

Testimony of Richard Sarles, General Manager  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
before the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of  
Columbia under the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
U.S. House of Representatives  
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Chaffetz, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am Richard Sarles, General Manager of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, known as WMATA or Metro.

Today at Metro there is no higher value or priority than safety. We have taken dozens of actions just in the last year, to improve safety for our customers and employees. Five months ago, when I appeared before the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, I reported on our six month plan to move Metro forward to improve safety, service reliability, and our financial stability. Today I want to update you on our progress.

I will also address the progress that Metro has made in response to the comments, findings and recommendations of the National Transportation Safety Board regarding the June 22 accident. Upon receiving the recommendations, we immediately began work to follow up on every recommendation.

But first, I'd like to turn to our Six Month Plan and take you through the actions on each of our priorities, beginning with safety.

## **Safety**

1. **Fill remaining safety department vacancies and increase training.** James M. Dougherty was appointed Chief Safety Officer for Metro effective April 19. Reporting directly to me, he oversees the Department of System Safety and Environmental Management, which includes all safety involving passengers, vehicles, the environment and health and training. Since joining Metro, he has strengthened the safety team by increasing the safety staff by 12 positions for a total of 43. SAFE is staffed by highly skilled individuals with diverse backgrounds with over 230 years of safety experience. The department includes registered Professional Engineers, Associate Safety Professionals, Certified Safety Professionals, a Certified Safety and Security Director, and Senior Associate Staff Instructors for the Transportation Safety Institute (TSI). On average, SAFE personnel have nearly 17 years of transit experience, nearly 10 years of safety experience, and 13 years of experience working for WMATA – providing the department with a strong depth of institutional knowledge for WMATA's system.

It is a testament to Mr. Dougherty's industry leadership that he was appointed along with Ms. Jackie Jeter (President of Local 689) to the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) Transit Rail Advisory Committee for Safety (TRACS) which will provide information, advice, and recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation and the FTA Administrator on matters relating to the safety of U.S. public transportation systems and activities.

We offered five training courses taught by the Training Safety Institute (TSI) ranging in duration from two to five days. The courses have afforded training to 220 Metro employees between May and September, 2010.

Additionally, seven TSI courses have been added for 2011.

2. **Continue accelerated close-out of open safety-related audit findings.** With the approval of the Tri-State Oversight Committee (TOC), Metro developed Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) in response to findings from both external and internal audits and investigations. Metro has closed 223 CAPs since 2004, with the rate of closure increasing significantly in recent months. Currently 33 CAPs remain open. I have communicated to Metro staff that continuing to close CAPs is a top priority.
3. **Develop incident tracking and safety management reporting system.** We are taking advantage of improvements in technology and developed the Safety Measurement System (SMS) which is a web-based tool to allow for communication of safety-related information and tracking across departments. SMS went live for Bus operations on July 1, 2010; training for the rail division has started this month and is on track for all other divisions by the beginning of November.
4. **Encourage near-miss reporting, including anonymous hotline and strengthened whistleblower protection.** We have established a safety hotline and safety email address through which employees are encouraged to report safety concerns, anonymously if desired. Also, the Metro Board on July 22, approved Metro's revised whistleblower protection policy to encourage

employees to raise safety-related concerns. We have also started working with our largest Union, Local 689, to develop a non-punitive program to report near misses.

- 5. Complete new right-of-way worker protection manual and revisions to Metrorail Safety Rules and Procedures Handbook (MSRPH).** On August 24, 2010, Chief Safety Officer James Dougherty, Deputy General Manager Dave Kubicek, and I officially signed the agency's new Roadway Worker Protection (RWP) Manual, making it Metro's primary guide for safe operations along the tracks, which is commonly referred to as the "roadway." Also, a revision to the Metrorail MSRPH has been completed. Training for both programs will begin later this fall.
- 6. Complete self-assessment of safety-related internal controls and conduct thorough assessment of safety culture.** We intend to complete multiple self-assessments in safety-related areas, the first of which is focused on internal controls. The Internal Safety Audit (ISA) began on May 17, 2010 and will be completed within the next week. We have also conducted a survey of all Metro employees entitled "Safety Cultural Diagnostic Survey" to provide an analysis on Metro's safety culture and after-survey action plans, guidance, and tools for addressing safety challenges. Over 97% of employees completed the survey with a final report to be delivered by September 30, 2010. Finally, we are launching a new cross-departmental Safety Action Team to assist in identifying and addressing safety concerns. The first initiative of the team is to find ways to improve communications with all front-line employees.

## **Service Reliability**

The quality of our customers' experience is the key to the continued success of our system. We are taking steps to improve the on-time performance of all of our modes -- Metrorail, Metrobus, and MetroAccess -- as well as the availability of our elevators and escalators which have a very direct impact on the quality of our customers' trips.

In April, I identified the following actions in the six month plan to improve service reliability:

- 1. Increase training for front-line employees and supervisors.** In May Metro implemented a new biennial recertification process for station managers. The two-day curriculum, with practical and written exams, includes elements such as dealing with difficult customers, emergency response training, first aid and CPR. We have also implemented revised 30-, 60-, and 90-day training performance reviews for newly certified train operators and station managers to ensure that they are meeting our standards for safe operations and customer service and to provide us with an on-going source of review regarding the effectiveness of our training programs.

We continue to emphasize training related to the reorganization of our bus department, designed to improve management of operators, reduce accidents, and improve service. Finally, in conjunction with the new RWP Manual, we have begun to pilot a new training program with classes starting October 4.

- 2. Create transparent performance tracking & reporting systems.** New performance measurement tools have been developed, including web-based dashboards, a monthly vital signs report of key performance indicators, and an annual performance report to assess what is working well, what is not, and why. The first Vital Signs Report was presented to the Board on June 10, 2010 and has been posted on the internet to foster increased accountability and transparency.
- 3. Revise inspection and maintenance procedures to accommodate changes in operations.** As in the area of safety, our rules and procedures for inspections and maintenance need to be clear and relevant for our current operating environment. To date, all bus, rail, and MetroAccess inspection and maintenance procedures have been updated and inspections are ongoing.
- 4. Pilot Metrorail schedule adjustment on Red Line.** We have evaluated ways of improving service reliability through our schedules and implemented the first adjustment on the Red Line in June to improve service reliability and the quality of the customers' experience. The new schedules reflect reality and allow for more time for customers to board and exit the trains at our busiest stations, and we have more 8-car trains running to the ends of the line.
- 5. Initiate external assessment of elevator/escalator maintenance and repair programs.** With regard to vertical transportation (i.e. elevators and escalators), WMATA has 588 escalators located throughout its system. Many of them are over 30 years old and working under ridership levels that were not contemplated when they were originally installed. Throughout the years, the

escalators have been subjected to extreme conditions and have not been kept in a state of good repair. What customers are experiencing today results from these factors.

The situation is exacerbated because some escalators are one-of-a-kind and the original manufacturers are no longer in business. To repair and maintain them, we need to search for available parts or even re-manufacture them — a step that can add considerable time to the repair process.

Additionally, while we do maintain an inventory of some key components, we cannot always know which parts need to be replaced until an escalator has been dismantled.

To address the situation, we have done the following:

- Brought a fresh eye outside expert in to complete an assessment of the escalator and elevator maintenance program.
- As part of the major Red Line and Blue/Orange Line rehabilitation projects, we will rehabilitate 146 escalators, replace nine and also rehabilitate 31 elevators. The Red Line rehabilitation started in 2009 with completion in 2013 and the Blue/Orange Line rehabilitation will continue for the next several years.
- Complete the rehabilitation of the 2 platform escalators at Bethesda by the end of October.
- Dedicated nearly \$5 million in the capital budget to repair escalators at Wheaton and Dupont.

- Established rapid response teams and consolidated management within Metro for accountability.

As we work to bring all of WMATA's escalators to a state of good repair, customers will continue to see escalators out of service, because we will still perform routine maintenance and inspections. We understand that this work can seriously inconvenience customers, but the work is essential to bringing the entire system to a good state of repair and maintaining it, and we appreciate our customers' patience.

**6. Continually re-emphasize safety and state of good repair as top priorities.**

Maintaining vehicles, track, structures, signals, and other infrastructure in a state of good repair has a direct impact on the safety and reliability of the Metro system, as it does for every transit agency in the country. If Metro's system is allowed to degenerate, issues related to service reliability will increase. The most effective action we can take to improve reliability is to improve the physical condition of our system.

For Metrobus, we have replaced 139 of the 148 older buses, with 9 remaining buses to be delivered by the end of the month. With newer vehicles we expect fewer equipment failures, leading to improved service delivery. With each new bus delivered a 15 year old bus is taken out of service. In fact, for the months of June and July, Metro achieved the best Mean Distance Between Failure (MDBF) rate for those months in Metrobus history. Metro achieved a MDBF of 6,578 miles in June, a 30 percent improvement from June 2009, and a MDBF of 6,670 mile in July, a 26 percent improvement from July 2009.

We have also reorganized our bus transportation division, retrained operators and supervisors, and increased supervision of street operations to better monitor and address service reliability issues. We have implemented NextBus, which provides customers with real-time bus arrival information by phone or online, and have created a new on-line service disruption notification for bus customers.

For MetroAccess drivers, we have developed and begun to implement a pilot training program conducted by classroom instructors utilizing techniques for adult learners and interactive video to achieve training consistency and improve performance. Also, MetroAccess dispatchers will receive enhanced training on trip movement and MetroAccess road supervisors will receive safety and trip monitoring training. We have also installed DRIVECAM in all dedicated MetroAccess vehicles and signed a contract to install the safety system on Metrobuses to help serve as a teaching tool and monitor for bus and MetroAccess vehicle operators.

### **Financial Stability**

Now let me turn to a topic which is integrally related to our ability to improve service reliability – Metro’s financial stability. Vice Chairwoman Hudgins’ testimony provides some background on Metro’s funding sources and outlines some of the challenges that we face over the long-term. I would like to focus this part of my testimony on the specific steps we are taking to gain better financial stability.

In April, I set out to accomplish the following objectives related to financial stability:

- 1. Educate policymakers, customers, and members of the public about their role in funding Metro.** In order to continue the type of regional conversation that I believe must take place about Metro's financial future, we must ensure that everyone shares a common understanding of how Metro is funded. To this end, Metro held six public hearings around the region from March 22 through April 1, 2010, at which 1,842 people either testified or provided written comments about how to close the FY11 budget gap. We also received 3,633 completed on-line questionnaires. Overall, the message that we heard from the public was: do not cut service; get a larger contribution from the federal, state, and local governments; and raise fares if you have too. We clearly heard at the public hearings, that when we raise fares or reduce service, we have a direct impact on the people we serve every day, on their ability to get to work, school, medical appointments, and recreational opportunities. In addition to public input, Metro received and incorporated comments from the Riders' Advisory Council, Jurisdictional Coordinating Committee, and the ATU Local 689.
- 2. Implement Board-approved FY2011 operating budget.** Metro's fiscal year 2011 budget, which was approved in June is composed of a \$1.4billion operating budget, which funds daily transit service (including personnel costs, fuel and propulsion costs, etc.) and a \$1 billion capital budget, a first in many years. In the end, Metro developed a balanced budget that reflects input from

all of our stakeholders. As I have discussed, the budget included job cuts, fare increases, and subsidy increases to fill the \$189M budget gap.

- 3. Manage transition from Metro Matters capital funding agreement to next capital funding agreement.** Over the last six years, Metro has funded its capital program through a multi-year agreement with our jurisdictional partners, known as Metro Matters. The stable funding stream provided by Metro Matters allowed us to begin addressing our backlog of state of good repair needs, which included the replacement of 767 Metrobuses to reduce the age of our fleet from over 10 years to less than 8 years. It also allowed us to begin addressing capacity needs with the procurement of 122 new Metrorail cars, expansion of rail yard maintenance and storage facilities, and upgrades to power systems to run 8-car trains.

Over the past year, Metro and our jurisdictional partners negotiated a funding agreement to succeed Metro Matters. That agreement allows Metro to address some portion of the highest priority projects from among more than \$11 billion in capital needs that we have identified over the next ten years. The new capital funding agreement has been signed by Metro's funding jurisdictions and provides a framework for greater accountability and more effective project management.

- 4. Continue efforts to secure alternative financing.** Given our funding constraints, we are compelled to re-think our priorities and consider alternative financing. We have submitted a competitive letter of interest in seeking participation in the U.S. Department of Transportation's TIFIA Credit Program

which provides credit assistance in the form of direct loans, loan guarantees, and standby lines of credit to finance surface transportation projects of national and regional significance.

- 5. Initiate a discussion with regional and federal stakeholders on Metro's long-term fiscal outlook to identify both challenges and solutions.** Fiscal year 2011 likely will be the most difficult year, financially speaking, that Metro has ever faced. The economic slowdown is having a continued impact on Metro, as it is across the country. For the transit industry as a whole, the slowdown has meant that ridership and revenue are down, while costs continue to go up.

For Metro, the austere economic times are a major contributor to a decline in ridership from previous years. This constraint has also required Metro to limit our capital investment for the next six years to only the most critical, "must-do" safety and system maintenance projects, even with the new dedicated funding authorization.

As Metro faces these constraints, it must also prepare for the future in which we are anticipating ridership growth of 20% over 10 years. These facts provide the beginnings of conversations that we expect to have with many stakeholders over the next several months.

Now I would like to turn to the work we are doing to respond to each of the NTSB recommendations associated with the June 22 accident.

## Update on NTSB Recommendations

On July 27, 2010, I, Vice Chair Hudgins, and members of Metro's executive leadership team were in attendance, listening carefully to the NTSB board meeting proceedings to gain a full understanding of the findings and recommendations. Immediately following the NTSB board meeting, we set out to address each of the 16 recommendations. Within 24 hours of that meeting, I assembled Metro's senior leadership team and have met with them regularly since then to begin work on each and every recommendation; which I will outline for you now.

First, with respect to the recommendations for the Metro Board to revise policies and processes to further codify and improve safety oversight, Metro's Customer Service Operations and Safety Committee has recommended that the full Board of Directors establish a Safety and Security Committee and that the Board also adopt a new mission statement that clearly places safety at the forefront of the transit agency. Additionally, as directed by the WMATA Board, the Chief Safety Officer reports monthly to the Board on safety progress to date, including responsiveness and compliance with safety oversight agencies. With respect to the other recommendations, the following summarizes our actions.

1. **Parasitic Oscillation.** The NTSB made two recommendations intended to reduce the potential of parasitic oscillation in track circuits. We have already replaced track circuit modules at 34 locations and are in the process of replacing an additional 8 locations of the 103 total locations. Metro has begun implementing the plan to complete the remaining locations. We will increase

the frequency of our inspections on audio frequency track circuit modules within the rail system from annual to quarterly inspections. We will continue the loss of shunt review twice daily until the testing is completed on the real-time alert system, and we can implement it before the end of the year.

2. **Improving Internal Communications.** In response to a recommendation to improve the dissemination of safety-related information, we have developed a cross-functional committee that is currently developing procedures that ensure clear communication and that receipt of all technical bulletins and other safety-related information is documented. We will begin to put these procedures in place within the next 30 days. In the meantime, safety related information is disseminated to all metro employees via email. I have requested that supervisors review the information with their staff.
3. **Wayside Communications.** The NTSB recommended that Metro remove unnecessary communication equipment along the wayside that might interfere with the automatic train control system. We are currently working to identify all locations throughout the rail system where unnecessary wayside communication equipment exists, and are developing a plan to disable and/or remove it.
4. **Safety Analysis.** There are two recommendations related to the Automatic Train Control system: to conduct a complete analysis of foreseeable failures and to address the findings of that analysis. With the Board's approval, we have retained an independent firm to perform a rigorous safety analysis of the automatic train control system and provide recommendations to address

potential failures identified as a result of the analysis. We are presently working to develop the scope, schedule and budget for the project.

5. **Cable Insulation Resistance Testing.** The NTSB also recommended that cable insulation resistance testing become part of our periodic maintenance requirements. A schedule is being developed to perform nightly cable insulation resistance testing as part of a larger comprehensive cabling maintenance review.
6. **Federal Transit Administration Final Report.** The NTSB recommended that we, in cooperation with the Tri-State Oversight Committee, address the findings of the March 4, 2010, FTA audit. I am pleased to report that we have submitted our initial response from the recent Federal Transit Administration audit to the Tri-State Oversight Committee in April and provided an update on our activity to the Tri-State Oversight Committee and Federal Transit Administration's Office of Safety and Security during the first week of August. All Federal Transit Authority audit findings related to Metro were addressed and labeled as "open acceptable" by FTA officials, which means the FTA has reviewed and accepted the proposed actions.
7. **Operational Data on On-Board Recorders.** An additional recommendation was that we review data from on-board recorders in trains and the Advanced Information Management system. Senior staff meets monthly to review data on reliability, maintenance and engineering, and then to develop trend analyses. We will include a review of the data from on-board recorders installed on rail cars in these meetings. Local 689 union representatives will also be invited to

participate in the meetings. A plan has been developed for installation of Federal Railway Administration compliant event recorders on the remaining 400 railcars which are not currently equipped.

8. **Non-Punitive Safety Reporting Program.** The NTSB recommended the establishment of a non-punitive safety reporting program to collect incident reports from across Metro and share the review of those incident reports across the entire organization. As mentioned earlier we have initiated discussions with Local 689 to establish a procedure and program for the reporting of near misses without punitive consequences.
9. **Hazard Identification & Hazard Management.** The NTSB made two recommendations related to the evaluation of risk and the mitigation of risk through corrective actions. In September, Metro's Executive Safety Committee, which was previously established as the Standing Safety Executive Committee, reviewed hazard identification and hazard management. This process is included in the System Safety Program Plan. Further, as part of its monthly meetings, the Executive Committee has begun reviewing safety audits, open corrective action plans and takes the necessary steps to adequately address the corrective actions in a timely manner.
10. **Removal of 1000 Series Cars.** The NTSB recommended that Metro remove the 1000 series rail cars from service as soon as possible and replace them with rail cars that are comparable to the 6000 series rail cars in terms of crashworthiness. In July, our Board of Directors approved a contract to replace

the 1000 series cars, which are the oldest cars in the fleet, with new generation 7000 series rail cars.

**11. Installation and Maintenance of On Board Event Recorders.** The final two recommendations called for ensuring that the lead married-pair rail car set in each train has an operating on-board event recorder, and that we develop a maintenance program for our on-board recorders. We are developing a plan to equip the 4000 and 1000 series cars with onboard event recorders. The 2000, 3000, 5000 and 6000 series cars are already equipped with event recorders. The enhanced maintenance criteria of the on-board event recorders will be incorporated in the preventative maintenance and inspection process beginning in November.

In the coming years, Metro faces a number of challenges and we appreciate that the Metro Board has already dedicated more than \$30 million over the next three years in our capital budget to begin addressing the NTSB recommendations enumerated at their July 27, 2010 board meeting. We now know preliminary cost estimates to initiate response to these NTSB recommendations will be at least an additional \$150 million dollars. This estimate does not include any costs that will be required to respond to some specific recommendations. For instance, the NTSB has recommended that Metro conduct a comprehensive safety analysis of the Automatic Train Control system and secondly, based on that safety analysis, that Metro incorporate the design, operational and maintenance controls necessary to address potential failures of the ATC system. Our preliminary cost estimates include funds to

perform the safety analysis but until the analysis is complete, we will not be able to determine the costs to address the findings of the analysis.

## **Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I would like to conclude by saying that at Metro, there is no higher value than safety. We want riders to know that we recognize that our long-term success depends on our ability to change our safety culture to one dedicated to prevention and constant improvement. Reorienting our safety culture in this fundamental way will require enduring, consistent commitment, from the top all the way through the organization. The change will take years to become engrained, but we have begun putting the foundation in place.

Our commitment to a new safety culture cannot be accomplished without a commensurate financial commitment. The WMATA board anticipated this by including a \$5 billion six-year capital spending plan, the largest capital budget since the completion of the rail system, to ensure we can make needed equipment and infrastructure safety improvements. More specifically, the board dedicated more than \$30 million over the next three years as well as \$835million for replacement of the 1000 series cars in Metro's capital budget to address recommendations received from the NTSB.

In the last year, Metro has faced a number of challenges, and there are more to come. But we also have forged better partnerships with the agencies that provide safety oversight such as the NTSB and the TOC. With their help, and the continued

leadership of our board, we are on a path to continual improvement of safety and service reliability.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to respond to any questions.