

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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Opening Statement
Ranking Member Jason Chaffetz
Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service,
and the District of Columbia
Hearing: “Back on Track: WMATA Red Line Accident
and Continual Funding Challenges.”
July 14, 2009

Thank you, Chairman Lynch, for holding this hearing.

On April 29 we held an oversight hearing on the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. At that hearing we examined Metro’s financial condition and internal controls, along with safety and security issues.

On June 22 a tragic accident, the most serious in Metro’s history, occurred on the Red Line. One train crashed into the back of another, killing 9 and injuring 80. In addition to the dead and injured, damage to the morale of Metro’s riders, and to Metro’s reputation, is ongoing. A recent Washington Post editorial commented on the crash as having “shattered many riders’ assumptions about the safety of the system”.

Today’s oversight hearing will examine that accident and the continuing challenges faced by Metro.

Metro appears to be in the throes of an epic crisis. As a Member of Congress and as a Metro user, I am very concerned.

Even before the catastrophe of June 22, a Washington Post story described comments from Metro riders as revealing “a band of beaten down and frustrated people who, despite their close kinship with Metro, have had about enough.”

In the wake of the June 22 crash a more recent story reflected growing concerns about excessively cramped conditions, excruciatingly long commutes, jerky rides, abrupt stops, and passengers waiting for more than three full trains to pass before boarding. There is also evidence of nerves rubbed raw, with some reports of yelling and shoving.

While investigations are continuing, there are deeply disturbing reports of track circuit problems which should have been anticipated, and which have been dealt with in other systems, notably the Bay Area Rapid Transit System in San Francisco. Metro apparently never installed a backup system that is used by BART.

A significant segment of the Federal workforce relies on Metro, plus millions of visitors each year. We are also quite aware of the enhanced security issues which apply to Metro because it services the Washington Region.

The last Congress approved a measure sponsored by the former Chairman of our Committee, Tom Davis, who I am pleased to see is one of our witnesses today. That law authorizes much needed funds and mandates management assistance. But follow-through by the Administration and this Congress is required to make that law a reality.

I welcome all the witnesses at today's hearing, and look forward to their testimony.