



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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Randy Clarke
General Manager and CEO
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
300 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Via e-mail

Dear Mr. Clarke,

Thank you for your continued work on the Better Bus initiative. As the first major redesign of our bus network in decades, this redesign is an opportunity to meet the transit needs of our region in a way that is reliable, equitable, and sustainable. My goal through this process is to allow community members to hear directly from WMATA about potential changes and to give WMATA a chance to hear feedback from across Ward 3. My team and I have made efforts to meet with WMATA and community members to discuss alternatives, trade-offs, and options to find resolutions to the concerns that have been raised. We received a very significant amount of helpful feedback, which speaks to how critical these proposed changes are to the lives of residents. I want to thank WMATA for the coordination with my office to hold a Better Bus Forum for Ward 3 residents. Those who attended the forum were encouraged by WMATA's willingness to listen, acknowledgement that the proposed network can be improved, and offer to work collaboratively with our office going forward.

In that spirit of collaboration, this letter provides my comments on and recommendations for the Better Bus plan for your reference as you craft the next iteration of the plan. These comments do not replace feedback provided by Ward 3 residents, tenant and building associations, community associations and Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANC), but amplify and summarize concerns heard directly by my office. I urge WMATA to look closely at comments and resolutions provided by the Ward 3 ANCs which go into further detail regarding residents' concerns. The ANCs can and should be valued thought partners as you consider possible revisions to the Better Bus plan in the coming months.

Before I address the main issues and concerns of Ward 3 residents, I want to acknowledge the many positive developments in the current plan that respond to feedback provided previously by residents and my office, including:

- More direct service on Connecticut Avenue NW
- Efforts to increase access to MacArthur High School.
- Maintained bus service in areas that had previously been under consideration to be cut, including Glover Park to Dupont Circle, Tenleytown to Woodley Park Metro Station, and between Woodley Park and Adams Morgan
- Higher frequency on Wisconsin Avenue NW
- New connections: from Tenleytown/Wisconsin Avenue NW and Woodley Park to LeDroit Park/Howard University Hospital on C55; between Barnaby Woods, Glover Park, Georgetown, and Foggy Bottom on C85; between Silver Spring, Tenleytown, and Van Ness/UDC on C87 during the weekday peak period; and between Dupont Circle, Thomas Circle, and Mount Vernon Square on D90
- More direct routing from Adams Morgan/Columbia Heights to Washington Hospital Center on C61

I appreciate the progress reflected above and hope collaboration can continue as we seek to address the important remaining issues. Those issues are often due to the reality that residents of Ward 3 are spread out over a large area with, often, challenging topography. As you evaluate the most recent feedback and further refine the Better Bus network, I ask that you prioritize:

- 1) Preserving critical service and avoiding the creation of transit deserts
- 2) Ensuring frequency and reliability
- 3) Maintaining access to key destinations put at risk through proposed truncated routes

1) Preserve critical service and avoid transit deserts

Adjust routing and frequency of routes to maintain the vital services of the N-series buses.

Hundreds of residents have written to me about the elimination of the N series, which in many cases would cut off their access to public transit to get around. Cathedral Avenue NW, especially between New Mexico and Massachusetts Avenues NW, where bus stops are proposed to be removed contains a significant population of seniors, many of whom will be unable to traverse the difficult topography to reach alternative bus stops on Massachusetts Avenue NW. A high density of seniors, people with disabilities, families, and many others rely on these buses to access medical facilities in Friendship Heights, commercial centers, and downtown. This area does not have easy access to Metrorail, making it even more vital to sustain bus service.

“There is no bus down Cathedral Avenue, leaving the Westchester, Idaho Terrace, The Warwick, and several other buildings having to walk several blocks to the bus. This is a big problem to those of us who depend on the bus for the groceries and library and other errands that require heavy lifting. This is a senior dense area and the topography makes that an even more difficult walk.”

-Dale, Cathedral Avenue NW

“As a senior citizen without a car, I use these lines regularly to get to doctor’s appointments, go food shopping, [and] visit museums and theaters. I would be confined to my neighborhood without these buses, since I would not be able to afford taxis and Ubers.”

-Patricia, Cathedral Avenue NW

Preserve service to the Glover Park interior and Wisconsin Avenue NW. The current proposal cuts off vital services to interior Glover Park.

The existing D2 line allows access to the interior of Glover Park, while the proposed line will traverse Tunlaw Road NW -only skirting the outside of Glover Park and effectively cutting off service to numerous riders given the difficult topography. While the street grid presents

“I plead for WMATA to keep the D2 bus to serve a neighborhood full of professionals, students, and other residents to enable us to live and work in the District in a more predictable and less stressful manner. Without good bus connections the District becomes a less attractive place to live and work.”

-Anonymous

“The D2 route serves a broad range of individuals living in Glover Park, Burleith, Georgetown, and DuPont [sic] Circle. The elimination of this route would deprive them quick, easy, and timely access to the DuPont [sic]Circle Metro, Hardy Middle, Duke Ellington, and Stoddert Elementary. WMATA’s proposal would also have an outsized impact on the elderly and children. Please rescind the proposal to modify service.”

-Reed, 41st Street NW

challenges for the next generation of larger buses to access the interior areas, I urge WMATA to work with community leaders, particularly the ANC, to identify alternatives to preserve access. Given the topography of the area, the loss of interior service would be a serious blow to Glover Park residents who rely on the D2 bus line to reach Dupont Circle and downtown for work, as well as to support restaurants, small businesses, and generally engaging in the District as a whole.

Address the bus desert within the Barnaby Woods, Hawthorne, and Chevy Chase communities

The elimination of the E6 during the pandemic, along with the proposed changes in routes replacing the E4 and M4, have left the Barnaby Woods, Hawthorne, and Chevy Chase communities feeling stranded. The E6 was the only direct bus option to Lafayette Elementary School, Broad Branch Market, the Connecticut Avenue NW commercial core, the Friendship Heights commercial core, and the Friendship Heights Metro station. A significant number of seniors live in these neighborhoods and rely on access to medical facilities in Friendship Heights, which would become less accessible under the longer, circuitous routes included in the current proposal. I urge WMATA to work with the ANCs and community leaders to develop routes that better replace the important connections the E6, E4, and M4 have provided.

The E4 line, presently running part of its route on Military Road NW before moving to McKinley Street, will become the C83 and relocate its stop on McKinley Street NW to Military Road NW. Current riders have stressed that this change would further isolate riders who would have to walk farther and transfer lines at the intersection of Nebraska Avenue NW and Military Road NW. This weekday change causes a huge gap in service north of Military Road between the Utah and Nebraska Avenues and Connecticut Avenue. This is made even worse on weekends. Furthermore, there are no bus shelters for the lines currently stopping on this route. This intersection has multiple lines running on the road, and pedestrians do not feel safe transferring at this intersection. DDOT has not yet addressed these dangerous conditions. I

understand that WMATA has concluded that McKinley Street NW, as currently configured in parts of the existing route, presents challenges for the larger next generation buses to navigate, but again this is an important area for WMATA to work with the local ANC to address.

2) *Ensure frequency and reliability*

Ensure proper frequency on Massachusetts Avenue between Cathedral Ave/Wisconsin Ave and Dupont Circle

The proposed new routes replacing the N series, including the D96 and C85, reduce peak hour frequency by half on Massachusetts Avenue NW between Cathedral Avenue NW/Wisconsin Avenue NW and Dupont Circle. Given the density of the area, this will lead to overcrowded buses and reduce reliability for residents who need transit to work, doctor visits, recreational activities, and more.

For the D96 and D94, peak hours would require service every 10 to 15 minutes to ensure riders can get on at later stops given the consolidation of routes. This need is further amplified given the fact that the new C85 and D96 routes (which took over parts of the N series) will be more circuitous than the existing N line buses. Peak hour frequency also presents challenges for students given that these routes serve Duke Ellington High School, Hardy Middle School, MacArthur High School, and Georgetown University.

Ensure adequate frequency of service to the western side of Ward 3, including the Palisades business district

The previous iteration of bus proposals replaced the D6 with an option that provided the Berkley, Foxhall, Kent, Palisades, Spring Valley, and Wesley Heights communities with a high frequency bus service; however, the current plan leaves this whole area without a single high frequency bus route. Neighborhoods like the Palisades and its network of hospitals and schools require reliable, more frequent service at a minimum during peak hours of 7-9 AM and 4-6 PM.

Ensure adequate frequency and weekend service for the C85 (and C81) as replacements for numerous routes such as the M4, E4, D33, and D32 services

The new C85 route would eliminate the rush hour service, which currently runs at 15-minute intervals, and will instead run the service at 30-minute intervals from 6 AM until 10 PM. The proposed level of service is not sufficient. Families who rely on the E4, D33, D32, H4, and W45 lines to travel to and from Deal Middle School and Jackson Reed High School, as well as commuters to the Tenleytown-AU Metro Station are alarmed by these cuts and the decrease in frequency for alternatives that may take their place.

The new line also leads to a complete elimination of weekend services for residents in Barnaby Woods, DC Chevy Chase, and Hawthorne- resulting in no bus service in an area which does not have metro access. This isolates many residents from Friday evening until Monday morning and pushes others towards driving.

Ensure adequate frequency during peak school hours on other routes relied on by students and parents

While Woodley Park residents were generally pleased with the C55 route in the current proposal, they have serious concerns about the frequency of the buses, particularly at the beginning of the school day. The route serves parents and students from Alice Deal Middle School, Beauvoir, Cardozo High School, Jackson-Reed High School, Janney Elementary School, Maret, National Cathedral School, Oyster-Adams Bilingual School, Sidwell Friends School, St. Albans School, the Washington Ballet School, and the Washington International School. The proposed 30-minute frequency will make this an untenable option for many who currently rely on the buses, which are already reported to be too full to pick up would-be riders near the ends of their routes. The decrease in frequency from 20 to 30 minutes will make the bus service less reliable for students who need to get to school on time.

3) Maintain access to key destinations put at risk through proposed truncated routes

Address the loss of 31/33 bus service to the State Department and Federal Triangle

The D82, which replaces the 31 and 33 routes, would end at Franklin Square well off the Pennsylvania Avenue corridor. Federal Triangle is a major destination and transfer point, using the full block of bus stops on 9th Street NW between Constitution and Pennsylvania. While WMATA has expressed that many workers have not returned to offices in Federal Triangle, I have heard from many residents that their work from home policies are becoming less flexible and they will need to be in the office more. The changes will reduce reliable public transportation and likely lead to worsening congestion in this area. I recommend continuing the line until the Federal Triangle endpoint.

Restore the 96 Crosstown line to reach Union Station

The 96, which currently extends to Congress Heights at the Maryland border in Southeast, has been a pain point for many residents who have reached out expressing their hope that it would be able to at least continue until Union Station rather than its proposed termination at Howard University Hospital. The 96 line has been flagged as an invaluable crosstown route by our residents and ANCs. It connects Tenleytown, Cathedral Heights, and Cleveland Park/Woodley Park to Adams Morgan, U Street, Union Station, and destinations farther east and allowed for commuters to reach large employment areas, shopping destinations, and other important destinations for students. While the entire route is valuable, cutting the route off before it reaches Union Station has been flagged numerous times for our office as it has left many residents feeling cut off from being able to utilize the regional transportation options that Union Station offers.

Address the elimination of the Circulator

While I recognize that District Department of Transportation (DDOT) had not yet announced the elimination of the Woodley Park Circulator route when WMATA developed the Better Bus plan, I urge WMATA to work in partnership with DDOT to identify ways in which routes in the final plan can address the effect of the loss of the Circulator in Ward 3.

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Much progress was made between the first and second iterations of the Better Bus plan, and I appreciate the transparent, collaborative approach WMATA has taken as you envision the future of bus transit in the District and broader region. However, as noted above and acknowledged by WMATA during our joint forum, serious concerns remain. I again urge the importance of taking into consideration the resolutions and feedback you have received from ANCs, building and tenant associations, and other community leaders during this feedback period for more detail. We are happy to provide those as well.

I look forward to continued partnership as you address these remaining critical issues and to working closely with WMATA to ensure full regional support for your mission. Indeed, it is my hope that together we can advance beyond this plan for 2025 to a full Visionary Network soon. As we go down this road together, I also hope we can explore how micro transit could help connect topographically challenged areas in Ward 3 and other parts of the city.

There have been times in our history when our region's public transit system has been the envy of the world. Let's make that a reality again, together.

Sincerely,



Matt Frumin
DC Councilmember for Ward 3

cc:

Peter Cafiero, Managing Director, Inter-Modal Planning
Allison Davis, Vice President, Planning
Ann Chisholm, Government Relations Officer