to allow larger transit systems,
including WMATA, to use their FTA funds for operations
in crisis situations.

\textbf{Fill Budget Holes Using Available Paratransit
Operating Assistance}

The FAST Act (the new surface transportation bill)
contains a section allowing transit systems to use an
increased amount of their FTA funds for paratransit
operating assistance. Under previous law, transit systems
could use up to 10% of their formula funds for operations
in connection with the provision of Americans with
Disabilities (ADA) paratransit services. The new bill
increases the percentage to 20 if the system takes some
nominal steps to improve ADA service. This change will
free up millions of dollars for ADA service.

\textsuperscript{6} Special Assessment District’s Ability to Fund Transit. Shishir Mathur.
Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board,

\textsuperscript{7} Value Capture for Public Transportation Projects: Examples. APTA,

\textsuperscript{8} 2016 Survey of State Funding for Public Transportation. American Association
of State Highway and Transportation Officials.
WMATA qualifies for this funding because it employs several full time professional travel trainers in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia through its MetroReady Travel Training Program. The transit system should take advantage of this new funding. WMATA’s FY 2017 Formula funding (Sections 5307 and 5340) totals more than $104 million. Therefore nearly $21 million could be used for ADA paratransit operations, helping to alleviate the budget crisis.

**Preventive Maintenance**

Preventive maintenance provisions under federal law permit the unlimited expenditure of funds for maintenance costs, including labor, for transit vehicles, facilities, and rights-of-way, by agencies in any urbanized area, regardless of population size. With one of the largest maintenance fleets in the nation, WMATA should be taking advantage of this federal funding flexibility to the maximum extent feasible. Again, if the choice is between buying a new bus and fixing an old one, and fare increases and service cuts are part of the equation, common sense tells us that fixing the old bus may make more sense if it can be placed back into service safely.

**Increasing Ridership Through Federal Tax-Free Transit Benefits**

As a result of a new law in the District of Columbia, employers with 20 or more employees are required to offer pre-tax or subsidized commuter benefits for use on WMATA. This is a significant benefit because transit riders can now get up to $255 a month to pay for transit under a tax bill Congress agreed upon at the end of 2015. If an employer allows setting aside pre-tax earnings for transit, riders will also be able to reserve more. Lowering the cost of transit for commuters will attract more riders and bring in more fare revenue for WMATA.

A rider who uses the maximum monthly transit benefit can save hundreds of dollars over the course of the year, depending on the tax rate. In addition, employers save money by not having to pay the 7.65 percent payroll tax on the benefit amount that employees set aside pre-tax. WMATA attributed a drop in ridership partially to the 2014 cut in the federal tax benefit (from $245 in 2013 to $130). Now that the benefit has been set at $255 (the same as parking), the entire region should be doing all it can to encourage people to ride WMATA without having to dig into their pocket. Maryland and Virginia should pass similar legislation, requiring employers in the WMATA service area of these states to offer the transit benefit.

**FIX IT**

On a typical day, it is likely that a Metro rider will need to deal with a broken-down bus, climb up a giant stationary escalator, wait a half hour for a train to arrive on a crowded platform, cram themselves into a packed subway, stand for 45 minutes with nowhere to hold onto, sweat through
their clothes on a train without air conditioning, pray that their train stays on the tracks, and get herded like cattle through the exit gates.

Paratransit riders can spend hours in a van for a trip that should take minutes.

No matter which mode you choose, it’s an awful experience, and it’s no wonder that ridership plunged by 12% during the period from July through December of 2016.9

**Safety First?**

Is WMATA addressing the problems? New General Manager Paul Wiedefeld, instead of working with the union, is acting like President Trump, telling us that he can fix everything on his own.

He has unilaterally brought in outside contractors to do the work of long-time Metro employees. The operations funding the agency has spent on private contractors has nearly doubled in the past two years, from $24.8 million in fiscal 2015 to $47.4 million in fiscal 2017, and Wiedefeld’s proposed fiscal 2018 operating budget increases that amount to nearly $65 million.10 This money is being spent in lieu of training WMATA workers — a recipe for disaster. The contract workers lack familiarity with Metro’s particular issues and are prone to performing substandard work.

Local 689 members are often called upon to redo work that has been poorly done by private contractors. This is both inefficient and dangerous, and it’s an obvious plot to decrease the number of union members, as it is being done in conjunction with Wiedefeld’s proposal to eliminate 500 staff positions in fiscal year 2018 in addition to 500 job cuts he announced this past spring. Private contractors working on SafeTrack may outnumber union members almost 2 to 1, but even Wiedefeld’s own staff cannot provide an estimate on just how many contractors are roaming the system.

It has not taken long for Wiedefeld’s WMATA legacy to resemble his time as head of the MTA in Baltimore, which was plagued with safety problems and what are now known as “alternative facts.” In 2008, MTA light rail riders had their lives disrupted as Wiedefeld’s agency grappled with maintenance issues that sidelined more than three-quarters of its rail cars at peak travel times. According to news accounts, “The resulting delays and cattle-car conditions outraged passengers and led some to question the system’s safety and its managers’ competence. MTA officials have had little advice to give light rail’s roughly 26,000 daily passengers except to be patient.”12

When the problems were first reported, MTA issued a number of statements that Wiedefeld later retracted. He later said that the agency “clearly needs to do a better job of communicating with customers.”

Sound familiar?

Wiedefeld left the MTA in shambles, neglecting to perform critical maintenance work, forcing it to recently shut down.13 The subway system is a maze of unsecured wiring, dead rodents, and old rails.

*Labor-Management Partnerships Key to Safety*

The most critical problem facing WMATA is safety. For years, Local 689 has been advocating for major changes in the way WMATA does business. We have repeatedly

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12 *Angry Sardines; Cuts in Service For Emergency Maintenance Leave Light Rail Riders Frustrated And Irritated.* The Baltimore Sun, May 8, 2008.
13 *Metro to partially close for weeks of maintenance.* The Baltimore Sun, July 13, 2016.
asked WMATA to provide front line employees with the tools and materials necessary to do their jobs, and we’ve raised concerns about getting preventative maintenance done ahead of time, instead of kicking the can down the road year after year. The reality is that if work had been done over the past twenty years, WMATA would not be disrupting the lives of people in this region in the way they have these past six months. Unfortunately, SafeTrack is what riders of this region are left with after decades of mismanagement and neglect.

How Did We Get Here?

When SafeTrack was first introduced, Local 689 was hopeful that it would mark a departure from the culture and old practices at WMATA. As things have progressed, we are now concerned that WMATA’s failure to consult with our union and with experienced employees on the ground will be its fatal flaw. Had our input been solicited, we would have worked to find a better way of getting the work done without disrupting the lives of so many riders in this region. We all have members of our families that ride Metro daily, and most of us ride the system as well, so we know the frustrations with SafeTrack firsthand.

Local 689 deals with constant complaints about lack of employee morale. In other transit systems in the country and around the world, there is a culture of labor-management cooperation where employees are treated with dignity on the job, their opinions valued, and they have a sense of ownership in the work they do. That is not the WMATA way. Ask long-time employees that have devoted a significant amount of their lives deep underground, fixing the aging tracks of this system in the middle of the night, whether their expertise is frequently solicited by WMATA’s management team. Unfortunately, by and large, this invaluable source of institutional knowledge is overlooked or even ignored by management.

Safety culture is a way of life. Maintaining a safety culture requires vigilance, an ongoing commitment, and realization that your work will never be done. Assessing the state of safety culture at WMATA is as important as measuring on-time performance or equipment reliability. In order to improve the state of safety culture at WMATA, it is essential to establish a baseline and then periodically measure progress.

Beyond Rail

While we are primarily addressing rail safety, it is important to note that the recommendations that we make here on safety culture may also be applied to bus operations, where there is a dire need to address this issue. Over the past few years, as passengers have grown sick and tired of paying higher fares for less frequent service, we have seen an incredible spike in assaults against bus drivers, and in D.C., the problem is so persistent that it has become a public safety epidemic. When bus operators are punched, stabbed, or have bodily fluids thrown upon them while they are in the course of performing their duties, the lives of passengers, pedestrians, and other motorists are placed in jeopardy.

Bus operators also face significant challenges in finding adequate access to clean restrooms. They refrain from drinking fluids, starving their internal organs, and become highly distracted operators -- the equivalent of driving under the influence of alcohol -- as they hold it until the next opportunity arises. Once again, the general public is placed at risk of serious injury. Is this a health issue? Yes. But it is also a safety matter that cultural change can and should address.

Indicators of Effective Safety Management

When a safety culture improvement program is being introduced, it is essential that every effort be made and specific processes be implemented to enlist the active participation, involvement, and shared ownership of all key stakeholders, including labor union representatives and management. The more challenging and difficult the
transformational change required, the more important will be the buy-in required, and the more likely the process will have to overcome barriers—including problems of cynicism, suspicion, and distrust. Even with strong leadership, progress cannot be sustained without buy-in by all levels of management and employees; it must be evident up and down the organization.\(^{14}\)

The national Transit Advisory Committee for Safety (TRACS), which ATU Local 689 has participated on for years, has put forth the following examples of indicators of effective safety management in a transit agency:

1. Policies clearly describe the responsibilities for safety in all functions throughout the organization.
2. Safety goals in the strategic plan are measured and assessed along with the other strategic goals.
3. Competing pressures to safety are discussed openly.
4. Safety performance measures (leading indicators) are part of everyone's performance management plan and evaluation.
5. Safety performance measures and priorities are clearly communicated and understood.
6. Employee retention rates and absentee rates are evaluated for any issues with regard to safety.
7. The chief operating officer (CEO) or general manager (GM) discusses and assists in resolving safety issues with members of the executive team. Safety issues are discussed openly at executive meetings. There is an executive-level safety committee.
8. The executive team implements corrective actions when safety issues are raised.
9. The CEO or GM has his/her team participate at quarterly meetings with the state safety oversight agency (SSO).
10. Employees assess their supervisor's concern about safety.
11. Employees are regularly surveyed regarding their perspective on the organization's safety climate.
12. A joint union-management committee identifies and resolves safety issues.
13. Supervisors' safety attitudes are assessed and corrective actions are taken.
14. Front-line supervisors have performance measures associated with safety responsibilities.
15. Supervisors conduct safety inspections and monitor the work that employees are doing.
16. There is a process for the signing of safety briefing sheets.
17. Front-line employees are involved in developing safety policies and procedures (hazard analysis).
18. Front-line employees are empowered to restrict or stop operations based on unsafe conditions.
19. Good faith challenge processes (safety dispute resolutions) are available to workers.
20. There is interdepartmental involvement in developing safety policies and procedures (hazard analysis).
21. Involved departments conduct hazard analysis when new systems or changes are introduced. They use engineering solutions as the first method of solving problems (hierarchy of control).\(^{15}\)

Employee safety reporting systems are critical, and prevention of a recurrence is a high priority. Transit systems that provide disciplinary immunity for employees reporting near misses or close calls have the highest percentage of near misses reported. And, employees must have full confidence in the integrity of the reporting and investigative system. They must know that appropriate action will be taken. Cooperation is essential. The “my way or the highway” approach does not work. And mutual trust cannot be established overnight.

Transit systems that have good systems in place that improve the safety culture have fewer accidents and fatalities amongst passengers and employees as compared to similar systems.

ATU members often feel that safety culture and safety results are compromised by pressure from WMATA management to keep the trains and buses running on time, the growing frequency of assaults on operators, the lack of a sufficient response by management, and the absence of effective involvement by employee representatives in problem solving and decision making. In fact, low trust,\(^{15}\)


\(^{15}\) Implementing Safety Management System Principles in Rail Transit Agencies. TRACS, May 20, 2011.
inconsistent accident follow-up aimed at preventing future recurrences, and low employee and union involvement are the most significant negative factors detracting from the safety culture at WMATA.

Key elements must be in place, most importantly trust. There must also be strong leadership, management, and organizational commitment to safety; employee/union shared ownership and participation; open and frequent communication and feedback; and labor management cooperation.

Fixing Paratransit at WMATA

MetroAccess, WMATA’s service for people with disabilities and elderly individuals, is a disgrace, overrun with problems that seriously impact the quality of life for the nearly 42,000 people who use the service. Performance for MetroAccess has hit its lowest levels in three years. The number of late trips has surged, nearly doubling from August to 28,784 in September. “Super-late” trips - extending 20 minutes past the delivery window - nearly tripled, rising to 7,715 in September. September marked the program’s worst month of service in more than three years.16

Horror stories are common for frail, elderly, blind, paraplegic, and other disabled citizens. Quality of service issues at MetroAccess are mind numbing, and anyone who is related to a senior citizen or person with disabilities knows this all too well.

On-time performance is a major problem, caused by poor planning and unrealistic schedules. Trips are often scheduled too close together, and drivers say their schedules are impossible to keep. Pick up times are too often far ahead of the needed arrival time at the destination, leaving customers waiting outside and unprotected in varying types of weather conditions. Often, when customers are delivered late to their destination, no accommodation is made to pick them up at a later time. Some have said that the private contractors treat the disabled like they’re cattle. The unreliable service often makes people late for work and meetings and forces them to reschedule medical appointments.

Many customers report that reservation agents do not ensure that their address is correct, resulting in the driver going to the wrong address and documenting the customer as a “no-show.” Moreover, persons with disabilities complain that the reservation process takes too long.

Some disabled riders say the problem is not just on-time pickups – it is being stuck in a paratransit van for hours while other riders are picked up and dropped off. In some cases, people are literally being held hostage for hours.

While riders complain, they have no recourse because WMATA hides behind the contractors which perform the service. The lowest bidder gets the work and the riders pay the price.

WMATA’s solution to fix this mess is to contract out more service, this time to Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) through a program called Abilities-Ride. The agency says it can save millions of dollars.

For several reasons, this is an ill-advised plan that will not work. None of the traditional cost-saving factors associated with TNCs are applicable to the paratransit market. Any attempt to run a paratransit service like a TNC would quickly result in service disruption.

The TNCs will need to ensure reliable service according to ADA standards. Vehicles will need to be retrofitted to be ADA-accessible or new vehicles will need to be purchased. The TNCs will pass the cost of this back to WMATA, which will then need to increase fares on passengers. TNCs will also need to pay the costs of training sufficient numbers of drivers to serve paratransit customers.

Moreover, TNCs’ other source of cost savings is density. They rely on connecting customers with nearby drivers to keep waiting times brief and maintain operational cost efficiency. Paratransit services, on the other hand, operate primarily in less-dense areas where intensive transit is not available. For paratransit services in suburban areas, lack of density is a serious factor influencing service efficiency, and the necessary density to be cost effective may not exist.

We can and should do better.

The key to implementing a successful paratransit system is to dissect the entire operation. Simply stating that trips cost too much and then coming to the conclusion that the entire operation needs to be outsourced does not make sense.

Good scheduling people are essential. If a paratransit system is picking up three people or more per hour, they are meeting or even exceeding industry goals. WMATA's contractors' unlinked trips per vehicle revenue hour are just 1.1.\textsuperscript{17}

It is critical to have seamless coordination with the fixed route part of the system. The successful transit systems literally have paratransit and fixed route management at desks across from each other. WMATA looks at these modes as entirely separate -- the wrong approach. Fixed route can complement the paratransit routes.

Example: A paratransit customer has trouble getting their wheelchair onto a paratransit vehicle. If a fixed route bus is nearby, they can handle the issue.

Example: Flex routes -- During off peak times, fixed route buses can deviate from their routes to pick up people with disabilities at their curbs. No special service is needed, saving lots of money.

WMATA needs to also examine off hours. Perhaps contracting only service during late nights, when costs soar, makes sense. Moreover, it is important to examine late nights and weekends to determine the appropriate workforce size. Traditionally, mechanics, dispatchers, and operators are needed at all times. However, during the off hours, it is possible to have maintenance on call.

In addition, not every disabled rider qualifies for an ADA trip. WMATA needs to reexamine its process defining if people are ADA eligible or not, and if not with what restrictions.

For example, perhaps WMATA has a number of people who use wheel chairs that by itself do not qualify them for ADA service. Monitoring and keeping to the guidelines can restrict usage to the people that really qualify for the service.

ATU also supports developing a publicly-owned and maintained demand response scheduling and dispatch system. There is no reason that a national consortium of agencies or the Department of Transportation could not develop a mobile application with the customer service advantages that Uber and Lyft's apps pioneered. WMATA relies on old software. TNC-like technology could help alleviate two major concerns of riders -- trip length and advanced scheduling requirements -- by incorporating multiple real-time sources of geolocation data and more sophisticated scheduling algorithms. ATU also recommends establishing a procedure for human review of all automated schedules to ensure route efficiency and reduce on-board time for riders.

Reducing deadheading -- the movement of a vehicle without passengers -- can be achieved by implementing flexible zone systems so more passenger trips are provided per revenue hour, empty vehicles cover fewer miles, and individual riders travel shorter distances with less unnecessary time on board vehicles.

WMATA should also establish, with the involvement of riders with disabilities, an agency-wide training standard for fixed route and paratransit workers.

The agency should develop a program to ensure reservationists and dispatchers are trained and understand the traffic patterns and streetscapes in the service area.

Finally, we can reduce turnover and create a career path for paratransit workers by raising their hourly wages and providing the basic health and sick leave benefits necessary to protect themselves, their families, and their paratransit clients.

These recommendations can only be done by taking MetroAccess services back in house.

\textbf{MAKE IT FAIR}

\textbf{Reject Service Cuts and Fare Increases}

Just as Metro management should consult with Labor on issues relating to safety, they need to listen to our frustrated riders about the best ways to keep them and our former riders regarding how we can lure them back. It does not take an advanced degree to realize that asking our rail customers to deal with even longer waits through expanded headways and stranding bus riders on dozens of bus lines through the elimination or reduction of service is not going to restore customer satisfaction. Neither will increasing the minimum rail fare to $2 during off-peak times and $2.25 during peak times. Increasing Metrobus fares by a quarter, to $2 per trip

\textsuperscript{17} National Transit Database (2014 Agency Profile).
will put a huge hurt on some of our most transit-dependent riders who have no other way to get around. Slashing MetroAccess routes, an unintended consequence of the fixed route cuts (due to federal ADA rules requiring transit agencies to offer paratransit service within three-quarters of a mile of a fixed bus route), is cruel.

“You are not just cutting bus stops,”
You are also changing the rides of people with disabilities.”

— Denise Rush, WMATA’s Accessibility Advisory Committee

Laying off 1,000 employees – once again shedding sorely-needed institutional knowledge and putting a huge burden on a shell of a workforce – is not only ill-advised but also dangerous.

Yet, this is WMATA’s plan to dig out of the hole.

We know from countless studies across the country that raising fares drastically reduces ridership, having the opposite effect on revenue that is desired. Moreover, asking people to pay more for less service is a recipe for disaster, especially frustrated WMATA customers that are already getting on board our vehicles with their blood pressure at sky-high levels.

Like most transit systems that cut routes, WMATA is looking primarily toward those with low ridership -- early morning, late night, and weekend service. People who work non-traditional hours, typically minorities who have no other means of transportation, will be disproportionately affected. The single mom who now gets her kids up at 4:30 a.m. to catch two buses in time to get her children to daycare and then herself to work cannot be expected to wait an additional hour for that transfer bus to arrive, standing in the freezing cold with two kids. The person who cleans offices downtown in the wee hours of the morning should not have to sleep on the cold hard floor in the lobby of the building after finishing her work until the buses start running the next day. But that is exactly what WMATA is proposing. They are leaving elderly and disabled people scrambling for a way to buy food and get to the doctor. That is where we are headed here.

Through its slash and burn budget proposal, Metro is using the self-inflicted SafeTrack crisis to justify massive cuts in service that would never be accepted in this region under normal circumstances. Metro riders need to call them out, letting them know that we need more, not less service.

As bad as circumstances are today, if we go down this road, it is likely that WMATA will never be the same again. People will forever abandon the system, and it will crumble, causing an embarrassing mobility crisis in our nation’s Capital.

Making Fares Fair

Only about one-fifth of the nation’s rail transit systems use distance-based pricing, and just six percent use time-based pricing,\(^{19}\) and for good reason: these systems are far too complicated and many agencies are wary of potentially harming transit-dependent riders. Apparently, WMATA is not concerned with the impact of its brutally unfair fare system on low-income passengers.

WMATA fares are simply too high. Many of our customers now pay more than $12 per day to get downtown – and that doesn’t even include parking at the station. Without question, WMATA’s plunging ridership is in part due to the skyrocketing fares that have made it much more appealing for people to carpool, bike or jump in their car and clog our already jammed highways. Many are turning to Uber, which has taken advantage of WMATA’s downfall by offering fares which are lower than transit fares.\(^{20}\) Others who don’t have the luxury of having their own vehicle of course must make tough choices: pay the higher fare or quit their job and go on public assistance. This is reality for many of our neighbors.

WMATA tells us to travel during off peak hours to avoid premium fares. Try telling that to the boss!

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\(^{19}\) APTA Fact Book 2012

WMATA fares need to be fair. The best way to achieve fairness, bring back riders, and boost revenues is through a modified $2 flat fare system.

Most transit agencies employ largely flat fare systems, which charge the same price, regardless of time of day, distance or direction traveled. Boston’s MBTA has a flat $2.25 fare. In New York City, the fare for a subway or local bus ride is $2.75. Chicago’s CTA charges a flat $2.25 for the train and $2.00 for the bus. Philadelphia’s SEPTA is $2.25.

Former WMATA customers who have been turned away from transit by $5.00 one way fares will certainly be enticed to come back by a flat $2 fare. Ridership, which is now plummeting, will likely skyrocket to the point where we will need one-minute headways between trains. Revenues will soar.

The proposed $2 flat fare is actually significantly higher than the off-peak and rush hour base fares. Therefore, in order to avoid a situation where people making shorter trips (often those living in the urban core) will be subsidizing those making longer trips (those living in the suburbs), we propose to keep those fares that are currently under $2 at their current levels. Since WMATA is one of the few systems in the U.S. that is equipped with exit faregates, where a rider swipes the fare media to exit as well as to enter, such a modified flat fare system could be easily implemented with no additional capital costs.

Other “Fair Fare” Proposals

Free Transfers

In New York City, transit passengers transfer free from local bus-to-subway, subway-to-local bus or local bus-to-local bus within two hours of the time you paid your fare. WMATA can and should do the same for Washington area riders, and all of WMATA’s partners (such as Montgomery County Ride on and Fairfax Connector) should also participate in this program.

For a vast number of the transit system’s daily riders, free transfers would create faster, cheaper or more direct ways to get around the area. Riders within D.C. would no longer have to choose between a two-fare bus and Metro trip, or a long, slow bus ride. A commuter from the suburbs would no longer have to walk several blocks home from the subway to avoid paying an additional fare for a bus. It will draw enormous numbers of people into public transit, and it’s the right thing to do.

Although free transfers will initially cost WMATA lost income, the plan will soon increase the number of transit riders. New York implemented the free transfer system in 1997. Within a year, ridership increased by a whopping 15%, providing increased revenue and a much needed boost to the entire system.21

Fares Based on Ability to Pay

WMATA should implement a system that takes into account passengers’ ability to pay, rather than simply on their ages. For instance, San Francisco’s SFMTA has a “Lifeline” pass program, which provides a 50% discount on the monthly pass for residents whose incomes are below 200% of the federal poverty level. WMATA should similarly provide discounts for those in financial need.

Hours of Operation

The hours of operation for a city’s transit system have wide ranging effects on mobility, and they are not limited to the barhopping college student, the sports fan who worries about overtime or extra innings, or the concert attendee.

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real victims of WMATA’s new early shutdown policy are the D.C. region’s poor -- transit-dependent individuals working the late shift who simply can no longer get to work because their ride is gone. Many of these people are service workers.

WMATA should stay open later.

Conclusion

This is clearly a pivotal moment for WMATA and the millions of people who rely on it annually. We need to make the system safer, and this process cannot be done without the full participation of the men and women on the frontlines every day.

The agency’s leadership tell riders it is time for a “reality check,” citing the need for all of us to dig deeper into our pockets for the privilege of waiting longer for the train, or walking even further to find a bus stop where we can get a ride to work. Pay more, get less, they say.

This is a false choice. The key to restoring WMATA is to bring back our customers, and that can only happen if they are provided with safe, affordable, reliable, and convenient transit service. Driving our remaining riders away is a ridiculous plan that is sure to bury the system.
