

July 2, 2008

To: COG Board of Directors  
From: Joan Rohlf, COG/DEP  
Subject: Ride Free Code Red on June 9, 2008

### **Ride Free Code Red**

MWCOG provides air quality forecasts seven days per week at 2:30 pm through email and fax to the local transit providers and the media. The forecast uses the national Air Quality Index (AQI), a color-coded index required by EPA (see table below).

AQI Range	AQI Color	Description
201-300	Purple	Very Unhealthy
151-200	Red	Unhealthy
101-150	Orange	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups
51-100	Yellow	Moderate
0-50	Green	Good

When COG forecasts Code Red (unhealthy) air quality, the next day transit providers in Northern Virginia and suburban Maryland provide free rides on transit buses ("Ride Free Code Red").

### **June 9 Code Red Forecast: Communication Issue**

On the afternoon of Sunday, June 8, notification emails and faxes were sent to the media and transit providers that Monday June 9th was forecast as a Code Red day. Early on the morning of June 9, all participating transit providers, with the exception of WMATA, offered their customers free rides. After receiving customer complaints, WMATA began offering the Ride Free to bus customers at 7:30 am that morning. A communication glitch appeared to have occurred between COG and WMATA leading to a delay in offering free bus rides in northern Virginia.

### **Meeting with WMATA**

After the event, COG staff met with WMATA bus operations personnel to determine the cause for miscommunication. Although WMATA personnel received the forecast on Sunday, they received the forecast on cell phones that display text messages, not HTML, and Code Red was not apparent to the recipients. The Code Red forecast is sent as an HTML message that uses color as well as text. As a result of the meeting, the following changes will be made:

- Six WMATA bus operations personnel were added to the list, for a total of 10 WMATA staff.
- The e-mail and fax text will be improved by adding the forecast color code, in text format, in the body of the emails and faxes.
- The forecast color code will be added to the email subject line.
- COG Air Quality hotline number will be added to the forecast fax.

Staff believes that through these and other potential actions, the problems experienced on June 9<sup>th</sup> will be corrected.