



Testimony of Paul J. Wiedefeld, General Manager and Chief Executive Officer of
the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Before a hearing of the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit under the
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
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Good morning, Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Norton, and Members of the Subcommittees. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Paul Wiedefeld, General Manager and Chief Executive Officer of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, known as Metro.

I joined Metro five short months ago with more than 35 years of public and private sector transportation experience. Prior to joining Metro, I ran Baltimore/Washington International Airport twice, from 2002 to 2005 and again from 2009 to 2015, and in between, I served as head of the Maryland Transit Administration.

On March 6th of this year, after 90 days on the job, I released my initial action plan to improve Metro and begin to restore pride in the National Capital Region's public transit system.

Through conversations with riders, advocates, employees, business and community leaders, elected officials, funding partners and regulators, the message was clear – make Metro safer and more secure, improve service reliability by getting the trains and buses to run on time, and manage effectively and efficiently as stewards of customer fares and public assets.

As indicated by my decision to shut down the Metrorail system for emergency safety work and our SafeTrack plan, Metro and the region have some hard truths to confront.

First, the safety culture at Metro is not integrated with operations, nor well-rooted at all levels. Understandably, high-profile incidents have shaken the public's confidence in the operational safety of the rail system.

Second, while riders tell me they want to feel safe, the top issue they point to again and again is service reliability. Last year, rail on-time performance fell from 92 percent to 85 percent, and the experience for many customers was even worse as rail car mechanical failures have doubled the number of late trains.

And third, we continue the work that has been underway for over two years to improve our fiscal management. While I can say confidently that Metro's financial position today is stable, we need to ensure that the programs and policies that have been put in place continue to be followed by employees across Metro.

The authority-wide action plan I released in March is focused on confronting these three areas of improvement with realistic goals. As part of Metro's commitment to transparency, members of the public can view Metro's progress towards completing our action plan through a new Customer Accountability Report. The report can be found on our website and is being updated regularly so the public can track our progress. On the website you will see 60 specific actions to improve safety, reliability, financial security, and restore the public trust – and we'll continue to add to the list whenever necessary.

These priorities are the first in a portfolio of initiatives that are being undertaken to deliver the basics of better service. Actions will be taken in every department as part of Metro's business plan to make these initiatives successful and to ensure accountability. I look forward to working with Members of this Committee and the public as we work to implement this plan.

Two weeks ago, I announced Metro's SafeTrack plan. Under SafeTrack, Metro will begin a massive effort to address years of deferred maintenance of the rail system, and National Transportation Safety Board and Federal Transit Administration safety recommendations. The plan condenses three years of work into approximately one year. Following the release of a draft plan, we received feedback from the FTA on the priorities in the plan and specific projects they wanted to see completed sooner. I appreciate their collaboration and guidance, and the final plan released last Thursday reflects FTA's input. I am encouraged by the region's response to SafeTrack and appreciate the support of business and community leaders, jurisdictional officials, our Congressional delegation and most

importantly the riders, who have rallied to help us get through this challenging work. I also want to recognize FTA for their collaboration, which is reflected in the final plan.

Under SafeTrack, fifteen "safety surges" are planned that will allow track crews to exponentially increase productivity and achieve safety results for customers faster. These long-duration track outages use either around-the-clock single tracking or line-segment shutdowns that will impact rush hour commutes. Metrorail riders will be encouraged to consider using alternate travel options while safety surge work is in effect on their line.

But the Safety Surges are just one part of SafeTrack. We are also gaining more time to repair the system by instituting a moratorium on early openings and late closings for special events in the region; closing the Metrorail system at midnight seven days a week beginning Friday, June 3; and starting track work earlier on weekday evenings at 8 pm. This will ensure work crews have enough time to complete critical repairs throughout the system.

Some of the elements of SafeTrack include: installation of NTSB-recommended boots and seals on all 3rd rail cables by end of summer, replacement of 12,000 insulators, removal of all 3rd rail expansion joints in the underground system, elimination of all temporary gauge bars that prevent spread of tracks, replacement of approximately 48,000 wooden ties, replacement of 36,000 direct fixation fasteners, clearing of 87,000 linear feet of drains, and extensive tunnel leak mitigation.

All of the work will be independently inspected and verified by our Office of Quality Assurance to ensure that it is completed properly and FTA will be carefully monitoring our work. In fact, we are working closely with the FTA now to review inspection and maintenance practices of our power systems to prevent incidents like we've seen in recent months from continuing to happen.

Given the extensive repair needs throughout the rail system, and with service running 135 hours out of 168 hours in a week, there is simply not enough time to catch up without a plan like this in place. Though it will be inconvenient for our customers and the region, SafeTrack is necessary to restore the system to a state of good health. The plan, combined with a commitment to conduct regular maintenance, will improve safety and reliability.

Metro's old approach to dealing with issues, lurching from crisis to crisis, is not working. SafeTrack is part of my plan going forward to come at these issues more holistically.

In addition, SafeTrack will help WMATA make further progress in response to the FTA's Safety Management Inspection (SMI) and WMATA Safety Oversight, or FWSO. WMATA already has submitted 482 actions in response to 65 percent of the more than 700 action items identified by the FTA. WMATA submitted its plan to address the FTA's "safety inspection blitz" in addition to ongoing field inspections, and triennial audits.

Since the FTA issued the Financial Management Oversight (FMO) report findings on June 10, 2014, WMATA has complied with all 45 recommendations and provided timely submittal of the required 65 CAPs to address the findings. In addition, WMATA has worked cooperatively with FTA on its Testing and Validation Plan, which included 20 action items aligned to removal of ECHO restrictions. As of last month, WMATA closed five of the required testing and validation actions items, has submitted eleven to FTA for review, and the remaining four, which have later due dates, will be submitted on time.

WMATA has implemented numerous process improvements to address many of the system deficiencies identified in the FTA's financial audit. To ensure ongoing compliance with those findings WMATA established an Office of Internal Controls (OICC), which is independent of WMATA's Budget office and is focused on financial management, including compliance with federal grant regulations. With support from that office, WMATA submitted 100 percent of the recommended CAPs on time to FTA; and the office works with other departments throughout the Authority to ensure compliance with FTA rules.

Each capital project invoice at WMATA is now reviewed through an extensive process, which has resulted in a manual grant reimbursement accuracy rate of over 99 percent. The ECHO restriction, which prevents WMATA from automatically drawing down on federal grant funds, has added more than \$9 million dollars in additional expenses to the jurisdictions responsible for funding WMATA.

Meanwhile, WMATA is making use of all available federal funds. As of March 31, 2016, the total value of FTA grant funds available to WMATA was \$708.3 million. Of this amount, \$301.8 million is committed to projects that are underway and are being funded over multiple years. The funds are reserved for the designated projects and only released once work is completed, documentation is submitted and approved by FTA. Designated projects include the purchase of 7000-series rail cars, bus purchases, maintenance and rehabilitation of the Cinder Bed and Andrews bus garages, Blue Line rehabilitation, escalator and elevator maintenance and rehabilitation, track circuit replacement, and rail yard rehabilitation.

The remaining \$406.5 million encompasses past capital project expenses that are in the reimbursement process. WMATA has submitted and is awaiting FTA approval of \$108.8 million in expenses. The remaining \$297.7 million will be requested for reimbursement as soon as WMATA's enhanced process for internal review and documentation is complete, in order to manually submit paperwork under the ECHO restriction.

Finally, following the tragic bombings in Brussels, we have been working very closely with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force and the Transportation Security Administration to share intelligence. The Metro Transit Police Department has increased police presence throughout the system with plain clothes and uniformed officers, and our 27 K-9 units have been deployed throughout the system. I would like to thank the police departments of our local

jurisdictions that have stepped up their patrols in stations located in their jurisdictions.

Like the majority of mass transit systems in the United States, Metrorail is an “open” system, which creates unique challenges and requires security strategies that are complex and multi-layered. The federal government provides significant funding for these efforts – Metro has invested nearly \$172 million of federal Homeland Security funding into the system since September 11, 2001. These resources have helped us install thousands of new cameras, and supported our anti-terrorism team, bomb squad and K-9 units.

I will close by thanking Congress, and in particular our Congressional delegation, for support of critical capital funding provided through the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIAA) and federal formula dollars.

Thank you and I look forward to answering your questions.