

ITEM 12 – Information

April 20, 2016

Briefing on the Forum on the Future of Metro
Hosted by COG and the Greater Washington Board of Trade
On March 30

Staff

Recommendation: Receive briefing

Issues: None

Background: On March 30, COG and the Board of Trade convened a forum with regional leaders to discuss the future of Metro. At the April 20 meeting, the TPB will be briefed on what transpired at the event and follow-up steps that were identified.

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

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Leaders Focus on Restoring Metro's World-Class Reputation at Regional Summit



At a summit on the future of Metrorail, about 100 government, business, and civic leaders discussed how they can work together to help the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) restore the transit system's "world-class" reputation.

The March 30 summit, *Metrorail at 40: Restoring a World-Class System*, sponsored by the Greater Washington Board of Trade (BOT) and Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) and took place during the week of the 40th anniversary of Metrorail's opening. Participants discussed a variety of topics, including funding, safety, development around Metro stations, and governance.

"We must work together to restore Metro to the world-class stature it once proudly possessed," said COG Board Chairman Roger Berliner during opening remarks. "It cannot fail. We, as regional leaders, cannot let it fail."

[Read Berliner's full remarks.](#)

BOT Chairman Daniel Waetjen added, "I hope that moving forward from today our collective partnership will reinforce how important Metrorail is to the economic vitality of this region."

The heads of the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia transportation departments discussed immediate issues on safety and reliability, including establishing a tri-state Metro Safety Commission and cultivating a collaborative relationship with federal officials on safety.

WMATA General Manager Paul Wiedefeld and WMATA Board Chairman Jack Evans briefed participants on Metro's focus on the system's maintenance needs, its financial outlook, and the urgent need to secure additional funding from area governments as well as the federal government. Evans added that maintenance and repairs could require Metro to close entire lines for several months at a time. He indicated that any decisions related to any need for closures would be made by the General Manager based on further assessment and analysis.

In addition, transportation expert Robert Puentes incoming president of the Eno Center for Transportation and Brookings gave a presentation on how changes in technology and travel behavior could impact Metro. He also noted Metro's key

role in accommodating the region's forecasted growth over the next several decades.

The summit concluded with an interactive session for participants to identify Metro's top attributes, challenges, and areas of opportunity. The participants highlighted Metro's value in connecting the region across many jurisdictions, incorporating many modes of transit, and helping communities around its stations thrive. Among the challenges, they noted the decline in ridership, unsustainable finances, and a loss of credibility. Participants offered a range of ideas for improving the system from transparency to smart land use around Metro stations. Several participants said throughout the summit that Metro must demonstrate safe and reliable operations to attain additional funding.

Berliner reminded participants that the summit was the first step in a new regional effort. He asked all in attendance to "join with us in the months ahead as we delve deeper into the overarching issues that impact Metro."

As one of the first action items following the summit, COG and BOT is looking into convening a task force to address the top issues identified at the forum, including funding and development. In addition, COG and BOT are planning to convene an event with the leadership of other world-class metro systems through the Community of Metros, an organization known as CoMET. The group provides a forum for their members—top-tier metro systems such as those found in Toronto, Paris, and Beijing—to identify best practices and learn from one another.

[Listen to recorded audio: view other event materials.](#)

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1. What makes WMATA a world class Metro system and what specific aspects of the system are most important to the region?

- Economic Impacts on regional housing and jobs market
- Example for rest of country with respect to TOD and transit
- Incorporates multiple modes of transportation into one regional transportation system
- Iconic architecture; still a world class system
- Reliable system that connects suburbs to inner core of the region; allows many communities to thrive
- Symbol of regionalism uniting the region as one community
- Metro is an institution can begin to reduce economic disparities
- Single greatest sign of regional collaboration
- Fundamentally responsible to the economic success of Arlington County
- Impacts on traffic reduction and positive environmental impact

2. What is keeping the system from being world class and what are the biggest challenges to WMATA's viability?

- Lack of credibility
- Cannot definitively identify the root cause of the current problems; greater transparency
- Two rail system inhibits growth potential
- Need to think forward to avoid mistakes of the past
- Region must rally behind the new GM/Board plan
- Contractors must deliver
- Governance must play its role in implementing the improvement plan
- System is very limited in its ability to be maintained; lacks redundance allowing for operations during maintenance
- Need to consider international lessons learned
- Must consider connectivity to regional transit systems to keep people out of cars; must encourage people to use the system
- Lack of economic development around stations; stations need to be destinations
- Operating salaries, pension obligations are unsustainable
- Concerns with labor agreements; historic trends indicate wage growth
- Purpose of Metro has expanded - commuting, economic develop, etc - funding growth has not accompanied evolving role
- The Metro brand is broken; leaders have not set the bar high enough to inspire people to get behind Metro
- Must inspire confidence prior to obtaining funding increase
- Quality of service is dropping while fares are increasing; how are we pricing and what is the goal in pricing decisions?
- Safety concerns; riders must feel safe riding the system

3. Where do you see the biggest opportunities for improvement?

- Foot paths, bike paths, sidewalks - last mile to stations
- BRT networks that compliment the Metrorail system
- Demonstrate that we can deliver if given the funding; link funding to benefits and then deliver
- A more transparent Metro will inspire confidence; should utilize elected officials to help communicate with the public
- Metro can shape economic development, affordable housing, walkability in the greater region
- Acknowledge that Metro is a way of life; must champion and unite to bring it along for the next 40 years; start with safety
- Addressing governance issues is the elephant in the room that can drive change
- Should be able to connect Federal dollars with regional transportation plans to fully realize the potential of the investment that is already there

