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The Honorable Joel T. Broyhill
House of Representatives

R Dear Mr. Broyhill:

By letter dated July 2, 1973, you requested that we investigate complaints contained in a letter from Mr. Dale E. May dated June 25, 1973, concerning the bus service between 14th Street and Independence Avenue in the District of Columbia and Shirlington, Virginia, during the evening rush period from 4:45 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.

We discussed Mr. May's concerns with officials of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (METRO) and reviewed their records of bus use.

The route is not part of the Government sponsored Shirley Highway Demonstration Project but it is part of the regular service provided by METRO. The buses are identified as the 6, 7, and 8 route series. In the past, METRO has scheduled three buses during the evening rush period over this route. However, five additional buses were scheduled to operate during the subsequent 20 minute period. During the first week of July 1973 an additional bus was added to the subsequent period. At present, METRO officials do not anticipate making any further changes.

Recent ridership counts during the two periods show that the early runs were overcrowded while the latter runs had ample space. For example, on July 3, 1973, the first three buses carried 85, 55, and 52 passengers, respectively. The remaining buses carried from 14 to 50 passengers. All of the buses on this route had a 51-seat capacity.

Mr. May pointed out in his letter that each night he and several passengers have occupied a position in front of the standee line which is in violation of Federal motor carrier safety regulations. Enforcement of this regulation is the responsibility of the bus driver. METRO officials indicated that a combination of leniency by the bus driver and the desire of many commuters to "beat the rush" was the main reason for passengers crowding on the first available bus, forcing some to stand in front of the standee line. They added that one of the duties of METRO road inspectors was to determine whether drivers were in compliance with the regulation and to remind those who were not to enforce the regulation.

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Also, Mr. May stated that many buses purchased by the Federal Government for the Shirley Highway Demonstration Project were being used during midday hours for charter service. The practice of using idle equipment during non-rush periods for charter service is a transit industry management approach designed to obtain maximum utilization of equipment and labor. All commuter buses used by METRO for charter services, however, are scheduled to return in time for rush-hour service.

Concerning the availability of transfers between buses at Shirlington, it is METRO's policy to permit such transfers when Shirlington is a scheduled stop for the outgoing bus. For example, a transfer could not be made from a 6G bus because Shirlington is not a scheduled stop for that route but a transfer could be made from a 6J bus.

We trust that this information will be helpful in responding to Mr. May.

Sincerely yours,


Comptroller General
of the United States