



Government of the District of Columbia
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3/4G

CHEVY CHASE, BARNABY WOODS, HAWTHORNE

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ANC 3/4G Resolution on
WMATA's FY 2021 Budget Proposals to
Combine the E6 and M4 Bus Routes and Capital
Expenditures for Historic Bus Terminal Rehabilitation
February 24, 2020

1. On January 16, 2020, the Washington Area Transit Authority (WMATA) board authorized a public hearing on its proposed FY 2021 budget for the period beginning on July 1, 2020.¹ This budget covers a wide range of topics, including multiple rate and services changes as well as planned capital expenditures. ANC 3/4G has identified two provisions that will particularly affect our constituents: (1) WMATA proposes to combine the E6 and M4 bus routes,² thereby eliminating seniors' and students' access to important services and adversely impacting our community; and (2) the capital budget for rehabilitation of the historic bus terminal on Connecticut Avenue, NW, just south of Chevy Chase Circle³ does not include reasonable use of this valuable site for other purposes — e.g., to address the need for more affordable and moderate-income housing — that can incorporate the existing structure in a mixed-use facility.

¹ Authorization of Public Hearing on Proposed FY 2021 Capital Budget, Operating Budget, and Fare Service Changes, January 16, 2020, Attachment C at pages 8-9, available at <http://bit.ly/2GGDPL1>.

² The proposed E6 and M4 bus route changes are available at <http://bit.ly/2HDS83x> at pages 29-30 and 35-36.

³ The proposed capital budget for Historic Bus Terminal Rehabilitation is available at <http://bit.ly/2V1f7xo>, Appendix D, page 156.

The Proposed E6 and M4 Bus Service Reduction

2. The E6 bus serves a vital function for residents and workers within our ANC. It is particularly important for our seniors who live at the Knollwood Military Lifeplan Community, 6200 Oregon Avenue, NW. Knollwood and other area residents rely on the E6 to get to the Chevy Chase Community Center, the Chevy Chase Public Library, the Avalon Theater, the Safeway grocery store, and to shops and restaurants along the Connecticut Avenue corridor as well as to the Friendship Heights Metro and the nearby shops, restaurants, and doctors' offices. For many of Knollwood's staff, the E6 bus links this far northwest facility to Metro and provides an essential way to get to work. Students and faculty at Lafayette Elementary School also use the E6 bus to and from school.
3. WMATA's current proposal to eliminate the E6 bus route and extend the M4 route in its place is not new. In response to prior proposals, both the Commission and the community have steadfastly fought to preserve the E6 bus as an essential transportation link for many residents and workers. At its April 25, 2011 meeting, by a unanimous vote, the Commission expressed its "strenuous opposition" to WMATA's proposal to eliminate the E6 bus.⁴ The Chevy Chase Citizens Association joined the Commission in a May 13, 2011 letter stating that "the proposal to eliminate the E-6 bus line is seriously flawed, and we urge WMATA to reject it." Councilmember Cheh and then-Councilmember Bowser joined the chorus of protest. In the face of this concerted opposition, WMATA relented and did not implement that proposal.
4. In September 2013, the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) proposed to curtail service on the E6 in order to reduce the District's subsidy payments for this route. The Commission again voted unanimously at its September 23, 2013 meeting to request that DDOT "maintain current E-6 bus service levels and consider the re-establishment of weekend service." At the Commission's February 8, 2016 meeting, it asked WMATA to "expand service on the E6 bus route," emphasizing the District's

overall strategic effort to provide a "livable" environment and its specific commitments to provide "safe and affordable modes of . . . public transportation" for the District's senior residents. If the District is to be truly livable and age-friendly, it must look beyond a simplistic cost analysis and assure its tax-paying residents have those transportation services that are essential to our urban quality of life.

⁴ WMATA's 2011 proposal was to replace the E6 bus route with an extension of the M4 route — exactly the same as its proposal for the FY 2021 budget. The 2011 proposal did not, however, include the elimination of the M4 route on 30th Place, NW and Military Road, NW.

5. In apparent disregard for this history, WMATA again proposes to combine the E6 and M4 bus routes. The offered justification for this change is “efficiency.” Under WMATA’s plan, residents along Western Avenue, NW, Chestnut Street, NW, Oregon Avenue, NW, and at Knollwood would no longer have direct bus access to Lafayette Elementary School, the government facilities and businesses along Connecticut Avenue, or the businesses, doctor’s offices, and the Metro stop at Friendship Heights. The proposed extension of the M4 bus would not connect E6 bus users to the destinations that they need. WMATA would also eliminate all of its current M4 bus stops on 30th Place, NW and Military Road, NW. As noted, the community “strenuously opposed” WMATA’s almost identical proposal in 2011,⁵ and, consequently, it was not implemented. WMATA has offered no new information suggesting that residents’ need for the E6 has diminished.
6. Knollwood residents have advised the Commission that they strongly oppose this change, which would make it much more difficult for its senior residents to access essential services and vital social engagement activities. In a short, two-day poll of Knollwood’s 190 independent living residents, 36 responded, and of those, 29 reported that they use the E6 bus at least one day a week. Their typical destinations were to Connecticut Avenue, NW and McKinley Street, NW (23 respondents go to the bank, drug store, grocery store, Chevy Chase Public Library, Chevy Chase Community Center, the U.S. Post Office, or other) and to Friendship Heights (31 respondents go to Metro, connecting buses, stores, restaurants, and to medical appointments). If WMATA’s proposal were implemented, half of the respondents said they would have to transfer to the E4 to go to the destinations previously served directly by the E6. Other seniors who are aging in place along the E6 route tell the Commission that they rely on it as well, for the same reasons. Finally, 36 of Knollwood’s 198 staff members reported that they use the E6 bus, which would be even more useful if weekend service were available.
7. Under WMATA’s proposal, young students in Barnaby Woods, Hawthorne, and parts of Chevy Chase DC would lose bus access to Lafayette Elementary School. Some parents reported that they ride the E6 with their children to Lafayette in the morning and then continue by bus to the Friendship Heights Metro. This would no longer be possible if the E6 were combined with the M4, as WMATA proposes. The principal at Lafayette Elementary also reports that about 15% of the school’s staff use the E6 bus daily and stated, “We would definitely feel the E6 if it were missing.”

⁵ See “Chevy Chase residents oppose proposed Metrobus cuts,” Greater Greater Washington, May 22, 2011, available at <http://bit.ly/2taYcNd>. At the hearing, Councilmembers “Cheh, Bowser, and others testified that the E6 serves upper Connecticut Avenue and Friendship Heights, both important commercial and medical destinations for seniors. They argued that cutting the E6 would hurt local businesses and burden seniors trying to reach doctors’ offices.”

8. Moreover, because of the proposed elimination of a portion of the M4 route, senior residents at the Ingleside Continuing Care Retirement Community on Military Road, NW, would no longer be able to get to Tenleytown on the bus without walking several blocks to Nebraska Avenue, NW. Some residents have also noted that the M4 is already heavily used during the morning rush hour by students at Deal Middle School and Wilson High School, including students who live on the portion of the M4 route that WMATA proposes to eliminate. This heavy ridership would be exacerbated if it were combined with the E6 riders. The M4 bus is also subject to significant rush hour delays because of backed up traffic at Nebraska Avenue, NW and Connecticut Avenue, NW, which makes it less reliable as a substitute for the E6, which normally runs reliably on schedule.
9. The M4 stops at 30th Place and Military Road also provide an important transit option for Temple Sinai, located at 3100 Military Road, NW. Temple Sinai's Executive Director advised the Commission that two staff members regularly use this M4 bus stop.

Our Temple Sinai Nursery School also uses that bus stop in front of the temple for trips to points of interest around DC with our nursery school children. In addition, for nursery school faculty and staff recruitment overall, it is a significant benefit to be easily accessible to a public transportation/bus route. The loss of this bus stop may have a negative impact on the ability of Temple Sinai to recruit and retain staff for a variety of positions ranging from nursery school teachers, to custodial and administrative staff as needed to support for the over 1200 area resident families who are members of our temple community.

10. As the ANC has pointed out before, WMATA's proposed changes are inconsistent with the District's Age-Friendly DC commitment to promoting "safer, timely and affordable modes of private and public transportation" for our seniors.⁶ It may also cause greater use of cars to transport young residents to and from school, exacerbating congestion around Lafayette.
11. WMATA initially agreed to explain its proposal and to answer questions at ANC 3/4G's February 24, 2020 meeting, but on February 3, 2020, it advised all ANCs that "due to the large number of requests and very limited staff resources we are unable to attend individual ANC meetings." Instead, it held an "ANC Forum for Commissioners" on February 11 2020. Such a forum format is an inadequate substitute, however, for a presentation at a public venue where residents and bus patrons — not just commissioners — can hear directly from WMATA and ask their questions.

⁶ See One-page Summary of Age-Friendly DC, 2018, available at <http://bit.ly/370MVBw>.

12. The Commission participated in WMATA's ANC Forum where WMATA indicated that 82% of WMATA's bus revenue comes from subsidies paid by the District, Maryland, and Virginia. WMATA explained that the need for subsidies will be even greater in FY 2021 because WMATA projects a 21.6% drop in revenue from FY2020 to FY2021 "due primarily to the decline in full fare riders, increased fare evasion, customers taking advantage of new pass products, and an increase in transfer credit to \$2.00 when transferring from rail to bus." In other words, WMATA needs more subsidies from the three jurisdictions because of its decisions to cut fares and increased fare evasion.
13. WMATA's description of the proposed change on January 30, 2020, indicated that the decrease in the E6 subsidy based on its proposal would be \$197,000. It later reduced that decrease in subsidy, however, by more than half — to \$94,063. WMATA has not yet responded to the ANC's request to explain this reduction in the amount of the E6 subsidy, and it is unclear what the reduction would be, if any. It is not surprising, however, that this route requires subsidies from the District to ensure that we meet residents' transportation needs. There are ample reasons to justify this expense and to reject WMATA's proposed change. Dedicated bus lanes and limited-stop buses often receive deserved attention, but local buses that serve an important segment of the population — like the E6 — must continue to be an essential part of the District's multi-modal transportation system.
14. WMATA's recent count of E6 bus riders is not a reliable basis for eliminating this service. Since early 2017, the E6 has been subject to repeatedly adjusted detours due to construction work and the resulting closures on Oregon Avenue, NW, and that disruptive work will continue until the end of 2021. The "standard" E6 route has been in place only intermittently over the past three years. Considering the persistent uncertainty about where and when to catch the E6, is not surprising that ridership measured in the fall of 2019 would show a decline from earlier years. WMATA will not know the full potential for ridership until the E6 route stabilizes again at the end of 2021.
15. WMATA suggests that E6 riders can reach the same destinations at Lafayette Elementary School, along Connecticut Avenue, NW, and at Friendship Heights by transferring to the E4 bus at McKinley Street, NW, to the L1 or L2 at Connecticut Avenue, NW and Nebraska Avenue, NW, or to the Tenleytown Metro stop. All of those transfer alternatives would add substantially to riders' travel time. It is not reasonable to ask seniors or elementary school students to rely on those theoretical options.
16. WMATA should not have made this proposal without first consulting with our ANC and hearing from residents who depend on the E6. At a minimum, before proceeding with any aspect of this plan, WMATA should explore a DDOT

proposal presented to the Commission in March 2019, for “micro-transit” as a possible way to curtail the E6 bus route while continuing to provide an equivalent — or even superior — service.⁷

17. WMATA has provided no sufficient justification for its proposal to combine the E6 and M4 bus routes. No bus riders support this proposed change, and it would negatively impact seniors, elementary school students, and workers who rely on the E6 bus. The Commission requests that WMATA withdraw its proposal and reject any effort to reduce the current E6 and M4 bus service unless and until reasonably comparable service is in place and approved by the community.

The Chevy Chase Bus Turnaround

18. WMATA’s FY 2021 capital budget proposes to spend \$1.4 million to design and rehabilitate the Chevy Chase historic bus terminal.⁸ The budget describes this bus terminal as “obsolete and in failing condition,” and these funds “will ensure terminals are in a State of Good Repair.”
19. Six years ago, at its January 27, 2014 meeting, ANC 3/4G expressed concern to WMATA about the deteriorated condition of the bus terminal building⁹ at 5720 Connecticut Avenue, NW, and advised WMATA of the ANC’s interest in finding an adapted use for this building at the prominent Chevy Chase Gateway entering the District.¹⁰ The Commission — often joined by the Chevy Chase Citizens Association and Historic Chevy Chase DC — has revisited these two concerns repeatedly over the intervening six years.
20. For all of this time, the bus depot has been an eyesore and a severely underutilized site. Though it has not been formally designated historic, WMATA and the community agree that the building has historic significance. At the Commission’s November 25, 2019 meeting, WMATA advised that it has a contract for designing

⁷ See ANC 3/4G’s March 25, 2019 meeting minutes at <http://bit.ly/2GWqYod>. The Office of Planning’s proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan’s also emphasize the need to “supplement basic public transit services with shuttle and minibuses to provide service for transit-dependent groups, including older adults, people with disabilities, school age children, and residents in areas that cannot viably be served by conventional buses” (Transportation Element, Section 412.5, page 41, available at <http://bit.ly/31AOfW5>). WMATA may not, however, deprive those citizens of bus service without first putting such supplemental services in place.

⁸ See FY 2021 capital budget for Historic Bus Terminal Rehabilitation, available at <http://bit.ly/2V1f7xo>, Appendix D, page 156.

⁹ Various called a “bus loop,” “bus turnaround,” “bus terminal, or “bus depot,” the building is used by WMATA as a turnaround for buses on Connecticut Avenue and as a restroom facility for bus drivers. For many years, however, the restroom in the building has been closed and unusable, and the passenger shelter behind the building has been unsafe.

¹⁰ See ANC 3/4G’s January 27, 2014 meeting minutes at <http://bit.ly/31ms1ab>.

and restoring the building, and expects construction to begin in July 2020, and end in December 2020.¹¹ Again, the Commission asked WMATA “to continue communicating with the ANC about potential other uses for the property in addition to its use as a bus loop.” WMATA indicated that it had no plans for any other use of the site than as a bus terminal.

21. ANC 3/4G adopted a resolution on February 10, 2020, asking the Office of Planning (OP) to designate the Connecticut Avenue corridor from Chevy Chase Circle to Livingston Street, NW — including the bus terminal — as the Chevy Chase Gateway. It also asked OP to develop a Small Area Plan that would “guide long-range development, improve our neighborhood, achieve citywide goals, and attain economic and community benefits.” As described in the Commission’s resolution, the Small Area Plan should include development of mixed-income residences with particular provision for affordable and moderate-income housing. The bus terminal should be a prime location for housing above the restored historic building. The current single-use of this space is inefficient, uneconomic, and cannot be justified, particularly in light of the District’s goal to add affordable housing throughout the District. This site is a prime location for just such an improvement.
22. The Commission urges WMATA to include in its capital budget funding to examine ways to make better use of the bus terminal site so that it can be integrated into a mixed-use building to better benefit the community and the District.

Approved by ANC 3/4G after a discussion at its regularly scheduled and noticed February 24, 2020 meeting by a vote of _ to _ (a quorum being 4).

Randy Speck, Chair

Abe Clayman, Secretary

cc: Councilmember Mary Cheh

Councilmember Brandon Todd

Councilmember Robert White

Stephanie Gidigbi, WMATA Board First Vice Chair (District of Columbia representative)

Jeff Marootian, WMATA Board Member (District of Columbia representative)

Tom Bulger, WMATA Board Member (District of Columbia representative)

¹¹ See ANC 3/4G’s November 25, 2019 meeting minutes at <http://bit.ly/2S7TA2M>.