



Testimony to WMATA Board Regarding Leadership

By Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director

April 8, 2015

Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Stewart Schwartz and I am the Executive Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, an 18-year-old organization dedicated to sustainable growth through walkable, transit-oriented communities linked by an extensive and efficient transit network. When I last testified before you in February, I outlined how essential Metro has been to the success of our region and stressed that we need the leadership and commitment of all area officials to the system's success, and a similar commitment from staff to improving system communications, safety, incident response and customer service. Certainly, we need the financial commitment of the region's jurisdictions to support the continued operations, rehabilitation and capacity expansion of the system.

Metro is all of us. It's not some alien entity. We share ownership of this amazing asset, and we cannot let it fail on our watch.

That's why we are extremely concerned about the recent public dissension between the jurisdictions and among Board members. Particularly distressful was the leak of the candidate names for General Manager, which may have significantly compromised our ability to attract top candidates to apply for or accept the top leadership position at WMATA. Of equal concern is the lack of commitment from some jurisdictions to fund necessary capacity expansion, beginning with all 8-car trains at rush hour. Unless the Board and the jurisdictions work together toward a shared vision of a healthy, restored, and growing transit network, we cannot possibly attract the top talent we need to lead and manage this large and complex agency.

We disagree that the system needs a General Manager with some narrow range of expertise such as finance. Instead, it first needs your unity and commitment -- including a commitment to the financial resources it needs. No experienced candidate will want to walk into this agency in a multi-jurisdictional region without knowing that the jurisdiction's leaders have come together with a common commitment and shared vision. Restoring this shared commitment and vision may even require some sort of summit that includes our Congressional delegation, the Governors, Mayor and local elected leaders.

You need just what the title says, a General Manager. One who has managed complex systems like Metro, but also one who possesses the leadership skills necessary to inspire and empower the staff to be investing in unrelenting improvement in maintenance, operations, planning, financial management, communications and customer service. The General Manager does not have to be a specialist in any of these particular fields, but must know how to hire and empower Assistant General Managers with the right combination of technical expertise and management skills for each of these service areas. The General Manager must have the experience to improve the structure and performance of the bureaucracy, and the leadership skill to build morale and personal commitment among staff, demand top performance,

and create a culture of safety, positive customer service, and pride.

At the same time, the Board, General Manager and staff must create a more open culture that shares more information with the public and engages the public in improving the system performance. Including the public in the process, openly accepting and acting on input, improving communications, and being open about mistakes, will build trust and strengthen a shared commitment to the system, which will help to retain and attract riders.

In summary, the selection of a permanent General Manager must begin with recommitment to the system as our top regional priority. It is the backbone of our continued economic success. We need your commitment and that of all of our region's elected officials to fully fund operations, rehabilitation and expansion of the system, working together toward a shared vision of a Next Generation of Transit for our region. We need to demonstrate the regional unity necessary to attract the best talent possible.

Thank you.

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