



March 2, 2020

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Executive Director
Katherine A. Mattice

Ms. Jennifer Ellison
Board Corporate Secretary
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)
600 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Re: Additional Comments on Proposed Fiscal Year 2021 WMATA Budget (Docket B20-01 and B20-02)

Dear Ms. Ellison:

The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission's (NVTC) Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Committee wishes to convey additional comments on new fare changes authorized for advertisement by the WMATA Board in January. This letter supplements the [comments submitted by NVTC to WMATA on February 12, 2020](#) that noted concerns on the Proposed FY2021 WMATA Operating and Capital Budget, changes to fares and fare policy, Metrobus service cuts, late-night Metrorail hours and the transfer discount. The Committee continues to support a balanced budget—inclusive of new initiatives, fare policy changes, and service changes—that is in compliance with the legislatively mandated 3% subsidy growth cap.

Advertised Rail Fare Changes

WMATA's advertised budget includes a range of options that could raise the Metrorail peak base fare from \$2.25 up to \$2.50 and raise the Metrorail peak maximum fare from \$6.00 up to \$7.00. As previously indicated by the Commission, we believe that a proposed \$7.00 peak maximum fare places a disproportionate burden on long-distance riders—especially when the broader proposed budget package provides these riders with little benefit. We also see that such a drastic increase in the peak base rail fare would cause a dramatic loss in rail ridership, further decreasing farebox revenues. NVTC's WMATA Committee urges WMATA to follow its existing adopted fare policy principles whereby increases to the Metrorail peak base and maximum fare are tied to the Consumer Price Index.

NVTC's WMATA Committee strongly opposes the advertised \$1.00 surcharge at Dulles Airport Station. The Committee does not believe any station should be singled out for a surcharge as this violates WMATA's adopted fare policy principle of establishing equitable fares. Furthermore, we anticipate the completion of Silver Line Phase 2 will 1) benefit Metrorail riders systemwide by providing a one-seat ride from Ashburn to downtown Washington, D.C. and into Maryland via Dulles International Airport; and 2) provide service consistent with other Metrorail lines.

In addition, WMATA proposes to restore some late-night Metrorail hours. NVTC and its WMATA Committee believe that late-night Metrorail hours should not compromise the safety and maintenance of the system. As such, we look to the Washington Metrorail Safety Commission (WMSC) for its position on this proposal, as the WMSC should thoroughly review this proposal's impact on the safety of the Metrorail system before additional late-night rail hours are restored. If it is determined that increases to late night hours will not compromise the safety and maintenance of the system, we support a return to WMATA's historic policy of charging peak fares for Metrorail service after midnight, as it did prior to FY2017.

Advertised Weekend Fares

NVTC's WMATA Committee supports incentives to increase weekend ridership. However, we do not support the proposed weekend flat fare options as all three flat-fare proposals analyzed by WMATA will lead to a loss in revenue. Furthermore, two of the three weekend flat fare proposals would lead to a loss in both revenue and ridership. While creating incentives for weekend ridership is applauded by the Committee, we believe that maintaining revenues to support the continuation of existing bus routes is a higher priority for this budget.

The Committee does support the proposed 1 and 3-day short-trip rail passes aimed at visitors and weekend riders. These passes 1) would complete WMATA's suite of 1, 3, and 7-day unlimited and short-trip pass products; and 2) would be an appropriate approach to weekend passes that would create incentives for weekend ridership, maintain equity between short and long-distance riders and avoid sacrificing revenue. The Committee encourages WMATA to evaluate the ridership and revenue implications of these passes and seriously explore the communications, marketing and renaming of these passes as part of a larger integrated fare pass strategy.

Bus Fare Changes

NVTC's WMATA Committee opposes the advertised increase in fare for MetroExtra bus routes. MetroExtra bus routes are limited-stop Metrobus services that currently have the same fare (\$2.00) as regular Metrobus routes. Any fare increases to MetroExtra routes apart from regular Metrobus fares could push price-sensitive riders to slower bus services. We believe that WMATA should not create a disincentive to use the MetroExtra bus service and that these routes should be the same price as regular Metrobus routes.

The Committee encourages WMATA to implement a phased approach to increases in the transfer discount. As mentioned in NVTC's letter of February 12, 2020, our local transit systems value parity with WMATA policies. Increasing the transfer discount from \$0.50 to \$2.00 in FY2021 would place an unanticipated and significant cost on local transit operating budgets. NVTC's WMATA Committee urges WMATA to seek incremental changes to the transfer discount so that it can minimize the fiscal impact to our jurisdictions while still benefitting riders.

Addressing Fare Policy through the Annual Budget Process

WMATA's fare structure is complex because of the competing demands for service between short and long-distance riders. WMATA's recent progress with pass products and the pending low-income fare pass pilot with the District of Columbia provide an encouraging direction for the agency. NVTC's WMATA Committee urges WMATA to take a strategic approach to developing fare policy rather than tackling fare policy incrementally through the budget. We encourage the General Manager to revisit WMATA's fare policy principles and engage the WMATA Board and jurisdictions on a comprehensive and strategic fare policy that is equitable, generates adequate revenue while maximizing ridership, and balances the often-competing needs of short and long-distance riders and WMATA's individual funding jurisdictions.

On behalf of our jurisdictions, NVTC's WMATA Committee appreciates the opportunity to provide additional comments during this budget's public comment period. Please do not hesitate to contact NVTC's Executive Director, Kate Mattice, at 571-483-3224 or katemattice@novatransit.org if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Matthew F. Letourneau
NVTC WMATA Committee Chairman