

Implementing ARRA

Design Snapshot

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Carefully Prioritizes Stimulus: Strategically Selecting ARRA Transit Projects

July 2009

To ensure its one-time ARRA formula allocations would address short-term needs as well as support longer term goals, the [Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority](#) conducted a new agency-wide structured strategic capital planning process to select the most high-impact ready-to-go projects for stimulus funding. This strategic process started with identifying capital needs, refining agency goals through objectives and then prioritizing needs based on the objectives. This prioritization process will also serve as the agency’s new preferred framework for making future capital needs decisions.

WMATA Structured Prioritization Process	
Purpose:	Deploy ARRA funds quickly in line with strategic goals
Lead entity:	Transit Agency
Partners:	Federal Transit Administration, regional policymakers, contractors and local community stakeholders
ARRA focus (selected):	Fixed Guideway Modernization program, Transit Capital Assistance program, Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program, Transit Investments for Greenhouse Gas and Energy Reduction (TIGGER)
Scale:	Five-county and six-city transit zone
Strategies:	Reflects a long-term regional vision; embraces integrated solutions
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The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) selected projects for stimulus funding based on its long-run strategic capital needs. In September 2008, WMATA released a Capital Needs Inventory (CNI) of over \$11 billion over ten years. Anticipating the federal stimulus package, WMATA identified which CNI projects were “shovel ready,” eligible for federal funding, and could not be implemented without additional funds. The resulting list totaled \$530 million dollars in capital needs that met the criteria.

Not knowing what its exact stimulus allocation would be, WMATA began to prioritize the \$530 million shortlist of potential projects in a process grounded in the agency’s five strategic goals: create a safety culture, deliver quality service, use every resource wisely, retain and attract the best and the brightest, and maintain and enhance WMATA’s image. To further refine these goals, WMATA developed strategic objectives

for each goal by conducting a series of internal discussions and reaching out to external partners as well, such as the agency’s Jurisdictional Coordinating Committee comprised of transportation officials across the cities and counties it served, the [Riders Advisory Council](#) representing everyday passengers, and the

Accessibility Advisory Council representing riders with disabilities. WMATA asked each of these stakeholders to define the strategic goals from their perspective to better appreciate whether an overarching aim such as “deliver quality service” meant on-time performance, customer communication, or both. The result was twelve strategic objectives that would help drive progress on the five strategic goals.

Next, WMATA ranked each potential stimulus project based on its linkage to each strategic objective and, in turn, its connectivity to the five strategic goals. When WMATA learned that its final stimulus allocation would fall short of its hoped-for amount at \$202 million, the agency used this ranking to prioritize its potential projects based on project rank given the tighter funding constraint. Projects that made the cut included such work as upgrading communications and computer equipment for a new operations control center, introducing new hybrid-electric buses into service, and investing in software for real-time bus routing and scheduling systems.

WMATA’s prioritized projects provided a framework for connecting different ARRA funding streams to the agency’s strategic goals and allowed the agency to make capital investment decisions in a more deliberate and thoughtful manner. The agency’s prioritization identified projects to implement its \$202 million formula allocations through the [Federal Transit Administration’s](#) (FTA) [Fixed Guideway Modernization](#) and [Transit Capital Assistance](#) programs.

WMATA’s resulting ranked list of projects also helps guide the agency’s approach in developing applications for several ARRA competitive grant programs. For example, WMATA, in conjunction with local jurisdictions and the [Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments](#), is working on bus rapid transit plan for ARRA’s new [Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery](#) (TIGER) program. Further, to advance sustainability goals, WMATA is applying for ARRA funds through FTA’s [Transit Investments for Greenhouse Gas and Energy Reduction](#) (TIGGER) program to install more efficient lighting in MetroRail stations, and the [Diesel Reduction Program](#) through the Environmental Protection Agency to help upgrade its bus fleet. Moreover, to enhance safety and emergency preparedness, the agency is seeking to use stimulus dollars to hire new police officers through the Department of Homeland Security’s [Public Transportation Security Assistance](#) program and the Department of Justice’s [Community-Oriented Policing Services](#) program.

Given the positive reviews by WMATA managers of the degree of cross-agency communication, collaboration, feedback, and capacity-building generated by the stimulus project prioritization process, the agency is pursuing a similar effort to prioritize its \$11.4 billion capital needs list for fiscal years 2011 to 2020. To systematically tackle this much larger scope, WMATA will apply lessons learned during the stimulus experience, such as streamlining, to the extent possible, the number of objectives associated with each strategic goal to make project-by-project examinations less time- and staff-intensive. The prioritization process established through the stimulus program will help WMATA prepare to take advantage of possible future funding through new, federal legislation proposing a dedicated funding stream for WMATA, the reauthorization of the federal transportation bill, and the renewal of WMATA’s local capital funding agreement.

The Implementing ARRA Series

America's current economic crisis is not only a national crisis. It is also a metropolitan crisis. Therefore, it is critical to monitor the progress of creative metropolitan leaders who are leveraging the myriad resources provided by the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). To that end, the Metropolitan Policy Program's Implementing ARRA Series is tracking the implementation work of metropolitan leaders, assessing their progress and struggles, and extracting from the innovators' experiences ideas for short- and long-term federal policy reforms. Ultimately it is hoped the series will serve as a resource for best-practice exchange among regions and a source of ideas for designing the next generation of metro-friendly federal policies.

For More Information

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