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February 25, 2010

Chairman Benjamin and Members of the Board:

It is my pleasure to present you with the Riders' Advisory Council's report for February 2010.

First, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Frank DeBernardo and I am the 2010 Chair of the Riders' Advisory Council. I do not own a car, so I am dependent upon public transportation for all my transit needs, including my daily bus-rail-bus commute from my home in Greenbelt, Maryland, to my office in Mount Rainier, Maryland.

In my day job, I serve as the executive director of New Ways Ministry, a national Catholic organization which attempts to build bridges of justice and reconciliation between the lesbian/gay community and the Catholic church. Perhaps it is because I work at the intersection of religion and sexuality that even the most contentious transportation issues, though certainly very serious, sometimes seem not so vexing to me.

More seriously, I do enjoy my work with the Riders' Advisory Council, which I have been part of since February 2009. As you know, the members are a stellar group of intelligent, concerned, and civic-minded citizens. My election in January as Chair for this year was wonderfully complemented by the election of three more than capable vice-chairs from each of our major jurisdictions: Victoria Wilder from Maryland, Dharm Guruswamy from Virginia, and David Alpert from the District of Columbia.

It is my hope for the coming year that the Riders' Advisory Council and the Board of Directors will strengthen its working relationship through more interactive communications. We strive to be a voice for riders, but more importantly, we strive to be a resource for all of you. You have my contact information, and I sincerely hope that you will not hesitate to contact me if you have any requests, questions, concerns, or advice for the Riders' Council.

Several items are listed in this month's written report to you, only a few of which I would like to highlight today:

By-laws

We would like to thank you for passing the proposed changes to our by-laws last month. We believe that these amendments will help us to work more efficiently and effectively.

February Council Meeting:

The February Riders' Advisory Council meeting included a presentation from Steve Strauss, an employee of the District Department of Transportation and a member of the Jurisdictional Coordinating Committee (JCC). As both the Riders' Council and the JCC advise the Board, the discussion focused on ways that the two groups can collaborate as well as on how they each serve unique roles. The Council looks forward to working with the JCC on upcoming issues.

FY2010 Fare Increase:

The Council would like to thank the Board for its quick and decisive action to help balance Metro's FY2010 Budget without having to resort to reductions in service. Riders who testified at the public hearing were clearly in favor 10¢ fare surcharge, which will take effect this weekend, and we appreciate the Board's willingness to take action on riders' suggestions.

FY2011 Budget:

As discussions on Metro's FY2011 budget continue, the Council has convened a Budget Committee to develop recommendations for the Board in balancing the budget. We would welcome any guidance from the Board on how to best provide feedback and recommendations for the development of the FY2011 budget, especially as they relate to proposed changes in fares and service levels. The Council does request that similar to the recent public hearings in balancing the FY2010 budget, the Board provide the public with options for comment that exceed the amount of savings needed.

New Members:

Two new members, Robert Petrine and Clayton Sinyai, both representing Fairfax County, attended their first Council meeting earlier this month. We look forward to their participation.

Member Orientation:

Lastly, the Council is working on putting together a member orientation session to help Council members learn more about Metro and, ultimately, to provide the Board and Metro staff with the best possible feedback. Again, I would welcome any suggestions or guidance you may have.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.