

**Highlights From The****FIFTEENTH ANNUAL PUBLIC TRANSIT FORUM***District of Columbia**Bowie**College Park**Frederick County**Gaithersburg**Greenbelt**Montgomery County**Prince George's County**Rockville**Takoma Park**Alexandria**Arlington County**Fairfax**Fairfax County**Falls Church**Loudoun County**Manassas**Manassas Park**Prince William County*

Date: May 4, 2004

Time: 11:00 a.m.

Place: COG Rooms 4 &amp; 5

Chair: Robert Werth

**ATTENDEES:**

Sharon Affinito, Loudoun County Office of Transportation  
 Deanna Archey, Prince George's County DPW&T  
 Frank Bell, Prince George's County DPW&T  
 Bill Bruce, Baltimore Metropolitan Council  
 Jim Bryant, Manassas Cab Company  
 Bee Buergler, TransCore  
 Murray Callahan, Barwood Transportation, Inc.  
 Anne Carey, ATC  
 Ruth Ann Costa, Greyhound Lines, Inc.  
 Irving Frye, First Transit, Inc.  
 Brian Glenn, Federal Transit Administration  
 E. Patricia Hallmore, D.C. League of Women Voters  
 Tom Harrington, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
 Jim Hughes, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
 Cynthia Porter Johnson, Fairfax County, Fairfax Connector  
 Patricia Jones, First Transit, Inc.  
 Richard Kane, International Limousine Service, Inc.  
 Charles King, Transportation General, Inc., Red Top Cab  
 Nancy Kutz, Montgomery County Transit Services  
 Stan Laughter, Brightbill Bus Sales  
 Eric Marx, Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission  
 Tom Morton, Barwood Transportation, Inc.  
 Ray Robinson, Greyhound Lines, Inc.  
 Glenn Saffran, MDOT/Maryland Transit Administration  
 William Sears, Federal Transit Administration  
 Eric Smith, Arlington County Transit – ART  
 Douglas Stallworth, DDOT, Mass Transit Division  
 Rick Stevens, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
 Robert Werth, Diamond Transportation  
 Sharon Wharton, Connex, Inc., Fairfax Connector

**COG Staff:**

Andrew Austin

Gerald Miller

## **Introductions**

Chairman Robert Werth welcomed everyone to the forum and asked the participants to introduce themselves.

## **Update on Private Sector Transit Opportunities in Federal Programs**

Richard Stiemann discussed the reauthorization issues of TEA-21 from the perspective of the Federal Transit Administration. He said that both the Senate and House of Representatives had passed proposed bills for The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA) of 2003 and that the current provisions of the law were on a two-month extension. Mr. Stiemann described several provisions of the new bill. He said that SAFETEA proposes to foster and require coordination of transit travel. He said that both large urban agencies and rural transit agencies can qualify for grants to meet this requirement. Mr. Stiemann noted that Medicare and Medicaid funds could qualify for match requirements and that local transit services could qualify as soft matching funds. He added that the grants were applicable to capital costs in urbanized areas and were extended to operating costs in rural areas.

Mr. Stiemann stated that the grants allowed for the employment of a mobility manager as a capital expense. He said a mobility manager would coordinate with dispatchers of regional agencies to reduce trip redundancies. Mr. Stiemann also discussed funding availability for job access and reverse commute programs, programs for elderly, disabled, and unemployed persons with disabilities. He said that many of these programs would be required as a condition for funding. Mr. Stiemann stated that another expected provision of SAFETEA was the inclusion of intercity bus service for federal funding. He also added that private, for-profit transit providers would be eligible for federal funds contingent on 13C labor protection laws.

Rick Stevens expressed WMATA's frustration at its ineligibility to be designated as a certified Medicaid transit provider while disabled passengers continued to be directed towards their Metro Access program. Mr. Stiemann cited an executive order that directed the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to work with other departments and noted that they had sponsored a workshop series to address issues like this. Mr. Stevens said that it was important for the DOT to work closely with the Department of Health and Human Services to break parochial barriers, particularly in a region with two states and a federal district. Nancy Kutz added that the State of Maryland has ordered that Medicaid be used as a last resort for transportation funding and that they routinely suggest that passengers use Metro Access.

Mr. Stevens also stated that WMATA has spent a great deal of money to make buses accessible to people with disabilities. He noted however that many bus stops are not accessible to those riders, so they are required to request paratransit service. He recommended that the DOT fund improvements to stops to allow disabled riders to ride regular bus services. Jim Hughes added that these bus stops are the responsibility of the local and state jurisdictions and not the transit agencies. It was also noted that some jurisdictions have been able to find local and developer funding for improving sidewalks and bus stop accessibility, particularly in areas of growing development.

Chairman Werth inquired about the status of WMATA's Job Access and Reverse Commute program. Mr. Stevens said that some of the matching funds had been scaled back requiring some service cuts accordingly. Gerald Miller added that this program requires a 50% hard match and said this was a big hurdle for local jurisdictions. Brian Glenn commented that there was a proposal to make this program administered via the states instead of individual transit agencies, but he noted that this was unlikely to be approved.

Chairman Werth asked if there was any discussion of modifying federal 13-C regulations. Mr. Stiemann stated that there was a special warranty in place that certified that each grantee was in compliance with 13-C regulations, but did not describe any significant changes.

Irving Frye asked if there was a committee that met to discuss and lobby for more funds for safety enhancements. Mr. Miller said that the TPB's Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee dealt extensively with this issue and agreed that funding was important.

## **Transit Plans and Prospects**

### Potomac-Rappahannock Transportation Commission

Eric Marx stated that his agency had a contract for up to 10 years with First Transit. He noted that with the change in contractor, they had to replace their entire staff but added that they have received some early positive customer feedback. He also said that new buses would be delivered in the fall to replace the OmniLink fleet. Mr. Marx added that his agency has adopted a five-year strategic plan in coordination with Prince William County. He said some new services will begin in the fall of 2004 including a route from I-66 in Prince William County to West Falls Church and enhanced service on Route 1 into the District of Columbia.

Mr. Marx recognized Patricia Jones, a representative from First Transit Inc. Ms. Jones commented that her company was excited by the challenge of working in a public-private partnership.

### Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Mr. Hughes described the service improvements that were implemented on Columbia Pike last fall as doing very well and experiencing an increase in ridership. He said some poorer performing routes in Arlington County had been eliminated. Mr. Hughes said that WMATA was working with Fairfax County to restructure service on the Route 1 corridor and added that the Columbia Pike service would be modeled after a Bus-Rapid Transit service. He also said there would be some changes to Route 29 service in Maryland to consolidate services onto major corridors. Mr. Hughes said that WMATA was installing new fare boxes on all buses that would include SmarTrip readers. He also noted that fares were likely to increase in June from \$1.20 to \$1.35. Mr. Hughes said that both the rail extension to Largo, Maryland and the New York Avenue station were expected to open in December 2004.

Tom Harrington stated that WMATA was exploring Bus-Rapid Transit for three corridors; H Street in the District, Route 1 in Maryland, and I-66 from Virginia into the District. He said they were working on a set of standards with Montgomery County and the City of Alexandria. He also added that the goal was to provide enough information to riders and to make their trips seamless. Mr. Harrington also described signal priority measures for buses along the Georgia Avenue and Route 1 corridors. He said his agency was currently in the process of implementing these systems.

Finally, Mr. Harrington described the Regional Mobility Initiative; a plan to make the bus as seamless a transportation system as rail. He noted that inadequate shelters and a lack of information were the primary reasons given for people's reluctance to ride the bus. Mr. Stevens said that their bus enhancement program was working to provide more information on bus service at Metro stations. He said directories will be installed in stations and that their Board has asked them to place the new, improved service maps at all bus shelters.

Mr. Stevens also said that the Metro Board asked WMATA to convene a task force to improve the efficiency of the Metro Access paratransit service. He said a number of recommendations were given to the Board that dealt with policy and service issues, accessible environments, and eligibility issues. He added that the task force recommended charging a supplemental fare to extend paratransit beyond three quarters of a mile from service areas.

Mr. Stevens stated that WMATA would be seeking a new contractor for Metro Access within the next couple of months. He said the service may be broken up into two or three separate contracts and invited interested bidders to submit their names and contact information.

Mr. Stevens also discussed two Metro Matters programs. The first was to procure 120 additional rail cars and the second was to procure 171 new buses. He said the goal of these programs was to improve quality of service on existing routes and to perhaps add others. He added that these programs were unfunded at this time.

Chairman Werth asked if Metro Access extended Logisticare's contract out to its final years. Mr. Stevens said they did not.

#### District of Columbia

Douglas Stallworth said that the District would like to provide more bus service to supplement the New York Avenue Metro station when it opens. He also said the downtown circulator system was getting closer to implementation. He said the first phase of the high-quality, high-frequency service would begin next year with two routes; from Southwest D.C. to the Convention Center and from Union Station to Georgetown with five to ten minute headways. Mr. Stallworth said they have \$1 million budgeted to buy the buses. He said the second phase would add a route that circulated around all of the federal monuments and a second east-west route between the U.S. Capitol and the White House. Mr. Stallworth said it was possible that additional funding could come from the federal government and the Downtown Business Improvement District.

Glenn Saffran asked what the hours of operation were going to be. Mr. Stallworth replied that the circulator would run from 8:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. Mr. Marx asked what the proposed fare structure was. Mr. Stallworth stated that the fares would be similar to Metro services, starting out at 50¢. He said they would use special fare cards and also accept Metro's SmarTrip cards. Mr. Stallworth said the service would use 3-door, 40 foot vans. Chairman Werth asked if the current Georgetown Shuttle service would continue to operate. Mr. Stallworth said that it would but added that it may eventually combine with one of the circulator routes.

#### City of Alexandria

A representative from the City of Alexandria was unable to attend the forum.

#### City of Fairfax

A representative from the City of Fairfax was unable to attend the forum.

#### City of Falls Church

A representative from the City of Falls Church was unable to attend the forum. Mr. Stevens of WMATA noted that they were unable to obtain a contractor for their George bus service that met their specifications. Mr. Hughes added that they were running the service with regular buses but not carrying as many passengers as they had hoped for. He said they were considering options of cutting back daytime services.

#### Arlington County

Eric Smith stated that the ART bus service would celebrate its fifth anniversary in November 2004. He said they currently served ten routes and had a fleet of 30 CNG buses. He added that they had received a grant from the Department of Energy to put a refueling facility in their equipment yard. Mr. Smith said they were looking for additional land to build a bus lot on. He said they hoped that purchase would coincide with a contract that was due to expire in two years. He said the new contract would include buses, facilities, and a fueling station. Mr. Smith said that ART had been awarded the outstanding transit award at the American Public Transit Association's fall 2003 meeting. Mr. Smith said that Arlington County's STAR service just celebrated its fifth year of operations. He also noted that some ART buses had been added to the Columbia Pike route. Mr. Smith said his agency was examining bus priority lanes and signal systems and installing 'next bus' information at stops. He said they were also looking at non-accessible bus stops, but noted that they did not have much money to address that issue.

#### Fairfax County

Cynthia Porter Johnson said that as of last August, Yellow was the sole contractor for Reston, Huntington and Springfield bus divisions. Ms. Johnson also described a shuttle service to VRE's Burke Center station where full parking lots have prevented riders from using rail service. She explained that riders subscribe to the service and are taken on a first come – first served basis. Ms. Johnson noted that ridership had doubled since its debut in December 2003.

Ms. Johnson stated that the Fairfax Connector was sponsoring a counter-terrorism exercise at the Fairfax County Government Center. She added that most regional transit providers had been invited.

Ms. Johnson stated that Fairfax County's South County Bus Plan would be changing a great deal. She said that a series of public meetings had been held and that the changes were scheduled to take effect on September 26, 2004.

#### Frederick County

A representative from the county was unable to attend the forum.

#### Loudoun County

Sharon Affinito noted that the county was the fastest growing county in the nation. The commuter bus service is expanding rapidly with a tremendous growth of 52 percent in ridership over the past year. She described how the 22 new county-owned buses will be utilized this year, and that the county approved a 3-year contract with Connex North LLC to maintain and operate the new buses. The county provides a text messaging service to over 60 percent of the riders to alert them to service changes and disruptions. She said that the county is looking a service expansion in the Dulles Corridor and at new markets in Tysons Corner and Reston.

Mr. Stevens commented that finding park-and-ride lot capacity was becoming more of an issue in the fast growing areas like Loudoun and Prince William Counties.

Chairman Werth asked about why the Virginia Regional Transportation Association paratransit service was not put up for bid. Ms. Affinito replied that it was a non-profit service for clients and operates some reverse commute service from West Falls Church.

Mr. Stallworth noted that there is reverse commute service operated by WMATA from the District to Dulles Airport. Mr. Stevens commented that there is a lot of reverse commute services being operated and that there needs to be information on them for potential users. He suggested that the COG Commuters Connection program should be encouraged to promote these services.

#### Montgomery County

Nancy Kutz reported that the county's contract with First Transit would end in September 2004 and that the three bids for the next contract are currently being reviewed. She said that Ride-On fares will probably increase along with Metrobus fares this summer and that state and county funding for new transit services was limited.

There was a discussion about the county's new taxicab hot line and proposed taxicab regulations that would specify response times for taxi pickups. Mr. Stevens commented that the Metro Access paratransit service for persons with disabilities has found that many taxicabs in jurisdictions throughout the region do not have accessible vehicles which limits there potential for providing this service.

Prince George's County

Frank Bell explained that the county was starting a demonstration of "next bus" at selected bus stops. He said that the bus service on several routes was being revised by December as Metrorail service extends to Largo and other stations. He noted that the development of 5-year bus service master plan is underway.

Maryland Transit Administration

Glen Saffran reported on the performance of the MTA commuter routes and that new contracts for several services have been issued. He said that another fare increase is under consideration this year. He pointed out that like in the Virginia suburban areas that park-and-ride capacity was becoming more critical and was limiting ridership growth.

Northern Virginia Transportation Commission

A representative from NVTC was unable to attend the forum.

Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit

Ms. Samarasinghe of VDRPT was unable to attend but provided a detailed memorandum report on recent transit projects and activities. The memorandum was distributed at the forum.

Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland

A representative from the council was unable to attend the forum.

**Other Business**

Ray Robinson reported that efforts are underway to establish a new bus depot at Union Station.