



March 3, 2023

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Mr. Paul Smedberg, Chair
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Board of Directors
300 7th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

Re: Comments on Proposed Fiscal Year 2024 WMATA Budget (Docket B23-02 and B23-03)

Dear Mr. Smedberg:

On behalf of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC), I write to convey our comments regarding WMATA's proposed FY 2024 Operating Budget and FY 2024-2029 Capital Improvement Program.

NVTC has a wide array of roles and responsibilities that pertain to Metro through our local jurisdictions with funding and stewardship. The NVTC WMATA Committee, chaired by Fairfax County Supervisor Walter Alcorn, provides a forum for regional dialogue on Metro-related issues and represents Northern Virginia funding jurisdictions that have financial obligations for paying its share of WMATA's annual operating and capital subsidies. Through this committee and with support of the full Commission, we have outlined the following **NVTC priorities for WMATA's FY 2024 Operating Budget and FY 2024-2029 Capital Improvement Program:**

- Continue the safe return of the 7000-series railcars and deliver budgeted service and ensure Metro makes safety and security priorities for customers and Metro staff.
- Continue fare simplification efforts that balance ridership and revenue, while also reviewing ways to lower the per-mile rate with consideration for suburban commuters, including the cost of parking in those calculations.
- Open the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station for full revenue service.
- Support the policy goals and concept of the proposed low-income fare program with effective implementation, avoiding overlap with existing programs and fair cost allocation to jurisdictions.
- Concern over flexing such a large amount of maintenance funding to the operating budget and starting a trend of over reliance on this budget tool.
- Continue progress on reducing the state of good repair backlog.
- Ensure close coordination with NVTC and jurisdictions for Summer 2023 maintenance work.
- Continue active engagement with NVTC and its jurisdictions on developing long-term solutions to address WMATA's future operational funding shortfall.

Proposed FY 2024 Operating Budget

NVTC is generally supportive of the initiatives for the FY 2024 Operating Budget; however, we do have comments, concerns and questions on service, fare changes, preventative maintenance funding and future maintenance work.

NVTC commends the work of Metro on the *Return to Service Plan* and partnership with the Washington Metrorail Safety Commission on the plan. Through this fiscal year and next, NVTC asks Metro to **continue the safe return of the 7000-series railcars** and, in turn, **deliver budgeted** service – including bus service - to improve reliability. This is critical to the region’s transportation network to ease congestion, rebuild ridership and provide customers with consistency. Regarding physical safety, the Commission looks for Metro to work with local jurisdictions to ensure a safe environment for Metro employees and customers, recognizing the partnerships and initiatives of Metro and the Metro Transit Police Department to keep the Metro system safe.

The Commission is supportive of the fare simplification proposals as outline in NVTC’s [2022 Report on the Performance and Condition of WMATA](#). The consolidation of peak and off-peak fares and aligning the Metrorail base fare with Metrobus will allow for an easier fare structure for customers. However, we request that Metro continue fare simplification efforts that balance ridership and revenue while also reviewing ways to **lower the per mile fare** and **consider the cost of parking** in the total trip fare for customers who live further away from the core. As Metro works to rebuild ridership it is important to recognize a customer's origin before they arrive at a Metro station, which sometimes may be a car. With the elimination of off-peak fares, a trip that was once \$3.85 would increase to \$6.50, which would be a large increase for some of our riders. Adjusting the per mile rate would provide ease for many suburban customers, along with considering the daily parking fee as part of the total cost of travel for riders who park at the station to ride Metro.

Additionally, we support the policy goals and concept of the proposed **low-income fare program**. However, NVTC has **questions about implementation, overlap with existing programs and cost allocation to jurisdictions**. In Virginia, we have the Transit Ridership Incentive Program or TRIP, which supports low income and zero-fare programming, an effort that is being implemented by several of our local bus systems. As Metro continues to refine this program, we ask that staff work with jurisdictions that have similar programs to ensure targeted fare efforts are complementary and not duplicated.

We applaud the opening of the Silver Line Extension in 2022. This was a great accomplishment for Metro and the region as the Silver Line Extension is a vital component of Northern Virginia’s transportation network. Similarly, the opening of the **Potomac Yard Metrorail Station must open for full revenue service as scheduled**. NVTC does not want to see a slip in its completion date as the new in-fill station will provide walkable access to transit and create a stronger multimodal transportation network in an area that continues to grow and is actively generating long-term private investment.

The Commission is pleased to see the FY 2024 operating deficit will be closed through a combination of expense reductions, revenue increases and additional federal funding assistance. However, NVTC is concerned **about the reliance on federal preventive maintenance funding to back shortfalls in the operating budget**. Although we support this solution for closing the FY 2024 operating deficit, we are concerned that Metro will become reliant on this budget tool to close future gaps. Moving federal capital funding to use as preventive maintenance funding will not be a solution to long term operating deficits in the future.

Proposed FY 2024 Capital Budget and FY 2024-2029 Capital Improvement Program

NVTC supports the priorities of the FY 2024 Capital Budget and FY 2024 – 2029 Capital Improvement Program to advance the goals of safety, reliability and a state of good repair. We recognize that Metro has made great progress on system repair and maintenance, and we encourage continued progress on **reducing the state of good repair backlog**.

As additional maintenance is planned in the future, particularly in Virginia with the summer 2023 maintenance work, we ask for **continued partnership with NVTC and local jurisdictions** to coordinate minimizing impacts on our customers and providing complementary efforts for a smooth transition.

The passing of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) considerably improved the federal funding levels available to support WMATA's capital program. As such, **NVTC requests WMATA provide details on the impact of these additional IIJA funds** on WMATA's Capital Improvement Program and how they **may offset or extend the balances of WMATA's dedicated capital funding** provided by Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. Furthermore, we look forward to updates on other WMATA major capital improvement initiatives such as the *Blue/Orange/Silver Line Capacity and Reliability Study* and the selection of a locally-preferred alternative, as well as the zero-emission bus transition.

Our region must unify now to have the difficult discussions on how to address Metro's operating budget future. This cannot wait until the development of the FY 2025 budget to initiate strategic conversations on the future fiscal health of the Metro system. As such, NVTC seeks to engage early and often with Metro and its stakeholders to bring in the unique aspects of Metro's role in Virginia, including our funding dynamics, to a regional discussion. With the looming challenges ahead, open communication and collaboration will be critical as the region ideates solutions to address the funding model.

NVTC and its partner jurisdictions are committed to the success of Metro and its role as a transit leader in the region. As Metro continues to work towards improved service, an enhanced safety culture and overall stable operational structure, we look forward to beginning discussions on Metro's vision for the future. Please do not hesitate to contact me or NVTC's Executive Director Kate Mattice if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Dalia Palchik
Chair