

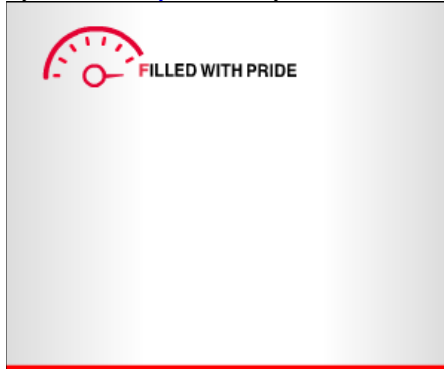


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Experts say Metro escalator woes product of union inefficiency

By [Caroline May](#) - The Daily Caller 7:09 PM 01/10/2011



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Anyone who has spent time in and around Washington, D.C. in recent years knows that the one guarantee of D.C. public transit is that the Metro escalators are about as dependable as David Hasselhoff after a bender. While some may speculate that the poor function of city escalators is a plot by Michelle Obama to get citizens to burn calories, other factors may be at play, and some speculate union chicanery is the culprit.

Of Metro's 588 escalators, dozens are out of service daily, many of which serve [major](#) rider locations. Monday alone 78 escalators were reportedly [inoperable](#).

A recent [report](#) commissioned by Metro not only pointed to water damage and the old age of the equipment as problematic but also the Metro union's "Pick" system rule.

"Management is limited in its ability to use best qualified field labor by 'Pick' system," the report reads. "To be effective, management must be able to use best qualified field labor to meet equipment service needs. While the 'Pick' system would appear to be beneficial in theory, its success is solely contingent upon the [performance](#) of the individual worker...It must be realized that not all workers have the ability to perform effectively within each scope."

Under the "Pick" system, workers are able to pick the location to which they report. It is speculated that the most experienced workers select those escalator areas that they know have little chance of breaking down, leaving the malfunctioning elevator areas to the rookies.

Chris Edwards, director of tax policy studies at the Cato Institute, told The Daily Caller that this is a classic example of the way in which unions stifle growth and innovation.

"Unions create these extremely bureaucratic and rule laden work force that prevent managers from making the constant changes and experiments in production and operation that any private company sector would do. It essentially puts a straight jacket on innovation in the workplace," he said.

The president of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, Jackie Jeter, told TheDC that she believed the charges against the union to be baseless. Instead, she blames the escalator problems on the age of the equipment and the hazards created by escalators exposed to the elements. She explained that workers do get to choose their reporting location under the "Pick" system, they do not get to choose their workload.

"The fact is journeymen may select their report location but [Metro](#) managers assign the work," Jeter wrote in a statement. "Plain and simple! In addition, less seasoned workers always work side-by-side with experienced journeymen. An apprentice never goes it alone."

Edwards says that constant change and improvement is what is essential to maintaining a successful business and iron-clad union rules prevent that.

"You often hear big corporate leaders like Jack Welch often talk about how innovation is a constant ongoing process where companies constantly need to try and evolve to get better. Unions with collective bargaining deals stifle that innovation and change," Edwards said.

Ivan G. Osorio, editorial director at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, told TheDC that not only is there little ability for the Metro to improve, but there is also no incentive as the Metro system is a government [monopoly](#). There is no competition and therefore no need to be more efficient than the other guy, he said, because there is no other guy.

“This is what is part of the problem with public sector unions,” Osorio said. “There is no incentive to reform or improve those kind of rules because there is no competition.”

In December the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA) appointed a supervisor of escalators and elevators to oversee the operation of these systems. Time will tell if the new supervisor, Rodrigo Bitar, will be able to create an environment of efficiency — evidenced by working escalators.

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