



March 15, 2021

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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 2022 WMATA Budget (Docket B21-01 and B22-02)

Dear Ms. Ellison:

On behalf of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC), I write to convey our comments regarding the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA's) proposed FY 2022 Operating Budget and FY 2022-2027 Capital Improvement Program as part of its public comment period. Our budget priorities are as follows:

- Maintain a dependable and sufficient level of rail and bus service throughout FY 2022
- Open Silver Line Phase 2 as soon as possible
- Rebuild ridership
- Minimize shifting operating expenses to the capital program

FY 2022 Operating Budget

Our regional congressional delegation was again successful in securing additional relief aid from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) and the recent American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). Because the CRRSAA aid did not fully close the operating budget gap in FY 2022, we are grateful that the additional federal relief funding provided in the ARPA will help WMATA avoid layoffs and drastic service changes as our economy begins to recover.

Prior to the passage of the ARPA, the proposed budget maintained FY 2021 levels of rail and bus service in the first half of FY 2022 followed by sharp reductions in service for the last half of FY 2022 in order to defer layoffs and maintain service levels as long as possible. The proposed service reductions— notably 30-minute headways on rail, twenty-two station closures and significant consolidation and reduction of Metrobus lines in Virginia to fewer than ten routes—were deeply concerning, and we appreciate Congress for providing additional federal relief funding so WMATA can **maintain a dependable and sufficient level of service** across the entire year for essential workers and to support a regional recovery.

The Silver Line Phase 2 will provide Metrorail service to six stations in Fairfax and Loudoun Counties and connect the region to Dulles International Airport. This is a fast-growing corridor, and Metrorail service is key to Northern Virginia's mobility, accessibility, economic development and congestion relief goals. We encourage WMATA to **open the Silver Line Phase 2 as soon as possible** in FY 2022 with full service to all stations (Ashburn to Largo Town Center).

We hope to see an end to the pandemic through the distribution of effective vaccines throughout 2021. As employers, schools and individuals consider their reopening and recovery plans and strategies, we encourage WMATA to **rebuild ridership and demonstrate that it is safe to return to transit**. We support WMATA's marketing efforts in this area and encourage WMATA to engage with regional stakeholders such as employers and universities to welcome riders back and attract new riders. An excellent way to build ridership is integrating our local transit providers into existing pass products—notably the monthly pass—and improving pass integration with SmartBenefits. Lastly, we appreciate that the General Manager's proposed budget acknowledges the fiscal strain that our jurisdictions are facing during the pandemic by forgoing the 3% subsidy growth.

FY 2022 Capital Budget and FY 2022 - FY 2027 Capital Improvement Program

NVTC supports the priorities of the FY 2022 Capital Budget and FY 2022 - 2027 Capital Improvement Program. In the proposed budget, WMATA continues to leverage periods of lower ridership from the pandemic to accelerate investment in its capital program to address critical state of good repair projects and prepare for the return of riders to the system. We support WMATA's continued focus on safety and reliability in its capital improvement program to address the system's estimated \$15.7 billion backlog in state of good repair projects. As part of our 2021 Legislative Agenda, NVTC is also actively supporting efforts to reauthorize federal dedicated funding, which is critical to support the capital program's short and long-term funding needs.

The current proposed budget aligns with WMATA Board policy and only shifts \$60 million in eligible operating expenses to the capital budget for preventive maintenance. NVTC urges WMATA to **minimize, to the greatest extent possible, shifting operating expenses to the capital program** for preventive maintenance in order to maintain state of good repair priorities for the capital program and preserve limited dedicated funding debt capacity. Our region has invested billions of dollars in maintaining and rebuilding WMATA, and we must not fall back upon unsustainable budget actions that undermine efforts to achieve and maintain a state of good repair.

NVTC and its jurisdictions are committed to WMATA's success. We look forward to working with WMATA as the agency continues to recover from the effects of the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Katie Cristol
NVTC Chair