



Council of the District of Columbia

John A. Wilson Building
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Washington, DC 20004

Janeese Lewis George
Councilmember, Ward 4

Committee Member

Human Services
Labor and Workforce Development
Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs
Transportation and the Environment
Special Committee, COVID-19 Recovery

September 27, 2021

WMATA Board of Directors
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
600 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear WMATA Board:

Thousands of Ward 4 residents depend on safe, reliable bus service to get to work, school and other life necessities. I greatly appreciate the dedication of WMATA front-line staff, particularly your bus and rail operators who put themselves at risk during a global pandemic. Unfortunately, however, in recent weeks there have been multiple disruptions in service that have negatively impacted our community that I must bring to your attention. And I must further request that future service disruptions or canceled trips are communicated in advance so as not to leave riders without service. Please also consider providing additional service to lines currently experiencing overcrowding.

Several times in recent weeks the D31, 32, 33 and 34 buses¹ failed to run in the morning and/or evening, leaving hundreds of students without transportation to and from their neighborhood schools. Last week, the D31 bus failed to run in the morning apparently due to a “scheduling mistake”.² It ran in the afternoon, but apparently left before its scheduled departure time, meaning most students missed the bus because it left before the school day ended. That same day, the D33 did not provide afternoon service at all. Parents reported to my office that this was not an isolated incident, and that this has happened multiple times already in the first few weeks of school.

When buses do run as scheduled, they are often overcrowded. This forces students and other riders to share small, enclosed spaces together for the duration of their rides. Alternatively, some buses are so crowded that they skip stops with dozens of students waiting to be picked up. Given the limited number of scheduled runs for these buses, many students are being left behind without another option. I ask that you consider providing additional buses to each route to ensure everyone gets a ride who needs one. I ask that WMATA deepen its coordination with DCPS and DDOT to ensure students and families have confidence in the reliability and availability of service for students getting to and from school. Anything less is unacceptable, and risks disrupting students’ access to in-person learning which our Mayor has mandated. I rode the D34 bus to Alice Deal Junior High School as a student myself and know first-hand how critical it is to have sufficient and reliable service for our students and their families.

¹ WMATA Timetable, effective Sunday, September 5, 2021:

https://www.wmata.com/schedules/timetables/upload/D31,32,33,34_210905.pdf

² ABC 7 News report, September 10, 2021: <https://wjla.com/news/local/dc-parents-say-kids-were-stranded-when-metrobus-didnt-show-up-claim-long-history-of-problems>

Additionally, the S1 bus was recently suspended as part of Metro's COVID-19 Recovery Plan.³ The S1 bus runs between Sixteenth Street Heights to Potomac Park downtown. The S1 is currently suspended "until crowding on adjacent services warrants restoration",⁴ and there is no timetable for when WMATA will re-evaluate this decision. Neighborhood residents lack a one-seat ride to Foggy Bottom, despite many federal agencies in the area returning to in-person work and DCPS and DCPCS students returning to in-person learning. This has exacerbated crowding in other routes and caused significant increases in the length of our students and workers' commutes. I greatly appreciate the restoration of the 63 bus from Takoma to Petworth and ask that the Board do the same for the S1 bus.

Similarly, I call on WMATA to reinstitute the E6 bus that has served neighbors in Chevy Chase, Barnaby Woods, and Hawthorne for many years. The E6 helps transport students, staff, and educators from Ward 4 to three major schools: Lafayette Elementary, Alice Deal Middle, and Wilson High, all three of which rank in the top 5 largest DC Public Schools in enrollment. We're increasingly hearing from families about overcrowding during rush hour on the M4 bus, which was meant to accommodate some of the residents displaced by the discontinuation of the E6. In addition, adjustments to the M4 have not fully served the many senior residents who live in the Barnaby Woods and Hawthorne neighborhoods and now lack direct access to public transit. That includes hundreds of seniors and health care professionals at Knollwood Military Retirement Community, many of whom are veterans or have family members who served in our Armed Forces. We need the E6 back in service to provide these seniors accessible public transportation and help their staff and visitors commute to Knollwood.

Overall, Metro continues to provide invaluable transit services to our community and the region. I'm confident that we can work together to address these issues and restore confidence in the reliability of Metro bus service. I stand ready to partner in these efforts.

Sincerely,



Janeese Lewis George
Ward 4 Councilmember

Cc: Phil Mendelson, Chairman

³ WMATA Metrobus Service Changes, June 6, 2021: <https://www.wmata.com/service/status/details/Metrobus-Service-Changes.cfm>

⁴ WMATA Fiscal Year 2022 budget documents, page 1593 of PDF: https://www.wmata.com/about/board/meetings/board-pdfs/upload/3A-FY2022-Budget-to-POST.pdf?link_id=13&can_id=bbc811007deb13d59a24d144d29111ef&source=email-ward-4-dispatch-how-we-respond-as-a-community&email_referrer=email_1137344&email_subject=ward-4-dispatch-council-action-vaccines-clean-ups-and-larrys-park