

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 20, 2019

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: HILLARY ORR, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM # 6 – WMATA FY 2021 PROPOSED BUDGET INITIATIVES

ISSUE: Consideration of the WMATA General Manager proposed budget.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Transportation Commission provide input to staff on priorities during the budget negotiation process.

BACKGROUND: The City of Alexandria allocates upwards of \$40 million per year towards WMATA's operating budget and upwards of \$12 million towards its capital budget. In coordination with the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, and through the two Virginia WMATA board members, Alexandria participates in the budget process to ensure that the City's investment reflects its priorities.

Each fiscal year, the General Manager proposes major budget initiatives in November, a full draft budget in December, and adopts a budget in March before the start of the next fiscal year. At the November 7, 2019 Finance Committee meeting, the General Manager presented his major initiatives in the FY 2021 proposed budget.

The capital budget includes a continuation of WMATA's Strategic Plan *Keeping Metro Safe, Reliable, and Affordable*. These include:

- Prioritize rehabilitation and replacement of assets to improve passenger and worker safety
- Regularly evaluate asset condition and reliability for high performance to meet customer needs
- Invest in technology to modernize how people travel

The Proposed FY2021 Budget initiatives include:

Restore Late Night Metrorail Service

Trains would operate an additional four hours per week staying open 30 additional minutes Monday through Thursday (until midnight), and one additional hour on Fridays and Saturdays (until 2:00 a.m.).

Better Weekend Metrorail

Trains would operate Saturday frequencies on Sundays. As a result, headways on all lines would be reduced from 15 minutes to 12 minutes, and in the core, frequency would be reduced from 8 minutes to 6 minutes.

Better Weekend Metrobus Service

Bus service frequency would be improved in two ways: first, Sunday frequency would improve to match current Saturday service on six bus lines that connect to rail stations and second, Saturday and Sunday frequencies would increase on seven bus lines.

Improve MetroExtra Metrobus Service

Service would be added to the weekday service plan of eight MetroExtra lines, including adding midday service to three lines, extending the service period to four lines, and extending the service area of one line.

Improve Customer Service

Enhanced customer service training would be provided to frontline employees to better serve the traveling public.

Reduce Less Productive Bus Routes

To fund these investments, while adhering to the mandated three percent subsidy growth cap and increased operating efficiency, the Proposed Budget includes the elimination of the nine least productive bus routes and some weekday trip reductions on services with low demand. WMATA has not released which routes these will be.

Increasing Non-Fare Revenue

Efforts would continue to increase revenue outside of the fare box including through:

- Station Commercialization and
- Naming Rights
- Enhance Fare Options to Drive Ridership

Key proposed fare changes include:

Metrorail and Metrobus

Full transfer discount (\$2.00) between Metrobus and Metrorail and vice versa

Metrorail

- Peak base fare: +\$0.10
- Standardize Peak Mileage Tiers to \$0.33 per mile
- Peak Max fare: +\$1.00
- \$2 Weekend Flat fare

Metrobus

- Cash fare without SmarTrip: +\$0.25
- Onboard Cash Loading: +\$0.25

- Lower 7-Day Regional Bus Pass price from \$15.00 to \$12.00

DISCUSSION: Staff is currently seeking more data to better understand the implications of many of the operating budget proposals. Initial areas of concern include:

- Whether the benefits of late-night rail service outweigh the costs. Late night rail service would still include late night bus bridges to accommodate track work, which could reduce ridership. Moreover, it may impede current progress on state of good repair. Lastly, it comes at a cost that is being paid by additional bus cuts. Staff has requested more information about potential ridership on rail compared with late night bus service.
- Lack of parity between Metrobus and DASH bus fares with the proposed elimination of the transfer penalty. This would happen if the transfer penalty were eliminated between Metrobus and Metrorail only, as opposed to eliminating the transfer penalty between DASH and Metrorail as well. Staff is interested learning more about the implications of a lack of parity between Metrobus and DASH transfer costs and the cost allocation, revenue implications, and implications for passengers for the elimination of the transfer penalty between DASH and Metrorail.
- WMATA included metrobus in their rail pass products in the FY2020 budget. Local jurisdictions in Virginia are interested in having their local transit systems included in pass products this budget cycle but need more information to make this policy decision. This is especially important as pass products are not seeing a fare increase in the proposed FY2021 budget.