

# TRANSIT FIRST!

*Coalition members: Action Committee for Transit, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, Audubon Naturalist Society, CASA de Maryland, Clean Water Action, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Crofton First, Greater Greater Washington, MCGEO — UFCW Local 1994, Prince George's Advocates for Community-based Transit, Progressive Maryland, Save Maryland Area Rail Transit*

June 8, 2009

Mr. Jim Graham  
Chair, Board of Directors  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
600 Fifth Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Subject: FY 2011 Budget and Bus Priorities

Dear Mr. Graham:

We congratulate the WMATA Board of Directors on the leadership it showed in the last few months by adopting a budget that avoids significant service reductions without neglecting needed system maintenance. These times of fiscal stringency make transit service more essential than ever to the household budgets of Metro's riders and to the economic future of our region.

As members of the board pointed out during budget deliberations, the budget situation may be even more difficult next year. Metro will need every possible efficiency improvement that saves money without reducing service.

One important opportunity for savings is by giving buses priority in use of the streets. The less time a bus needs to complete its route, the less the cost for salary and equipment. Faster-moving buses simultaneously save money, improve service for bus passengers, and attract new riders.

While there has been much discussion of Bus Rapid Transit plans that require capital investment, we believe that substantial savings are available without capital investment by changing traffic engineering policies to prioritize the movement of buses on existing streets. Examples of bus priorities that could be implemented with only negligible cost (for restriping, signage, etc.) are the following:

- Adjust traffic signal cycles to minimize bus delays
- Let buses drive on highway shoulders to bypass congestion
- Let buses use right-turn lanes as queue-jumper lanes
- Restrict curb lanes to buses and turning vehicles only (diamond lanes)
- Improve enforcement of existing bus lanes

While these improvements do not require capital investment, they do require a policy commitment and need some time for implementation. WMATA planners have pursued bus priority treatments in selected corridors, but progress has been limited in the absence of a

regional commitment from the top levels of government to change traffic engineering policies. In the current climate of budget stringency, this issue takes on a new urgency.

We recommend that the WMATA Board of Directors establish a target for annual savings in bus operating costs, to be achieved by prioritizing the rapid movement of buses on existing roads. The Board would assign a contribution of bus operations cost savings to each of the jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction would be responsible for identifying specific actions and locations within its boundaries that add up to its assigned share of the cost savings.

In order to implement these savings in time to include them in the FY2011 budget, we believe that targets must be assigned this summer. Implementation of traffic engineering at pilot intersections could then begin in time to be reflected in January 2010 bus schedules. This would provide experience so that cost savings from reductions in running times could be reflected in the FY 2011 budget.

Again, we commend the board on its success in retaining service in the FY 2010 budget and we look forward to working with you for better Metro service over the coming year.

Sincerely,

/signed/

Ben Ross  
Chair

cc: Gabe Klein, DDOT  
Neil Pedersen, Maryland SHA  
Beverly Swaim-Staley, MDOT  
Pierce Homer, Virginia DOT