

**Tuesday, May 24, 2016  
10 a.m. – 2167 Rayburn**

**Statement of Congressman Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11<sup>th</sup>)**

**Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highways and Transit Hearing:  
“Improving the Safety and Reliability of the Washington Metro”**

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Holmes Norton, and members of the subcommittee, I want to thank you for inviting the Members of the National Capital Region who represent Metro to share our perspectives with you in advance of today’s hearing. I am pleased to be here with my colleagues, Mr. Hoyer and Mr. Delaney. As you know, I serve as Ranking Member of the House Oversight Subcommittee on Government Operations. Our committee has held three hearings on Metro over the past two years in the wake of the January 2012 arcing incident at L’Enfant Plaza, a tragedy which claimed the life of Virginia resident Carol Glover. The challenges facing Metro are significant, and I welcome collaboration between our committees to ensure robust oversight over Metro’s management of federal dollars and its adherence to federal safety standards.

I have spent the past 21 years working on Metro related issues. First as a member of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, where I made appointments to the Metro Board, rezoned property around Metro stations, approved the local operating subsidy, and helped create the local tax districts to fund construction of the new Silver Line. For the past eight years, I am pleased to have worked with my colleagues here in Congress to secure the \$150 million annual federal commitment for Metro safety improvements -- which is matched by Virginia, Maryland, and D.C. So no one is more disappointed or disheartened than I am with the unacceptable and unsustainable state of affairs at Metro.

I want to start by commending the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for your efforts through MAP-21 and then the FAST Act to create a comprehensive framework of safety standards for Metro and all the nation’s transit systems following the horrific 2009 Red Line crash, which killed nine people, including the train operator, Jeanice McMillan of Virginia. As the NTSB and the FTA have highlighted again and again, both after the 2009 and 2015 tragedies, the current local oversight agency, the Tri-State Oversight Committee, is nothing more than a paper tiger without the proper resources or tools to provide effective oversight.

Our partners in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia are working together to stand up a new Metro Safety Commission that will meet and enforce the new federal standards. I join you in urging them to move more swiftly with that effort, which is expected to be complete next year following the states’ respective legislative sessions. Until then Secretary Foxx, acting under new authorities provided in the FAST Act, has appointed the FTA as the interim safety oversight

agency. While I respectfully disagreed with that action, deferring instead to the NTSB's recommendation to use the FRA's more robust safety standards, I share the Committee and Secretary's ultimate goal for addressing the shocking lack of safety culture within Metro.

To that end, I welcome an opportunity to work with you to explore further expanding the FTA's authorities to better match not only the oversight, but also the enforcement authorities under the FRA to address the NTSB's urgent safety recommendations. In fact, Metro's new General Manager, Paul Wiedefeld, has indicated he is voluntarily directing his team to explore what FRA standards they can apply on their own. Regardless of what style of transit commuters are using, they deserve to know they are being protected by effective and enforceable safety standards.

What we're witnessing today with Metro is the result of a decades-long march into mediocrity and dysfunction. Riders are now confronted with near daily service or safety delays, and incidents of arcing or smoke in the tunnels have become all too frequent and, frankly, are scaring riders away. Recent arcing incidents led the GM to take the unprecedented step of shuttering the entire system for 24 hours in March to allow for emergency inspections and replacement of problem cables. Earlier this month, another arcing incident forced the closure of the two stations serving Capitol Hill during the evening rush hour.

Mr. Wiedefeld recently released an aggressive proposal, named SafeTrack, to single-track and shutdown portions of Metro lines for days at a time in order to condense three-years-worth of deferred maintenance into the next year. Such disruptions will present significant and sustained challenges to riders and the federal government. As the Committee knows, federal employees represent more than 40% of Metro's ridership. I have called on OPM and all federal agencies to push telework and flexible work arrangements with their workforce. The success of SafeTrack will require a robust communications strategy that regularly informs the public as Metro works through this maintenance and rebuilding plan.

Of course, Metro cannot focus only on track and infrastructure repairs; a complete system-wide change in culture is necessary at all levels. I commend Mr. Wiedefeld for the safety and personnel actions he's already taken which should serve as a shot across the bow throughout the agency that indifference to safety and customer service will no longer be tolerated. He further underscored that point last week with the termination of 20 managers, and I understand other personnel actions are under review.

These are not problems that can be fixed overnight. Metro and its partners face a monumental task, but I feel confident that we now have the right leadership in place to get Metro back on track. The federal government must be a full funding partner in this effort, and I welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee to explore options for expanding our federal commitment to include operating subsidies. The federal government is the only compact member

that does not pay its fair share in operating costs. We also must incentivize the National Capital Region to finally create a dedicated source of funding for Metro. Those are separate, but equally important investments that will be critical for Metro's continued success.

Metro has been our single greatest regional achievement and working together we can restore America's Subway to the place of prominence it once held, setting the standard for other transit systems across the nation and giving our riders the world-class system they deserve.