

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3B**  
**GLOVER PARK AND CATHEDRAL HEIGHTS**



September 9, 2021

Mr. Paul J. Wiedefeld, General Manager and CEO,  
and Directors of the WMATA Board  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
600 5th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

RE: Adjustments in Metrobus Operations coming out of COVID-19 emergency

Dear Mr. Wiedefeld and Board Members:

As you will remember from previous letters and testimony by ANC3B, our Commission area is heavily dependent on bus services for public transportation. The nearest Metrorail station is 2 miles from Glover Park, beyond a practical walking distance for most residents in ANC3B. For the past 15-20 years, ANC3B Commissioners have worked to save the bus service that we have and also encourage WMATA and DDOT to make improvements, to increase the availability, frequency, capacity, and reliability of bus operations to and from Glover Park-Cathedral Heights.

The Metrobus routes we depend on include the 30-line serving Wisconsin Avenue—one of the highest volume lines in the District—as well as the D1 and D2 buses and the N series serving Cathedral Heights along the New Mexico and Massachusetts Avenue corridors. Those routes provide service essential to people who live, work, attend school, visit or shop in our area. We have lost a number of routes over the years, including the N3 and N8, and service particularly to the interior of the neighborhood seems to be under continuing threat with each new budget. But with the increasing need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase use of alternatives to private motor vehicles, we know that maintaining and strengthening public transportation has to be a priority. That is especially true in parts of the urban areas such as ours, where rail transit is not available or planned and the only practical transit option for most residents is bus service.

While we appreciate the recent improvements in the operating schedules on some of the bus routes serving our Commission area, including the N2 and N4, 31 and 33 routes, we are very concerned at this point with:

- low frequency of operations on the vital D2 route serving the interior of Glover Park
- continued suspension of the D1 route during peak hours, which in combination with the D2 had provided service every 7 minutes in the key morning hours when workers and students rely on the service
- total elimination of the 30N and 30S cross-town routes between Friendship Heights and Naylor Road or Southern Avenue respectively, which we have worked for years to preserve as essential transportation for residents and workers traveling to and from our area, and a needed connection between parts of the District.

We would like to request a meeting with WMATA at your earliest convenience to discuss these services and your agency's thoughts and plans on Metrobus services serving our community.

Since the last major organized response by our community to a proposed WMATA budget in early 2020, many factors affecting bus and overall transit operations have changed in the District and around the country. COVID-19 and the economic downturn have altered work and travel patterns dramatically, along with individuals' choices of mode and timing of trips. Available funding has also changed.

We appreciate the difficult decisions that transit agencies have had to make to continue to be viable, and we are grateful for the flexibility of the WMATA staff and board in adjusting rapidly to the changes, trying to balance the many interests and requirements of the public as well as of the transit system itself. As the Washington metropolitan region continues to emerge from the pandemic, we hope that WMATA will maintain a high degree of sensitivity to the financial situation and also to the people's transportation, economic, and social and cultural needs.

These matters are vital for our Commission. Please let us know when it will be possible to schedule a meeting with us, in person or by remote technology. If we do not hear from you, we will be in touch by phone and email.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Brian Turmail  
Chairman

cc. Deputy Mayor Lucinda Babers, Primary Vice Chair of WMATA Board  
DDOT Director Everett Lott  
Councilmember Mary Cheh  
Ann Chisholm  
Christian Piñeiro

This letter was approved by the Commission by a vote of 5-0 at a duly-noticed public meeting on September 9, 2021, at which a quorum was present. (Three of the five Commissioners constitute a quorum.) By the same vote, the Commission designated the Chairman or his designee to represent ANC3B on this matter.

## **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND ON WMATA SERVICES AND CONCERNS IN ANC3B**

Submitted to WMATA September 9, 2021

Though none of the operational changes WMATA has made this month require public comment, the ANC would like to share our thoughts and concerns about some of the changes. We understood that some service improvements were planned in September 2021 that local riders would appreciate and some other changes were going to go against the community's interests and requests, and that is the case:

- WMATA's public statement at the beginning of September 2021 noted that 97% of pre-pandemic Metrobuses are now running again. For the past year, our area had lost service on five of the ten Metrobus routes that previously provided service, and we currently do not have service on four of the ten Metrobus routes that were serving ANC3B in February 2020 (30S and 30N, as well as the D1 and 37 routes that ran at peak times on weekdays to accommodate commuters).

- Service on the D2 has not been changed, and the D1 service remains suspended, although in the spring WMATA indicated the D1 might be restored as ridership increased on the D2. The D2 is still only operating every 44 to 46 minutes at the most critical time in the morning, between 7:15 and 9 am. The D1 is not operating at all. Reliability and on-time performance have also been poor. In peak hours before the pandemic, the D1 and D2 together were running every 7 minutes. This is a dramatic reduction in bus service, leaving commuters with minimal transit options. Middle school students who used to take the D buses to and from Hardy Middle School are now either arriving late to school or they have to get up and out to the bus stop as much as 45 minutes earlier in order to try to catch a bus, or they have to be driven to school.

- As of September 5, service has been restored on the N2 and N4 lines between Friendship Heights and Farragut Square, with some adjustments. (N4 no longer operates between Farragut Square and Potomac Park.) For 18 months, riders who depended on the N2 and N4 were left with just the N6, which normally ran only on nights and weekends and operated in only one direction on the Idaho Avenue/Cathedral Avenue/New Mexico Avenue/Nebraska Avenue loop. That was a serious reduction, especially for regular commuters and seniors and others who rely on service to their stops. Current service is not quite identical to the pre-COVID-19 schedule (There is no after-midnight service) but it is a great improvement to have Metrobus once again serving every stop on the N2 and N4, including the Tenleytown Metro stop and the Idaho Avenue/Cathedral Avenue/New Mexico Avenue/Nebraska Avenue loop in both directions on the N2.

- More buses have been added on the short-distance 31 and 33 routes serving the Wisconsin Avenue corridor, between Friendship Heights and Potomac Park or Federal Triangle respectively. The 33 buses also offer service after midnight, which late night riders appreciate.

- For the first time since WMATA was created in the 1970s, the cross-town 30 buses are no longer running between Friendship Heights and Southeast Washington, which have provided economical transportation for workers to get to and from jobs and maintained a vital socio-cultural connection across the District and its diverse neighborhoods. Early leaders of WMATA joined District officials in making a commitment to the people to maintain that one-ride bus service to allow workers to travel between of the city at affordable fares, recognizing that many workers, students and others would need an option to the more costly Metrorail service, and also that Metrorail would require one or more transfers to make some of the same trips. Until now, WMATA has kept that promise.

Our area is a densely developed community of primarily row houses and apartments, and one commercial strip with restaurants and stores along Wisconsin Avenue that provide many essential jobs. It is in all of our interests that residents and workers be able to travel effectively across the city by transit. We trust WMATA will not look at median incomes or other characteristics and assume that lower quality transit service is "good enough" for people living and working in our neighborhood. The entire city is covered

by the same transportation and energy and equity goals. The District's commitment to achieve 50% of commuter trips by transit applies to every ward.

At the end of calendar year 2019 and the beginning of 2020, WMATA proposed a draconian set of changes in Metrobus services that would have eliminated about half the routes serving our community, in order to meet anticipated budget shortfalls in FY2020. The ANC, along with hundreds of residents, businesses and employees who use those routes, joined thousands of other Metrobus riders in working to reverse those changes, and in March 2020 the WMATA staff prepared a revised budget that would fund all the existing bus services to and from our area, as we had requested. That budget was approved by the WMATA Board in April 2020. But unfortunately by that time COVID-19 restrictions had gone into effect, all but non-essential trips were barred, and transit service had to be severely reduced in order to adjust to the changed circumstances and avoid huge financial losses. The WMATA Board always has to consider funding constraints. In a time of tight budgets and multiple competing demands, everyone cannot have all their demands fulfilled. But economic and social equity have to be key considerations.

#### Concerns about Elimination of 30N and 30S

We were very pleased to see WMATA leadership speaking in April about the importance of ensuring that bus service directly links essential workers and underserved communities to job centers, even if the routes may not be as productive as other services. The 30N and 30S have long been examples of bus service to job centers, and though WMATA has expressed concerns about the efficiency and reliability of those routes, they have kept up their load factors throughout the pandemic. In fact, according to WMATA's statistics presented in the FY2022 budget slides, ridership on the 30S and 30N has consistently remained at higher levels compared to pre-COVID-19 volumes than the more frequent 31 and 33 bus services. Riders have continued to choose to ride the 30N and 30S that operate every hour instead of the short-distance routes that operate more frequently but require a transfer, which WMATA is asking people to use instead. (WMATA's FY2022 budget presentation showed the 30N and 30S ridership at -39% from pre-COVID levels compared to -54% for the 31 and 33 and -80% for the 32, 34, 36.) That is probably because the buses go where people need to go and allow them to make cross-town trips without a transfer.

The 30N and 30S buses have for decades been making it possible for riders to travel between distant parts of the District at affordable fares, without a transfer, to get to jobs and other destinations across town on the bus. That was the commitment of WMATA and local leaders, even after Metrorail started service to Wards 7 and 8 in Southeast Washington and to far northwest Washington along Wisconsin Avenue. There are many reasons:

- a) Metrorail was never planned to reach all the points served by bus around the city, including on Wisconsin Avenue between Georgetown and Tenleytown.
- b) Even along a Metro route, Metrorail stations are spaced fairly widely apart; bus stops generally are placed at shorter intervals. Therefore, many more people along a cross-town route are within practical walking distance of a bus stop than a Metrorail station.
- c) Metrobus fares for long trips were lower than Metrorail fares that vary by distance. Taking the same cross-town trip by Metrorail can cost several dollars more in each direction than the standard Metrobus fare.
- d) Transferring between buses or modes to get between origin and destination adds to the trip time, inconvenience, exposure to weather and even security concerns.

At this time, when so many households have lost income and are facing severe challenges to keep up with the costs of rent and utilities, food and health care, as well as transportation, we believe it is ill-advised and deeply unfortunate to cut off this vital service, for transportation as well as economic and sociocultural reasons.

When WMATA asked for comments on the FY2020 budget that would have eliminated the 30S and 30N service, a total of 2,291 comments were submitted about those routes – the largest number of any route in the District, and more than 1,000 more than any other route. More than 2/3 supported continuation of the service. The Board listened, and restored that service in the approved FY2020 budget.

When the pandemic restrictions went into effect, though most Metrobus service was suspended, the 30N and 30S were the one service that was retained on the 30-lines, as the backbone for essential workers across the District to get to and from jobs. The riders and supporters of the 30N and 30S have not gone away. Many have continued working and continued using those bus routes throughout the pandemic.

WMATA's proposal for eliminating the 30N and 30S in the final FY2022 budget was not widely known, but more than 480 people signed a letter to WMATA in mid-April asking that those services be maintained. Board members noted that they had received numerous comments from riders, presumably referring at least in part to the letters and emails about the 30N and 30S, but they did not take any action in response. In June, WMATA's adjustments to Metrobus services did not discontinue the 30N and 30S, but simply eliminated the last run of the day in each direction. Service has continued into the new fiscal year and through the summer of 2021.

However, the WMATA Board's vote in April 2021 approving the FY2022 budget allowed discontinuing operations on a list of Metrobus routes, including the 30N and 30S. WMATA budget materials continued to present the 31, 33, 32, and 36 – with a transfer mid-route to another bus or Metrorail -- as one-for-one substitutes for one-ride cross-town service, and therefore did not require any further analysis or justification. In August, WMATA's announcements included the 30N and 30S among the routes that would be seeing schedule modifications. Now, as the new season begins and many people are returning to work and school, the 30N and 30S routes--long-time mainstay of the District transit system--are no longer operating. In spite of strong opposition from riders, affected ANCs and employers they serve, hundreds of people have lost the service they used day-to-day.

We remain very concerned about what this change means for people across the city. WMATA has contended that discontinuing the 30N and 30S would not have significant effects, while we and our constituents, as well as additional ANCs served by the 30N and 30S and Councilmembers have warned that many workers and other riders would suffer adverse consequences and economic harm. We urge that the WMATA staff and Board monitor the effects of eliminating the 30N and 30S, evaluate what riders are doing in the absence of their customary service, and review the impacts on their travel time, travel cost, and reliability. We hope that not only riders and their representatives but also the Bus Planning staff, the WMATA Riders' Advisory Council and the DDOT Transit Advisory Council will also be paying attention. This raises important transportation, environmental, and equity issues which are all among the policy priorities for the District and the region.

#### Concerns about D1 and D2 Services

In recent years, WMATA has often proposed to cut back or eliminate the D2 as well as the D1, which we would like to see returned to operation. Before mid-March 2020, the D1 and D2 buses were running at full capacity during peak hours, and residents were asking for more frequent service. No one can predict patterns of work or even school, shopping, or other travel at this point, but we would like to see local residents and employees to return to their previous levels of transit use. That will only be possible if the service is available. Earlier this WMATA said in its operating plans that it would be possible for the D1 route to return to operation if the D2 buses were overcapacity. But that prospect has not been mentioned in the past few months. We would like to discuss possibilities for more frequent peak hour service on these routes.

At the same time, we are extremely concerned about continuing mentions of elimination of both the D1 and D2 and in favor of some kind of combined route that would not provide the same capacity and might not even serve points in the interior blocks of Glover Park that are such important parts of the current D-routes for our constituents. Many residents in apartments and row houses in western and northern Glover Park do not have private motor vehicles and chose to live in our area because bus service is available on the D1 and D2 lines.

Without a bus route to the interior of Glover Park, many regular Metrobus riders who depend on the service would be left 6 to 8 blocks from the nearest bus stop, often up and down steep hills. That is impractical and unacceptable for seniors, people with difficulty walking, families with young children in strollers, people carrying heavy bags, luggage, or rolling shopping baskets.

We hope that WMATA does not have the impression that all residents in Glover Park and Cathedral Heights are wealthy and can just as easily book a ride-sharing service to handle their needs when transit is not an option. That is a misreading of the facts. Census data showed more than 10% of households in the ANC3B area below the poverty level. Many residents do not have cars and/or do not want to rely on private motor vehicles. Anyone with limited funds, including students, young professionals, and seniors on fixed incomes, would be hard pressed to pay for Uber, Lyft, or taxis for every ride. It is not likely that individuals would book a ride on a car service to get to and from a bus stop on Wisconsin Avenue, so they could use transit for the rest of the trip, especially if they then have to make another one or two transfers after they board the first bus.

When the limbs of a tree are cut off and there are no longer any branches, the trunk of the tree cannot survive. As transit planners know, bus services are similar. The transit system gets a good share of its bus ridership from the network of routes serving neighborhoods throughout the District, including near neighborhoods like Glover Park and Cathedral Heights as well as neighborhoods around the edges of the city. The District cannot survive without its neighborhoods and the neighborhoods cannot survive without public transportation.

Our area has many residents and workers who walk to work and to school. Pedestrian trips are a high and share of the total and walking is continually increasing. Bicycle use is also growing, along with scooters and other micromobility devices. But bikes, scooters or bikes and similar devices are not going to be a practical option for many seniors, people with small children, or those with groceries, packages or luggage. This is a vital issue of equity for many workers to get to and from their jobs. The District has found both the neighborhoods at the western edge of the District and neighborhoods at the eastern edge of the city are lacking in high quality high-frequency transit service that allows them to effectively reach key employment centers and other destinations.

We hope in future Metrobus service adjustments, WMATA will continue to give appropriate attention to riders traveling to and from our community, including essential workers, students and seniors who are so dependent on effective public transportation.

We look forward to the chance to meet and discuss these points in more detail.