

**Highlights from the
ANNUAL PUBLIC TRANSIT FORUM**

June 26, 2012, 11:00 a.m.

Place: COG Board Room

Private Providers Task Force: Robert Werth (Chair)

ATTENDEES:

Brian Anderson, Quick's
Mary Ellin Arch, Transurban
Melissa Barlow, FTA
Amber Carran-Fletcher, DDOT
Teresa Chronister, Quick's
Pierce Coffee, Transurban
Rick Kiegel, MTA
Rhett Buer, Alexandria Yellow Cab
Mike Flood, Parsons Brinckerhoff
Lyn Erickson, MDOT Office of Planning
and Capital Programming
Mariela Garcia-Colberg, NVTC
Chris Gay, Parsons Brinckerhoff
Nathan Graeff, MTM
Claire Gron, NVTC
Arthur Guzzetti, American Public
Transportation Association
Julie Hershorn, WMATA
Kenneth Hoggard, LogistiCare Solutions
Pierre Holloman, City of Alexandria
Transit Services
Wendy Jia, WMATA
Stan Laughter, Brightbill Bus

Jeffrey Lehmann, WMATC
Camille Mack, Veolia Transportation
Kelley MacKinnon, Arlington County
Eric Marx, PRTC
David Mohebbi, Regency Cab
Bill Morrow, WMATC
Raymond Mui, Alexandria Transit
Company
Nancy Norris, TransIT Services of
Frederick County
Bill Orleans, hack
Aaron Overman, Cambridge Systematics
Von Pelot, Red Top Cab
KJ Reynolds, FleetPro
James Ryan, Montgomery County DOT
Andre Stafford, Alexandria Transit
Company
Kyle Summers, Alexandria Yellow Cab
Andre Taylor, Veolia Transportation
Robbie Werth, Diamond Transportation
Danielle Wesolok, WMATA
Alexis Verzosa, City of Fairfax

TPB Staff:

Ron Kirby
Rich Roisman
Jerry Miller
Ben Hampton

Wendy Klancher
Eric Randall
Dan Sonenklar

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Werth welcomed the participants and asked them to introduce themselves.

2. The 495 Express Lanes – It's Time to Change Lanes

<http://www.mwcog.org/uploads/committee-documents/a11dW1xX20120626150019.pdf>

Ms. Pierce Coffee, Director of Marketing for Transurban's 495 Express Lanes project, presented an overview of the history and planned operation of the project. Previously known as the Capital Beltway HOT Lanes (Virginia), the 495 Express Lanes are scheduled to open by the end of 2012. Vehicles with 3 or more persons, as well as buses – both private and public – and motorcycles, will be able to use the toll lanes free of charge with the proper tolling transponder. Mid-sized trucks such as local delivery trucks may use the lanes as a toll paying customer or carpool. Trucks with more than two axles, including large, 18-wheel trucks will not be allowed to access the lanes.

As drivers approach the Express Lanes access points, there will be two pricing signs, one approximately a mile before an on-ramp and then one sign just before entry. The pricing signage will list tolls to three upcoming destinations, which drivers can use to know exactly how much they'll pay if their destination is listed, or to estimate the toll they will pay if their destination is not listed. The tolls are all electronic, with no toll booths and no cash payment. For HOV-3+ automobiles, the E-ZPass Flex will be required, and should be available from VDOT starting in July. Any E-ZPass transponder will work for buses, which must pay the deposit fee, but do not need to fund a balance on the E-ZPass (as long as it is a non-revenue E-ZPass). Ms. Coffee also spoke to the enforcement of the use regulations, as well as the outreach campaign being conducted by Transurban.

Questions included:

- Even if just vacationers passing through, with four people in the car, will they need an E-ZPass Flex to avoid paying the toll? A: Yes. Anyone who anticipates wanting to make use of the toll lanes as an HOV-3 user - and avoid paying the toll - will need to obtain and use the E-ZPass Flex transponder.
- How does the E-ZPass Flex work? A: There is a switch, which users will have to select for HOV-3 when travelling with three or more people, and otherwise put in normal position if not travelling with three people but using the toll lanes. Transurban has an agreement with the Virginia State Police for enforcement, so there will always be officers patrolling the lanes. They will receive information on E-ZPass Flex transponders indicating HOV-3, and will use the information to monitor compliance (through a visual check).
- Must buses buy an E-ZPass transponder? Will they have to pay the monthly fee VDOT is proposing? A: Currently, buses must pay the transponder deposit fee. It has yet to be determined if the newly proposed monthly fee would have to be paid by buses. VDOT is still evaluating public input.
- Has there been any outreach to tour buses or other potential users coming from outside the region? A: Not as of yet, but Transurban is trying to formulate an effective strategy.
- How often will the toll fee change? A: It can change as often as every 5 minutes.
- What is the experience from across the nation on the effectiveness of variable pricing in managing demand? A: There is some experience in at least seven locations, but the 495 project has some unique characteristics that may not make all lessons applicable. Other HOT lanes projects throughout the US have had good results. You can learn more here: <http://495expresslanes.com/feature/270>. However, the toll price on the Express Lanes can be raised in \$0.05 increments, providing the ability to fine-tune use and maintain travel speeds of 45 to 55 mph.

- In the event of an incident that closes the general lanes, will the toll lanes be opened to general traffic? A: There is a protocol agreement between Transurban and VDOT for the opening of the lanes to all traffic in special circumstances, when directed by VDOT.
- If a toll lane user does not have an E-ZPass, how will they get charged? What if they don't pay? A: Transurban has a 75-year contract for the toll lanes, and the toll revenues are needed to pay off the cost of construction and operation. The firm is interested in collecting tolls. License plates of vehicles without E-ZPass transponders will be photographed and a bill sent to the owner. If necessary, unpaid bills will be referred to a debt collection agency and ultimately, court.
- How reliable is the E-ZPass Flex and the photographing of license plates technology? What if someone receives a nonsensical bill? A: Both are tested and reliable. There will be procedures for contesting a toll fee bill.
- What if the police apprehend a driver with the E-ZPass Flex transponder set incorrectly? Will driver license points be issued as well as a fine? A: There will be a fine, but no points will be issued against a driver license. *(NB. Verified in follow-up e-mail.)*
- Is there an exemption for common carriers (e.g., taxis and vans), such as a paratransit vehicle carrying two people: driver and disabled passenger? This exemption is in effect for the HOT lanes. A: We need to look into the taxis but Metro Access Paratransit vans are going to be treated like buses.
- What are the anticipated maximum and minimum charges? A: Between \$0.20 and \$1.25 a mile, but again tolls will be variably changed to fine-tune use and maintain travel speeds of 45 to 55 mph.
- How will drivers know what the toll is as they drive? Will they be distracted by looking at the pricing signage? A: Once a driver enters the Express Lanes, the toll price is locked in for their drive. There is no pricing signage once in the Lanes, only before entry.

3. Reauthorization of Federal Surface Transportation Legislation

Mr. Arthur Guzzetti, Vice President of Policy for the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), opened his remarks by stating that he was one of 36 million boardings on public transportation across the United States for the day. Public transportation is a vital part of the national transportation system, and critical to a successful surface transportation act. While the overall funding of the current bill is still unknown, there is a tremendous back-log of transportation projects across the nation that need investment. APTA supports the current bill and the certainty it will provide to public and private providers of public transportation. However, if funding remains flat, while program changes are mandated, it will be difficult to implement. In any case, given the short time-frame of the current bills under discussion, APTA will need to get right back to work on the next surface transportation authorization.

Mr. Guzzetti spoke to multiple areas affected by public transportation projects and operation, reacting to demographic shifts in the country, economic development, energy and the environment, and many others. An effective transportation system is a four-legged stool, in which the federal government, states, local governments, and private partners all play their part. A successful federal program is critical; much of the renaissance of public transportation from the low point of the 1960s and 1970s is due to the increased federal role in supporting public transportation. Public agencies need the private sector as an investment partner as well as an

operations partner. APTA's Transit Vision 2050 anticipates the private role in transportation will increase considerably.

APTA has both private and public members, and it has been a breakthrough year for the private sector. The \$2.3 billion Denver Eagle P3 project is a leading example of private financing to balance risk and revenue in a way that benefits both private and public partners while providing critical new public transportation investment. Toronto, Canada, is even further ahead, with a \$10 billion private financing arrangement for private financing of public transportation. On the operations side, San Diego and Nassau County, New York, have both seen private management taking on a new role in public transportation. Regarding the surface transportation bills, the unsuccessful House bill (HR 7) would have encouraged an expansion of contracting and private financing and management for public transportation. In the future, APTA sees the role of the private sector in mobility management as an investment opportunity, concentrating on particular sectors and corridors. This is a model in use internationally, such as the service contracts being implementing in Birmingham, UK. The combination of tolling roadways and funding transit is a powerful combination for investment, and was the topic of recent APTA conference. The Denton County, Texas, A-train, in which a toll concession on I-35 provided the financing to fund commuter rail, is one example.

Mr. Guzzetti then addressed some of the specific elements of the current bill for reauthorization. APTA is against the requirements for all interstate operators to be licensed at the federal level; this would require more bureaucracy. APTA is also looking closely at the interplay between bus grants and New Starts funding, and does not want any excuse to be used for reducing total funding available for these two programs, however combined or separated. APTA supports expanded TIFIA grants and federal guarantees for low-cost capital through Private Activity Bonds; the Dulles rail is a terrific example of such. However, financing is not a replacement for funding.

4. Transit Plans and Prospects

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)

Ms. Hershorn provided an overview of surface transportation activities by the Authority. The MetroAccess contract is up for bid. All documents are posted on-line, and bids are due by August 17. With regard to Metrobus, a number of service changes took effect on June 18. Metrobus has also accelerated the procurement of 100 new buses to replace the Orion buses being retired due to their propensity to catch on fire. Metrobus is also implementing further improvements on its Priority Corridor Network, and more of the limited-stop MetroExtra service is being developed. Ms. Jia then spoke to Metrorail, describing in detail the Rush Plus service changes that also took effect on June 18. Metrorail sees this as the first of several steps to prepare for the opening of Phase I of the Silver Line in December 2013. There will be future efforts to prepare customers. Finally, she mentioned the fare change to take effect July 1, which will include a \$1.00 surcharge for paper farecard us on any Metrorail trip.

City of Alexandria

Mr. Holloman stated that the City is still working on an RFP for the DOT paratransit service, due to changes in the services to be procured. They hope to issue it this summer once approved by

the procurement office. An additional private sector opportunity will be bids for the Del Ray Trolley. The King Street Trolley, operated by DASH, has been tremendously successful, so the Del Ray Trolley will operate through that neighborhood and to Fairlington. An RFP will go out requesting bids and provision of five vehicles for the service. (The service will not be operated by DASH.) Mr. Holloman also provided an updated on the Potomac Yard Transitway, the dedicated lanes for which will enter construction in July.

District of Columbia

Mr. Foster spoke to three elements of the District's transportation services. Firstly, the DC Circulator ten-year plan has been completed, and service changes will take effect in October as one of the first steps in implementation. Secondly, the DC Streetcar H Street line will be bid out to a Design-Build contractor next year. Meanwhile, construction of phase two of the Anacostia line and the streetcar barn is to start in the fall. Further design is planned on the One City Line from Union Station to the Georgetown waterfront. Thirdly, DDOT is working with Metrobus on improvements to the 14th Street Line and North Capitol Line bus services, including recent public meetings.

Arlington County

Ms. MacKinnon described recent investments by the County in the ART bus system, including nine new CNG buses, which will handle the 15% annual increases being experienced in ridership. She also spoke about the STAR paratransit service, for which a new provider contract will be needed next March. The service operates with approximately 50% dedicated vehicles and 50% accessible taxis. She also described some of the service changes that have taken place in the County recently.

Fairfax County

No representative from Fairfax County was able to attend the forum.

City of Fairfax

Mr. Verzosa reported that the CUE service has been stable over the past year, despite completion from the new shuttle service operated by George Mason University. This service, operated under contract by Reston Limo, is carrying about 230,000 riders per year and is expanding with a new route to Loudoun County. He suggested they be invited to next year's forum. Meanwhile, the City is considering bidding out an integrated contract for advertizing on both vehicles and bus shelters.

Loudoun County

No representative from Loudoun County was able to attend the forum.

Frederick County

Ms. Norris reported that the County Commission assigned a goal of reducing the costs of transit services in the county by 30%. Through service rationalization and some revenue enhancements, a 20% savings was realized, and the Commission approved the final result. As part of this process, bi-directional service will begin on some current peak-direction only routes, beginning July 30, accompanied by a fare increase. TransIt is just about to celebrate its 900,000th customer, and ridership grew by 10% in the past year.

Montgomery County

Mr. Ryan reported on Ride-On's ridership, up 5% this past year. While still lower than in 2006, and while Ride-On's fleet has since been reduced by 10%, trends are looking positive. The County has a goal of replacing 25 vehicles per year, but has only averaged replacement of 7 to 10 buses the past several years, even with ARRA funds available. There is also now an effort to eliminate cutaways by mid-2014, due to various safety concerns. He also passed around fliers on the phone-based, real time transit application for Ride-On, and encouraged all persons to download it to their smartphone.

Mr. Ryan then spoke to taxi cab service in the County. There are 770 licensed cabs, for which meter inspections have just been completed. Issuance of further licenses this year is still being assessed. Mr. Ryan then spoke to the challenges of monitoring the Uber real-time ride matching service. The Uber service and others being offered are very challenging for both regulators monitoring safety and security as well as for regular taxi cab operators.

Prince George's County

No representative from Prince George's County was able to attend the forum.

The following update was provided following the forum for inclusion in these highlights.

The County is conducting a renewal and upgrade of NextBus, which will enable better data accountability of bus passengers per stop. Also, automated voice annunciation is being implemented on The Bus fleet. The County has incorporated accessible taxis into the Call-A-Cab program so that seniors may utilize discounted coupons for accessible taxis. Regarding planning, the County is completing a comprehensive Transitway study, funded by a TLC grant from the TPB, which will plan future transit needs for the County. Coordination with WMATA is continuing on common elements as they relate to the priority bus corridors and metro in the future. A public survey is also in progress for the south county area to collect information on proposed route expansion and changes in that part of the County.

Maryland Transit Authority (MTA)

Mr. Kiegel gave an overview of commuter bus concerns and other transit plans in the state. While no new commuter bus lots are being evaluated, two new lots are in design and may enter construction by 2014. Five ICC bus lines are in service; those connecting to BWI Airport are doing well, but the effectiveness of the other lines is still being evaluated. The MTA is also proceeding with the South Side Transit study of possible transit options across the Woodrow Wilson Bridge which would connect National Harbor and Alexandria. Lanes 11 and 12 are currently striped off, but could be used for bus, bus rapid transit, light rail, or even heavy rail service. The study report should be issued near the end of this year. Other MTA work includes preliminary engineering for the Purple Line, this step having been approved by the FTA. Also taking place is further design and planning of the Corridor City Transitway (CCT), for which the preferred alternative was recently announced as Bus Rapid Transit. Phase 1 of the CCT, connecting Shady Grove and Metropolitan Grove, could open in 2020. MTA is also working with Montgomery County and the State Highway Administration on planning for two BRT corridors, on Veirs Mill Road and Georgia Avenue. In Prince George's County, a preservation study was recently completed for a corridor along MD-5 (Branch Avenue) and Route 301, which preserves a potential transit connection to Waldorf in Charles County.

Northern Virginia Transit Commission

Ms. Gron gave a brief summary of NVTC's development of an RFP to carry out an FTA-funded Alternatives Analysis of transit options along the VA-7 (Leesburg Pike) corridor.

Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission

Mr. Marx provided an overview of PRTC's current operations, carrying 13,500 passengers a day on commuter and local (demand-response) bus service, on 140 buses. PRTC is rebuilding its fleet, with 34 new buses being delivered that will provide a modest operational contingency reserve. Some replacement buses are just arriving, procured with TIGER funds via the grant awarded to the TPB. In addition, PRTC is halfway through an ongoing contract for the overhaul of 62 of their 45-foot MCI coach buses being carried out in Orlando.

The contracted operator, First Transit, operates roughly 155,000 platform hours a year. This is under a ten year contract, of which nine years have passed, so it will be up for re-bid next year. An RFP will be issued this fall. PRTC is also looking at acquiring a western facility, in the vicinity of the Cushing Road park-and-ride lot. A new route connecting Gainesville and the District of Columbia will start soon, and PRTC continues to experience demand growth from this region. PRTC is also active in the I-95 TMP project, during which additional transit service will be funded to mitigate the construction impacts of the HOV lanes to be built on this highway. This additional service will mostly be trips just before or just after peak periods, as maximum service is already being operated in the peak. Finally, another TIGER grant funded project is the implementation of a Computer-Assisted Dispatch/Automated Vehicle Location (CAD/AVL) system, which will be provided by Trapeze.

Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit

No representative from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit was able to attend the forum.

Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA)

No representative from MWAA was able to attend the forum.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Commission (WMATC)

Mr. Morrow reported on the Notice of Proposed Rule Making issued this past spring, which will govern the safety regulation of transportation services through the region. The comment period is closed and comments are now being reviewed, with a final rule expecting in July. Drivers providing service to eight or fewer passengers will require certain driving record, background, and criminal history checks. Other rules will govern ADA accessibility and the requirements for wheelchair lifts and ramps. The WMATC Executive Director would also be given additional authority to stop unsafe operation. Finally, WMATC has fully shifted to an electronic filing process for all regulatory paperwork.

Regency Cab

Mr. Mohebbi described the recent introduction of accessible taxis in Prince George's County, with Regency now operating fifteen MV-1 ADA cabs. In addition, Regency will be operating shared ride vans to National and Dulles airports starting September 1, as part of a contract split conducted by MWAA.

MTM

Mr. Graeff announced the travel training services of MTM, which they would be willing to discuss with any jurisdiction interested in providing travel training to its citizens.