Washington DC: Metro System and Union Station

Introduction

Washington DC, the U.S. capital, is a compact city on the Potomac River, bordering the states of Maryland and Virginia, home to over 600 thousand people. It’s known by its imposing neoclassical monuments and buildings

One of the most popular modes of transportation in Washington DC is the Metro System, or the Washington Metro. The Washington Metro is a rapid transit system running throughout Washington DC. It takes thousands of people per day and has several tracks.

Washington Union Station is a major train station, transportation hub, and leisure destination in Washington, D.C. Opened in 1907, it is Amtrak's headquarters and the railroad's second-busiest station with annual ridership of just under 5 million and the ninth-busiest in overall passengers served in the United States.

About the Metro System

Washington, DC’s Metro is one of the busiest public transportation systems in the country. Its expansive network of tunnels and above ground tracks connect all four quadrants of DC with suburban Virginia and Maryland. The system is heavily used by local commuters and it’s a popular, convenient and affordable way for visitors to DC to get around the region.

The Metro consists of six color-coded lines: Red, Blue, Orange, Yellow, Green and Silver. The lines are connected to each other via transfer stations and many Metro stops are serviced by more than one color. Each train car has an exterior electronic sign that marks the color and the direction of the train. Direction is indicated by the final station of that line.

Popular sightseeing Metro stops include the Smithsonian (Orange, Silver and Blue lines), Woodley Park-Zoo/Adams Morgan (Red line) and Gallery Place-Chinatown (Red, Green and Yellow lines).

Prices and Times

DC Metro trains run Monday – Thursday, 5 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.; Friday, 5 a.m. to 1 a.m.; Saturday, 7 a.m. to 1 a.m.; Sunday, 8 a.m. to 11 p.m.

During peak operating hours (weekdays, 5-9:30 a.m. and 3-7 p.m.), trains usually arrive every 8 minutes. At stations served by more than one line, trains will arrive every 3-4 minutes. At off-peak times, trains come every 12 minutes, while later trains typically arrive every 15-20 minutes.

Metro fares are calculated by how many stops you travel and vary during peak and off-peak hours. During peak hours, most fares range from $2.25 to $6 per trip. During off-peak hours, fares typically range from $1.85 to $3.85.

Metro riders must pay via SmarTrip card. These are plastic, rechargeable fare cards that can be purchased by cash or credit at any Metro station or in advance

The Union Station

In 1907, Daniel H. Burnham finished the design for the Union Station. The Union Station started construction in 1907, and was finished and opened to the public in 1908. The finished result cost DC over 25 million dollars. The station was huge, dimensions of 120ft-119ft, and tons of materials. The wood was mahogany, and white granite was everywhere.

The first train ran through the Union Station on October 27th, 1908. This was the Baltimore and Ohio Pittsburg Express. There was originally a plan to demolish the Station due to declining train useage, but it was restored in 1965 when people used more trains again.

More than 100,000 visitors pass through Union Station each day, including passengers using Amtrak, Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) rail and Virginia Railway Express (VRE), Metro subway trains and buses, taxis, tourist buses, intercity buses and Capital Bikeshare. The building is also a popular shopping and dining destination for residents of the Capitol Hill neighborhood, and the city at large. Behind the station, above the train sheds, stands a parking structure offering approximately 2,500 spaces. The station, bringing all these modes of transportation together, makes it easy for people to move from private automobile to Amtrak to taxi or from commuter rail onto the subway and still have time to buy a meal, a gift, or a cup of coffee on their way.

Key improvements undertaken during the 1980s rehabilitation project included introduction of a mezzanine level within the Concourse that provided expanded retail opportunities; creation of a food court in the basement; the addition of dedicated areas for Amtrak seating and signage; restoration of the floors in the West, East and Main Halls; restoration of exterior walls, doors, and windows; upgrades to the exterior lighting; and installation of a public elevator to connect all three levels of the station.