



Testimony by David Alpert on B22-568
“Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Dedicated Funding Act of 2017”
February 7, 2018

Dear Chairman Evans and members of the committee,

Good morning. My name is David Alpert, and I am here today as Executive Director of DC Sustainable Transportation, an organization which brings together Business Improvement Districts, other business groups, advocacy organizations, and government entities to collaborate on shared priorities for transportation in DC and Arlington.

Metro is a vital part of our region’s and our city’s economy and we must get out of the constant spiral of budget deficits, deferred maintenance, and safety problems which have plagued Metro in the last decade but whose roots stretch all the way to the planning and opening of the Metrorail system, whose creators did not plan for the ongoing capital needs and where the federal government has never contributed to operating and only recently, to capital maintenance.

DCST supports the goal of this bill to secure a dedicated, bondable revenue source for Metro. Our region must come together to provide this funding.

We agree that a regional, consistent revenue source would be best, as it would help keep a level playing field between jurisdictions. However, the reality at this point is that proposals in Maryland and Virginia do not impose a consistent tax, and it would not be wise for the success of this effort to be blocked by the lack of agreement on this point.

Therefore, we recommend removing the provision in the bill (Section 3 paragraph 1) that requires an identical tax in Maryland and Virginia before this would take effect. Further, we recommend increasing the rate, or using other funding sources, to reach a total funding level of \$178 million rather than \$125 million.

The recent roll-back of late-night Metrorail hours, while perhaps necessary for the safety and maintenance of the system, nevertheless has created hardship for many businesses and workers in DC job centers. We hope that Metro will work to reach a better state of good repair and higher

degrees of maintenance efficiency in the future so that restoring some late-night hours could be considered.

Finally, I would also add that as this council considers the needs of transit in our city, while Metrorail is in the greatest crisis at the moment, there are significant needs and opportunities in other areas. Many residents do not live or work close to a Metro station, but utilize our buses to reach jobs and schools.

The potential exists to improve the quality of our bus service while also keeping costs steady by implementing a network of bus priority improvements including dedicated lanes, signal priority, off-board fare payment, all-door boarding, and stop rebalancing. Doing so will require the cooperation of WMATA, DDOT, businesses, advocates, and neighborhood stakeholders.

WMATA is currently considering a “bus rethink” which would comprehensively re-examine the current bus network. We believe there is a lot to be gained by such an effort, such as rationalizing the standards for regional versus non-regional bus service and optimizing routes which sometimes, for better or worse, still follow the paths of old streetcar lines from the last century.

However, we also want to ensure that a redesign effort starts with a goal of improving service while holding funding constant, rather than one of reducing funding and offering the same level of service, as some ambiguous wording in the recent LaHood report might be read to suggest.

Meanwhile, our Circulator system, while not under the purview of WMATA, has struggled with maintenance and reliability problems. Much of this stems from the existing maintenance facility, controlled by contractor First Transit, which is inadequately sized and in poor condition. It is imperative that the District secure a new, better maintenance facility and improve its operating contract and/or switch operators to ensure better and more reliable service.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Alpert". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Alpert
Executive Director
DC Sustainable Transportation