

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH PAUL WIEDEFELD

SUBJECT: FUTURE OF THE METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

MODERATOR: THOMAS BURR, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: THE PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 12:300 P.M. EDT

DATE: MONDAY, MARCH 7, 2016

(C) COPYRIGHT 2008, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, 529 14TH STREET, WASHINGTON, DC - 20045, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FOR INFORMATION ON BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, PLEASE CALL 202-662-7505.

THOMAS BURR: (Sounds gavel.) Welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Thomas Burr. I'm the Washington correspondent for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, and the 109th President of the National Press Club.

Our guest today is Paul Wiedefeld, General Manager and CEO of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, or as we often call it, Metro; or in less happy times, choice words I will not use from the stage. We'll get to those issues soon. I would like to welcome our C-SPAN and public radio audiences, and I want to remind you, you can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLive. That's hashtag NPCLive.

Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I ask that each of you stand briefly as your name is announced. Please hold your applause until I have finished introducing the entire table. From your right, David Shepardson, transportation reporter at *Reuters*; Martin Di Caro, transportation reporter at WAMU; John Donnan [?], freelance radio reporter; Talia Schmidt, editor at Families USA; Bruce Johnson, news anchor at WUSA; Dan Stessel, the director of communications at Metro; Marcia Wiedefeld, the wife of our speaker; Angela Greiling-Keane of *Bloomberg News*, a past NPC President and Vice Chair of the Speakers Committee.

Skipping for our speaker for a moment, Pat Host, a reporter for *Defense Daily* and the member of the Speakers Committee who organized today's luncheon. Chuck Bean, the executive director of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments; Dan Waetjen, chairman of the Greater Washington Board of Trade; Paula Reid, a justice

reporter at CBS News; and Ferdous al-Faruque, a reporter of the Gray Sheet and a member of the National Press Club Board of Governors. Thank you. (Applause)

A fatality during a smoke-related incident, physical attacks on passengers, derailments, a drop in ridership and other worrisome events might be what keeps our guest, Mr. Wiedefeld up at night. But a new fare card system, communication improvements for first responders and passengers, and work with vendors to develop a real time smart phone surely make the days more exciting for the new general manager and CEO of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Hired in November, Mr. Wiedefeld's career has been in public and private sector transit. Previously, he was the CEO of Baltimore Washington Thurgood Marshall International Airport. He is credited with leading BWI's growth as the busiest passenger airport of the three airports in the metro Washington region. Now his attention is on the country's second busiest subway system in the United States, and his citywide bus system.

Forty years after the first metro rail car ferried area residents to work and tourists to sites, today's riders experience unpredictable travel times and must budget more time to reach their destination. Rail on time performance, which measures how evenly spaced the trains are, has been consistently below target, particularly since the opening of the silver line. Ongoing track work outside of rush hour hobbles the system. Maintenance challenges including broken elevators and escalators, creates more distress for passengers, especially for those in wheelchairs or on crutches.

Mr. Wiedefeld rides the Metro to work from Union Station, and has witnessed the frustration that extra time added when the escalator isn't working, or the annoyance when the announcements are garbled. In addition to safety and maintenance issues, Mr. Wiedefeld will usher Metro through a critical period. Union contract negotiations are scheduled to begin this summer. Please welcome to the National Press Club stage Washington area Metropolitan Transit Agency general manager and CEO, Paul Wiedefeld. (Applause)

MR. WIEDEFELD: Thank you, Thomas.

MR. BURR: Thank you for joining us today, sir. My first question; you've been in office for about three months now, and clearly there are a barrage of issues facing the nation's second busiest transportation system. How are you going to tackle and actually solve the problems facing Metro?

MR. WIEDEFELD: That's all?

MR. BURR: That's it. Easy question.

MR. WIEDEFELD: Very good. If I could, before starting there, I did want to introduce my board members that are here, because they're so important. Mort Downey's

here, Michael Golden, Malcolm Augustine, and Leif Dormsjo, I think, is over there from Washington, D.C. And most importantly, I'd like to introduce the first person I met at Metro, which is my station manager, Miss Odom, right there. Hi, Miss Odom, nice to see you. My first day on the job, she was-- I got to meet her and got an understanding of her world.

MR. BURR: She's here in uniform, too.

MR. WIEDEFELD: Yeah, because she's a good worker. All right, rephrase the question? (Laughter)

MR. BURR: I'm wondering your observations and your plan. You've been in office three months. There's a lot of problems that faces Metro from the things I started out talking about, broken escalators and elevators, the funding issues, and problems with incidents that have lead to deaths in the past on Metro. How are you going to tackle them and how are you going to solve them?

MR. WIEDEFELD: The first thing I did when coming on board in November, November 30th, is I spent the whole month of December basically reaching out to stakeholders to understand those issues a little bit better. Meaning stakeholders, everything from my line employees all the way up to leaders of business, elected officials and the riders, to give me a feel for that.

At the same time, we started in December and January, in particular, we had a number of outside consultants come in to sort of get our arms around these issues. And then my own assessment, based on my experiences, in different positions. And I really got a good flavor during the blizzard when I got a good sense of just operationally some of the things that we're dealing with.

From the start, my priorities have been around safety, service reliability and getting the fiscal management in order. Just today, we started to roll out some of the specific initiatives we're doing in those three areas. I'll get into them further. But it starts with me and getting the entire organization to understand those priorities, to start to organize, to deal with these issues in an efficient way. And to get particularly the line people, the operators, the station managers, the mechanics, to understand what we're up against and to get their support. And to work from that end up with our supervisors and superintendents, because that's a lot of where these issues get determined, and particularly from a customer's perspective. So I'm focusing on that.

At the same time, I'm focusing on the overall management level, the executive management team as well. So that's how we're starting the process, and I can get into lots of specifics on those, as I'm sure you have other questions about specific issues.

MR. BURR: Sure, but let's address the first one that comes to mind. You had an op ed. in the *Washington Post* yesterday kind of laying some of this stuff out. But riders

have seen people come before with promises and these promises sometimes take years, or never get done. How is this going to happen and how fast is this going to happen?

MR. WIEDEFELD: My approach is, again, and starting really nuts and bolts and not so much maybe the larger things that we've tried to frame in the past. To me, when I look at particularly the service liability, for instance, it's fairly simple. It's the cars, it's the vehicles, being in the line every day, a.m. and p.m. and then obviously mid-day. It is the track and it's the operations; meaning operators, station managers.

So we've basically-- I've set up three separate teams with champions on each one of those. We meet weekly on what they're doing, what the plan is and what we're doing to achieve it, and what I found in each one of those categories, to be frank, it's much worse than I expected and even publicly we've been talking about. So, we got to clearly go right at those issues. We have issues, for instance, in the cars, a lot of the debate and discussion over time has been about parts, that's only one part of it. It's everything from how we move the cars in the yard. It's everything from how we're efficiently programming work, using our employees most efficiently. So I have a whole team just working on that issue.

On the track issue, same thing. When you take a look at our track issue and the work that we've been doing, when you start to peel it away, we have 30 very sharp curves in this system and so that's got to be our first priority because that leads to a lot of our issues. But it's not only just fixing what we see, but it's thinking much more holistically about what we do.

So for instance, on the track work, we have a lot of fasteners we have to replace. They're aged and broken, and whatever they're doing. What I found, I went out with my head engineer and CEO on the rail side, when I went out there and looked in the tunnel and met some of the workers that were doing this work, what's the root cause? Why are these things breaking down? There's lots of moisture, obviously it's the wear and tear. There's a drainage system that's not working. So it's not just go out and fix the fastener. It's like no, what is-- let's come at this together at one time.

We have a lot of equipment left over that we left sitting there. We actually sell a lot of our parts, leftover steel and stuff, and it's sitting there. To me, it's money just sitting there. We got to get that out of there very quickly, when we have a contractor following up right behind us taking it. Eventually, a contractor does take it from us after we moved it two or three times. It doesn't make sense.

So, the way I'm getting at these things is, again, not coming out with a five year plan. We have those things in place. It's really, again, the nuts and bolts of where we can start to make changes that will impact the customer in the immediate term. Longer term-- okay.

MR. BURR: No, I'm just going to follow up a minute ago. You said something from the stage, which is rare to hear somebody in charge say something like that. You're telling us that the problems are actually worse than we may think they are?

MR. WIEDEFELD: In terms of the way they've been presented and the way they've been framed, I think maybe it's just the way that I look at them, how I would plan to solve-- how I plan to solve them, it's probably different than maybe they'd been planned before. So from that perspective, they're not-- I don't think from my estimation, they haven't been framed correctly in the public dialogue with the board. And so that's what I intend to do.

MR. BURR: The hard truth thing you've been talking about, the idea you actually need to know what they are before you can actually fix them and not try to cover?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Right.

MR. BURR: Okay. And I interrupted you, but you mentioned the five year kind of plan, the five billion, five year plan. It seems that riders have heard about this, but they never see. They don't have that like, well, what actually has happened? How are you going to show riders that there are improvements coming and make sure they notice those improvements?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Right. Again, I think that's an area where we haven't done a good job in framing that out. And to be frank, I've asked for that exact thing. Where are we on basically where we have to catch up with work that we had put off over time? And then where are we, then, on what we call the state of good repairs. Once you get it to a certain stage, how do you just keep maintaining it?

And so I'm going to come out with basically what that is, where we are. Here's what we said we were going to do, here's where we are. I mean, that's where I'm starting from. We have a backlog of work, what is it? And then once we get through that backlog, what is the plan going forward?

And we have to be very clear to people what that is. And then we have to think strategically about how we address it. So I get into just thinking about-- we have an effort under way, A, to do that. Let's define it for people so they can understand it. But more importantly, let's think strategically how we address it. In my estimation, we try to make everyone happy, we pretty much made everyone not happy with some of the approaches we've taken. I think when you look at other systems around the country, you have to make some hard decisions. But I think there's a discussion that needs to be had, is what can we get, how much quicker can we get it? If we have a little bit of pain here, do we get things quicker?

One of the things I hear constantly is I won't use the weekend service because it's so inconsistent. Well, then maybe it's time to look at how we're doing the weekend service. Is there other things we can do?

Same way with some of the midday. We do midday work. We come upon a problem, and guess what? It rolls right into the peak period. So, I'm basically doing a total assessment of what we're doing and how we're doing that. And so that will be part of that going forward strategy so it's not just something that there's this five-year plan out there, but it's specifically talking about this is what I need to do to get us back up to this state. And at that point, here's what you're going to see going forward.

MR. BURR: And this is going to be trackable for the public? We're going to be able to see-- "in two months we're going to have this done, in one year this is going to be done," and we can judge you?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Yes. We started on our website today a customer report accounting system, basically, where I've laid out almost 50 items that we're starting to work on. Some of these we've already been since I've been on board. Some, before I got on board. But a lot of them that we're just starting to do now. And so that's going to be something that we-- some of these things will be updated weekly, monthly at a minimum. And then things will come and go. I only wanted to put things on there that I'm comfortable saying, "Yes, I know what we're doing, and this is the schedule we're going to do it on." And then let's judge ourselves against that.

There'll always be issues with schedules, I get that. But I think it's important for us to be both transparent about it and then also turn up the accountability on us.

MR. BURR: You mentioned fiscal management. There's only a finite amount of money that you have. So when you're trying to fix things, where does that come out? If you're talking about you want to maybe improve the 20 minutes you have to wait for a train on a Sunday, that has to come out of somewhere else. How do you find that money?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Well, in the first and foremost is safety. I mean, that's going to be the first priority, so we have to do that. We have to bring-- to get at some of these core issues, we have to bring just the basics up, so that's going to be sort of the next priority. And then we go out from there.

Anything that we touch, it gets very expensive, very quickly, particularly if we're in the-- I'm speaking rail. There's a whole 'nother side of the question here with bus and Metro access. But on the rail side, just given the physical limitations of a two-track system, any time we touch it, it best very expensive in terms of just getting it out there, the ability to get it out there and then the challenges we face with a 40 year old system that in some cases was not-- it was just not kept up.

MR. BURR: Interesting. The plan talked about safety. There's a couple of issues there. One is obviously the safety when you're on the train from no derailments or things like that. But we're also-- raised concerns about stabbings or shootings or rapes that have happened, sexual harassments that have happened on the metro. What is the plan there, and are you going to boost the number of officers on the trains?

MR. WIEDEFELD: So the personal security, personal safety issue. You know, numerically, it's a very safe system when you look at-- it's six part one crimes per million passengers. And if you look in most communities, that's a very safe number. That means nothing to the person or to the community when they see one of these tragic events or drastic events that occurs. So, what we've done, I've worked with the chief of police. Basically, we've sort of gone back and stepped back, all right, what is it that we can do differently than what we've done in the past?

One of the first things that I notice with our security is it tends to be almost invisible at times because literally because of the uniforms. You know, they blend into the crowd, and so we have an event where anything that occurs, it's even hard to see who's in charge. So that's one of the things, for instance, that minor thing I'm doing. But more importantly, we're getting more people. We have a class that comes out in April, we have another one that comes out in September for more people. We've realigned our resources to basically free up some things that our uniformed police officers were doing to put them out into the field.

I've made it very clear to the chief that I want these officers on the platforms, popping into cars, popping out. Again, it's as much giving people the sense and the reassurance that it's under control. And the same way for our bus operators, same issue. We have issues, serious safety issues with some of our bus routes at different times of the day. We've created a sort of night watch program, in effect, where we're having our officers come up to buses, stop, greet the operator, make sure everything's all right. We're also doing that with our central control system where we're touching in with the bus operators. Because again, it's not just rail, but clearly rail's one of the biggest ones for us.

But even when we do all that, it's a much larger issue, as we all know, a community issue. One of the things that we have reached out to is the schools, where we want to go out and meet particularly with the students. And we're going to bring not only the police, but bring some of the operators and station managers like Miss Odom and other people like that so that we can make the connection with these students that it's just not-- you know, it's not a power issue. This is your mother, this is your grandmother, this is your uncle, whatever it is, so they can start to relate and to try to take that in. So that's one of the things we want to do, or we started actually to do that.

We've also worked very closely with the district. We have some of their personnel dealing with us on a day to day in our operation center so we have direct communication. We do intel. every day with the police and with the school system, if there's anything going on in social media that we can all watch. We have an excellent closed circuit television program now on every [00:18:24] and their stations. The reality is if you do something on our stations or platforms, we're in our-- or even at our bus stops, we're going to see it and we have been-- basically, any of these things, we've been catching the people. We've been getting them. But we want to prevent it, if we can.

MR. BURR: On that note, though, we're in a city with a lot of visible security. Just staying on this theme here, WMATA seems almost to be a soft target with almost no visible security. Oftentimes, you walk into a Metro station and there's one employee, there's one person there. I've been riding Metro for 11 years and I can probably on one hand how many times I've seen officers inside of the tunnel. What is your specific plan to try to raise that, more than just changing the colors of the uniform?

MR. WIEDEFELD: No, it's to get more people out there. And, again, have them police differently. Again, have them proactively doing down. A lot of times, again, being new, what I would see is police officers around the station Kiosk. I wanted them on platforms. I want them popping into trains. That's a different policing strategy. So that's where I think it is, it's getting physically getting the police officers into the system, deeper into the system.

MR. BURR: Got you. Back to fiscal management for a second. You had a memo recently that talked about no more travel and no more purchasing, I believe paper clips were even on your target list. Guessing that paper clinical practice purchases are not going to solve your budget crisis, what is this an effort to do?

MR. WIEDEFELD: It's a checkbook effort. It's just like you have with your own personal checkbook. If you know for the month that you've allocated \$500 for food and travel and you're burning it much quicker than you thought, you've got to start ratcheting it back. And that's all this is. It's a normal budgeting process that we have to manage the operating budget very tightly so we monitor it constantly. And that at this point, we just want to say, "Look, with the blizzard particularly, with the expenses that we incurred there, we've got to make sure we're ratcheting it back and just thinking about all expenditures."

MR. BURR: Let's talk about the blizzard for a second. A very bold choice to shut down the system for for two, three days there. Can you give us a little more rationale why you shut down the entire system when under ground, for example, it wasn't snowing?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Sure. It gets to the larger issue of if we are serious about safety, then we have to start making decisions based on safety. And across the entire agency, every employee I've met, they basically said that's the first time we've done this because someone understood the safety concerns that they had as operators and people. So that was-- I mean, part of it is just the recognition that we cannot ignore the safety implications of a storm like that.

If you recall, when we were preparing for that storm, our big concern was not only the snow and trapping vehicles in the snow and in the yards, but the winds. They were calling for 40 mile an hour winds, and we have a power source, we have very limited backup power. And if that power goes out, then we are basically-- we have people marooned in locations if we kept just the underground open.

The other part that we wanted to do, which I think was the first time we had done it, which was basically we harbored the vehicles, a large portion of the vehicles, in the tunnels. So that let us get back up and service much quicker. If you go back and look at some of the history of some of the snowstorms here, we had large mechanical issues after trying to go through snow because of the age of some of the equipment and where literally the snow gets under the cars and we create other issues for us. We didn't have that this time. So we had that figured out.

So anyway, it was something that I think was the right thing to do from a safety standpoint, for our employees and for the customers. The worst thing we could have done is to have people out there, A, to get them to think they could travel in a storm like that, as we knew it at the time. And B, then have to go in and rescue them because then we're pulling resources away from basically getting the system up and running. So that was the decision, and I think it was the right decision to make.

MR. BURR: Staying with the safety issue, there are a lot of times you can get into the Metro system and see a very crowded platform. When the games, the Gallery Place, or something like that. But also, there are issues when it comes down to construction inside of the stations where there's only a few feet between falling off the edge. Do you have any plans to try to address that for safety concerns? Just passengers trying to walk through stations?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Right. In the short-term, one of the things we're doing is we're basically-- we've created a new class of employees that are basically going to be working on platforms, particularly at the busier stations just to deal with, in fact, crowding issues like that and also using obviously the police to do that.

The reality is in some of our stations, the physical limitations are very tight and it gets compounded when you have either a major event or you have some incident on the rail. So there's clearly that. So what we have to do is one of the things that, particularly for incidents, is we want to get people to understand before they get down into the station, or before they go through the-- into the mezzanine, that basically there's an issue and we start to hold people there. So we do that during some incidents, but I want to be much more proactive in that.

One of the things we're looking at is putting rail information out on the pylons out at the street level because we do have electric there. So that's one of the things that we're basically trying to figure out right now. And where we can tell people what's going on before they get down there, because that's part of the issue, you get people down there and they're stuck.

The other thing that we're doing is we have proposed doing a tap in, tap out. Some of the times, people come into a station and there's an issue and, in effect, they already paid and they figure out, "All right, I'm going to stay here because I already paid," and they wait it out. Or they're frustrated because they paid and they have to-- and they don't get the service they demand.

So anyway, we're looking at a 15 minute grace period for that. So again, to help relieve some of that pressure so people don't feel they have to stay. "Okay, I get it. Something's going on here, let me get out and do another plan," without costing them.

MR. BURR: I know I've done that myself, I understand that very much. Talk to me a little bit about those situations, too. If I walk in and I see there's a 20 minute wait, I walk out and pull up my Uber app, Uber, Lift, these other organizations are causing competition for you. Is there a way to address that, or do you find it complementary to your system?

MR. WIEDEFELD: I look at that-- let me talk about it on two levels. One is there are certain things I have no control over. I have no control over the price of fuel, if it's \$1.60, \$1.70, what can I do about that. That's going to impact this Uber, Lift and Bike Share, or car sharing, all those things impact us. That is not what I want to focus on. What I want to focus on is let us provide the best service we can within that context. So that's where we should be focusing, not worrying about some of these things I have no control over. So that's at the one level.

At the other level is thinking about those as part of an overall transportation plan for the region. There's nothing wrong with that, you know? It's not an either/or car, next car or any of that. To me, it's all part of a system. So we should think of it as a system and gear towards that. Then, are there opportunities to use that? Are there other things we could be doing that are more efficient by tapping into those resources and not figuring out ways to try to beat them. So it's a little different, maybe a little different philosophy with them.

MR. BURR: In fact, I think I recently read that-- was it Giant with Peapod is going to deliver groceries now to some Metro stations so people can pick it up on their way home. You just kind of hinted at this, but does Metro's problem-- and a lot of the issues it faces reflect the larger state of the country's infrastructure, especially transportation infrastructure? Are we essentially an example of what's going wrong right now when it comes to transportation funding and structure?

MR. WIEDEFELD: I think, yeah, a lot of the same trends that you see across the country, whether it's transit, highway. You look at any of the industry groups, and they have a laundry list of needs that haven't been met, have been sort of kicked down the road. And at some point, they come back to haunt us. I mean, you look at manhole covers blowing up in the air. I mean, there's all kinds of infrastructure things that have been ignored that need to be fixed. And so that's a national debate. It's also a regional one for us.

MR. BURR: Speaking of regional, the idea of a dedicated tax has been pushed for a very long time with little interest in Virginia and Maryland. Is there any way you think you will ever see a dedicated tax for the Metro system?

MR. WIEDEFELD: I think that the way that I view the system is we are in a region that is competing globally. I mean, that's what we are. And the Metro is just one of the tools to help this region compete globally. And so, unless we start to think in those terms, it puts us in a very difficult position to compete.

So, what that means is if we fund them on a local level, then you're going to think much more locally. If you fund on a regional level, you tend to think more regional. And then you set the governance structure around that and you start to have an understanding of what you're trying to do as a region. So from that perspective, I think it is important.

If you look at the major transit properties around this country, I think we're the only one that does not have some sort of regional mechanism like that. It provides the stability and the certainty in budgeting rather than an annual budgeting thing that we go through. Now, we do reach agreement for some longer-term agreements, but by and large, again across the country, the reason that you see that is because these are very large, complex expensive systems to maintain and operate. And unless you have that, it makes it very difficult.

MR. BURR: In terms, relative terms, Metro is pretty young compared to a lot of the other systems out there in the United States and in Europe. Are there lessons you can learn, for example, from some of the systems in Europe that have been operating for a very long time and don't seem to have as many of the issues that we face here in Washington?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Well, I think to compare it to Europe is a little-- we look at trains in this country a little bit differently than some other places, both in Europe and Asia. So I think that comparison's a little tough. Yes, there are definitely lessons to be learned. I mean, the smart card is, in effect, building off what the Oyster did in London, for instance. So I think there's lots of things we can do that we can learn from them.

But I think just particularly the funding and the public policy decisions in both Europe and in some of the Asian countries, they're not quite applicable here. I think, clearly, we can learn from other major systems in the country. My experience has been every one of those systems have their issues and I'm sure that if you look a little bit deeper they have very similar issues that they have to go through. We all do because, again, the nature of the beast. But I think if we get at some of these core issues, we can start to solve-- we should be, at a minimum, the best transit system in the U.S., both in terms of its age and in terms of its meaning to this economy, what it means to the nation as the nation's transit system. I mean, we should definitely be there, for sure. As we reach to meet European and/or Asian sort of models, that's a little bit further down the road.

MR. BURR: Why aren't we the best one in the United States?

MR. WIEDEFELD: I think some of it is because we had a new system and we focused on the newness and maybe not some of the aging of it. We had a capital construction mentality, I believe, as an agency over the years. We've now moved into,

obviously except for the silver line, but we've moved into a DPW type environment, Department of Public Works environment where basically you're taking care of the basics. And that's a shift for the agency.

MR. BURR: Some questions from the audience. This questioner wants to know, there are many examples of wonderful Metro customer service representatives, but often there's often operators who abandon their trains or their station and there's no one there to help. Does Metro have a customer service problem?

MR. WIEDEFELD: I have seen just some fantastic customer service from people that have no idea who I am. They don't even know I was there. So, they by and large do very well. Do they have issues? Yes. Have we brought the line employees into the solutions? No. And that's exactly what I talked about earlier. What I'm trying to build is at the staff level, particularly at the operational front line people level, is the pride in the system. I want them, and I've said this, we have a class of new employees that come in every two weeks, and Dan who runs that is here. And the thing I say to all those employees is what I want you to do is when you go out to watch a Caps game, or whatever, if someone asks you, "Where do you work?" I want you to be able to say Metro, and they think, A, that's cool; and B, you're proud to do it. So that means we got a lot of work to do that. But I think that is something, if you ask someone where they work and they say Under Armour, for instance, you may have a whole different view of them and they may say it a different way.

And I know we can get there. It's something that we did at BWI. I think if you ask anyone if they say BWI, they're going to feel proud about it, and you generally are going to think positively about it. So that's the same goal I have here. But it starts with the line employees. That means a lot of work with our managers to understand that, to buy into that. It means working in the construct of our-- how we operate in terms of both unization [?] the labor, making sure there's rules that we abide by there. We got to make sure that the goal here is to be proud in the system.

MR. BURR: Can you do that without raising salaries? That's usually one thing that instills some happiness in a workforce?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Yeah, of course, that's always going to be an issue. But I think if you treat people with respect, it goes an awful long way, is my experience. They get it. The money's not always going to be there. I think that we have-- these are great jobs, there's no doubt about it. The employees have great jobs. But more importantly, it's building that relationship with the front line employees that we're in this together, that we're thinking of you. So like for instance, when I make a decision on blizzards, I'm thinking of them; not just okay, I got to try to do this because that's what other people say I should be doing. It really is thinking about them at the same time.

MR. BURR: Speaking of that, you've had some big decisions you've had to make so far. And you've been pretty decisive in your three months as the GM from the

snow storm to the police expansion, others. How do you approach decision making? Is this a group effort, you bring everyone together? Is this you saying we have to do this?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Right now, it's probably a little bit heavy-handed on my part. I just came out with a new organizational structure, and I am recruiting for a number of those positions. My experience, though, eventually is I get a sort of tight team that basically is thinking strategically about the agency all the time, is what I want. And then I manage more of a matrix style, which is I get out and wanting all of my-- particularly my managers to do that.

One of the things that I found at the agency is quite a bit of silos and a lot of turf issues. So with the new organizational structure, I'm basically tearing that down so the people that work for me directly, that are my direct reports, and all the people under them are at will and they will understand that what that means is that either they act as a team or they're not on the team.

MR. BURR: One of the questioners wants to know your personal-- what has been your worst Metro fiasco as a passenger?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Actually, one of the worst was-- and it wasn't-- it was understandable. We had an issue and it was at Union Station. I had a breakfast meeting there early, and then I caught the train down. And it was kind of interesting because I had a 9:00 back at headquarters and it was on customer service. When I was there, there was a number of issues we were dealing with, but it could not find the people that were managing it. I did not get the sense of urgency of what we were dealing with.

And so when I got back to the meeting, when I look at the pages I was getting, it was, "We had these train delays and there's these things going on, but that was it." So I sort of lost it a little bit but I think they started to understand that, A, they had been over the years a little dulled to some of the issues, I think. So I've got to bring that into focus, that this is not acceptable. That we need to be proactive when things occur and not just think, "Okay, I've got the trains and they're moving back." It's all the customer experience part of it, which I did not see.

I was lucky enough to be recognized by a couple of customers and I informed them of what was going on. So that was probably one that sticks in my mind as one that kind of got to me a little bit.

MR. BURR: You want to tell me your best experience just to counterweight that?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Oh, best? I've had so many-- there's one gentleman that's a train operator that's just fantastic and providing information. In fact, I asked him to come down to the office and we get to meet him, so that's fantastic. I've seen our police do just tremendous work. Unfortunately, we had a terrible incident not too long ago on the tracks with an individual. And it was a Friday night and it was a three-hour ordeal. And guess

what? No one on that line that was dealing with that issue, most of them were not working, they were off. And this wasn't how they were planning to spend their Friday night. But they handled a very complex and tragic incident with just utmost professionalism in dealing with the situation and also trying to get it out to the customers so they understood what was going on, and then rebuilding the services as quick as they can.

So to see that, again, I'm very thrilled with the passion I see in the people. I think it needs to be harnessed, I think it needs to be directed, I think it needs to be brought out, but it's definitely there.

MR. BURR: You referenced crime problems a few minutes ago. And you seemed to be talking a little bit more about transparency with the Metro system. Currently, information about these crimes, arrests and prosecution of crimes on Metro, is currently not available publicly. Will you make it publicly available going forward?

MR. WIEDEFELD: We will make public whatever we have. It's a little bit more complex than just what we control, particularly with youth crime. There's all kinds of rules that I'm still learning about in the region. But from what we do, we will be as open as we can. If it jeopardizes an investigation or a method that we're using, we're not going to be open about that.

MR. BURR: The same question about transparency. Will WMATA make public the terms of real estate transactions after they're finalized and approved. Other public agencies do this across the country.

MR. WIEDEFELD: Again, I see no reason not to.

MR. BURR: And I'm just getting as many promises as I can from you right now. (Laughter) When will WMATA join so many other transit agencies and post all procurement awards, all bidders and responders and the values of those bids on your website?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Again, I don't see any problem in doing that.

MR. BURR: I think you're making the crowd very happy. This questioner wants to know, why does it take so long to replace broken escalators? And I think we've seen stories of especially in some places like Wheaton or DuPont Circle, and why do they break so often?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Well, let me touch on the why part first. We actually have a lab where we have the mockups basically of the escalators and the two different type of elevators we have. One of the things I learned, particularly with the escalators, is they-- a lot of times what you see is-- now from a customer perspective, it's broken, it's a breakdown. But the reality is these are very complex systems that are designed from a safety standpoint. And I'm not even going to tell you what you can do. But there are

certain things that if you do certain things on those escalators, they will stop automatically and it deals with steps, it deals with rails and deals with some other things.

So just in normal usage, it can happen pretty quickly. And what happens, it shuts down automatically as it's supposed to do. So, we have station managers, have some ability to investigate. But the reality is you have to make sure it's safe. So that means you take a technician out. So we try to keep technicians in effect in an emergency response condition so they can do that.

So a lot of times what you'll see with a stopped escalator is that very issue. There's a whole 'nother set of escalator issues where we literally have to replace escalators. That gets to be quite a challenge if you have limited access to a station, because we have to think about, all right, how do we get people out of there if an emergency occurs? So that's how they have to think about how they stage these things.

In terms of rehabilitation of escalators, it's the same issue. We try to maintain them, we replace the basics, and then every now and then, or every few years, we have to basically do a whole rehab on them. But our breakdown rate is in the '90s-- or, we're performing in the 90 percentile, 92, 93 percentile.

The reality is if an escalator's broken down and it's your escalator, they're all broken. But if you look at any of our stations, you may be looking at a dozen escalators in that one station that you may, as a customer, never think about. But there's escalators all over the place there. But the one that you hit is broken, and so it's broken and we get it. But from the percentage standpoint, they've actually done a very good job. But we're going to continue that. We're going to continue to try to do that better.

MR. BURR: Continuing with a little bit of the transparency and the openness part, to my knowledge, Metro has not released the number of amount of settlements paid out for injuries or death that have occurred in the system. Will you release that information, or do you know offhand how much has Metro paid?

MR. WIEDEFELD: I just don't know that issue enough to commit to that one. I just don't know what the overall ramifications of all that are. I just don't, I don't want to commit on that one.

MR. BURR: Okay. Changing subjects a little bit, recently we learned that an effort with the major phone carriers to plug the system with more cell service towers, antennas, fell through. Now Metro's going to fund that itself. Why was that decision made and why did it take this long to--?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Sure. Again, I walk in, there's a ten year history of this thing. But the reality is it's not a cell phone issue for us, it's a radio issue. So we have a major radio system both above ground and below ground that's basically used for emergencies and the 700 megahertz system. A, we have to replace that because the FCC says we have to get off the band that we're on. So we have a roughly \$350 million project

to replace the entire radio system above ground, below ground. New radios, new cabling, new antennas. So as part of that, as we're in the tunnels hanging our cables for our radio needs, we basically have struck a deal with the carriers to hang their cable.

A few years ago, eight years ago, ten years ago, it was flipped. There was a business reason for them to do that. That business reason has pretty much dried up. You used to pay by the minute, you don't pay by the minute anymore, all right? So now, and the other thing is as they tried to do it, what they found is it's a very complex environment to work on because basically you're competing for space to get track space because you're literally hanging these cables on the walls, on the tunnel walls, above third rail. You're moving utilities and/or signage on those things, and you have to do this in a very small window of time. Or, the customer pays in terms of what we can provide.

So basically, what the arrangement is we have now is we have this roughly \$350 million project, \$125 million or so is in the tunnel portion of it. Of that is a subset that deals with the cell phone portion of it. So what we've done is struck a deal where they get us some cash and they give us some materials in kind. So we're going to be doing it as we're doing our radio. So it's sort of flip the approach.

MR. BURR: Do you see that as a safety issue as well? Is it a safety issue for people not to be able to use their phones when they're on the trains?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Yes, definitely. I mean, at a minimum, it's a perceived safety issue because if something happens down there, you want to be able to have access. I get it, that's very understandable. So yes, I mean, from that perspective, I think the customer would like just to have it. For sure, you see it in the stations where we do have it. This is not anything unique to Metro. This is an issue for any transit system around the country, particularly the major systems. It's very expensive and it has a major impact on the system when you put these things in and then you compound it with our system, with only a two-track system. You're taking out one of the tracks to do it.

MR. BURR: Let's talk a bit about the phone app. The ability for riders to be able to tell how long until a bus is coming, how long until the train's coming, or if there's a backload at Union Station, they know that they should maybe walk to the other side to another train. What efforts are you making there to make that information available to app developers?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Sure. Apparently, we had-- for some reason, we weren't sharing as much information as we had, so we changed that about two or three weeks ago. To be frank, I hadn't gotten down to that level. And when I discovered it and learned a little bit more about it, I said, "Well, that's ridiculous. We should be able to share whatever information we have in terms of particularly train movement."

The reality is, though, we don't have excellent information on that. It's based on maybe a 10 or 15 year old technology that we've been trying to track trains. So you can see that on the pids [?], the information displays that we have. So you might see

something that says there's three minutes. It's measuring where it was, and there's one gap and it's estimating what it'll take to get there. It doesn't understand what's happening between here and there.

So we have to create a system that does that. So we need to do that on our own, so we're going to do that on our own. At the same time, we want to be able to open up as much of the technology to third party developers to do this. One of the things that I've said repeatedly is for us to try to catch up in some of these areas, whether it's social media, and some of these technologies areas, for us as an agency to get there is we will always be behind. We just don't have that capability. It's not our core mission. It supports our mission, but it's not our core. Why don't we let private sector people, other people, creative people, do that? And let's figure out ways to do that. So we are doing that across the board. We've reached out to Greater Greater Washington, for instance, to help us think things like that.

Again, there's a lot of smart people in this area that know much more than we will ever know in that area.

MR. BURR: You know, a lot of these things you talked about today, and your bullet points you started with today; safety, reliability and fiscal management, those things cost money. So that gets to the third, fiscal management. Where are you going to find the money for better technology for tracking buses, fixing elevators so they're not breaking as much, adding security and making safety important? How do you do that?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Well, first we have to manage more efficiently. I think there's a lot of things we can pick up by managing a little differently than we've managed before. So I think there's definitely efficiencies there. I think there is some redundancy in what we do, and we need to make some changes there. We just have some things that are legacy that we just don't need anymore. So we have to address all those, so that frees up some dollars.

To work smarter, I think, in general, we can achieve more. But we need to continue to work with our federal partners, and our jurisdictions to basically address those issues. And make hard decisions. But my job is to give them clear understanding of what we're up against and now what do we want to-- where do you want to chip away at?

MR. BURR: Does the FTA oversight-- how much does that affect what you're trying to do? Or does that change what you're trying to do now that you have different federal oversight?

MR. WIEDEFELD: No. I welcome oversight. I think we have to make sure it is as efficient as possible. I think we have to-- one of my concerns is we tend to be very focused on process and not the product. So one of the things we did online today is we outlined 732, I think it is, literally actions that we're taking because that's more important to me, is what physically are we doing to get the system safer and not sort of the compliance part of the issue. Obviously, we have to meet the compliance, but we seem to

be spending a lot of time and energy on the process versus what are we doing to change the product. So my focus is more on that.

I think obviously as the new Metropolitan Safety Commission gets set up. I think that's great. Again, I think those are things that we should have. The sooner that is done in a definitive way, the better.

MR. BURR: There's a question who wants to know about what can be done about the bad behavior by some of the riders on Metro trains, being from noise to food, blocking the exit, people put their feet up on the chairs. Is there an effort that may be done with a courtesy campaign or is there a culture problem you see with riding trains that needs to be reversed?

MR. WIEDEFELD: I don't know, I've been to movies, I've been to malls, I've experienced all kinds of things, lot of public environments. So I think we reflect that no differently than other public environments. So, yes, we can make sure that we try to do that. That we project a certain decorum that we would like to have in the system. But it's a big community.

MR. BURR: You talked earlier about all the stakeholders you visited with; news outlets, civic groups, politicians in the D.C. area. But this questioner wanted to know, you've only spent about 10 minutes with WMATA's Riders Advisory Council. This is a 21-member group of riders representing the ridership of each district in Metro service area. When do you expect to spend more time with this group? And how do you see their influence as ridership representatives during your time as general manager?

MR. WIEDEFELD: They're right. I did meet with them early, when I just came on board. Basically, I've got to spend some time with them, I know that. And I basically said that at the time, that I need to get back and really work with them. I think now, where I basically-- remember, at the beginning two months or so, I was really in this sort of absorption stage and I was trying to take in as much. So now I can start to talk about more of what we're doing so I think I can get more engaged with groups like that so I look forward to doing it.

They offer an excellent perspective. Now, they do provide a perspective to the board, myself, but more importantly to the board. And it's one of their committees, in effect. So that's important for the board to have some direct connection with some of the riders, and that's what that does.

MR. BURR: Got you. A questioner wants to know the blue line riders have been complaining, seemingly nonstop, since the introduction of the silver line and the rush plus changes that reduced the number of the blue line trains through the Roselyn switch. That happened 2012, so four years later, these riders are crammed, this questioner says, onto six car trains at 12 minute headways while paying peak fares. How do you plan to address this inequity in the long term and the immediate?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Sure. You want me to just talk to Martin directly, or do you want to--

(Laughter)

MR. BURR: Nice.

MR. WIEDEFELD: You know, the reality is those decisions were made a dozen years ago by the local governments. They understood that you have a tunnel, or a portion of the system that can handle roughly 26 trains per hour. So decisions were made a decade ago that that's what they would do.

We have to, again, where I need to focus on is making sure that what we put out there operates. A, that we put it out at the right numbers in the morning at a.m. and p.m. peak particularly, and that once it's out there, it's reliable. So I think that starts to solve some of those issues. I can't undo the construct of that deal because of limitations. That's, again, something that was settled, I think, quite a while ago. So it is the nature of what we have with a very constrained system at that point.

MR. BURR: You've had declining ridership for many years, it seems. And you've got some bullet points here, you're talking about what you'd like to do to change that. But will the improvements in safety, reliability and fiscal management mean you can increase the number of people using it, or does it have to be a wholesale change in how the system operates?

MR. WIEDEFELD: I think it definitely has to be-- we have to get the basics right. But I have reached out, actually, to Chuck Bean at Wash Cog to take a broader look at some of those trends, what's going on. Clearly, you can point to some of the issues that we have. But this is a complex region. You hit on some of the things that are impacting that. So, I think when we look a little bit harder at the numbers, some of the core routes and some of the areas where we have joint development, the numbers are actually up. Some of the longer haul routes tend to be down, so there's lots of dynamic going on there.

So I've reached out to Wash Cog to see-- you know, help us think this through and think about all these other all these other aspects of it, whether it's land use, whether it's different business and whether you can telework, not telework. All those things have to be thought of this so that we can start to think differently about what we provide. Because we continue to try to provide a system from a '70s and '80s mentality, then we're wasting dollars and time.

MR. BURR: We're almost out of time. I wanted to enter the few notes and then I have a couple last questions, if that's okay. Before I ask the final questions, a quick reminder. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists. And we fight for a free press worldwide. For more information about the club, please visit our website at Press.org. Once again, that's Press.org.

I would also like to remind you about some upcoming programs. Tomorrow, Republican entrepreneur turned philanthropist, Jay Faison, founder and chief of ClearPath, a new nonprofit foundation dedicated to finding and promoting conservative clean energy policies, will outline the organization's conservative approach.

One week from today, we'll host documentarian Ken Burns and Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., to discuss race in America. Also that night, March 14, the National Press Club will be honored to welcome home Jason Rezaian, a *Washington Post* journalist imprisoned unjustly in Iran as a political hostage for 545 days. Jason will be with us that night, a week from today.

Now, I'd like to present our guest with the traditional National Press Club mug. But I'd also like to remind you not to use this on the Metro system to drink out of. (Laughter)

MR. WIEDEFELD: Very good. Thank you, Thomas.

MR. BURR: We've talked earlier about a lot of the issues coming with Metro and the bus system and your efforts to address those. Recently, D.C. started running its streetcar after many years and many failed promises of when it would start running, \$200 million I believe is the effort. What are your thoughts on the management of the D.C. streetcar, and will you be able to use Metro fare passes when they eventually-- so it's all integrated in some form?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Leif Dormsjo is just doing a fantastic job in running that system. I mentioned he's a board member, too, I think. No, they've done a really-- he's done a very good job, and I know his team has, to get that up and running. And I think they did the same approach that we're applying, is we're not going to put out something out there until we know it's safe and it's reliable. And that's basically what I think you just saw play out there, so that's very good. We'll discuss later the fare issue with the district.

MR. BURR: Okay, but will it be integrated? Do you plan to try to make it integrated?

MR. WIEDEFELD: Yeah, we'll work with them to see what makes the most sense once they've decided to start to charge.

MR. BURR: Okay. And I guess for my last question, we'll end a little bit early today. But you've moved from Baltimore now here to Washington. We have some sports teams that are competing. So I'd like to get you on the record, are you now a Redskins and a Nationals fan?

MR. WIEDEFELD: As I mentioned to one of my board members a whole ago when he asked me the same question, you have a great hockey team and a great basketball team down here. (Laughter)

MR. BURR: I guess I could press you a little more, but I also know your wife is sitting right there, and she's from Baltimore County, so I will be very careful. Thank you, Mr. Wiedefeld, I appreciate that. I'd like to thank the National Press Club staff, including our Journalism Institute staff, and broadcast center for organizing today's luncheon. If you'd like a copy of today's program, or to learn more about the National Press Club, go to our website, Press.org. Thank you, we are adjourned.

MR. WIEDEFELD: Thank you.

END