

May 25, 2010

The Hon. Kwame Brown
Chairman, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Chairman Brown:

As organizations with a long-standing commitment to good public transit in the Washington region, we read with great interest of the Council of Governments' (COG) May 12th decision to endorse and co-lead the Greater Washington Board of Trade's proposed task force on governance of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). We applaud your leadership and COG's continued recognition of the importance of Metro to the metropolitan Washington region, and of the importance of WMATA governance. However, we believe it is vital that COG uphold its high standards of inclusiveness by adding to the task force a third, equal group of members representing public transit advocates, transit riders and environmentalists.

We believe that the task force has the potential to make a significant, positive contribution toward strengthening accountability and policy expertise of the WMATA Board, and management stability of Metro. Yet, we are concerned that its current structure is not inclusive of other stakeholder groups. Indeed, the very title of the May 12th news release elicits our concerns: "COG, Board of Trade to Lead Independent Review of WMATA Governance; Longtime regional advocates for WMATA will offer recommendations to support transit system's long-term sustainability, success."

The Board of Trade plays an important role in the region and deserves credit for helping to win capital funding for Metro. However, they have played little role in the highly effective and constructive work by a wide coalition of groups to organize public support for ongoing capital and operating funds for transit. Our groups are "long-time regional advocates for WMATA" and have frequently made constructive recommendations regarding operations and accountability at Metro.

At the same time, there are differences between the core missions and perspectives of the Board of Trade and riders, public transit advocates, and environmentalists. Appropriately, riders and advocates agree with the Board of Trade on some issues, and disagree on others. That is healthy. Decisions should involve the entire community, not merely a single economic interest.

We believe that for COG, an "independent nonprofit association," to effectively serve *its* mission of "providing a forum for consensus building and policy-making," it should ensure that the task force devoted to governance be more representative of stakeholders and the public. The task force should demonstrate, through its very composition, a serious and sustained commitment to integrating a wider spectrum of voices than the task force is currently chartered to provide.

Opportunities for public participation can be important, but are no substitute for integrally contributing to the deliberations, and can of course effectively leave substantial constituencies in our community on the sidelines.

There are many individuals from the public transit advocacy community who have a breadth of knowledge and a commitment to collaboration and who have substantial insight with respect to areas of governance at WMATA that merit reform.

We therefore respectfully recommend that COG modify the task force's composition to contain a third group of members comprising rider and public transit advocates, equal in number to the Board of Trade-appointed members and "current and former public officials" already represented. We are confident that your commitment to involving citizens in a "forum for consensus building and policy-making" can help set the new body on the right track.

Sincerely,

Ben Ross
President, Action Committee for Transit

Stewart Schwartz
Executive Director, Coalition for Smarter Growth

Chris Weiss
Director, DC Environmental Network

David Alpert
Founder and Publisher, Greater Greater Washington

Gwyn Jones
Chair, Sierra Club – Washington, D.C. Chapter

Roger Diedrich
Chair, Transportation Committee, Sierra Club – Great Falls Group

Patricia Soriano
Chair, Political Committee, Sierra Club – Mt. Vernon Group

Ron Henry
Chair, Sierra Club – Maryland Chapter

cc: David Robertson, Executive Director, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments