

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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**“Metro: Report Card for America’s Subway”
Subcommittee on Government Operations
Committee on Oversight and Reform
2:00 PM, October 22, 2019
Chairman Gerald E. Connolly**

Today, this subcommittee continues its oversight of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). I say “continues” because this is an issue that Ranking Member Meadows championed as Chairman of this subcommittee. Mr. Meadows convened hearings on WMATA in the wake of Carol Glover’s tragic death in the L’Enfant Plaza tunnel fire, after the East Falls Church derailment, and amidst crises in system leadership, safety, and customer confidence. Mr. Meadows put the spotlight of this subcommittee on WMATA against a backdrop of seemingly daily track fires and when all the lights were blinking red. Thank you, Mr. Meadows for your leadership.

Together, we have been supportive of General Manager Paul Wiedefeld’s reforms to the system, including his efforts to place a premium on safety and combat a culture of mediocrity by holding bad actors accountable and demanding better service to customers. Mr. Wiedefeld implemented the SafeTrack blitz on safety improvements, led the effort to secure expanded maintenance hours, terminated track inspectors who falsified track inspection reports, and has increased annual capital investments. Some of these initiatives have not been popular, but these improvements coincide with increases in on-time performance, customer service ratings, and ridership — trends we must strive to continue.

Despite improvements, areas of concern, including a recent train collision, remain. These lingering problems demand continued attention. The newly-certified Washington Metrorail Safety Commission (WMSC) was on the scene of a train collision near the Farragut West station earlier this month. Congress was instrumental in establishing this new safety oversight body, and I was glad to help lead that effort with Majority Leader Steny Hoyer. We must ensure the WMSC has the resources and access it needs to conduct rigorous oversight of safety incidents like the Farragut West collision.

Moreover, WMATA is expected to take possession of the 23-mile Silver Line extension of Metro to Washington Dulles International Airport in late-2020. The WMATA OIG, however, released two management alerts raising concerns about construction deficiencies on the project and warning of the “extraordinary cost, maintenance and operational issues” that would arise if concerns were not properly addressed. We cannot allow shoddy construction work by cost-cutting contractors to saddle WMATA and its ridership with long-term, costly maintenance problems.

Finally, WMATA recently underwent immense upheaval on its governing board. Former Board Chairman Jack Evans violated the public trust as well as the WMATA Board Code of Ethics and Compact and has become “a walking billboard for the ethically challenged.” Mr. Meadows and I have acute concerns about the damage done by Mr. Evans and the Board’s mishandling of the ethics committee investigation. The opacity of the ethics committee process and Mr. Evans’ actions to threaten and intimidate WMATA staff to improperly influence the investigation did not inspire public confidence in the Board. We hope our witnesses can help the Subcommittee and the public understand how new ethics reforms address these lapses.

I believe the Ranking Member and I both appreciate how essential WMATA is to the operation of the federal government. In recognition of the special responsibility the federal government has to help "America's Subway," my Republican predecessor and former chairman of this committee Tom Davis led the effort to secure dedicated federal funding for WMATA. While I have not had many nice things to say about the President's budget request, I do appreciate that this year's request upholds this bipartisan and longstanding funding commitment.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 or "PRIIA", established the successful federal, state, and local partnership under which the federal government provides \$150 million in capital funding for WMATA each year. WMATA's three partnering local jurisdictions – Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. – collectively match this federal investment with an additional \$150 million.

Without continued federal participation, this successful funding partnership would unravel, leaving a massive shortfall in WMATA's budget and paralyzing this critical transit system. That is why I and other members of the DC-area delegation introduced the [Metro Accountability and Investment Act](#), or MAIA. The bill would reauthorize the \$150 million in annual capital funding for ten years – contingent on the local jurisdictions bringing a matching amount of funding to the table. In addition to the capital funding, the federal government would, for the first time, provide \$50 million for WMATA's annual operating costs – \$10 million of which would be provided to the WMATA Office of the Inspector General (OIG).

Currently the federal government contributes nothing to WMATA's \$2 billion annual operating budget, yet represents a quarter of the authority's board of directors. Given WMATA's myriad federal contingencies, it is past time for the federal government to have skin in the game on the system's operating costs.

This \$200 million in annual capital and operating funding authorized in MAIA would be conditional upon certain reforms that strengthen WMATA oversight. For example, WMATA would be required to provide the OIG with independent budget, procurement and hiring authorities, make independent legal advice available to the OIG, and improve transparency of OIG corrective actions. The OIG in any organization must be pure as the driven snow, and the reforms outlined in MAIA help ensure that the work of the OIG is above reproach and independent of the transit system it oversees.

MAIA would also authorize a second tranche of dedicated federal capital funding subject to certain conditions, including safety and reliability improvements. Additionally, the bill would require local jurisdictions to keep their promises to escalate their contributions to WMATA's capital costs. We should expect the federal government to take commensurate steps while WMATA continues to improve system performance.

We cannot afford a death spiral of disinvestment and declining service for the transit system that gets our federal workforce to work each day. We must use a carrot and stick approach to invest in this essential transit system and hold the system accountable to providing safer, more reliable service. This subcommittee will continue to provide strict oversight of WMATA. And I want to thank Ranking Member Meadows for making our WMATA oversight work a bipartisan, shared, and successful endeavor.