

**DRAFT—For Review by RAC members**

**Letter on 7000 Series Railcars**

Dear Members of the WMATA Board,

The WMATA Riders' Advisory Council is eager for the 7000 Series railcars to come to the Metrorail system and replace old railcars with known safety weaknesses. At the same time, we encourage you to ensure that adding needed capacity to trains, potentially with features such as longitudinal seating or more doors, also remains a high priority in the cars' final design, and that needs of riders with disabilities receive high priority as well.

Debo Ogunrinde presented the current plans for the 7000 Series cars to the RAC's Long Term Projects Committee in July. We appreciate his taking the time to speak with us and his forthrightness in explaining what options had been eliminated and the staff's rationale for doing so.

Riders raised concerns, however, about the decision to eliminate longitudinal seating (where seats face the centers of cars). Having even a portion of 7000 Series cars with this configuration would significantly add to standing capacity while only reducing seated capacity by 4 seats per married pair. The decision had also been made to design the cars with 3 doors per side instead of the 4 doors common on most other transit systems. More doors could speed boarding and therefore total throughput in the system.

Mr. Ogunrinde informed us that these options had been eliminated because of concerns over crash safety. However, he was not able to quantify this benefit. We are concerned that staff may be making decisions based on a desire to simply "do everything for safety" instead of a rational analysis of the benefits of each alternative.

Platform and train crowding is also a safety problem, and crowding is almost certain to worsen as loads increase and the system nears its design capacity. Reducing crowding would create a greater safety benefit as well as a service benefit.

While we agree that safety must be the foremost priority, we are concerned that future generations might regret design decisions made today when the signal system is fully fixed and crowding may replace train collisions as the primary safety concern. Adding capacity now through car design could also reduce the need to spend money on capacity upgrades, freeing up additional dollars for safety fixes and needed preventive maintenance.

We do not know whether these particular capacity designs are still possible at this stage in the design process. However, we hope the Board will keep in mind

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these big picture issues when making decisions about the 7000 Series railcars and ask staff to do the same.

In addition, based on feedback from the Accessibility Advisory Committee, we also recommend that Priority Seats be located near center doors but the wheelchair and scooter locations at the ends of cars, so that wheelchairs or scooters have more potential boarding sites and minimize blocking evacuation in the event of an emergency.

Riders have raised concerns that a fabric covering made partly of wool could become a nesting place for ticks, lice, or bed bugs, absorb bodily fluids, and trigger allergies in some riders. We therefore ask that the final decision of seat covering take these factors into account.

We ask that the choice of flooring strongly weigh the acoustic properties to aid hearing of announcements, resistance to skids and slips, ease of cleaning and sterilizing, and softness for people who fall.

Finally, signals and announcements for stations and doors opening and closing should be understandable for vision- and hearing-challenged riders. The electronic systems should ensure sufficient time for vision impaired and mobility impaired individuals to cross a crowded car and safely exit the train.

The Riders' Advisory Council appreciates the Board's efforts to acquire the 7000 series in a timely manner, and acknowledges their efforts to ensure both safety and riders' concerns factor prominently into the decision making process.

Sincerely,