



February 7, 2025

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Executive Director
Katherine A. Mattice

Valerie Santos, Chair
WMATA Board of Directors
300 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20024

Re: Comments on Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 WMATA Budget
(Docket B25-01 and B25-02)

Dear Chair Santos:

On behalf of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) and its WMATA Committee, I write to convey our comments regarding WMATA's proposed FY 2026 Operating Budget and FY 2026-2031 Capital Improvement Program. Last year, the region's funding jurisdictions secured additional investments to close WMATA's operating budget gap in FY 2025 and FY 2026. Those efforts, along with additional preventive maintenance transfers, fare increases, targeted service adjustments and a strategic two-year financial plan from WMATA, provided a path forward for a streamlined FY 2026 budget process as Northern Virginia jurisdictions and the Commonwealth of Virginia work toward a long-term, sustainable funding solution for WMATA. In this FY 2026 proposed budget, NVTC appreciates WMATA's commitment, as previewed in February 2024, to a 3% year-over-year total jurisdictional subsidy increase (in addition to replacing \$95 million in one-time savings) and adopting new Metrorail and Metrobus subsidy allocation formulas that better connect subsidy to service.

Continued Focus on a Long-Term Funding Solution

As Virginia approaches this second and final year of a two-year funding plan for WMATA's operating budget gap, with additional, temporary funding provided by the Virginia General Assembly and Northern Virginia jurisdictions, we must remain focused on a long-term, sustainable funding solution. NVTC applauds WMATA in identifying \$532 million in cost savings between FY 2023 and FY 2025 by freezing salaries for Local 689 and non-represented employees in FY 2025 and implementing improvements to maximize rail and bus service efficiencies. As Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia continue to identify potential revenues to support WMATA, it is vitally important for WMATA to continue look for opportunities

for one-time and recurring cost savings and to clearly communicate long-term operating and capital needs, both through the DMVMoves initiative and by engaging with the Northern Virginia Growing Needs of Public Transit Joint Subcommittee (SJ 28) over the next year. NVTC and its partner jurisdictions remain committed to WMATA's success and its role as a transit leader in the region.

2025 Better Bus Network

After years of planning and extensive public engagement, NVTC is eager to see the 2025 Better Bus Network implemented this summer. This strategic reimagining of the Metrobus system could attract up to 13,000 more daily weekday trips, provide more frequent, consistent service and better connect residents with key regional destinations such as grocery stores, hospitals and entertainment at all times of the day. The resource-neutral 2025 Network presents a great opportunity for WMATA to enhance access and mobility across the region. As implementation moves forward, NVTC encourages WMATA to continue to work closely with local jurisdictions on bus stop alignment and communications to the public given the scope of the Metrobus system overhaul.

NVTC further encourages WMATA to continue its efforts toward mitigating bus fare evasion, building on initiatives that began in November 2024 including checking more buses, issuing citations when warranted and maintaining high police visibility in places with disproportionate shares of riders who do not pay to use Metrobus. These continued efforts will further enhance public safety across the system and generate more fare revenue.

Advancing Rail Service Optimization through Cost Savings Initiatives

NVTC supports WMATA's proposal to implement a series of rail service optimization concepts with cost savings from automated operations and targeted use of six-car trains. Funding the approximately \$11 million suite of optimization concepts, including additional peak-service on the Silver Line between Wiehle-Reston East and Stadium-Armory eastbound in the morning and westbound in the evening, with savings from Automatic Door Operations, Automatic Train Operations (ATO) and Return to Design Speeds creates a safer, faster and more reliable operating environment without impacting jurisdictional subsidies. NVTC encourages WMATA to closely monitor and report on ATO implementation as the program is rolled out systemwide in 2025.

Open Payment Introduction

NVTC also supports WMATA's plan to introduce open payment across all modes, enabling an easier fare payment option for visitors, tourists and those newer to the system. This enhancement will be particularly important at the region's major transportation hubs, including Washington Dulles International Airport on the Silver Line and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on the Blue and Yellow Lines where record numbers of travelers are looking for easy access to transit as they begin their trips in the region. NVTC recommends that WMATA work closely with jurisdictional partners across the region as open payment is planned and deployed this year. As

most bus riders in Northern Virginia use systems that charge fares and participate in SmarTrip, it is important that WMATA's implementation of open payment consider the overall rider experience across bus systems.

Short- and Long-Term Capital Program Needs

Both through its FY 2026 budget process and the DMVMoves initiative, WMATA has outlined its anticipated capital program needs and resulting capital fiscal cliff as revenues are unable to keep pace with increasing costs. Two of these revenue sources – \$500 million in dedicated capital funding from the jurisdictions and \$300 million in Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) funding – were never indexed to inflation and their value has eroded over time. NVTC urges WMATA to focus its FY 2026-2031 CIP on state of good repair and necessary enhancements to ensure safe, reliable operations. NVTC supports WMATA's FY 2026 focus on critical programs such as fire systems, power infrastructure, shaft rehabilitation and escalator reliability. As longer-term needs are refined, including advanced signaling system upgrades and associated opportunities such as platform screen doors, NVTC recommends WMATA continue its focus on capital program investments that generate operational efficiencies, thereby lowering costs in the long run. In doing so, WMATA should communicate how its future capital needs contribute to savings in the operating budget.

We look forward to a successful FY 2026 for WMATA and all public transportation providers in the region as we collectively work toward a long-term, sustainable funding solution. Please do not hesitate to contact me or NVTC's Executive Director Kate Mattice should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

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

Walter Alcorn
Chair, NVTC WMATA Committee