

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689

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May 13th, 2026

Directors,

WMATA announced that it plans to force bus operators to quote the fare to all passengers, including non-paying passengers. Our members will not comply with this dangerous policy as it directly puts their safety in jeopardy.

Safety rules are not put in place to frustrate management, but to make sure workers go home safely every day. Transit worker concerns around fare collection safety go back decades. Management isn't unaware of our concerns, but chose to issue a policy designed to go into effect May 24th without any discussion.

Workers sacrificed to get fare collection and enforcement policies that made it clear our job is to move the public safely. In 1968, before WMATA was even created the transit workers in this region went on a wildcat strike after our member, Bus Operator John E. Talley, was shot and killed while being robbed for the money that bus operators were then required to carry for change. That wildcat strike led to the creation of the "exact fare" policy in this region that spread across the nation.

Constant assaults on our members led WMATA to stop requiring bus operators to quote the fare to fare evaders nearly a decade ago. This was because it directly led to fare disputes and operator assaults.

- In October 2024, when GM Randy Clarke was asked a question by Kojo Nnamdi on Politics Hour about whether it was accurate that bus operators are instructed to not quote the fare to passengers, he stated, "...So bus operators and this would be industry standard. Bus operators do not engage people for fare evasion. It is not worth the potential physical harm that could come to one of my staff members. And that is the ultimate thing we care about is the safety of everyone on the system. So if someone is causing a big problem we will obviously quickly get a supervisor or transit police or local police depending on the severity to go intercede in that situation, but when it comes to fares we want to keep our employees safe and the rest of the people on the bus safe."
- WMATA's own online FAQ regarding fare payment, states, "Will Station Managers or Bus Operators (Drivers) issue citations?...No. Station Managers and Bus Operators (Drivers) have important responsibilities.... For their safety, they are not asked to confront customers about

nonpayment related to fares.”

- WMATA’s own webpage dedicated to employee safety brags that to better protect bus operators they have, “programmed automated fare announcements so operators no longer have to personally quote the fare to passengers as they board the bus.”
- WMATA’s own bus operator training materials make multiple references to not quoting the fare at non-paying customers. From a section titled Avoid Operator Assault: “Many cases of Operator assault begin with a dispute over fare payment. Use the following strategies to avoid conflicts on your bus: Allow the fare evader to ride; do not mention the fare and especially do not get into an argument over non-payment.” It also states, “Enforcement of fare payment is the responsibility of the Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD), not the Bus Operator.” The final part is in bold.

WMATA is not unaware that this policy will place our members in harm's way. Management just doesn't care. As WMATA states in its own training materials and repeated quotes to the public, fare disputes are the largest cause of operator assaults. No rational person could believe that quoting the fare to all passengers, including fare evaders, will not lead to increased fare disputes and operator assaults. In fact, that was the justification for the implementation of the previous policy. This is just another example of WMATA leadership's, namely GM Randy Clarke, unjustified rollback of safety rules that protect our members. The GM repeatedly claims that there will be discussions with the union, but instead unilaterally issues policies or press releases that result in grievances that he knows won't be resolved for years. That's not a partnership and it's certainly not a leadership that values employees. Talking to the President after the fact as 'damage control' is not good-faith collaboration.

WMATA's Directive TRANS-BTPD-14-00 has the audacity to try to address worker safety concerns by letting them know that, “All bus compartments will have fully enclosed shields and over 30% is completed.” Coincidentally, WMATA's statements in 2017 trying to address worker concerns about fare enforcement also stated, “More than a third of Metrobuses have now been equipped with protective shields and all new buses will arrive from the factory with a safety shield already installed.”

Meanwhile WMATA has been bragging to the public about its progress on cracking down on fare evasion on both the bus and rail side. If this is the case, then why is General Manager Clarke intentionally putting our members in harm's way? Even if fare enforcement was the job of our members, which WMATA historically acknowledged it is not, where is the evidence that quoting “Hello, the fare is \$2.25” will lead to substantially higher fare payment compliance? As we see it, this performance will put bus operators in the hospital or worse so WMATA can seem like it's taking operating budget questions seriously.

We urge Directors to stop these reckless safety rollbacks and make clear that it expects actual labor partnership from executive leadership, not soundbites.

Sincerely,
Raymond Jackson
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WMATA Employee Since 1987