

**Council of the District of Columbia
Committee of the Whole**

**Testimony of David L. Mayer, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer,
Washington Metrorail Safety Commission**

February 22, 2022

Thank you, Chairman Mendelson and Councilmembers with us today.

The Washington Metrorail Safety Commission is the independent state safety oversight agency for the WMATA Metrorail system. We are the product of the WMSC interstate compact that was approved by the District, Maryland, and Virginia. That Compact created our agency in 2017 after years of work by each jurisdiction. After the appointment of commissioners, hiring of staff, and establishment of our safety oversight program, the jurisdictions regained state-level direct safety oversight of Metrorail from the Federal Transit Administration in March 2019.

In the years since our inception, our commissioners, including Christopher Hart and Robert Bobb from the District, have provided vital leadership as we have become established. We appreciate the work you and your staff are doing related to these appointments. Our Compact requires that our commissioners have expertise in transit safety, transportation, relevant engineering disciplines, or public finance. This focus on safety, transparency and on the WMSC's independence has allowed our commissioners and alternates to contribute to our public discourse and mission to make Metrorail safer for riders, employees, and anyone else who interacts with the system.

The most visible work conducted by the WMSC in recent months has been in response to the October 12, 2021, derailment of a 7000 Series train on the Blue Line between Rosslyn and Arlington Cemetery stations and the subsequent investigation that revealed outward wheel movement on railcar axles. The NTSB is leading the investigation, and we are actively participating.

As a result of our oversight work and information gathered during the investigation, all 7000 Series railcars are being kept out of passenger service under our orders until Metrorail develops and implements a plan to safely return each 7000 Series car to service.

Shortly after the derailment, Metrorail began special inspections that identified 20 other 7000 Series railcars with wheels too far apart. It also told us for the first time that routine inspections in the 12 months leading up to the derailment found 21 instances of wheels too far apart on their axles and found similar failures dating back to 2017.

On October 17, after Metrorail said it had removed from service all railcars that had failed the special inspections, our independent oversight identified that Metrorail had at least two of these failed railcars in use, carrying passengers.

Later that day, we ordered Metrorail to remove all 7000 Series cars from passenger service until it developed and implemented a plan under our oversight to safely return each car to service.

Metrorail submitted its plan to us on December 11. Three days later we communicated to Metrorail that we had no technical objections to their plan.

On December 29, again using our direct access to Metrorail systems, we identified that Metrorail had at least five railcars in passenger service that did not comply with its plan.

We notified Metrorail that it had cars carrying passengers that did not comply with its safety plan, and WMATA again removed all 7000 Series railcars from passenger service. We issued an order requiring Metrorail to keep the cars out of service until WMATA developed and implemented a revised return to service plan with additional protections to ensure the plan is followed.

We look forward to Metrorail developing its new return to service plan. When a new plan is in place, we will closely monitor its implementation as we did for the prior plan.

Speaking more generally for a moment, we conduct our safety oversight work in a variety of ways, and we have a focus on transparency. Our work requires frequent interactions with Metrorail—at all levels of the organization—with open lines of communication. You can see much of this work on our website, WMSC.gov, that now contains 145 safety event investigation reports, more than 370 inspection reports, and the reports of 10 comprehensive WMSC safety audits of Metrorail completed to date. Our website also includes the first two independent financial audits of the WMSC. I am proud that both of those audits resulted in clean opinions.

The jurisdictions' investment in the WMSC has led to tangible safety improvements for Metrorail. For example, our focus on deficiencies in the rail operations control center has led to new management in that facility and an increase in the number of certified rail controllers. And our station inspections have resulted in Metrorail coordinating across departments to repair fire life safety equipment.

In closing, our audit, inspection, investigation, and other work has led to required safety improvements for Metrorail to ensure that Metrorail is following its procedures, policies, and other safety commitments that it has made. It is up to WMATA to implement these safety improvements. The WMSC oversees this implementation.

Thank you, and I look forward to any questions you may have.