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September 29, 2005

Mr. Dana Kaufman
Chair, Board of Directors
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
600 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Kaufman,

I am writing to you in response to a letter I received from Mr. Richard White, General Manager and Chief Executive Officer, WMATA. His letter was in response to my letter to you of September 3, 2005, concerning the issue of restroom accessibility on the Washington Metro.

I was disappointed that I did not hear directly from you. This is an issue of staff not implementing WAMATA Board policy and as such my letter was appropriately directed to you as Chair of the WMATA Board.

The issue of restroom accessibility on Metro is a very important one, and my letter to you took considerable time to research and draft. I expected you to take this issue more seriously than to hand it off for a self serving response written by a Metro bureaucrat and put before Richard White for his signature. I called your office hoping to speak to you, but as you were unavailable I left you a voice mail message about my concern. I'm sorry that you never returned my call.

I wish to address this letter I received from Mr. White in a methodical fashion.

Restroom Signs...

Mr. White indicates that the WMATA policy is to post restroom availability signs on kiosk windows and he will post any missing signs in the 22 stations where my survey indicated they were missing. He ignores the fact that these signs are totally ineffectual, which I pointed out in my letter of September 3rd. To have the WMATA Customer Communications Department review the signs for changes to make them more prominent to customers is hardly a dynamic response that reflects a bold change in these signs. Mr. White's response reflects the pursuit of a failed policy of ineffective communication. Riders need signs that are prominent, unambiguous, user friendly, and vandal proof. We need a significant and complete change from the current ineffectual signage now in place. To pursue reinforcing the current signage is to chase after a failed communication policy, a policy that has been proven time and again not to work. The signs have disappeared before and will disappear again.

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Employee Response...

Mr. White indicates that if one is refused access to the restrooms, then the staff must notify Central Control when doing so. I did not know this, yet since Mr. White himself raises this requirement in his letter I would like to know how many of the staff members in the fourteen stations that refused me use of the restroom notified Central Control that they did so. Mr. Kauffman, you and I both know that not a single staff member did so. I would bet my life on that. Since Mr. White raises the issue I hereby formally request a response on this matter... how many staff members who refused me use of the restroom in the fourteen stations filed a notification with Central Control? I shall expect an answer on this point since he raised the issue, not me. This would be an important indicator as to staff compliance with WMATA employee policies. I look forward to receiving the data on this.

Mr. White indicated that the front line staff was still feeling the tension from the recent terrorist bombings as a way of excusing unprofessional behavior by Metro attendants. To excuse such behavior by attributing it to a London terrorist bombing is, to me, rather offensive... to use an attack in which people were killed and maimed as an excuse for bad behavior is to take advantage of the London attack and make its victims unfortunate victims all over again. I would expect just the opposite... that because of the recent terrorist activity that Metro staff would be trained to be especially professional in their response to reassure Washington Metro riders that everything is under control and that we have a system that is prepared for an emergency. Mr. White's remarks on this matter do not sound encouraging should there be any situation in which the riders will have to look to staff for leadership. Mr. White's logic and response on this issue is cause for concern.

Lastly, Mr. White indicates that they are in the process of re-organizing... My eyes just glaze over at this. I've worked at too many places where problems are supposedly solved by "re-organizing." Deal with the problem, don't reorganize. Mr. White gave me the names and telephone numbers of each customer contact person for each line.... I don't know why I'm supposed to call them on this restroom issue. Is he expecting me to call them and give them directions? That is Mr. White's job, not mine.

As a parenthetical note, I tried calling Rita S. Davis, manager for the line I live on, the Yellow Line, at the number Mr. White gave me in his letter. That number goes to a Metro repair shop in Brentwood and they never heard of a Ms. Davis. So I called the number Mr. White indicated for the Blue-Orange Line manager and I was connected to a continuous loop that I couldn't get out of. Finally I called the number Mr. White gave me for the Red Line manager and was given a number for Ms. Davis. That number turned out to be the wrong number and I was referred to another wrong number and finally to the central switchboard which got me to Ms. Davis' office. I'll add that Ms. Davis never called me back but I got my question answered elsewhere within Metro. This all strikes me as a bit dysfunctional. Mr. White really needs to update his phone directory and check phone numbers before sending them out in a letter.

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Mr. Kauffman, I request that you meet with me personally to discuss the Metro restroom issue I have brought to your attention, to move forward and discuss solutions (rather than Mr. White-excuses), solutions that will meet the needs of Metro riders, so that we may get this issue off the table, and create a Metro system that embodies excellence. I shall follow up this letter with a call to your office to arrange for a meeting. I just hope that in a matter of months, with another restroom survey, we won't be right back where we are now.

Sincerely,

Stephen H. Snell

cc: Gladys W. Mack, Vice Chair, Board of Directors, WMATA
Charles Deegan, Vice Chair, Board of Directors, WMATA
Robert J. Smith, Board of Directors, WMATA
Christopher Zimmerman, Board of Directors, WMATA
Jim Graham, Board of Directors, WMATA
Patrick Sheehan, Elderly & Disabled Advisory Committee, WMATA