

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-202](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Safety incidents in recent years on WMATA's rail system have raised questions about its processes for performing critical maintenance and replacing capital assets. WMATA initiated a new preventive maintenance program for its rail track in 2017, and is currently implementing a new capital planning process.

GAO was asked to examine issues related to WMATA's capital funding and maintenance practices. This report examines: (1) how WMATA spent its capital funds from fiscal years 2011 through 2017, (2) how WMATA's new capital planning process addresses weaknesses it identified in the prior process, and (3) WMATA's progress toward its track preventive maintenance program's goals and how the program aligns with leading program management practices. GAO analyzed WMATA's financial and program information, interviewed officials of WMATA, the Federal Transit Administration, and five transit agencies selected for similarities to WMATA. GAO compared WMATA's capital planning process and track maintenance program with leading practices.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations, including that WMATA establish documented policies and procedures for the new capital planning process and conduct a comprehensive risk assessment for the track preventive maintenance program. WMATA described actions planned or underway to address GAO's recommendations. GAO believes the recommendations should be fully implemented, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-19-202](#). For more information, contact Mark Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or goldsteinm@gao.gov.

January 2019

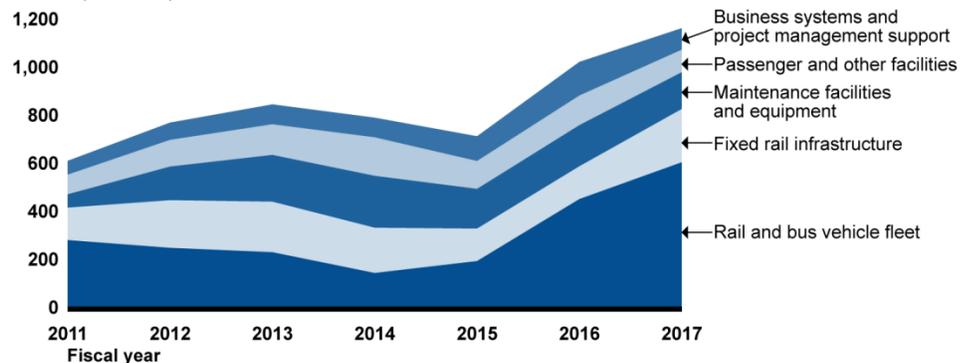
WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Actions Needed to Strengthen Capital Planning and Track Preventive Maintenance Program

What GAO Found

From fiscal years 2011 through 2017, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) spent almost \$6 billion on a variety of capital assets, with the largest share spent on improving its rail and bus fleet (see figure). Over this period, WMATA's capital spending was, on average, about \$845 million annually.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's Capital Expenditures by Asset Category, in Current Dollar Values, Fiscal Years 2011 through 2017
Dollars (in millions)



Source: GAO analysis of Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) data. | GAO-19-202

WMATA's new capital planning process could address some weaknesses it identified in the prior process. WMATA established a framework for quantitatively prioritizing capital needs (investments to a group of related assets) over a 10-year period. However, WMATA has not established documented policies and procedures for implementing the new process, such as those for selecting specific projects for funding in its annual capital budget. WMATA is currently using its new capital planning process to make fiscal year 2020 investment decisions. WMATA has proposed a fiscal year 2020 capital budget of \$1.4 billion. Without documented policies and procedures for implementing the new planning process, WMATA's stakeholders do not have reasonable assurance that WMATA is following a sound process for making investment decisions.

WMATA has made significant progress toward its track preventive maintenance program's goals, which are to reduce both track-defect and electrical-fire incidents by 50 percent in fiscal year 2019 compared with 2017. In fiscal year 2018, WMATA met its goal for reducing track defect incidents and reduced electrical fire incidents by 20 percent. However, in designing the program, WMATA did not fully assess risks. For example, WMATA did not quantitatively assess the impact of track defects or electrical fires on its ability to provide service, nor did it consider other risks such as non-electrical track fires, which represent about 30 percent of all fires on the system, or other factors, such as resources or track time. Without a comprehensive risk assessment, WMATA lacks reasonable assurance that the program is designed to address risks affecting the safety of the rail system or other risks that could hinder the new program's success.