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Mr. Dana Kaufman  
Chair, Board of Directors  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
600 Fifth Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Kaufman,

Recently I received some e-mails from the American Restroom Association, read news articles in the paper, and saw something on television, all about the lack of restroom availability on the Washington, DC, Metro system. Restroom availability is an issue that is very important to me for personal health reasons, and my need for restroom availability is a very real need which will only increase the older I become. Based on the news information I have seen recently, that there have been problems with accessibility, I decided to conduct an experiment on my own. I would like to share with you the results of this little experiment which I think proves that restroom availability on the Metro system definitely needs to be addressed and in a major way.

## **Introduction to My Experiment**

I dressed the same during the experiment so as to give a consistent presentation. I wore plain slacks, polo type shirt or a short sleeve dress shirt, and loafers. I did not carry a brief case but simply a 8 ½ x 11" writing pad, a few magazines, an open Metro map, and my glasses. At each stop I asked the same question, "Do you have a restroom?" In some cases when the answer was "no" I simply quizzically indicated that I thought I had seen something in the paper about there being restrooms on Metro, however I never challenged any attendant as that was not the purpose of this experiment. The purpose was simply to ask the question and observe, accept, and record the response.

I conducted this experiment over three days, August 26, 28, & 29, 2005. I visited 29 Metro stations, at each one asking to use the restroom. After visiting each station I completed an information sheet filling out in detail my observations. Copies of those sheets are attached for your review and your own analysis.

## **Restroom Signs**

Of the 29 Metro stations I visited only 7 had restroom signs posted on the kiosk and I could not see any signs on 22 of the station kiosks. It's possible, given how difficult they are to spot, that I missed a few.

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The restroom signs posted are very small. They are composed of white letters on clear plastic that adheres to the kiosk window, identical to some kind of station manager sign which you post. As such they not visually prominent, in fact, they are almost impossible to even spot. One has to know it is supposed to be there, look for it, and then get up very close and strain to read it. An elderly person, most of whom do not have excellent vision, like myself, and who are among the most restroom needy, would never even see it. For all practical purposes these are as good as no signs at all. Here I was looking for the signs, knowing what they look like, and I could not find them in 22 of the 29 stations I visited. I assume these signs were designed by a Metro system that does not wish to make restrooms available to the public, and further that Metro provided these signs as a perfunctory response to a request for restroom signs by restroom advocates. That struck me as quite obvious.

The wording on the signs is intimidating and makes one hesitate to even ask to use the restroom.

The locations of the signs were not consistent and they seldom appeared at the same locations in the 7 kiosks where I did spot them. This adds to their ineffectiveness.

Since these signs adhere to the window, when they are removed they are no longer usable. I assume that during the recent code orange alert, if these signs were posted, they were peeled off by the attendants. I'm sure Metro does not re-distribute these decal type signs to the station kiosks or does not provide the station kiosks with a supply, so eventually, as they are removed from kiosk to kiosk, over a period of time they will all disappear completely.

Metro should have large, visible signs that are vandal proof by construction and/or location that will clearly inform Metro customers as to the availability of customer restrooms.

### **Response to my question, "Do you have a restroom?"**

Of the 29 stations I visited, at 15 stations when I asked the question "Do you have a restroom?" the response was "yes" and at 14 stations the answer was "no."

Some anecdotal observations...

- At one station I was abruptly told "No" twice by an attendant standing next to the restroom availability sign. Obviously these signs are so inconspicuous that she didn't even know it was there.
- In some instances when I asked if there was a restroom the attendant asked me if I really had to go or if it was an emergency. My right to use the customer restroom is just that, a right. I am 63 years old, a responsible professional, far from being senile, and I resent being treated by a Metro attendant as if I were a second grade student having to justify to the teacher my having to go the potty. And I don't wish to go through the humiliation of standing in public in front of other people arguing with an attendant about my having to use a restroom. It violates my privacy.

- In another the station when I asked if there was a restroom the attendant indicated there was none. When I mentioned that I thought I had seen something in the newspaper about there being restrooms on the Metro he indicated that there had never ever been any public or customer restroom in that station. However, he did agree to let me use a restroom this one time and then escorted me to a locked door which he opened and, while pointing down the hall, told me to use the door marked “customer restroom”(!!).
- At another station two attendants standing together both told me there were no customer restrooms open to the public anywhere on the entire Metro system and I would not find one. The two together were rather intimidating and defensive. They indicated that I would have to exit and use one at a local restaurant which they named when I asked. I then went to that restaurant only to find a sign that indicated the restrooms were for the restaurant customers only.
- Several of the Metro attendants were not what I would call public relations oriented. Many, I observed, were non-verbal which I found odd for people who deal with the public. At Smithsonian, a tourist point which I assumed would be staffed with people especially trained in dealing with the public, I was treated so abruptly and with such defensive hostility it was embarrassing.
- I did have an experience at the Benning Road Station which I would like to relate because it was so exceptional, so unusual. I asked the kiosk attendant if the station had a restroom. She smiled broadly and responded enthusiastically and warmly, “Yes, we most certainly do.” She then asked if she could see my Metro card. I showed her my Smartcard in my wallet and she asked to see it. I quizzically removed it and gave it to her. While others had asked to see my card she was the ONLY Metro staff person to check it to make sure it was valid. (Evidently some people ask to use the restroom as a way of exiting without paying.) She then showed me to the restroom. She was very warm and friendly, a “people person”, as well as very professional, a really good combination. When I commented that she was very pleasant she held up her badge whereupon the name was Ms. Pleasant. This employee was outstanding and the kind of employee that I would think Metro would be seeking to place in any position where there is interaction with the public. However this was very much the exception.

### **General Observations About the Restrooms**

The Metro restrooms are very basic. They all were without exception neat and clean. I was surprised to find them equipped with the tissue toilet seat covers. Only in a few cases were the stations out of toilet paper, paper towels, or the tissue toilet seat covers.

These restrooms are not like using a restroom in the Ritz Carlton or the Hyatt Regency. In many cases the restrooms were hot and stuffy. Once you are behind that locked outer door all by yourself, the environment makes one feel a bit apprehensive. All I am saying here is

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that I would not use a Metro restroom on a casual basis. I would only use it if I had a really urgent necessity and I couldn't wait until I got to my home or to my office. There are times when one simply needs to use a restroom no matter what. You just cannot always anticipate your need for a restroom. That's the reality of life.

Some time ago I had an urgent need to use a restroom after leaving the Huntington Station for work in downtown DC. At King Street I got off and went downstairs to request use of the restroom. The attendant rudely said no even after I explained my desperate predicament. He said I'd have to use the hotel across the street. I didn't make it to the hotel without having an accident but went into the hotel to clean up as best I could. I returned to the Metro feeling very humiliated and angry, and then had to go back home to cleanup and change clothes. Needless to say I was very late getting to my office and was angry the whole day. None of this was necessary and when this kind of thing happens it creates some very hard feelings towards Metro. Metro should be trying to accommodate customers and avoid creating such hard feelings.

I would conclude from this experiment that restroom access for citizens who ultimately support this transportation system through tax payer dollars is not part of the culture of Metro, and this is indeed very very unfortunate. Lack of restroom accessibility demeans both the Metro system and its ridership. It is particularly discriminatory towards the elderly and to those with health limitations and challenges.

In closing I would like to express my hope that something can be done to infuse restroom accessibility into the basic culture of Metro. Metro officials can embrace it and work creatively and positively towards a truly great Metro system that includes this simply basic human need, or Metro officials will have to endure an ongoing battle with citizen taxpayers that will never end, especially as our population curve ages and those of us aging wish to maintain our independence as long as possible. I hope Metro officials will choose the former. I would be more than happy to meet with you, or anyone I have cc'd on this letter, to further discuss my concerns and my experiment.

Sincerely,

Stephen H. Snell

Enc.: 29 Work Sheets

cc: Gladys W. Mack, Vice Chair, Board of Directors, WMATA  
Charles Deegan, Vice Chair, Board of Directors, WMATA  
Robert J. Smith, Board of Directors, WMATA  
Christopher Zimmerman, Board of Directors, WMATA  
Jim Graham, Board of Directors, WMATA  
Senator John Warner, United States Senate  
Senator George Allen, United States Senate

Congressman James Moran, U.S. House of Representatives  
Congresswoman, Eleanor Holmes Norton, U.S. House of Representatives  
Congressman Chris Van Hollen, U.S. House of Representatives  
Congressman Albert Russell Wynn, U.S. House of Representatives  
Senator Patricia Ticer, Virginia Senate  
Senator Toddy Puller, Virginia Senate  
Delegate Marian Van Landingham, Virginia House of Delegates  
Delegate Kristen J. Amundson, Virginia House of Delegates  
Delegate Mark D. Sickles, Virginia House of Delegates  
Gerald E. Connolly, Chair, Board of Supervisors, Fairfax County  
Gerald W. Hyland, Board of Supervisors, Fairfax County, Mt. Vernon District  
The Board of Supervisors of Fairfax County  
The Fairfax Area Commission on Aging  
Board of Directors, Belle View Condominium Association  
Mack B. Rhoades, Jr., PhD., Mt. Vernon Council of Citizens' Association  
Anthony Williams, Mayor of the District of Columbia  
Robert Brubaker, Program Manager, American Restroom Association  
William Novelli, CEO, American Association of Retired Persons  
Dr. Ruth Nelson, President, Virginia Chapter, American Association of Retired  
Persons  
Mount Vernon Chapter, American Association of Retired Persons  
Johnny Barnes, Executive Director, ACLU of the National Capital Area  
Chellie Pingree, President & CEO, Common Cause  
Kathleen O'Reilly, President, Center for Science in the Public Interest  
Charisse Glassman, Chair, Seniors Committee, Fairfax County Democratic  
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David Englin, Democratic Candidate for the 45<sup>th</sup> District, Virginia House of  
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Greg Werkheiser, Democratic Candidate for the 42<sup>nd</sup> District, Virginia House of  
Delegates  
Annie Gowan, *The Washington Post*  
Gale Curcio, *The Alexandria Gazette Packet*  
Diane Rehm, *The Diane Rehm Show*, WAMU