



Metro Needs More Money

I'm tired—no, I'm beyond tired—of a public transit system that makes the Los Angeles freeways look efficient. Frequent delays; four-car trains in the middle of rush hour; train, bus, elevator and escalator breakdowns; and the carelessness with which Metro tries to soothe the public anger are all part of our daily transit farce. The February snowstorms highlighted Metrorail's inability to provide heating and plows for its tracks, as well as its lack of adequate barns to protect equipment.

Metro will enact a small increase in fares later this month to cover its deficit and to make repairs. But what we really need is a more significant fare increase to bring Metro in line with every other major U.S. city.

One option would be to raise the minimum train fare from \$1.10 to \$1.60 during off-peak hours and to \$2.10 during rush hours. That would mean that a commuter working at George Mason University and living in Silver Spring would pay \$3.75 each way during rush hour. Metrobus fares would increase to \$1.60, with transfer charges and times remaining unchanged.

The other option would be to charge a flat rate of \$2 for any Metrorail destination at any time of day or night. A bus fare increase to \$1.60 would suffice because buses are less costly to maintain than trains.

Either plan to increase fares would generate the funds needed to repair broken equipment, consistently provide six-car trains (including new ones), build additional barns for trains and buses, and even heat the tracks in winter. Further, either option would put the fares of the D.C. transit system in line with the fares in major public transportation networks elsewhere in the country.

To put this in perspective, the flat one-way fares for New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Pittsburgh and Los Angeles are between \$1.35 and \$2. The base fares for Philadelphia and San Francisco are 75 cents and \$1.15, respectively, but during peak hours, a one-way fare in Philly is \$2, while the one-way rush-hour fare in the Bay Area runs as high as \$4.65.

Of course, most people would prefer low fares. But when I'm waiting for a train that's delayed because the doors are malfunctioning, or when a bus doesn't arrive because it has broken down, that's a sign that Metro needs more money—much more money than we are giving it now. It would be worth it to provide that money if I could get to work on time.

—Donald E. Collins