



Metropolitan Washington
Council of Governments

Testimony of
The Honorable Timothy Lovain
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Before the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am Timothy Lovain, Chairman of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG). I also serve as a Councilmember of the City of Alexandria, Virginia.

The Transportation Planning Board is the federally designated metropolitan planning organization for the National Capital Region. It is responsible for developing and carrying out a continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative transportation planning process in the metropolitan area. The TPB is housed and staffed by the Council of Governments, a nonprofit association of 22 local governments representing the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia and more than five million residents.

I would like to thank Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Norton for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee today to share my observations on the importance of the Metrorail system to the National Capital Region on so many fronts.

Earlier this year we celebrated Metrorail's 40 years of service to the nation's capital. During this period, the rail system has helped tie our multi-state region together. It has had a significant impact on our region's mobility and economy and has supported the development of dozens of vibrant, transit-oriented communities.

Equally important, it has provided invaluable service to the federal government and to people visiting the nation's capital. It is in this context that I provide my testimony on behalf of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board and Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments to this Subcommittee on Highways and Transit.

Today, I will highlight some of the ways that Metro is central to our region's mobility and prosperity, and its importance to the region's largest employer, the federal government. I will also discuss the significance of Metro as the transit system of the nation's capital.

Washington D.C. is the most important world capital and its metropolitan region deserves a world-class rail system. Metrorail opened 40 years ago this year and quickly gained a reputation as a world-class system—a reputation it enjoyed for many years until recently. The 19 million annual visitors to this capital region come not just from across the country but across the world. Their impressions of the capital region, and our nation as a whole, are shaped in part by their experience of the Metro system.

The federal government has recognized Metro's important role from the beginning. Federal funding accounted for \$6.4 billion—more than two-thirds—of the system's initial construction. Federal funding continued the 40 year federal-state-local partnership supporting Metro with a major contribution to the recent expansion of the rail system (the Silver Line extension) to Dulles International Airport.

The federal government again reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining Metro as a world-class system by committing to provide matching funds to keep the system in a state of good repair through the 2008 Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) Act. Continuation of this funding for another decade is critical as Metro works to improve the safety and reliability of the system. The region remains committed to match the federal funds in this regard thanks to the Governors of Maryland and Virginia and the Mayor of the District of Columbia.

The importance of Metrorail to the National Capital Region cannot be overstated. It is vital to the region's economy. It serves people from across the country. It transports a significant part of the federal workforce and provides numerous other benefits.

As of fiscal year 2015, Metrorail logged about 710,000 rail trips on an average workday. In addition, 59 Metrorail stations are located within the region's Activity Centers, the region's priority locations for growth.

And Metro will shape future transportation and development patterns, helping our region accommodate an additional 1.5 million people and 1.1 million jobs that the Council of Governments has forecast for the next three decades. For example, one in five Metrorail riders come from zero car households.

Metro also serves a key role in helping the region accommodate special events. For example, Metro provided 1.1 million rail trips on Inauguration Day in 2009.

In addition to mobility, Metro is a major asset to the region's economy. In the 2011 study *Making the Case for Transit*, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) quantified some of the system's key benefits, such as providing access to jobs and increasing property values. For example, the study found that two million jobs, more than half of all jobs in the region, are located within a half-mile radius of all Metrorail stations and Metrobus stops.

Property values within a half-mile of Metrorail stations represent more than a quarter of local jurisdictions' property tax base, but only four percent of their land. This valuable land generates more than \$3 billion annually in property tax revenues.

More recent statistics from WMATA show that 86 percent of the region's new office construction is occurring within one-quarter mile of Metrorail stations and 93 percent of this construction is within a half-mile.

These numbers reveal how the region's economy has become closely intertwined with Metro. They also remind us that ensuring a safe, reliable system is essential if the region hopes to attract and retain businesses and workers in the future.

Finally, it is important to note that more than any other transit system, Metro helps the federal government do business. Recent data indicate that the federal workforce represents 43 percent of Metro's morning peak period commuters and about 40 percent of the federal workforce in the region use the Metrorail system for their commuting or business-related travel.

According to the U.S. General Services Administration, 315 buildings with federal offices or labs, excluding military and defense buildings, are within a half mile of Metrorail stations. The Metrorail

system also plays a critical homeland security role by enabling the evacuation of more than 120,000 people per hour.

As has been said by many regional leaders, all of us – the local, state and federal government, businesses, and citizens of the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia - own Metro. We all invest in the system because we all benefit from it.

I'd add that the success of all other strategies and future investments to improve transportation in our region relies on an existing system that functions properly and is safe.

We certainly acknowledge that Metro is facing some significant challenges in terms of ensuring the levels of safety and service reliability that characterizes a world-class system. There are many reasons that we are faced with this challenge today, including governance, safety oversight, and funding.

The region, with assistance from the federal government, has recently taken some significant action on these fronts. The WMATA Board has reaffirmed its commitment to address the challenges Metro is facing, such as hiring General Manager and Chief Executive Officer Paul Wiedefeld. Mr. Wiedefeld has a record of successful management of transportation systems. In his short tenure, he has taken bold actions to address safety and service reliability challenges and begin restoring the trust and pride of its riders.

The Federal Transit Administration has taken unprecedented and direct leadership in conducting the safety oversight of Metrorail. The Governors of Maryland and Virginia and the Mayor of the District of Columbia together with their legislative representatives are working collectively to establish a Metrorail Safety Commission that will take full advantage of the investigation, inspection, and enforcement authority the Congress has provided to safety oversight agencies.

Over the past four decades, local, state, and federal officials have made a major investment in Metro and have reaped many benefits. Now as the system faces serious challenges, our region's success will depend on our working together to support Metro and ensure safe and reliable service.

State and local governments fund half of Metro's \$1.8 billion operating budget, while fare revenues make up the other half. State and local governments also provide the majority of the system's capital budget. The 2008 Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) Act put in place a ten-year, \$3 billion funding agreement of which half of the funds are federal dollars.

Despite all of these contributions, Metro's needs are greater than the funding currently available. I believe that within the United States, Metro is the only rail system in its class that does not have a dedicated source of funding for its operations and state of good repair needs.

That's why the region is coordinating through the Council of Governments and our business community partner, the Greater Washington Board of Trade, to explore how it can collectively work at the state and local levels to provide long-term, predictable, and sustainable dedicated funding support to meet Metro's needs. And we look forward to continued and increased financial support from the federal government as well.

I am confident that the region and the federal government can continue our partnership and rise up to address Metro's challenges. For Metro to be a regional and national asset for future decades, we must ensure a safe and reliable system and help restore the system's world-class reputation.