

MEETING SUMMARY
NVTC WMATA COMMITTEE
NVTC Suite #230 Conference Room
2300 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, Virginia
Public Livestreaming via You Tube
January 25, 2023

NVTC WMATA Committee Members Present:

Walter Alcorn, Chair
Canek Aguirre
Matt Letourneau
Paul Smedberg
David Snyder

NVTC WMATA Committee Members Absent:

Matt de Ferranti

Staff and Others Present:

Kate Mattice
Allan Fye
Matthew Friedman
Ronnetta Zack-Williams
Kirk Dand (Arlington County)
Greg Potts (WMATA) (*via electronic participation*)
Brent Riddle (Fairfax County)

NVTC WMATA Committee Chair Alcorn called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. and noted that the meeting was being live streamed for the public. Mr. Fye confirmed a quorum was present.

Chair Alcorn asked for any changes to the December 9, 2022 WMATA Committee meeting summary. Committee members accepted the summary of the December 9, 2022 meeting with no changes.

Chair Alcorn asked Mr. Letourneau to provide an update on the Summer 2023 capital maintenance work. Mr. Letourneau shared that the project would replace cracked rails that are susceptible to breakage and require a shutdown on the western portion of the Orange Line between Ballston-MU and McLean/Vienna from June 3 - June 25 and the shutdown will continue between West Falls Church and Vienna stations from June 26 - July 16. He added that this work could not be completed concurrently with the Platform Improvement Project because these projects were incompatible with different contractors and purposes. Mr. Letourneau also stated that this project is an indicator that Metro is making safety its top priority. Mr. Snyder added that communication with that public on the nature of the work and why it is needed is vital. Mr. Alcorn

asked if the Silver Line will be back to full service on June 26 to which Mr. Letourneau confirmed. Mr. Alcorn asked if single tracking was an option to which Mr. Letourneau answered it would have extended the project timeline and opting to do this work on the weekends would be risky due to the project's nature. Mr. Smedberg added that many of the improvement projects are original to the Metro system's inception. Mr. Alcorn asked if the promotional ads for Dulles International Airport would cease during the portion of this work that will affect the Silver Line to which Mr. Letourneau assumed would be the case. Mr. Alcorn also asked about bus alternatives during the shutdown period and Mr. Letourneau answered that 3 months before the work begins alternative routes will be announced.

NVTC WMATA Committee Overview and 2023 Workplan

Chair Alcorn introduced the NVTC WMATA committee overview and workplan for 2023, which was presented by Ms. Zack-Williams. Ms. Zack-Williams provided an overview of the scope and responsibilities for the calendar year. The NVTC WMATA committee holds two primary responsibilities:

- Provide a forum for consensus-based recommendations to the Commission on WMATA policy.
- Provide strategic guidance to staff on WMATA related policy matters and NVTC's responsibilities from legislation.

Ms. Zack-Williams provided the NVTC WMATA committee schedule which includes the following action items:

- Provide comments on the WMATA FY 2024 budget.
- Work sessions on the Annual Report on the Performance and Condition of WMATA.
- Review draft of the Annual Report on the Performance and Condition of WMATA.
- Develop comments on the WMATA FY 2025 budget.

The committee calendar includes items that are not scheduled but will come up during the year such as updates on NVTC's WMATA Operating Funding Working Group and *Role of Metrobus Study*, an update on WMATA's Better Bus Network Redesign and comments on the *Blue/Orange/Silver Corridor Capacity & Reliability Study*.

Ms. Mattice added that NVTC is also currently working on the *Northern Virginia Regional Bus Analysis Study* to understand how buses are servicing the region. She noted this study is taking place concurrently with the WMATA better Bus Network Redesign and staff will work to Metro to ensure this work is aligned.

Discussion and Comments on WMATA's Proposed FY 2024 Operating Budget & FY 2024-2029 CIP

Ms. Zack-Williams and Mr. Fye provided an overview of key matters in the Proposed FY 2024 Operating Budget & FY 2024–2029 CIP, as well as staff recommended themes to include in the budget comment letter.

Mr. Letourneau presented a discussion on the proposed fare structure and its effect on long distance trips. He shared that reducing the base fare from \$2.25 to \$2.00 would create larger fare increases for commuters that live further from the core due to the consolidation of peak and off-peak fares. For example, a trip from Vienna to Smithsonian would be \$3.85 during the off-peak period and would increase to \$6.50 under the proposed fare structure. Mr. Letourneau added that revenue generation was in mind while preparing this budget. Mr. Alcorn added that the \$738 million deficit in FY 2025 compared to \$7 million in revenue that generated from the fare increases in the FY 2024 budget would be about 1% to which Mr. Letourneau mentioned the proposed fare structure is not solely to raise revenues, but also simplification. He also mentioned Metro is proposing a Regional Low- Income Fare Program, which would be 50% of the proposed fare. Mr. Snyder asked what the cost of the Regional Low- Income Fare Program to which Mr. Letourneau responded \$4 million.

Mr. Aguirre commented that with the 50% discount, the \$2.25 base fare could become confusing, and a \$2 base fare would be simple. Mr. Letourneau added that other options to address the larger fare increases would be lowering the per mile fare from \$0.40 to \$0.37 or lowering the max fare of \$6.50 to which Mr. Aguirre responded it would be more viable to change the per mile fare as opposed to the base fare. Mr. Snyder added that providing many options is a good idea. Mr. Smedberg mentioned that it may be a Metro assumption that commuters that live further out have a transit subsidy. Mr. Letourneau confirmed the consensus to keep the base fare at \$2 and Mr. Aguirre mentioned to would be worthwhile to adjust the base fare if the price is increased and Mr. Letourneau mentioned could be a discussion for the next budget cycle.

Mr. Snyder asked if adjusting the per mile rate would address the issue of the large fare increases and Mr. Letourneau confirmed both the per mile fare and reducing the max fare would be two solutions. He added that to make up the difference in the budget additional preventive maintenance funds would be used as it is the only option available, and Mr. Smedberg shared that the preventive maintenance funds are not coming from any state of good repair or rehabilitation projects.

Mr. Alcorn asked about ridership and whether there has been a calculation of what the FY 2025 operating deficit would be if ridership returned 100% to which Mr. Letourneau responded that even with 100% ridership and fare increases Metro would have still reached this point due to structural issues, the pandemic just accelerated these issues.

In regard to the FY 2025 operating deficit, Mr. Letourneau stated in the next couple of months Metro staff will develop scenarios to show what happens if Metro does not receive additional funding as well as what could happen if Metro is funded at an adequate level. He also mentioned that a stopgap solution would be Metro receiving additional funding support while a long-term structural solution would a dedicated funding source. Ms. Mattice added that the work done through NVTC's WMATA Operating Funding and Reform Working Group will examine approaches to the funding dilemma for Virginia jurisdictions. Mr. Snyder added that Metro must justify what its needs are, consider an array of options and the role of the private sector. Mr. Smedberg shared that a scenario that had been discussed is WMATA becoming solely a rail company. He also mentioned privatization of the Metro system would be a challenge because WMATA is a shared investment among three jurisdictions and upwards of a \$150 billion asset.

Mr. Letourneau added that the scenario planning analysis is necessary before bringing in influential partners. Mr. Snyder asked what the schedule is for addressing the structural issues of the operations budget to which Mr. Letourneau answered once Metro completes the FY 2024 budget process and staff has ample time to dedicate to the FY 2025. He also shared the scenario planning materials will be ready by late spring to share with the Transportation Secretary and other key partners. Ms. Mattice mentioned that NVTC is updating its *Economic Value of Transit in Northern Virginia Study* and will have updated numbers to include in the materials.

Mr. Fye commented that based on the discussion staff will develop a draft budget comment letter to share with the committee and full commission and be sent to Metro once the public comment period opens.

Mr. Letourneau presented a discussion on the relationship between Metro and the Washington Metropolitan Safety Commission (WMSC). He described the events with Metrorail operator distribution of training time, the directives issued by the WMSC and the eventual solution. He added that Metro needs support from the region to improve its relationship with the WMSC to build a more collaborative relationship, where the WMSC acts as a regulator and is not involved in Metro's daily operations. Mr. Smedberg added that when Metro petitions the WMSC, the arbitrator is the head of the WMSC instead of an independent body. Mr. Snyder asked what could resolve this issue and Mr. Smedberg added that one solution would be changing the arbitrator, along with issues Mr. Letourneau highlighted.

Chair Alcorn adjourned the meeting at 7:12 p.m.