

# The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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**Founded 1923**

April 14, 2017

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Mr. Paul J. Wiedefeld  
General Manager and Chief Executive Officer  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority - WMATA  
600 5<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Wiedefeld,

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City joins the numerous professional organizations, local citizens, and visitors to our Nation's capital in objecting to WMATA's painting the concrete vaults in the Union Station Metro Station. The design of the Washington Metro System is a nationally and, arguably, internationally renowned architectural and engineering triumph - studied and heralded in scholarly and professional circles worldwide. In fact, in a 2007 national survey of U.S. architects and engineers conducted by the American Institute of Architects, respondents listed our Metro System in the Top 150 "favorite" architectural/ engineering monuments in the United States – joining such well-known places as Monticello and the Chrysler Building.

That the Metro System is historically significant, there is no doubt. As the vision of Chicago modernist architect Harry Weese, it was recognized as a masterpiece of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century design even at its dedication in 1976. The system embodies contemporary architectural/ engineering precepts of its time, revolutionary material use (*Béton brut*, or raw concrete), with nuanced design acknowledging the neo-classical language of monumental Washington, DC through the handsomely-coffered station ceilings – arguably the most recognizable and heralded detail of Weese's design. As such, the original historic stations must be respected and cared for – for this and for future generations. The inappropriate painting of the station's *Béton brut* concrete - especially the ceiling coffers - disrespects and changes the integrity of Weese's original design and material choice. We acknowledge the purported reason behind painting the concrete – the need for greater station brightness. However, the challenge is better met with careful and respectful upgrading of Bill Lam's original historic lighting design – and not through multiple coats of paint – requiring constant renewal.

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The Committee of 100 strongly recommends WMATA assume fully its stewardship responsibility to preserve and respect the historic integrity of such a nationally-significant architectural and engineering treasure as the Metro System. We urge the immediate cessation of station painting. Further, we respectfully encourage WMATA to list the historically eligible elements of the System in Washington, DC, Virginia, and Maryland on the National Register of Historic Places - referencing as a primary research source Zachary M. Schrag, **The Great Society Subway: A History of the Washington Metro**, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. And most importantly, we urge your office to develop and adopt standards and guidelines for the appropriate maintenance and preservation of the historically-significant design elements throughout this great System.

Founded in 1923, the Committee of 100 is an independent, not-for-profit, citizen organization dedicated to safeguarding the fundamental values that give our nation's capital its distinction, beauty, and community character. Metropolitan Washington, DC and the Committee of 100 are proud of our Metro System – the 2nd busiest rapid, mass transit system in the United States. We know WMATA is as well.

If we may be of assistance to you in this matter, answer any questions, or provide additional information, please contact us at the above addresses.

Sincerely,



Stephen A. Hansen, Chairman

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