

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND  
GOVERNMENT REFORM  
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 2010  
STATEMENT OF JACKIE JETER, PRESIDENT AMALGAMATED TRANSIT  
UNION LOCAL 689**

Thank you for your invitation to appear before you today to share my insights, concerns, and suggestions for: improving safety and service within the Metro system; short and long term solutions for closing WMATA's current budget shortfall; and the selection of a permanent General Manager for WMATA who can provide effective, long term leadership.

As a long time WMATA employee and as a second term President of the third largest transit union in the U.S., I have had the exposure and experience that I believe can be instructive to the Board of Directors of WMATA as they work to address safety, personnel, service and budgetary issues confronting the Metro system.

WMATA's safety problems have been well publicized and include:

- a. A catastrophic Automatic Train Control (ATC) system failure that caused the deaths of nine persons, including the train operator. The precise cause of the collision that occurred in FY 09 is still not reported and the disruption caused by this failure has continued to the present
- b. The deaths of a track worker struck by a piece of track equipment, a wayside worker struck by a train, and two wayside workers killed by a piece of track equipment over the last 8 months
- c. Reports by Tri-State Oversight Committee of violations of routine safety rules
- d. Testimony before the National Transportation Safety Board of routine communications failures, as well as the overall operations of a mass transit system.

In addition to these issues, there are multiple failures of key systems resulting in their inability to perform as intended, including:

1. the Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system that failed in 2007 and at least twice in 2009
2. the automatic berthing of both six and eight car trains which repeatedly overshot stations
3. the automatic door openings on the wrong side of the platform

4. on board and hand held radio systems where there has been an inability to maintain constant, clear, understandable radio communication between wayside workers, controllers and train operators.

Third, a failure to implement needed procedural changes and a lack of oversight to do it quickly, compromised safety and service delivery. Finally, I would note that there is a tendency to blame the individual employee, instead of looking for underlying systemic causes of safety issues.

As a consequence of Local 689's investigations, it appears that WMATA has not implemented several key measures that would make the Metrorail system safer. I would like to offer the following as measures that are likely to address the system's inadequacies and failures that we believe contributed to or caused those accidents and the consequent loss of life.

After earlier rail incidents and as a result of investigations by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), WMATA announced its intentions to begin developing and/or implementing improved safety procedures and measures; however, few changes have ever reached the implementation phase. Since the horrific train accident on June 22, 2009, there is a greater sense of urgency that should be driving WMATA's rapid development and implementation of needed improvements.

WMATA must consider developing and instituting the following safety procedures and measures without delay:

1. Multiple layers and redundancy of safety protections (WMATA has said that these are being developed now. However, we are requesting that WMATA release a schedule, with deadlines for completion and implementation.)
2. Codification of standards for track worker safety similar to Federal Railroad Administration track worker safety standards
3. Clear and concise communication between workers and controllers
4. Clear notification and designation of work areas and zones on the right of way
5. Effective worker safety training
6. Supervisory enforcement of safety standards
7. A process for WMATA employees, to appeal the standards they believe to be incorrect or unsafe, such as a Safety Appeal Board.

8. Meaningful whistleblower protection to insure that employees are not fearful of reporting perceived safety problems
9. Effective labor-management safety committees
10. WMATA's commitment to the rapid development and implementation of procedures and standards that are calculated to improve safety immediately and in the long term.

Short and long term solutions likely to address the budget shortfall currently confronting WMATA must be seen in the context of the impact insufficient funding has on workers, riders, businesses and overall development in the three jurisdictions hosting the system. The critical nature of funding and the lack thereof, has a major impact on WMATA employees who are our members. We have struggled with wage and benefit issues for the last three years and have been victimized by WMATA's failure to adequately plan for expected cost increases. WMATA's current budgetary shortfall has meant that major benefits and wages have been reduced or eliminated and jobs have been cut with the expectation of further jobs losses and cuts in wages and benefits. Beyond the impact on wages and benefits is the impact on the public as service cuts are becoming standard practice to help close these budget gaps. The union has suggested the following alternative approaches to job and service cuts WMATA believes necessary because of the budget shortfalls it is experiencing:

- a. Review carefully the formula grant that is used as the basis for federal funding to consider adjusting the percentage allocated to Metro such that it reflects a percentage that is more closely aligned with other jurisdictions
- b. Look at reducing the number of parking spaces at metro stations to induce greater use of public transport between riders' homes and their jobs
- c. Consider recapturing tax incentives given to businesses that surround the metro stations such that they bear a greater share of the costs for metro commensurate with the income and benefits afforded them on the basis of the proximity to Metro stations
- d. The Federal transit benefit should be indexed to both increased use (riders) and inflation such that an annual increase would be automatic to reflect the real costs of providing increased services and any increase costs resulting from inflation

- e. Consider supporting the development of the outer spokes of the system to increase ridership and revenue from business development likely to occur around the stations.

Local 689 supports the selection of a permanent general manager for WMATA who is a seasoned transit, top level manager with vision and knowledge, anchored by the political savvy most likely to garner public, private and government support that will nurture this critical system in our nation's capital. We believe the General Manager should be a person of vision, capable of forming alliances, fostering tri-state cooperation, encouraging legislative affinity for addressing the needs of mass transit while possessing the background that comes from long term involvement in managing and developing a sizable system. It is our assessment that while the General Manager needs a background in management of a mass transit system, a deputy manager should be in place that has technical knowledge and experience in the technical aspects of managing a mass transit system. But without a true overhaul of the metro board any general manager selected will have serious pressure because of the micro-managemnet style. The board members are more interested in how funding or cuts impacts their jurisdiction and often times fail to examine the impact or benefit for the entire system.

I would be pleased to address any questions you might have in regard to my testimony. Thank you on behalf of my members and the riding public.