

**Opening Statement of Richard Sarles
Before the Council of the District of Columbia's
Committee on Public Works and Transportation
April 1, 2010**

Good Morning Chairman Graham, other members of the Council and staff. My name is Richard Sarles, and I am the Interim General Manager of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority starting next week. This is my fourth day on the job, and it is a privilege for me to be here this morning to share some of my thoughts and goals for Metro. But first, for the benefit of those citizens of District of Columbia who are watching—these proceedings, let me share a little about myself.

I grew up in a family without a car, so I used public transportation for everything through my college years. That had a profound effect on me, and it influenced my career choice. When I began my career, I chose transportation, and I have been in the industry ever since. Over the last 40 years, I have been with New Jersey Transit, Amtrak, and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

I recently retired as the head of New Jersey Transit, and I've been asked why I'd come out of retirement to work with Metro. That's an easy answer. Simply put, I want to help. I've ridden this system many times since its early years, and have always been impressed by Metro's services and how well they are delivered. Who wouldn't want to be part of something so critically important to our region?

But let's face it- Metro is no longer new. It is worn in many ways. We must devote the resources necessary to restore the luster to this system. I feel that I can help move Metro forward in three areas: safety, reliability, and budget. These are the fundamental areas we will focus on while I am here.

I have been doing a lot of homework to get up to speed about Metro, and I still have a lot of things to learn. In my first few weeks here, I am meeting with employees, elected officials, our oversight agencies, and customers to hear what they see as the problems and solutions in their own words. We know we need to address the following: December's Tri-state Oversight

Commission audit; what we learned from the National Transportation Safety Board's February hearing; FTA's recent audit; and the assessment from our former General Manager David Gunn. What remains is to build a cohesive response to the problems outlined in these efforts, and deliver safe, reliable, and efficient service to our customers.

I am an engineer by training, so I am not keen on coming into a place with pre-packaged solutions. I have to understand how Metro works and what corrective actions are already in place. Chances are the solutions for many of our challenges are already here; we just have to act on them. As a fresh set of eyes, I will work with the many great employees at Metro to resolve our issues. There is no magic formula. There is only hard work and attention to detail at every level. I will encourage open and frank dialogue with and among employees. We will conduct a rigorous examination of our rules, our training, and our adherence to both. I expect to spend a considerable amount of time in the field working with our operations supervisors and front-line employees discussing their needs and ideas for improving our operations and safety record.

I am excited and honored to be here. One just has to look around to see how important Metro is to this region; it moves millions daily to work, to festivals, events, entertainment and shopping. Metro has stimulated economic development in many communities around this region and has added millions if not billions to the regional tax base. Metro without question is vital to the health of the region and is the iconic symbol for transit in the nation.

Chariman Graham, I am looking forward to working with you, and the Government and citizens of the District of Columbia, to address the issues at Metro and to serve this region

Thank you.

Anticipated questions for Mr. Sarles:

1. Metro is facing a \$189 million dollar budget gap in Fiscal Year 2011. Please tell us if you have faced similar budget gaps in your experience and how you dealt with these gaps?
2. As you know or as you will find out, part of our problem with our budget gap is a loss of ridership due to the economy and not meeting our revenue projects in several areas. Knowing this, in your professional opinion should we consider raising fares across the board and substantially reducing our services to close the projected budget gap?
3. The Metro Board has debated for several months now approaches to solve our budget problems; - in fact we have a hearing tonight where we will hear from our riders and other concerned citizens things that we should consider to reduce the gap. --- In your experience have you or transit agencies that you have been associated with ever used capital program funding to help solve an operating debt problem and spare the riders from fare increases and service reductions?
4. If you are familiar with this approach were there long-term detrimental impacts on the infrastructure or the state of good repair of those systems? How would you minimize any detrimental impact if you were to use some capital funding to minimize service reductions and fare increases?
5. Please tell us what was the relationship between the transit properties where you worked and their state oversight agencies?

