



To: General Manager Wiedefeld and members of the WMATA board  
From: MetroNow Coalition  
Date: June 8, 2021  
RE: WMATA's Opportunity to Enable a Transit-Led Inclusive Recovery

The MetroNow Coalition is made up of regional leaders from the business, non-profit, and advocacy communities who believe that transit is essential to the economic health and vitality of our region. WMATA, especially our Metrobus and Metrorail operators, have kept this region moving and our economy alive throughout the pandemic.

On Thursday, June 10, the WMATA Board will have an opportunity to define the role WMATA, and transit writ-large, will play in the regional economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. After 15 months of uncertainty, loss, and economic hardship, we can see the future at hand with hundreds of millions of vaccines in arms around the country and case numbers dropping.

In March, after the American Rescue Plan was passed, we asked you to consider the following principles and recommendations in drafting your FY 2022 budget:

1. Make Equity the Cornerstone of Transit Recovery
  - a. Accelerate the Bus Transformation Project
  - b. Prioritize Low-Income Riders
  - c. Eliminate the Transfer Penalty
  - d. Restore Late-Night Service
2. Recognize WMATA's Essential Role in the Region's Economic Recovery
  - a. Aggressively pursue a return to pre-pandemic levels of service, but shift the service patterns to best meet demand
  - b. Clearly communicate the timeline for more frequent, reliable service
  - c. Continue COVID safety measures and investments in ventilation
  - d. Continue to reduce the backlog in preventative maintenance and advance major capital rehabilitation
3. Innovate
  - a. Create a Bulk Transit Pass Program for Employers
  - b. Pilot global rail maintenance practices during the low ridership period

We were heartened to see many of these service and fare opportunities presented by WMATA staff and discussed by the Board at the June 2 Finance and Capital Committee. As the Board prepares to vote on service and fare changes for this fall, when most of the region should be fully reopened and we are emerging into a post-pandemic world, we ask for you to consider a more targeted list of two principles and specific actions around service and fare opportunities:

## Principles to Consider

1. **Make Equity the Cornerstone of Transit Recovery:** Eliminating the transfer penalty, implementing a network of high-frequency all day and weekend bus routes, and restoring some late-night rail service, but supplementing with late-night bus service, are three concrete actions WMATA can take to improve transportation equity and enable a stronger, more inclusive recovery.
2. **Think Regionally Instead of Parochially:** What is good for transit riders in Maryland is good for transit riders in the District is good for transit riders in Virginia. Residents do not care about jurisdictional borders when looking for work or seeing family, they care whether they can access their destination safely and in a reasonable amount of time. Creating a network of high-frequency bus routes, expanding late-night service, opening the Silver Line extension, and committing to and funding a regional bus network redesign are concrete actions WMATA can take to recognize their essential role in the entire region's economy.

## Service and Fare Opportunities

1. **Eliminate the Transfer Penalty:** Riders who transfer between bus and rail only receive a \$0.50 discount, which can be a burden for low-income riders who must choose between the fastest bus-rail route or the cheapest multiple-bus route. Increasing the discount to \$1 was adopted in the original pre-pandemic FY21 budget but the transfer penalty should be eliminated entirely to remove barriers to moving around the region quickly and efficiently.
2. **Implement a Network of High-Frequency Bus Routes:** Improving the frequency of high-ridership bus routes can greatly increase transportation equity, the customer experience, and create a more reliable network that attracts more riders. The proposed 12 & 20 minute bus networks are a great start and we encourage the Board to adopt and encourage this service concept.
3. **Restore Rail Service to 12am, 1am on Fri/Sat; Supplement with Late-Night Bus Service:** The lack of late-night transit options hurts workers and businesses that operate outside of the traditional 9-to-5 schedule. This is especially critical as we look to support economic recovery for businesses that were hardest hit by COVID -- restaurants and entertainment venues -- and support their ability to bring employees back to jobs. Late-night service is an equity issue. We understand the need for overnight maintenance hours on Metrorail, but the bus does not have the same constraints. A late-night bus service that compliments and supplements that lack of late-night rail service can expand opportunities for late-night and overnight workers and businesses. The restoration of 34 bus routes to 2am is a great start,



but that still leaves a gap for overnight workers, 24-hour businesses, and hospitality workers who may not shut the doors until 2am. Even if no service improvements can be made in the near-term, a clear, understandable, and iconic map (similar to the WMATA Metrorail) of the existing late-night bus service (known as Night Owl Service in some other regions) would be a step in the right direction.

4. **Accelerate a Bus Network Redesign:** In 2019, WMATA concluded the Bus Transformation Project (BTP), a multi-year effort to assess regional bus service which resulted in twenty-six recommendations, including a transit equity framework and a regional bus network redesign. We applaud the Metro Board's adoption of the [Transit Equity Framework](#) in FY21 -- a critical first step to reexamine how we prioritize service and transit investment. The WMATA Board should commit to funding and launching a regionally coordinated bus network redesign to ensure that WMATA and local bus services can best meet the region's demands. This should include late-night bus service as well. The timing is right to start this project. A bus network redesign is typically a two to three year process which will allow the creation of a regionally coordinated bus network that better reflects our post-pandemic travel patterns.

As representatives of the region's business, non-profit, and advocacy communities, our success is dependent on WMATA's success. We thank you for your commitment and dedication to WMATA and ask for you to consider the principles and actions above as ways WMATA can help expand economic opportunities and an inclusive recovery for all residents of this region

- The MetroNow Coalition