

TRANSIT FIRST!

Coalition members (list in formation): Action Committee for Transit, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, Audubon Naturalist Society, Clean Water Action, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Greater Greater Washington, MCGEO — UFCW Local 1994, Prince George's Advocates for Community-based Transit, Progressive Maryland, Save Maryland Area Rail Transit

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METRO BOARD OPENS WAY TO NEEDED LOCAL FUNDING

The public will be part of budget-making at Metro, local governments are at last considering whether to increase their financial contributions, and elected officials will be required to face up to the consequences of their decisions after yesterday's Metro board meeting. The Transit First! Coalition of riders, environmentalists, and union members welcomed these developments as a first step toward protecting the transit service riders need.

The coalition reiterated its opposition to the severe service reductions proposed to close the remaining \$29 million gap in next year's Metro budget. These would come on top of spending cuts already approved that will leave more litter in rail cars and make bus service less reliable.

In the next two weeks, each local jurisdiction in the Metro area will develop a package of local contribution increases and bus cuts that would compose one alternative for bridging the budget deficit. Transit First! urged local officials to be forthcoming with funding. Otherwise, there is a danger that the locally driven budgeting process will undo Metro's hard-won creation of a regional bus network in 1997. Before then, buses were budgeted separately by jurisdiction. The result was distorted financial incentives and a lack of bus routes to serve trips between jurisdictions.

Another option on the table is to shift money out of Metro's capital budget. The coalition said that this would be preferable to cutting service but should be a last resort because it will just delay the problem until next year.

"The reaction to Metro's budget from the riding and voting public makes it clear that loss of transit service is not an option," commented Transit First! chair Ben Ross. "Now is the time for our elected officials to step up to the plate and solve this problem."

Members of Transit First! are the Action Committee for Transit, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, Audubon Naturalist Society, Clean Water Action, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Greater Greater Washington, MCGEO — UFCW Local 1994, Prince George's Advocates for Community-based Transit, Progressive Maryland, Save Maryland Area Rail Transit. The coalition is chaired by Action Committee for Transit president Ben Ross; vice-chairs are David Alpert, editor of the Greater Greater Washington blog, and Jason Rylander, Arlington environmental lawyer and transit activist.

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