

Monday deadline for public comment

Seven percent of stops are slated for removal — 259 in D.C., 263 in Maryland and 103 in Virginia, under a plan whose changes are set to take effect next summer.

By [Rachel Weiner](#)

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A comprehensive overhaul would eliminate stops in D.C., Maryland and Virginia.

D.C.-area bus riders have until 5 p.m. Monday to [voice any concerns](#) about a comprehensive overhaul of the system that would eliminate hundreds of bus stops, shifting commuting patterns in a way transit officials deem necessary but for some transit riders will be deeply disruptive.

As envisioned under the plan, lines would be renamed, buses would connect more Metro lines and travel more efficient routes, and new routes would be created. But with no new money on the table, the proposed changes come with trade-offs: seven percent of stops are slated for removal — 259 in D.C., 263 in Maryland and 103 in Virginia.

The system “hasn’t really been touched in 30 or 40 years,” Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority CEO Randy Clarke said in an interview. “A lot has changed. Unfortunately, this wasn’t done incrementally — instead it’s one big lift.” Changes are set to take effect next summer.

Cities across the country are going through similar overhauls. Reconfiguring bus networks is [seen as](#) an affordable way to increase use of public transit systems that were losing riders even before the [covid-19 pandemic turned](#) travel patterns upside down. Now, it’s also a chance to respond to persistent changes in ridership, driven in part by what jobs allow people to work from home.

In D.C. and [elsewhere](#), bus ridership has [rebounded](#) faster than rail, and more of those trips are outside traditional “peak” times. Lower-income people, who are more likely to work early or late and on weekends in service and hospitality jobs, tend to take the bus. Many traditional rail commuters who used to take the train to their 9-to-5 jobs are still not back in their offices every weekday.

Metro officials said they expect the changes to expand weekend bus access, deliver higher-frequency evening service and beef up weekday bus use by an estimated 13,000 additional riders. About 400,000 people now ride Metrobus every weekday; about half that number ride Saturday and Sunday.

There are 32 new connections in the works. New routes include lines from Bloomingdale to Tenleytown, L’Enfant Plaza to National Harbor, Fort Totten to Sibley Hospital and Anacostia to West Hyattsville. And there will be more buses on Saturdays and Sundays and on weekday evenings.

Other proposed connections are to the [anticipated Purple Line rail line](#) linking Montgomery County and Prince George's County. The plan includes more frequent service to the H Street NE corridor, where bars and restaurants have struggled in the past few years with crime and fallen foot traffic.

But in some corners of the city already poorly served by rail, residents say the bus cuts will isolate them further.

Bus service in Barnaby Woods and Upper Chevy Chase, on the northwest edge of the city, is being pushed east during the week and eliminated altogether on weekends.

James Nash, an advisory neighborhood commissioner from that part of the city, at a [recent public hearing](#) called the plan "unacceptable" in a "bus desert" that also lacks a Metro stop. "To those who have, more will be given and to those who have not even the little they have will be taken away, to quote the Bible," Nash said.

In 16th Street Heights, another area with no Metro, over a dozen bus stops would be eliminated. Maurice Jackson, a professor of History and African American Studies at Georgetown University, said the proposed changes would take away a bus he's ridden since he came to D.C. in 1970 and move the closest stop several blocks away. While it would be an inconvenience for him, he said moving the stop will fall hardest on young parents, older people, and anyone uncomfortable walking in the dark — ultimately driving people who can't afford a car out of the city.

He did not submit any comments on the proposals. "I've been to enough hearings in my life," he said. "I have very little faith in the process."

Ward 4 council member Janeese Lewis George said she shared those concerns, adding that some of the routes being eliminated altogether are used by students to get to and from school.

Clarke said the new system was designed with "a really significant equity lens," with the goal that "people with limited transportation options have the best transit options." He added that the map has already been tweaked in response to concerns from riders.

But he and other officials said they had to make trade-offs to keep the plan revenue-neutral. Long term, Clarke said that to fully serve riders' needs the system needs funding to expand by about 30 percent. Metro, which has [no dedicated funding](#), just [raised fares](#) to help cover a \$750 million budget deficit.

For now, Clarke said, "we have to use the limited amount of buses and operators we have to provide the most amount of service."

While some people will have a longer walk to the closest bus stop and have to transfer lines more often, officials argue the changes will ultimately save those riders time because buses will be able to move faster.

“This is a true trade-off, because we want to maintain access to people to where they need to go, particularly people with mobility restrictions,” Peter Cafiero, who manages service planning for Metro, said at an [online meeting](#) about the plan last month. “But on the other hand, buses just keep pulling out of traffic every block or half block — that really slows that down the route, makes it much less reliable.” Stops that don’t have sidewalks or crosswalks for pedestrians are also being cut, for rider safety.

Some of D.C.'s lines still follow streetcars routes from the 1930s. The [names and numbers](#) reflect the hodgepodge of companies that operated in the city before a unified system was created in 1970s. Now, lines that are primarily in D.C. are labeled D for downtown or C for crosstown. In the suburbs, the letters will signify the jurisdiction: M for Montgomery County, P for Prince George’s County, A for Arlington and Alexandria, and F for Fairfax. Express buses get an X.

Tens of thousands of people have commented on the plan; Clarke said the feedback has been “overwhelmingly positive.” In response to less enthusiastic responses, Metro has made some tweaks, including restoring a connection between Glover Park and Dupont Circle and adding one to Northern Virginia Community College’s Alexandria campus.

Justin Wilson, the mayor of Alexandria, said as a bus rider he understands the frustration of people living in residential areas that are seeing stops cut.

“There’s a route that goes right by my house that they’re proposing to take out,” he said — the 23B. “It stinks, I’m not happy about that, but I get it.” Alexandria remade [its bus system](#) a few years ago, for the first time since 1984. Lightly used lines were cut, in favor of better service in the denser parts of the city where more people took the bus regularly.

“It’s been a great success,” Wilson said.

The full list of proposed cuts is [here](#), and the list of new routes is [here](#).