



August 3, 2022

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan, Governor
State of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Governor Hogan:

We are writing to call your attention to the steep decline and deterioration of the Maryland Transit Administration's (MTA) service and request the necessary action to remedy the situation. The MTA's failure to provide reliable service and effectively communicate with its riders are causing ongoing hardships for the workers, businesses, students and other Maryland residents who rely on MTA rail, bus and paratransit service to get where they need to be on a regular basis.

Moreover, the current situation is impacting the economic future of Central Maryland, putting the region and Maryland as a whole at a competitive disadvantage with other states on the east coast and across the United States that have benefited from much more robust investments in public transportation.

Examples of MTA's service decline and inadequate communication with riders include:

- Repeated delays and no-shows of MTA light rail service, forcing passengers to wait an hour or more for trains along the route – including at the critical BWI Airport and Camden Yards stops – with little or no useful information provided by MTA personnel at the stations.
- Light rail trains stopped in the middle of routes with no information from MTA personnel, resulting in more than double scheduled travel times.

- Repeated announcements about MTA subway and light rail disruptions which provide no useful information for riders i.e. no specifics about what the disruptions are, where they are, which trains are affected, a revised schedule, what alternatives they have, etc.
- MTA only monitoring its Twitter feed on weekdays between 9 a.m. & 5 p.m, which is only one-third of service hours during the week and not at all on weekends.
- MTA providing inaccurate and misleading data regarding on-time bus performance, including **failing to factor in the significant percentage of scheduled buses that do not show up at all.**
- MTA paratransit riders reporting major delays or no-shows of their requested service.

Though MTA officials repeatedly cite Covid-19 issues for its service decline, riders on other urban transit systems are not facing similar problems. Despite more than half its rail cars being out of service over the past several months, WMATA has managed to operate its Red Line service and Green/Yellow line service on overlapping routes at 10 to 15 minute intervals.

Other examples include SEPTA trains in Philadelphia running every 6 to 8 minutes throughout much of the day and evening, Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Red Line trains providing 5 to 8 minute service from 5 am to 11 pm, and MBTA trains running 5 to 6 minute service during peak hours and 9 to 11 minutes off-peak through Boston and Cambridge.

Recent experiences during trips to these cities by coalition members confirm the frequency and reliability of their transit service.

To offset labor shortages in late 2021, New York City offered temporary jobs for retired subway workers which pay \$35,000 for three months of employment. Bus drivers have been given up to \$6,000 in signing bonus to work for New Jersey Transit per the NJ Transit website. When this was implemented, New Jersey Transit's bus on-time performance started rising. In November 2021, the on-time percentage was 93.7%; by February 2022 on-time performance of the buses rose to 96.6% (source - NJ Transit website). While NJ Transit determined that 93.7% was not adequate on-time performance and sought to improve it, MTA's reported on-time performance of 74.4% (**which is inflated by excluding scheduled runs that don't occur and considering vehicles up to seven minutes late as 'on time'**) pales in comparison.

In addition, Bloomberg's CityLab reports that new hires at Portland, Oregon TriMet are eligible for \$7,500 signing bonuses, while Houston METRO offers new hires a \$4,000 bonus.

By comparison, the 'Employment at MTA' webpage makes no mention of special incentives for new bus or light rail operators. There seems to be no sense of urgency to fill these positions so that MTA can provide the service that riders and our region need.

In your 2021 letter vetoing the Transit Safety and Investment Act passed by the Maryland General Assembly, you affirmed a commitment to ensuring the agency's "ability to effectively protect and serve the public," and lauded the agency's flexibility to prevent delays and staffing shortages caused by the pandemic. However, despite the assurances in your letter, the MTA's performance during the past year pales in comparison to systems in other major metropolitan areas.

This situation is unacceptable and requires immediate action before further damage is done to the Greater Baltimore region and Maryland. Therefore, we request an allocation of \$250 million from Maryland's budget surplus and/or Maryland's federal infrastructure funds to restore MTA's rail, bus, and paratransit service to acceptable levels while bringing MTA's communications up to acceptable levels of information and transparency.

These funds would be used for, but not be limited to the following purposes:

- Actively recruiting and hiring additional light rail and bus operators with necessary incentives including signing bonuses
- Increasing the frequency of MTA bus service
- Improving priority signaling for light rail trains on Baltimore City streets
- Purchasing new light rail cars to replace those not functioning properly
- Expanding existing MTA communications resources and reviewing the performance of current communications staff
- Reviewing the performance of current MTA management and operations staff

Visitors to MTA's website find the following mission statement, "*To provide safe, efficient and reliable transit across Maryland with world-class customer service.*" Sadly, MTA's current service, operations and communications speak to the gap between MTA's promise and the current reality.

As the official ultimately accountable for the quality and reliability of MTA's service, it is essential that you take action to allocate these funds without hesitation. Anything less would be an abdication of your responsibility to the state of Maryland's residents, businesses and other stakeholders you've been elected to serve.

Thank you,

The Transform Maryland Transportation Coalition

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