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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND  
URBAN AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6075

LAURA SWANSON, STAFF DIRECTOR  
BRAD GRANTZ, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

December 10, 2021

Paul J. Wiedefeld  
General Manager and CEO  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
600 Fifth St. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Wiedefeld:

We write to request information about the circumstances surrounding the derailment of a Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) 7000 series metro railcar in October and the order by the Washington Metrorail Safety Commission (WMSC) to remove all 7000 series metro railcars from service.<sup>1</sup>

According to a briefing by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the October 12, 2021 derailment in Northern Virginia was caused by the train's wheels shifting outward on the axle, causing the distance between the wheels to increase. NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy said "the potential for fatalities and serious injuries was significant," and that "this could have resulted in a catastrophic event."<sup>2</sup> The WMSC pulled the 7000 series metro railcars from service after inspections of the railcars following the derailment revealed that a number of 7000 series railcars experienced similar shifting of wheel spacing.

Initial indications are that the wheel assembly issue impacts a specific type of railcar known as the 7000 series railcars manufactured by Kawasaki Rail Car, Inc.<sup>3</sup> It appears WMATA and Kawasaki have been aware of wheel alignment issues with the 7000 series since 2017 and WMATA has been working with Kawasaki to address the issues since that time.

We fully support NTSB's investigation into the accident and related issues concerning WMATA's railcar maintenance, inspection, and safety protocols.

In furtherance of our oversight responsibilities and in an effort to better understand WMATA's reaction to the wheel alignment issue, and in particular, decisions by WMATA, Kawasaki or other parties about risk factors associated with the 7000 series railcars wheel assemblies, we request WMATA provide information to the Committee. The Committee requests:

1. A detailed timeline of WMATA's actions regarding the wheel assemblies of the 7000 series railcars. We request that the timeline include:

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<sup>1</sup> Justin George, et al, *Wheel assembly on Metro rail cars had failed repeatedly, NTSB says; reduced service expected all week*, Wash. Post (Oct. 18, 2021); <https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2021/10/18/metro-ntsb-investigation-safety/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Media Briefing by NTSB Officials*, (Oct. 18, 2021); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOWAE1kNxUQ>; see also Justin George, et al, *Wheel assembly on Metro rail cars had failed repeatedly, NTSB says; reduced service expected all week*, Wash. Post (Oct. 18, 2021); <https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2021/10/18/metro-ntsb-investigation-safety/>.

<sup>3</sup> WMATA, *Metrorail Service & Derailment Investigation Update*, (Oct. 18, 2021); <https://wmata.com/service/status/details/Metrorail-Service-and-Derailment-Investigation-Update.cfm>.

- a) Descriptions of interactions between WMATA and Kawasaki Rail Car, Inc. or suppliers ORX or Sumitomo Metals regarding problems related to the wheel assemblies of the 7000 series railcars;
  - b) Descriptions of interactions between WMATA and any contractor or consultant regarding wheel assembly performance issues surrounding the 7000 series railcars;
  - c) Descriptions of analysis or other actions undertaken by WMATA employees that identified performance or maintenance issues associated with the 7000 series railcars' wheel assemblies; and
  - d) Descriptions of analysis or other actions undertaken by WMATA employees that identified safety risks associated with the 7000 series railcars' wheel assemblies.
2. Reports or records to evaluate an analysis or other action in the requested timeline regarding identification of performance or maintenance issues or identification of safety risks under (1) above.
  3. Records sufficient to show the total amount of funds spent by WMATA related to wheel alignment issues with the 7000 series railcars.

We request that these materials be provided to the Committee no later than January 7, 2022. Should you have any questions about this request, please contact Homer Carlisle with Chairman Brown at [Homer\\_Carlisle@banking.senate.gov](mailto:Homer_Carlisle@banking.senate.gov), Nicole Christus with Ranking Member Toomey at [Nicole\\_Christus@banking.senate.gov](mailto:Nicole_Christus@banking.senate.gov), Stephanie Doherty with Senator Warner at [Stephanie\\_Doherty@warner.senate.gov](mailto:Stephanie_Doherty@warner.senate.gov), and Deborah Haynie with Senator Van Hollen at [Deborah\\_Haynie@vanhollen.senate.gov](mailto:Deborah_Haynie@vanhollen.senate.gov).

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



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Sherrod Brown  
Chairman



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Pat Toomey  
Ranking Member



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Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator



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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator