

GAO's Work on WMATA

Presentation to the Panel On Alternate Dedicated Revenue Sources for WMATA

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October 7, 2004

Briefing Overview

- Study Objectives and Approach
 - Results of GAO's study- July, 2001 report and September, 2001 testimony that discusses WMATA's:
 - Operations and Maintenance Challenges
 - Safety and Security Programs
 - Capital Planning Process
 - Recommendations and WMATA's Actions
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Objectives of GAO's Work

- What challenges does WMATA face in operating and maintaining its Metrorail system?
- What efforts has WMATA made to establish and monitor safety and security within its transit system?
- To what extent does WMATA follow established best practices in planning, selecting, and budgeting for its capital investments?

Methodology

- Overall approach
 - Conducted interviews and analyzed documentation at WMATA headquarters, WMATA Board of Directors, Transportation Planning Board, Federal Transit Administration, and America Public Transportation Association (APTA)
 - Compared WMATA's capital investment activities to those of leading public and private sector organizations, as outlined in GAO's Executive Guide: Leading Practices in Capital Decision-Making
 - Our work was performed from September, 2000 to June, 2001
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WMATA was addressing significant Metrorail operations challenges

- WMATA addressing problems with Metrorail's equipment and infrastructure through its Infrastructure Renewal Program (IRP)
- WMATA addressing problem of over-crowded trains by ordering about 200 new rail cars and considering future modifications to Metrorail's "core capacity"
- WMATA was taking steps to address concerns about its maintenance and repair shop capacity

WMATA established safety and security programs to address risks

- WMATA's safety program had evolved since the mid-1990s, when a series of accidents led to several independent studies citing the need for program improvements
 - WMATA had overall low injury rates on both the rail and bus systems—average of less than 1 injury per 1 million passenger miles, although the incident rate was rising slightly
 - Half of those injuries were on escalators, caused by passenger behavior. WMATA was conducting public awareness campaigns.
 - WMATA had numerous efforts aimed at security.
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WMATA addressing major capital needs, but planning improvements needed

- WMATA had adopted several of the best capital investment practices followed by leading public and private sector organizations, including:
 - Completing a comprehensive needs assessment of its infrastructure renewal and system capacity requirements
 - Ranking proposed projects based on criteria including the condition of the existing assets
 - Using innovative financing techniques to leverage its capital assets to generate additional income

WMATA addressing major capital needs, but planning improvements needed, cont'd

- To improve WMATA's strategic planning and capital investment practices, we recommended that the agency:
 - Develop a long-range strategic plan and annual performance plans that clearly define multiyear goals and objectives and plans for achieving those goals and objectives.
 - Develop a long-term capital plan that:
 - Define project justifications and baseline costs, schedules, benefits, and risks
 - Include alternate funding strategies and project outcomes, depending on funding availability

WMATA addressing major capital needs, but planning improvements needed, cont'd

- Formalize its capital decision-making process, laying out standard procedures and decision criteria for analyzing and deciding on projects.
- Develop a process—in consultation with the TPB and state and local jurisdictions—for WMATA to take a more active role in (1) identifying and evaluating alternatives for expanding the transit system and (2) proposing the most efficient and cost-effective projects for system expansion.

WMATA's response to GAO recommendations

- WMATA's actions included:
 - Creating a high-level organization for strategic and capital planning
 - Developing a strategic plan, a 10-year capital plan, a performance measurement process, a system for rating and prioritizing all of its capital projects, and
 - Taking the lead in identifying several less-capital intensive alternatives, such as bus rapid transit lines.

WMATA's response to GAO recommendations, continued

- WMATA disagreed with one of GAO's recommendations that called for developing alternative capital funding strategies and project outcomes, depending on the funding available from federal, state, and local sources.
 - WMATA cited its concern that developing contingency plans for addressing anticipated budgetary shortfalls would encourage its funding agencies to reduce the level of resources provided to WMATA.
 - We continue to believe, however, that prudent management requires WMATA to plan for such shortfalls, which we thought would only increase after Metrorail's core capacity needs were determined.

To obtain additional copies of GAO's report and testimony

- www.gao.gov
- Report number: GAO-01-744
- Testimony number: GAO-01-1161T