February 2, 2017

The Honorable Jack Evans, Chairman, and Members of the Board
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
600 5th Street NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Evans and the Board:

As the five members of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3B serving Glover Park and Cathedral Heights, we want to express our strong opposition to the proposal to eliminate Metrobus service on the 37 route as part of WMATA’s 2018 budget.

The 37 bus offers fast "limited-stop" service to downtown during rush hours from upper Wisconsin Avenue, south on Massachusetts Avenue to Dupont Circle, Pennsylvania Avenue, Farragut Square, and Archives, linking major residential and employment centers. The 37 buses run weekdays only, 11 trips inbound in morning rush hours (leaving Friendship Heights at 6:45 – 9:21 am) and 11 trips outbound in evening rush hours (leaving Archives at 4:00 - 7:06 pm).

The 37 is the only bus line in the District that is being proposed for total elimination in this budget cycle. For the other District bus routes in Docket B17-01, WMATA is proposing adjustments to current routes or fare changes to accommodate riders, not just complete elimination of the service.

We believe WMATA should not eliminate the 37 Metrobus service for the following reasons:

1. WMATA’s Performance Measures for the 37 route show high ridership (599 per average weekday, which is above WMATA guidelines, and 27.2 riders per trip, which is more than 2.5 times WMATA’s guidelines). Ridership is not the reason WMATA is proposing to eliminate the 37.

2. The 37 bus route operates as part of the system of 30-series buses in the Wisconsin Avenue/Pennsylvania Avenue corridor. WMATA’s 2008 “Metrobus 30s Line Study” recommended creation of the 37 to improve service on that corridor because it “speeds up travel times and helps make the service more reliable,” by stopping only every quarter mile and detouring around Georgetown.” The 30 Line, which has “the highest ridership in the Metrobus network, continues to be overcrowded at rush hour.

This point came up this past Tuesday, January 30, at a special ANC3C meeting on the proposed homeless shelter in Ward 3, where public statements included evidence that the 30 buses often bypass bus stops in areas north of our ANC, leaving people to wait for a second or third bus, because the buses have no more space to accommodate additional riders.

3. If the 37 bus is eliminated, approximately 300 people could be faced with a decision of whether to try to take another bus, including the overcrowded 30-series, or use their own private vehicle, taxi or ride-sharing service, most likely with one passenger per vehicle. Surely WMATA does not want to see 300 more vehicles on the streets in morning and afternoon rush, when our streets are already congested.
4. Wisconsin Avenue is part of the District’s Priority Corridor Network (PCN) where high quality, high frequency bus service, is offered and is presumed to continue at that level through the long-term future, as reflected in DDOT’s “MoveDC” 25-year plan. Under the District’s new Zoning Regulation Rewrite (ZRR) that went into effect last September, all properties within 1/4 of a mile of a route in the PCN are subject to reduced parking requirements for new development, based on the availability of high-level transit service. That designation is not time-limited.

5. The part of the Wisconsin Avenue corridor that runs through Cathedral Heights and Glover Park is not served by Metrorail. We rely on Metrobuses for transit service. The proposed elimination of the 37 bus route comes on the heels of changes in the 30s series of bus routes on Wisconsin Avenue in 2014, elimination of the N3 and N8, diminishing frequency of the D1 rush hour-only service, and the continuing threats to D2 service.

6. The overcrowding on our buses combined with the continuing loss of Metrobus services in our area is a source of great concern for our riders, some of whom must rely exclusively on bus service for their transportation. Degrading service is also a concern for all of us who care about the quality, reliability, and survival of our bus services and our transportation system in general.

7. The 37 is the only MetroExtra route serving Ward 3, so without the 37 service, our ward would have no MetroExtra service, while all other wards will have one and several will have more than one.

We are aware that the 37 bus route falls short of WMATA’s guidelines in that the subsidy per rider is $7.37 compared to the $4.81 per rider goal. Cost recovery is also somewhat low: fares paid by riders on the 37 bus cover 13.7% of the estimated costs of the service versus the WMATA guideline of 16.6%. Those shortfalls result largely from the fact that the 37 buses operate in only one direction and must return to their starting point empty, without generating any revenue on the “backhaul.”

But any changes in the 37 must be assessed from a systems perspective, taking into account the consequences, costs and benefits for the 30-series and the entire network in our part of the city.

We do not believe that cost measures for the 37 bus alone -- viewed in isolation from the system of buses it is designed to complement -- should force WMATA to eliminate a bus line that is well-used, fulfills a real need for public transportation in Cathedral Heights and Glover Park and beyond, and provides critical service in the overall system of 30-series and N-series buses in the area.

Public transportation that works for the communities it serves is a vital asset that benefits the city as a whole. We should not jeopardize the strong network of bus services operating in Wards 2 and 3 at this critical time for retaining Metrobus and Metrorail riders.

We believe a further review of the consequences of eliminating the 37 Metrobus service will justify keeping the route in service. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with us if you have any questions or would like to discuss the matter further.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jackie Blumenthal, Chairman (ANC3B02)
This letter was approved by the Commission on February 9, 2017, at a duly noticed public meeting at which a quorum was present.