



February 15, 2022

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

Re: Comments on Proposed Fiscal Year 2023 WMATA Budget (Docket B22-01 and B22-02)

Dear Ms. Ellison:

On behalf of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission’s (NVTC) WMATA Committee, I write to convey our comments regarding the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority’s (WMATA’s) proposed fiscal year (FY) 2023 Operating Budget and FY 2023-2028 Capital Improvement Program as part of its public comment period. The NVTC WMATA committee represents the Northern Virginia funding jurisdictions that have financial obligations to WMATA and share responsibility for paying WMATA’s annual operating and capital subsidies. As such, we have a vested interest in the financial and operational health of WMATA now and into the future.

For WMATA’s FY 2023 Operating Budget and FY 2023-2028 Capital Improvement Program, the NVTC WMATA Committee’s priorities are as follows:

- Identify opportunities, where possible, to right-size bus and rail service to match demand and seek opportunities for savings in FY 2023 that will reduce the projected operating funding gap in FY 2024
- Implement fare policy changes to balance ridership and revenue while recognizing the change in ridership behaviors from telework
- Encourage a swift but safe opening of the Silver Line Phase 2 and Potomac Yard Stations
- Urge the safe and timely return of the 7000-series railcars to service, improvements in safety culture, improved collaboration with safety oversight bodies and efforts to rebuild customer confidence.
- Accelerate WMATA’s Capital Improvement Program to advance goals of safety, reliability and state of good repair

FY 2023 Operating Budget

NVTC's WMATA Committee is grateful to the U.S. Congress and the leadership of our regional delegation for the operating funding relief made possible by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). These relief funds have enabled WMATA to close operating budget gaps, sustain operations and prevent layoffs across multiple fiscal years. However, while federal funding relief will sustain operations in FY 2023, the NVTC WMATA Committee is deeply concerned about the projected FY 2024 operating budget gap and, as a result, must consider the FY 2023 operating budget within the context of this looming fiscal shortfall.

We encourage WMATA to **right-size service to demand where possible - without closing stations - and find savings in FY 2023 to reduce the projected operating funding gap in FY 2024**. In addition, the WMATA Committee is generally supportive of proposed permanent and temporary fare changes that balance ridership and revenue, accommodate increased telework and don't lose significant amounts of revenue. Considering the recently updated fare policy principles, **we look forward to the WMATA Board's continued discussion on fare policy and structure** and WMATA's continued partnership with sponsoring jurisdictions on the best ways to provide low-income fare discounts in their localities.

The opening of the Silver Line Phase 2 and Potomac Yard Stations are vital to both economic development and the transportation network in Northern Virginia. They are strategically located in fast-growing corridors and key to Northern Virginia's mobility, accessibility and connectivity to the overall Washington metropolitan region. We are excited to see the Silver Line Phase 2 nearing completion and encourage a swift but safe **opening of the Silver Line Phase 2 and Potomac Yard stations** with full service in FY 2023. As WMATA finalizes the Title VI analysis for the Silver Line Phase 2, we support the selection and funding of equity initiatives and Title VI mitigation efforts that provide system-wide benefits to customers.

The October 2021 derailment of a 7000-series Blue Line train and subsequent removal of the 7000-series fleet continues to inhibit WMATA's ability to maintain a reliable and sufficient level of rail service as budgeted. With the decision to halt the reintroduction of the 7000-series for at least 90 days, the region will see at least six months of greatly reduced Metrorail service. This prolonged crisis of service threatens to undermine WMATA's recovery, lose riders, undermine the faith of funding jurisdictions and widen the projected FY 2024 operating gap. We **urge the safe and timely return of the 7000-series railcars to service, improvements in safety culture, improved collaboration with safety oversight bodies and efforts to rebuild customer confidence**.

FY 2023 Capital Budget and FY 2023-2028 Capital Improvement Program

The NVTC WMATA Committee supports the continuing acceleration of the capital program and the priorities of the FY 2023 Capital Budget and FY 2023 - 2028 Capital Improvement Program to **advance the goals of safety, reliability and a state of good repair**. While WMATA has made great strides in reducing the state of good repair backlog and maintaining and modernizing system assets, much more work remains. We encourage WMATA to closely monitor the structural integrity of elevated infrastructure throughout the system and use the results from the 7000-series investigation to make strategic investments in the capital improvement program moving forward.

With the passing of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, we are elated to see the inclusion of both the reauthorization of federal dedicated capital funding for WMATA, as well as increased federal formula funds for transit. Both of these provisions are vital to advancing the capital program and

addressing WMATA's state of good repair backlog. As additional information becomes available, we look forward to an analysis by WMATA on what this funding means for the Capital Improvement Program in terms of the projected state of good repair backlog, the impact on regional dedicated capital funding, as well as underfunded needs like Blue/Orange/Silver Line capacity and reliability improvements, zero-emission bus implementation and a next generation signal system.

Given the multiple challenges facing WMATA and the region this year, we encourage WMATA to adopt a more proactive culture of communication. NVTC and our partner jurisdictions are committed to WMATA's success and stand ready to work with WMATA, but better communications about the path ahead will be critical for maintaining broad public support for the system while addressing looming challenges. After the FY 2023 budget is approved, we look forward to working with WMATA as the agency continues to recover from the effects of the pandemic, adapts to a new paradigm of commuting and travel and begins discussions around the future of WMATA after federal aid is exhausted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Walter Alcorn", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Walter Alcorn
NVTC WMATA Committee Chair