

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Board Meeting, Testimony given by David Schwartzman, Thursday, September 28, 2017, Metro Headquarters, 600 5th Street, NW, Washington, D.C.

As a member of the Safe Our System Coalition (SOS), the DC Statehood Green Party strongly supports the Coalition's "Make it Fair" platform, in particular, its opposition to any increase in Metro/bus fares and cutbacks in services.

WMATA's policy of raising fares and cutting service will discourage Metrorail and bus ridership, shifting reliance for commuting to cars -- precisely the opposite of what is needed to reduce regional air pollution and its negative health impacts, as well as carbon emissions that contribute to global warming. This policy is a Trump-like climate denialist assault on the health and well-being of our residents. Shame on you. Chairman and DC Councilmember Evans, this outcome is directly opposite to the self-declared objectives of the District government through its Sustainable DC initiative. However, WMATA Board, you can regain the trust and respect of metro riders in the region by implementing the solutions advocated by SOS.

WMATA should be concerned with the needs of low-income and working class riders particularly those of color and the impact of its brutally unfair fare system. Therefore, we support SOS's demand for a \$2 flat fare and free transfers from local bus-to-rail, rail-to local bus or local bus-to-local bus within two hours of the time you paid your fare. For a vast number of the transit system's daily riders, free transfers would create faster, cheaper or more direct ways to get around the area. Riders within D.C. would no longer have to choose between a two-fare bus and Metro trip, or a long, slow bus ride. Yes, free transfers will initially cost WMATA lost income, but the plan will soon increase the number of transit riders. New York implemented the free transfer system in 1997 and within a year, ridership increased by 15%, providing increased revenue to the entire system. And expand hours of operation, bring back late night service.

As I testified to you on January 30, a progressive dedicated funding stream for metro should be created, relying on taxation of big corporations and wealthy residents, especially millionaires like Mayor de Blasio proposed for the NYC subway. Forcing those who can't afford fares to pay excessive fines or face arrest is a bad policy. Metro should serve low-income communities, not be financed by the criminalization of low-income particularly Black and brown communities. Criminalizing folks who can't pay fare is not the way to save Metro. The Trump-Sessions repressive "law and order" agenda should be rejected by WMATA.

We need transparency and broader public outreach on major transit changes. WMATA should hold public hearing in every region that receives WMATA services, Board meetings should be more accessible and held at a time when the average rider can attend, and in meeting rooms large enough to account for public participation.

Finally, we stand in solidarity with ATU Local 689 in their struggle for protection of union rights and public transit, expanded and better quality service and a cleaner environment.

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