

Member Day
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
5/1/2019
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

Thank you to Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves for hosting a Member Day to hear from Members on their transportation and infrastructure priorities.

One of the top transportation priorities for the National Capital Region and my district in northern Virginia is the safety and reliability of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Metrorail system. WMATA is a \$40 billion asset to the National Capital Region and is essential to the operation of the federal government, with federal employees representing approximately 40 percent of Metrorail's peak period customers. More than one-third of all Metrorail stations are located on federal property, serving federal facilities. Unlike other transportation networks in the nation, the WMATA system serves a unique vital national security role for the federal government, providing transportation for thousands of federal employees traveling to and from the Pentagon, Department of Homeland Security facilities, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation headquarters. On multiple occasions, the system has demonstrated it is vital during times of crisis, including evacuation for weather events and national emergencies. For all these reasons, Congress has consistently appropriated dedicated federal funding for WMATA, recognizing the special responsibility the federal government must help "America's Subway" fulfill these functions safely and reliably.

These appropriations have been made pursuant to the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA, PL 110-432), which established a successful federal-state partnership under which the federal government provides \$150 million in capital funding for WMATA each year. The three WMATA jurisdictions – Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. – collectively match this federal investment with an additional \$150 million. Without continued federal participation this successful funding partnership would unravel, leaving a massive shortfall in WMATA's budget.

That is why I have introduced, along with members of the DC-area delegation, the Metro Accountability and Investment Act (MAIA).

MAIA would reauthorize PRIIA funding of \$150 million in annual capital funding for ten years. This funding would remain subject to a \$150 million match by the jurisdictions. In addition to the capital funding, the federal government would provide a new, additional \$50 million contribution to WMATA's operating costs – \$10 million of which would be provided to the WMATA Office of the Inspector General (OIG). The federal government is represented on the WMATA Board of Directors and its representatives help make operating decisions for the system. However, the federal government contributes nothing to WMATA's \$2 billion annual operating budget. The jurisdictions, on the other hand, contribute a combined \$1.2 billion in local operating subsidies with the balance of the budget coming from fares. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) contributes to operating budgets for some transit agencies through FTA's 5307, 5310, and 5311 programs. Given WMATA's myriad federal contingencies, it is past time for the federal government to have skin in the game on the system's operating costs.

This \$200 million in annual capital and operating funding, would be conditional upon certain reforms that strengthen the WMATA OIG. WMATA would be required to provide the OIG with independent budget, procurement and hiring authorities, make independent legal advice available to the OIG, and improve transparency for OIG corrective actions. The OIG is a source of accountability for the system. The OIG has brought to light serious problems with WMATA's track inspection program and has issued reports that have led to the prosecution of fraud. The OIG in any organization must be pure as the driven snow, and the reforms outlined in MAIA help ensure that the work of the OIG is above reproach and beyond the reach of the transit system the OIG is tasked with overseeing.

MAIA would also authorize a second tranche of dedicated federal capital funding – \$100 million per year for 20 years. This new contribution would represent a long-term commitment to the safety and reliability of Metro. It would also be contingent upon two sets of conditions. First, the system would have to make progress towards certain metrics on safety, reliability, and operating cost efficiency. These metrics would be established through a collaboration between the Department of Transportation and the jurisdictions. WMATA is not without its challenges, and this funding would help incentivize the kind of reforms and performance we expect from this vital transit system. Second, the funding would be contingent upon the jurisdictions establishing and sustaining a dedicated funding source – something every other major transit system in America uses to meet capital funding needs. As the chairman of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments I convened a blue-ribbon panel on WMATA funding, and that panel recommended that the jurisdictions establish a dedicated funding source in order to meet the capital investment needs of the system. The jurisdictions took this important step last year, and in FY2020 the funding source is expected to produce \$384 million in capital funding for WMATA. That number is expected to climb to \$692 million by FY2025. With the jurisdictions stepping up their contributions to capital costs by as much as an additional \$200 million per jurisdiction per year, we should expect the federal government to take commensurate steps contingent upon WMATA improving system performance.

We cannot afford a death spiral of disinvestment and declining service for the transit system that gets our federal workforce to work each day. This bill uses a carrot and stick approach to both invest in this essential transit system as well hold the system accountable to providing safer, more reliable service. I want to thank the Committee for its consideration of this legislation and the federal responsibility to our national capital transit system.