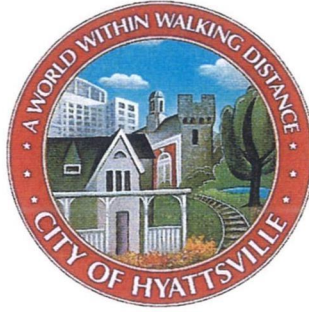


Robert Croslin  
Mayor



Tracey E. Douglas  
City Administrator

February 8, 2023

Honorable Paul Smedberg  
Chairman of the Board  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
300 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024

**RE: FY2024 Operating and Capital Budget and FY2024-2029 CIP and Service Changes**

Dear Chairman Smedberg,

I am writing on behalf of the Hyattsville City Council to express our community's opposition to the proposed service cuts to the WMATA Yellow Line, as proposed in the FY2024 Operating and Capital Budget.

The proposed Yellow Line turnaround at Mt. Vernon jeopardizes regional growth and access to job opportunities available at locations like the Amazon headquarters in Crystal City and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA). This significant reduction in service undermines our ability to attract investment and the economic development plans that have been jointly pursued by WMATA, the City, Prince George's County, and the private sector for more than ten years. Perhaps more significantly, it is also in opposition to WMATA's stated equity goals, leaving historically marginalized, majority Black and Latino communities in Prince George's County without adequate transportation service.

WMATA has communicated to our regional partners that it intends to prioritize transit-oriented development (TOD), including both stations in Hyattsville, over the next decade. We have actively championed and supported this growth as it creates safer, more vibrant community spaces; attracts and retains local businesses that provide local jobs; reduces carbon emissions through more sustainable land use practices; and increases local and state tax revenues through denser, mixed-use, sustainable development. TOD investments also directly benefit WMATA, as they increase transit ridership, improve safety near the stations with "eyes on the street," and create new revenue streams through real estate ground leasing or sales agreements with developers.

In his FY 2024 Budget address, General Manager Randy Clarke referred to the potential of transformative equitability, stating that budgets are about the values and priorities of an organization. WMATA's public statements commit to regional equity and sustainability. WMATA's 10- year strategic plan to expand dense, mixed-use development around three underutilized metro stations

in Prince George's County was a momentous commitment to our residents, who in Hyattsville are 32% Black and 39% Latino as of the 2020 Census. The budget suggested a serious commitment from WMATA to leverage the power of transportation and real estate investments to counteract long-standing patterns of disinvestment, racial segregation, discrimination in housing and access to financing, and the resulting racial wealth gap between predominantly white communities and majority Black and Latino communities.

With all this growing momentum in support of transit-oriented and inclusive development in our City, it came as a shock to us when WMATA released its FY 2024 budget proposal showing a significant cut in service with the proposed Yellow Line turnaround at Mt. Vernon station. The City of Hyattsville requests WMATA reconsider these proposed cuts in order to continue advancing your stated commitment to equity and the strategic plans already in place for transit-oriented developments in Prince George's County.

Recent WMATA ridership data on the impacts of the COVID pandemic show trips only declined 78 percent at stations in neighborhoods where at least two-thirds of the community is Black or Latino, compared with 88 percent for other stations. Thirteen of the 15 Metro stations that saw ridership declines of less than 80 percent during the pandemic were in neighborhoods where more than 8 in 10 residents are Black or Latino. Metro stations that lost the fewest users were mostly located on the edges of Metro's system or in predominantly Black neighborhoods, such as Hyattsville Crossing, West Hyattsville, Fort Totten, Deanwood and Benning Road.

It is clear to us that the service cuts proposed through the budget will further isolate a dedicated ridership that most relies on WMATA's services for access to jobs, childcare, healthcare, and more.

Alternatively, several of WMATA's recent high-profile capital projects are located within wealthy, white communities, including the recent completion of the Silver Line to Dulles Airport and the ongoing construction of the Purple Line. This appears to create a greater disparity between the region's most affluent communities and those that are most in need of WMATA's service, undermining WMATA's stated values about regional equity. WMATA is proposing to turnaround the Yellow Line, but not proposing similar reductions in service to Shady Grove, a station with far less proximity to the core of the transit system.

**We believe that WMATA should consider the following actions and alternatives to the proposed service cuts:**

- At a minimum, WMATA should hold community engagement sessions in our community to get more public input on this decision and educate our residents about the proposed changes and how they benefit us.
- Evaluate opportunities available in the Federal bipartisan infrastructure funding package that the agency could utilize to address short-term budget gaps. These investments could be leveraged to expand TODs that create long-term revenue streams to more effectively sustain the system. Opportunities could include increasing the use of ground lease agreements and partnering with localities to apply for competitive grants such as the Transit-Oriented Development Planning Grants.
- Re-evaluate its approach to assessing the equity of its investments regionally. The regional equity of service expansions through WMATA's capital projects and service cuts should not strive for fairness alone. They should also account for historical and structural inequities that continue to have present-day consequences for communities like ours, whether in terms of the racial wealth gap, reduced access to jobs and professional networks, traffic safety, or



discrimination in home appraisals. The lack of alignment between WMATA's strategic plans and the FY2024 budget proposal is very concerning.

We understand the serious fiscal challenges facing public transit agencies since the start of the pandemic. However, we do not feel that the agency has adequately considered how the Yellow Line turnaround will negatively impact the potential for WMATA to benefit from past and future TOD investments through alternative revenue streams and increased ridership in Northeast DC and Prince Georges' County. We hope that WMATA will reconsider these service cuts and their potential for having a negative impact on our community and many similar majority minority communities near us. Moreover, we are concerned that WMATA is not adequately leveraging the historic levels of infrastructure investment that are possible with the bipartisan infrastructure bill, as well as other major federal investments that could be used to proactively address structural inequality in our region.

We thank WMATA's Board of Directors for its consideration of this request and look forward to your decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'RC', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert Croslin  
Mayor

cc: City Council  
Honorable Angela Alsobrooks, Prince George's County Executive  
Honorable Wanika Fisher, Prince George's County Council