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Rewarding Metro's poor track record with more subsidies?

By [anathartmann](#) on April 21, 2010 into [Water Cooler](#)

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The same day the governors of Maryland and Virginia and the Washington, D.C., mayor called publicly for a less dangerous, more accountable Metro system, a D.C. Council member pitched a 10-cent-per-gallon gas-tax hike to help pay for the chronically-in-the-red, accident- and outage-prone rail network.

Democrat Jim Graham of Ward 1 introduced a bill Tuesday that would raise the gas tax in Washington--and areas Metro serves in Virginia and Maryland--from 23.5 cents a gallon to 33.5 cents a gallon. Washington already has among the highest gas taxes in the nation.

Mr. Graham told the [Washington Business Journal](#): "Each and every year, we have to pull together this crazy patchwork quilt of various jurisdictions contributing various monies without the opportunity to have a dedicated tax revenue source for our rail system. I know this is perhaps not the most advisable thing to do in an election year, but we've got to step forward and say we're willing to consider a dedicated tax."

But with Metro's track record, taxpayers certainly shouldn't be willing to fork it over. Even D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty remained mum this week on the subject of further funding for Metro and said the system needs to [better manage](#) its funds. Metro was recently given a \$1.5 billion pledge from local jurisdictions and Congress, and in February it raised its fares 10 cents--a measure the system said it undertook for the very purpose of helping to "close a shortfall in [the] current operating budget." Yet it is still saying it faces a \$189.2 million deficit in its operating budget this year. If the new bill passes, what guarantee would District residents and some Marylanders and Virginians have that the gas-tax gouge will be the last of its kind?

Given Metro's appalling recent track record on safety (it's had four train accidents in the past 10 months, including the deadliest collision in the system's history, and a Federal Transportation Authority report last month roundly criticized the system's lack of a cohesive safety program) it is no doubt the fact that Metro is the only rail game in town that keeps passengers riding. After all, what airline would still have any ticket sales to speak of if 11 people were killed and nearly 80 people injured on its watch in less than a year--yet fares kept rising and service remained less than reliable?

As Cato Institute Randal O'Toole wrote in an Examiner [op-ed](#) last year: "We won't fix transit's woes by throwing money at it ... Instead, we need to return to a private transit model, allowing competing transit companies to provide innovative transit services that people will use at no cost to taxpayers."

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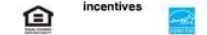
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