



November 13, 2008

Governor Martin O'Malley
Secretary John Porcari

Governor O'Malley and Secretary Porcari:

As you know, the Maryland MTA has proposed a number of drastic service reductions to the MARC commuter train system at a time when ridership has never been higher. We, the MARC Riders Advisory Council ("MRAC"), an all-volunteer group of fifteen MARC riders from all three MARC lines, respectfully request that you reconsider your requirement that the Maryland MTA not be allowed to raise some or all fares for MARC patrons so that the MARC system can continue to grow, rather than wither. We also respectfully ask that steps be taken to prevent the current financial state in which the Maryland MTA finds itself, which appear to be chiefly related to the fact that MARC service is heavily dependent on funds from the Maryland Gas Tax and from Maryland Vehicle Registration fees—funds that are dependent on the very things to which the MARC service serves as an alternative: automobiles. The fact that MARC train riders are facing drastic service cuts due to low automobile usage is a painful sting of irony and disappointment in our state government that we hope will be corrected. We also note that the Baltimore Light Rail and Metro systems do not appear to have similar service reductions, yet such reductions would likely impact only a fraction of the percentage of riders compared to the MARC system.

We hope that you will allow the MTA to consider fare increases and some of the following alternative ideas in an effort to minimize service reductions and to allow the MARC train system to continue to grow its footprint and headways in Washington, Baltimore, Frederick, Brunswick, and throughout the entire Delmarva region.

Immediate Concerns:

1) Ten-trip tickets have been targeted for elimination due to concern of corrupt usage patterns among frequent MARC riders. While a minority of riders may be willfully stealing transportation using these tickets, the majority of ten-trip ticket holders use these as a vital commuter option. If ten-trip tickets were to be eliminated, countless MARC riders would be adversely affected; examples include telecommuters and government and private sector employees who travel half-weeks. Please consider implementing some or all of these alternatives:

- a) Implement our recommendation for "Proof-of-Payment" outlined under Long-Term Concerns below.
- b) Allow ten-trip tickets on certain low-volume trains Monday through Thursday and on all trains on "S" days and Fridays until "Proof of Payment" is in place.
- c) Until "Proof of Payment" is in place, allow riders to purchase ten-trip booklets priced the same as the current ten-trip ticket, consisting of ten individual tickets.



2) Penn Line commuters face losing trains after 8:40 PM on a daily basis. At a time when the MARC was beginning to look forward to parity among all of the lines for late-night service, this proposal is the opposite of what we need. Many commuters' jobs hinge on the condition that one can work late into the evening. Indeed, many commuters don't work a standard 9 to 5 work day ; instead, they work in the afternoon and leave late in the evening. Losing these late night trains represents lost jobs for Maryland residents and a black eye for the MARC train service while sister services such as New Jersey Transit, Long Island Railroad, Metro North, CalTrain continue to expand and operate into the early morning hours in both peak and off-peak directions.

Brunswick Line commuters face the loss of train 871 Monday-Thursday, and the loss of service west of Brunswick on train 883. This change represents a drastic cut in service for Brunswick Line commuters and reflects a marked reversal of expansion plans that were received with much praise earlier this year.

Please consider implementing some or all of these alternatives:

- a) Institute "S" Schedule on all Fridays.
- b) Partner with West Virginia to shore up funds for unmodified service on the Brunswick line.
- c) Implement fare increases in the form of peak and off-peak tickets with round trip discounts.
- d) Introduce new ticket types, including day passes, quarter passes, and year passes.
- e) Enforce steep fines to be filed onboard for corrupt ticket usage; all proceeds go directly to transit-specific funds.
- f) Actively explore new revenue streams for the future, such as codeshare ticket bookings with Amtrak and Greyhound, private car services, and pay-for-use lounge cars, all of which are in operation on other commuter railroads
- g) If Train 871 doesn't run Monday-Thursday, the next train out of Washington would make all stops on the Brunswick Line. Furthermore, implement immediate monthly and weekly ticket cross-honoring with Amtrak on train 29 to Rockville, Harpers Ferry, and Martinsburg.
- h) If trains 445/446 and 447/448 are to be cancelled on Penn Line evenings, implement immediate monthly and weekly ticket cross-honoring with Amtrak on train 66 (northbound) and train 55 (southbound) for New Carrollton, BWI, and Baltimore Penn Station stops. Also consider adjusting afternoon trains so that train 442 leaves Washington, DC after 8 PM and so that train 544 leaves Washington, DC after 9 PM.
- i). Require MARC Weekly and Monthly riders to pay a surcharge for MARC tickets that can be used for unlimited access to city busses, Light Rail, and Baltimore Metro.



Major Long-Term Concerns:

1) The MRAC requests that the MTA immediately institute an indexed fare system to offset the possibility of a fiscal shortfall in the future. Furthermore, the MRAC requests that the funding sources for MARC service be altered, so that they are no longer fiscally dependent upon the very mode of transportation MARC supplements: automobiles.

2) The MRAC heavily endorses moving with haste (i.e., within one to two years) to a “proof-of-payment” ticketing system, similar to what has been implemented in other commuter rail infrastructures, such as CalTrans. Such a move would not only reduce the number of required conductors on board trains, but would also render any concerns with 10-trip ticket corruption moot.

We realize that some of our recommendations cannot be implemented quickly enough to resolve the immediate funding shortfall, which is why we recommend a series of fare increases as soon as possible. Based on conversations with fellow riders, a fare increase is considered far preferable to losing service.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lynda Clarke, Chair
Lawrence Gross, Vice Chair

Hameed Ahmed	Josh Friedman
Juan E. Calvo	Rafael Guroian
Steve Chan	Chikwe Njoku
Mark Dysart	Carol Oberdorfer
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The MARC Riders Advisory Council works with MARC Management to better communicate rider suggestions, inquiries, and concerns.