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Chairman Phil Mendelson

Councilmember Charles Allen

**A PROPOSED RESOLUTION**

**IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

To declare the existence of an emergency with respect to the need to amend the Department of Transportation Establishment Act of 2002 to require the Director to enter into an agreement with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority for fare-free Metrobus travel and expanded after-hours Metrobus service in the District, to establish the Fare-Free Bus Service Fund, and to establish the Bus Service Enhancement Fund; and to direct revised revenue to the Fare-Free Bus Service Fund and the Bus Service Enhancement Fund.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the “Fare-Free Bus Funding Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2022”.

Sec. 2. (a) On October 4, 2021, Councilmember Charles Allen, along with Councilmembers Brianne K. Nadeau, Christina Henderson, Anita Bonds, Janeese Lewis George, Robert White, Kenyan R. McDuffie, Mary M. Cheh, and Chairman Phil Mendelson, introduced the Metro for D.C. Amendment Act of 2021 (introduced version of Bill 24-429) (“Metro for D.C. Act”), with the goal of making public transit affordable to all District residents, especially District residents are most reliant on public transit to get to work, school, healthcare, and other important appointments.

(b) The Metro for D.C. Act was an updated version of similar legislation that had been introduced in Council Period 23, shortly before the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic caused huge

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reductions in both the District budget, making the legislation fiscally unfeasible during Council Period 23, and public transit ridership, putting the ongoing health of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (“WMATA”) high on the region’s list of post-pandemic recovery priorities.

(c) The Metro for D.C. Act, both the version introduced in Council Period 24 and the prior Council Period 23 version, sought to make public transit affordable for all District residents by providing subsidies directly to District residents for use on public transit. While some smaller cities have provided fare-free transit service, WMATA is a regional system, meaning that the District could not order the entire regional system, nor even just the portion of the system in the District, to become fare-free and replacing all fare revenue was far too expensive.

(d) Recently, however, WMATA has confirmed to Chairman Mendelson and Councilmember Allen that WMATA could make all current Metrobus routes within the District fare-free for around \$32 million. Additionally, WMATA could offer 24-hour service on 12 of the most heavily used Metrobus routes in the District for around \$8 million.

(e) Fare-free bus service within the District and expanded overnight service would be a major advance for transit equity in the District. Metrobus riders are disproportionately Black residents and, on average, have much lower incomes than Metrorail riders. Further, service industry workers, who are also disproportionately Black residents and other residents of color and who have lower-incomes than riders travelling during traditional commuting hours, work shifts that start earlier and end later than other workers, and they rely heavily on late night public transit service, which has been cut back significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, following trends that reduced late-night service even before the pandemic.

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(f) The opportunity to provide this transformational service for District residents is one that the Council cannot pass up, which is why the Fare-Free Bus Funding Emergency Amendment Act of 2022 (“Emergency Act”) would create special purpose revenue funds and set aside, for the purpose of providing fare-free Metrobus service and expanded late-night service, otherwise unappropriated increases to the District’s Fiscal Year 2023-2027 budgets that the Chief Financial Officer identifies in the December and February revenue estimates. Ensuring that these funds are identified for this purpose now, will provide WMATA with the certainty it needs to begin planning for the service changes, which could be implemented as soon as July 2023, once the Council has formally appropriated the identified funds in both the Fiscal Year 2024 regular budget and an anticipated Fiscal Year 2023 supplemental budget.

(g) The Emergency Act would also create a fund and set aside \$10 million annually to further improve bus service for District residents who are especially dependent on public transit, which is a feature of the Metro for D.C. Act, creating better and more equitable access to employment, education, and other services for areas of the District that are overwhelmingly populated by Black District residents and other residents of color.

Sec. 3. The Council of the District of Columbia determines that the circumstances enumerated in section 2 constitute emergency circumstances, making it necessary that the Emergency Act be adopted after a single reading.

Sec. 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.