March 11, 2021

Office of the Board Secretary
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001

RE: WMATA Draft FY2022 Budget

Dear Board Members and staff:

On behalf of the entire Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3B, I am responding to the request for comments on the draft FY2022 WMATA Budget posted on February 16, 2021. We are aware that this week, as the federal government has adopted a large COID-19 relief bill, WMATA is anticipating receiving several hundred millions dollars of additional funding. As the WMATA Board members stated in their introductions to the virtual public hearings held earlier this week, it is likely that the added infusion of funds will allow WMATA to avoid making most if not all of the reductions in service and payroll that were incorporated in the draft FY2022 budget for the second half of the fiscal year, between January 1 and June 30, 2021. We hope that will be the case when all the details of that legislation become clearer and the exact amount of federal funding for WMATA is determined. But we continue to have a number of interests and concerns that we want to express, whatever that funding total may prove to be.

We strongly urge that WMATA:
- Maintain at least at the current levels of service and continually built back up as ridership returns.
- Continue to run the cross-town 30N and 30 S buses which were put back into operation on August 23, 2020, and draw strong demand and support across wards on both the northwestern and southeastern portions of those routes.
- Restore weekend service on all routes that are now running through the day on weekdays.
- Operate the weekday rush hour services D1 and 37 as riders come back and the capacity on the current lines is strained on the other bus lines on those routes.
- Work closely with the ANCs and the communities that depend on Metrobus to gather information on demand and value of bus services in the area, now and into the future, and consult closely with the elected leaders and residents to get their input and help to plan for effective transportation service for decades to come.
- Ensure that the staff, board, and residents and their ANC representatives are aware of and paying attention to the costs of running the individual routes and the effects on both riders and the overall bottom line budget numbers, both of which are essential in assessing the capacity and benefits of continuing operations.
Our Commission area is entirely dependent on bus service for our public transportation, because the nearest Metrorail stations are 1.5 to 2 miles away, which is not a practical distance to walk for many of our residents, employees, students, and visitors. We have 30-series buses operating on Wisconsin Avenue along the east side of ANC3B through the commercial area of Glover Park, and N-series buses on Massachusetts Avenue along the extreme northern edge of the ANC in Cathedral Heights. The D2 as well as the D1 weekday rush hour buses have for many years operated on 37th Street, Tunlaw Road, and other residential streets close to Glover-Archbold Park, and that is the only transit service to the densely settled streets of row house and apartment buildings in the interior of Glover Park. Many residents and businesses have located in the area because of the transit service. The walkability and livability ratings for the neighborhood are heavily dependent on the availability of the buses, but that is only because of the services WMATA offered before the COVID-19 emergency. During the pandemic, service has been dramatically reduced, we lost D1 and 37 weekday rush hour services, and other routes were pared back. If the proposed changes for the second half of FY2022 were put into effect, only about half the bus stops in Glover Park would have service, even on weekdays.

ANC3B has participated in hearings regularly on previous WMATA budgets and proposed operating changes, including the draft FY2021 budget in February 2020 and the revised draft budget for the second half of FY2021 which was circulated for comment in fall 2020. Like many other parts of the District that depend on Metrobus, we have gotten used to seeing our buses off the main priority corridors included on the list of services to be cut back, curtailed, or consolidated with other nearby routes that have also been popular and running with crowds, standing room only. That is happening at the same time we are being told to reduce use of private motor vehicles and rely on alternative forms of transportation in order to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions and save the environment. That is untenable.

The area has about 300 residents per bus stop, which is close to double the District average. Our area has a large share of seniors as well as zero-car households and individuals at the poverty level. We need and depend on bus service to get people to work and school and other activities, avert congestion and meet environmental goals. The community and the people in it cannot continue to survive and thrive unless we have increased bus service, not reduced service. For all those reasons, we ask that WMATA’s bus planners work with us and with DDOT to find ways to build and improve service for the future. If you are going to restructure routes or shift service onto different parts of the transportation network, please coordinate with the ANC and residents so we can contribute information and insights, participate in the planning, and be aware of any changes that are being put forward before they become a fait accompli.

We strongly support continuing service on the D2; the N2, N4 and N6; the 31 and 33 as well as the 30N and 30S, which have once again appeared to receive more mentions from District witnesses at the WMATA public hearings than any other route. We also hope to see both the D1 and 37 rush-hour services return. We are enclosing more detailed thoughts on the specific bus routes that serve our Commission area. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with us if you have questions or would like to discuss any of the suggestions. In the mean time, please keep the buses going, make sure you get the word out that you are taking all the steps necessary to make sure transit riders are protected from COVID-19, and give the public confidence that you have enough service for customers to return to riding Metrobus comfortably and safely.

Sincerely,

Brian Turmail
Chairman

cc. Councilmember Mary Cheh

Enclosure: Additional Points on Metrobus Routes Serving the ANC3B Area

This letter was approved by the Commission by a vote of 5-0 at its duly-noticed public meeting on March 11, 2021, at which a quorum was present. Three of the five Commissioners make a quorum. By this vote, the Commission also approved the Chair or his designee to represent the Commission on this matter.
ADDITIONAL POINTS ON METROBUS ROUTES SERVING THE ANC3B AREA

D1 Glover Park-Franklin Square
Service on the D1 weekday rush hour route was eliminated at the beginning of the COVID-19 emergency and have not been restored. WMATA’s plans for the second half of FY2021 say that service on the D1 would be restored if ridership on the D2 route becomes so great at peak hours that the buses would be operating above the safe limits for social distancing. If that is done, please continue to monitor the passenger loads as riders return, particularly with reopening of schools and offices and other businesses, and assess the prospects for continuing increases in riders from both past customers and new customers.

D2 Glover Park-Dupont Circle (Non-Regional)
The D2 has been a 7-day a week service for many years, though since the beginning of April 2020 it has run on weekdays only. WMATA is planning to bring the D2 back to seven day a week operation this month. The D2 is the only public transportation service available to the majority of residents in Glover Park in many of the blocks west of Wisconsin Avenue, where the terrain is hilly, streets are winding and not all continuous, and a walk to Wisconsin Avenue can be as much as 10 blocks. People with any mobility challenge, seniors, families with small children, and anyone carrying packages or luggage or pulling a grocery basket would have great difficulty making that trip to the next nearest bus stop on Wisconsin Avenue.

WMATA’s draft budget for the second half of FY2022 would have combined the D2 with the N6 and M4, operating only on Tunlaw Road through most of Glover Park, which would have cut out all the bus service on the D2 serving the interior streets west or southwest of Tunlaw, leaving 25% of the riders on that route without any bus service at their stops. The D2 service is essential to the community for residents, employees, students, and visitors—people going to work, students going to school, individuals going shopping or to medical appointments, religious services or recreational activities, or trying to connect to Metrorail or longer trips throughout the city and the region. Many workers in the area who do not have a car or do not want to drive to work count on frequent service on the D2 (supplemented by the D1 at peak hours) to provide sufficient capacity to transport the large number of commuters without overcrowding the buses or leaving people behind at bus stops. We hope workers will be able to go back to work and Metrobus will be available to make that possible, for former customers, new residents, and people who want to try transit. They can’t use the bus if there is no service.

N2, N4, N6 Friendship Heights-Farragut West/Potomac Park via Massachusetts Avenue
Riders in Cathedral Heights and farther northwest depend on the N buses on Massachusetts Avenue west of Dupont Circle. During COVID-19, the only service has been the N6 which previously operated only in evenings and on weekends, and is slower and more circuitous than the N2 or N4 and does not serve all the streets or stops. The N4 followed much the same route as the N6, running on Western Avenue from Friendship Heights to Westmoreland Circle and then in Massachusetts Avenue, but the N4 did not take the Nebraska Avenue/New Mexico Avenue/Cathedral Avenue “loop” that the N6 follows in both directions. The N2 route served Tenleytown and Nebraska Avenue between Tenleytown and AU, and terminates in Potomac Park. Those points are not served at all by the N6, leaving some N-bus riders without convenient options for getting to Metrorail and shops, restaurants, schools and churches in Tenleytown or jobs in Potomac Park.

The proposed budget for the first half of FY2022 would have retained the N6 but the second half of FY2022 proposed combining the N6 with the D2 and M4, ad operating the N6 only on the Idaho Avenue/Cathedral/ New Mexico/Nebraska loop, leaving the vital Massachusetts Avenue corridor with basically no bus service west of Dupont Circle. Of the nearly 4000 weekday riders on the N-buses pre-COVID-19, that proposal would have left 39% of current N6 riders without any service at the bus stops they use. That would be a devastating change for residents going to work, employees getting to jobs in the area, students at American University and other schools, and visitors going anywhere in the Massachusetts Avenue corridor in Ward 3.
30N/30S cross-town buses Friendship Heights to Naylor Road (30N) and Southern Avenue (30S)
The other key routes for ANC3B are the 30-line buses that operate on the Priority Transit Corridor Wisconsin Avenue NW, including the 30N and 30S services that run across the National Mall. The 30S/30N have been particularly important because they allow employees and visitors from other parts of the city to take a one-ride bus trip between the farthest edges of the District to the northwest and the farthest edges to the southeast or anywhere in between, without making a transfer. When the draft FY2021 WMATA budget was up for comment in early 2020, more comments were filed about saving the 30N and 30S than any other route in the record. This year, with COVID-19, that route is even more important to help employees get to and from work at stores and other businesses that remain active in the pandemic, while workers, students, visitors, and tourists can use the 30N/30S routes to get to schools, shopping, cultural and educational and recreational sites. That service is a mainstay for many essential workers riding in early morning or going home late at night from jobs up and down Wisconsin Avenue.

WMATA says that if the 30N and 30S are eliminated, people who currently use those cross-town one-ride services across the National Mall could get to their destination by making a transfer such as at Archives. But that adds time and inconvenience. Before COVID-19, nearly 5,000 people rode the 30N and 30S every weekday and over 2,000 per day on Saturdays and Sundays. Loss of the 30N and 30S would mean that more than 10% of the daily riders would have to make a transfer, which means an average of at least 10 people per bus running in each direction on weekdays. Some hours there are very few riders, but that could mean that as many as 20 or more people per bus would have to get off the bus and make a transfer during peak hours. For the people relying on those buses to and from work, who work long hours and have a ride that can take an hour each way as it is, the proposed changes to the N6 route were out of the question, because of the added time and trouble to make the transfer, the risk to the reliability, and exposure to weather and other risks by having to get off the bus in the middle of the trip and wait for another bus.

WMATA made a commitment from the beginning that these cross-town buses would continue to be operated in order to keep the connections between distant parts of the city and between people, even if there were alternate service on Metrorail. Maintaining those connections is just as important today as they were in the 1970s, for achieving equity, diversity and inclusion.

37 MetroExtra Friendship Heights-Archives via Massachusetts Avenue
In recent years, the 37 one-way rush hour weekday service was the only MetroExtra service in Ward 3 and the only part of the 30-series that did not follow Wisconsin Avenue all the way between Friendship Heights and Georgetown. Instead the 37 used Wisconsin Avenue between Friendship Heights and Massachusetts Avenue and then took Massachusetts Avenue southwest toward Dupont Circle and Farragut Square. This route cut about 10 minutes out of the peak hour running time for commuters and provided added capacity to relieve peak time overcrowding on the rest of the 30-series buses. The route had support all around upper Northwest/Ward 3, among workers using it for their commute to and from work. Riders and the ANCs were extremely relieved when the WMATA Board voted a year ago to restore service on the 37 in the final FY2021 budget, even though within week that decision was reversed to adjust to the new COVID-19 emergency and the 37 has not run again since that time.