ITEM 10 - Information
September 15, 2010

Report on an Overview of Local and Regional Transit Systems Serving the Washington Metropolitan Area

Staff Recommendation: Receive briefing on the enclosed overview of the local and regional transit systems prepared by the Regional Bus Subcommittee.

Issues: None

Background: At the March 17 TPB meeting, the Board requested information on the ridership and costs of the local and regional bus transit systems serving the metropolitan area.

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Transportation Planning Board

FROM: Rex Hodgson and Eric Randall
Department of Transportation Planning

SUBJECT: Response to TPB Request for Information on Local and Regional Transit Services in the National Capital Region

DATE: September 15, 2010

Background

At the March 17, 2010 Transportation Planning Board (TPB) meeting, the TPB asked for a report on transit data, focusing on ridership and costs, for all bus transit services operating within the metropolitan area. The TPB asked that this information be compiled to provide a better understanding of the role that local bus transit service provided in each of the jurisdictions plays in supporting the region's overall transit network.

TPB Regional Bus Subcommittee
The Regional Bus Subcommittee (RBS) was formed by resolution of the TPB in January 2007 and it represents one of the ways that the TPB engages transit providers in the regional transportation planning process. Its mission is to provide a permanent process for the coordination of bus planning throughout the Washington region, and for incorporating regional bus plans into the long-range transportation plan. Participation is encouraged by all members of TPB to support the planning processes and activities related to public transportation in the National Capital Region. Participating subcommittee members are ideally principal transit planners for local, state, and regional agencies.

A Regional Perspective

Bus services are an important part of the region's transit and overall transportation systems, though the functions served by transit in the region have changed over the past 40 years. First, private operators provided local bus service to and around the regional core. Those services were then folded into Metrobus in 1973, which provided distributor services within the District and ran radial routes into the core from the suburban jurisdictions. In 1975, this was followed by the inauguration of Ride On in Montgomery Country, the first local public bus system to provide new service in the suburbs. The opening and gradual expansion of the Metrorail system between 1976 and 2001 resulted in the restructuring of many Metrobus lines to feed into the rail system, and Metrobus continues to operate largely within its historic service area today. Over the past 35 years, local jurisdictions established their own transit agencies, providing local/circulator service to suburban downtowns as well as feeder service to Metrorail stations. Commuter bus services now operate from fast growing outer suburban areas, and provide direct access between park-and-ride lots and the regional core or Metrorail stations. Commuter rail service connects outer-suburban jurisdictions with the inner-suburbs and core of the

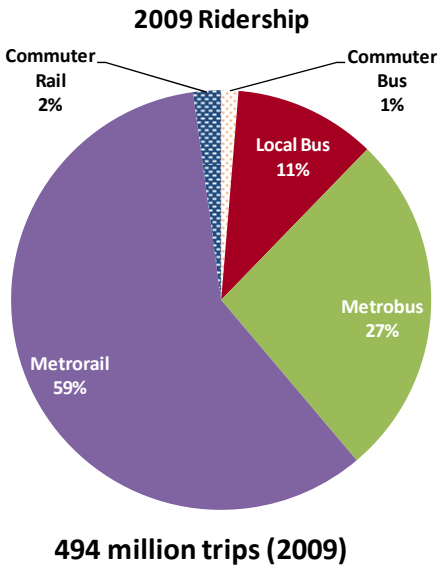
region. In addition to public systems, there are private providers of service, both bus and vanpool. There are also other fixed route systems such as the University of Maryland shuttle service. Finally, the Washington Metropolitan Region has many paratransit operators.

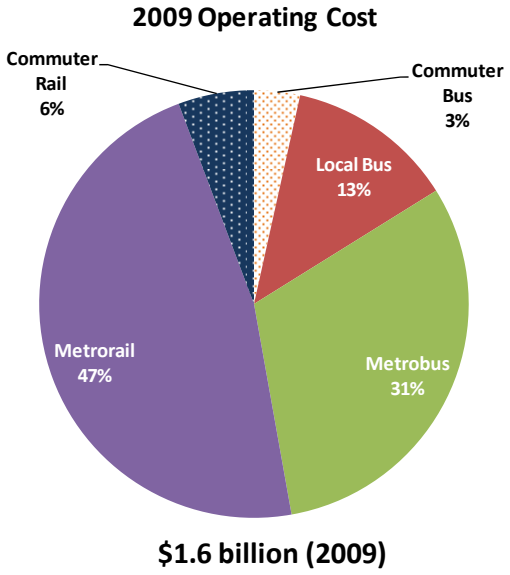
Today, there are 16 public transit operators providing service in the region, and they include:

Jurisdiction	Transit Service	Type of Service
WMATA Compact Area	Metrorail	heavy rail
WMATA Compact Area	Metrobus	express, local/feeder
District of Columbia	Circulator	local/feeder
State of Maryland	MTA Commuter Bus	express
Montgomery County	Ride-On	express, local/feeder
Prince George's County	TheBus	express, local/feeder
Frederick County	TransIT	local/feeder
Laurel/Columbia MD	Connect-a-Ride	local/feeder
Arlington County	ART	local/feeder
Fairfax County	Connector	local/feeder
Loudoun County	LC Transit	express
Prince William	PRTC (OmniRide, OmniLink)	express, local/feeder
The City of Alexandria	DASH	local/feeder
The City of Fairfax	CUE	local/feeder
Northern Virginia	Virginia Railway Express (VRE)	commuter rail
Suburban Marlyand	Maryland Area Rail Commuter (MARC)	commuter rail

Transit Service in the National Capital Region

While WMATA Metrorail and Metrobus service provide many of the transit trips occurring in the region, there are clearly a number of other public transit operators providing a substantial amount of service within local jurisdictions and to commuters. In 2009, Metrorail provided over half of all transit trips in the region, with Metrobus serving almost one-third of the total trips[1]; however, other public operators provided over 61 million transit trips on local and commuter buses, playing a significant role in meeting the mobility needs of residents and reducing congestion on area roadways.

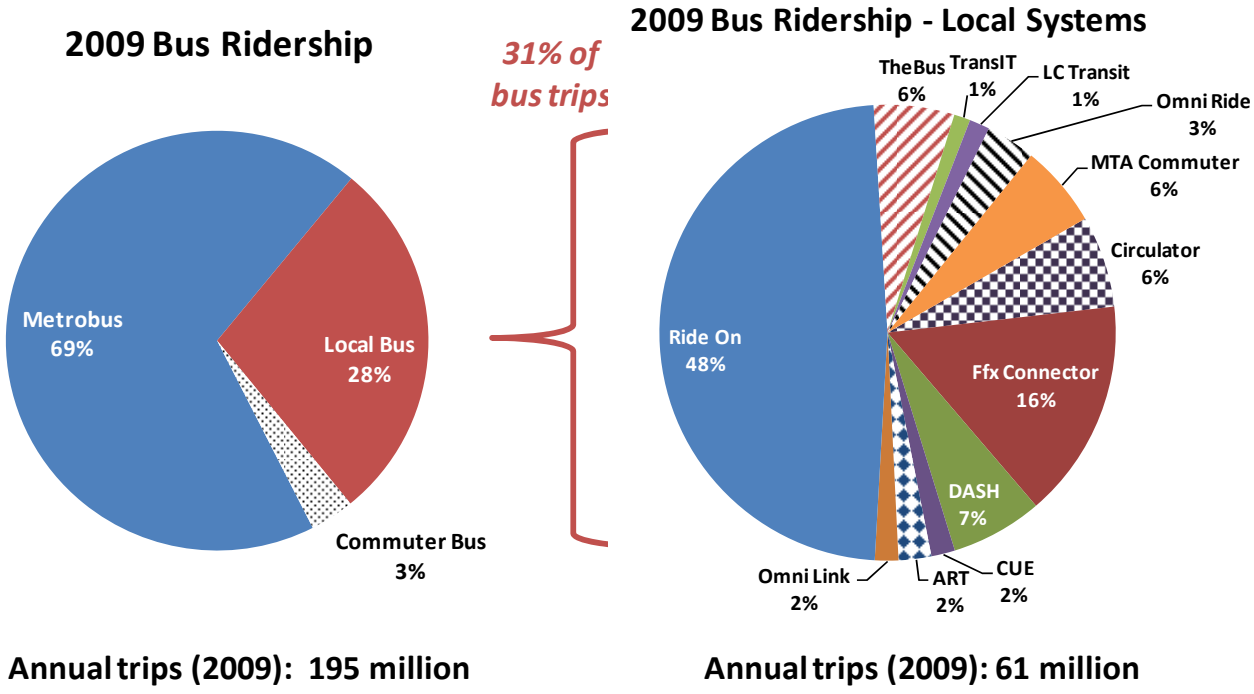




[1] Transit trips and ridership numbers represent unlinked passenger trips.

Locally Provided Transit Service

Many of the jurisdictions within the metropolitan area provide their own locally operated transit service to provide additional transportation options to serve the needs of their residents and workers. An average of 650,000 bus trips was taken daily in 2009, with 210,000 of those being provided by local and commuter bus systems. Montgomery County's Ride On is by far the largest locally operated transit service, providing nearly 30 million trips and accounting for almost half of all locally provided transit trips in the region in 2009. Fairfax County's Connector service provided about 9.6 million trips during 2009, while DC's Circulator, Alexandria's DASH, and Prince George's County's TheBus served 3.5 - 4 million trips each.



Ridership and Cost Changes over Time

Based on data from the FTA's National Transit Database, both Metrorail and overall bus ridership have grown over the past 10 years (2000 to 2009): 36% for Metrorail and 29% for overall bus. Specifically examining bus service, Metrobus ridership has gone up by 14% and local bus service ridership has gone up by 72%. Commuter bus – starting from a smaller base – has grown the most percentage-wise, more than tripling (increasing by 211%) over the past ten years. This can be explained, at least partially, by demographic changes and where growth is occurring in the metropolitan area. Obviously there are many other factors at play too – the price of gasoline, the economy, service available, etc., affect transit ridership. The table on page 5 provides additional detail for ridership and cost on each bus service (for the period from 2006 to 2009).

Operating costs have also increased for both Metrorail and bus services over the past 10 years, by 86% and 87% respectively (data from FTA's NTD). However, this is in year of expenditure figures, which does not account for inflation; cumulative inflation over the past ten years (2000 to 2009) is 30% for the region. Besides inflation, other factors in cost increases include the cost of service expansion to meet increased ridership, changes in energy costs, and – an especially important factor for bus service – the negative impact of traffic congestion, which has slowed operating speeds and increased service costs.

Bus System Accomplishments
The bus systems in the region have made significant investments in providing newer, cleaner, more accessible, and smarter service to transit customers. Fleet renewal has brought in newer buses using alternative fuels such as CNG, clean diesel, and hybrid engines, and improving service quality and reliability. The integrated SmarTrip® fare card is now accepted across most bus services. Commuter bus service has expanded significantly, while limited stop, express services have been introduced. Investments in customer information technology now provide real-time information on bus schedules via web services, text messages, automated voice response and information displays (e.g., NextBus, SmartTraveler). Finally, agencies have inventoried bus stops and improved them with ADA access and more shelters. Many of these improvements were recommendations of the 1999 Regional Mobility Panel report to Congress, which have been implemented to improve the coordination of transit in the Metropolitan Washington area.

Moving Forward with Bus Planning

Current Challenges for Bus Systems
The bus systems in the region also face common challenges, especially as the demand for bus service continues to grow. Several operators, especially Ride On and Metrobus, are facing capacity constraints in fleet size as current garage space is at maximum occupancy and many old garages need to be rehabilitated. Other infrastructure also needs repair and expansion, such as transit centers and bus bays at Metrorail stations. Meanwhile worsening traffic congestion continues to reduce service quality and increase operating costs, even as systems must contend with tight budgets that have led to recent and proposed service cuts, recent fare increases, and proposed staff reductions. Yet ridership continues to grow, including unmet customer demand in the outer suburbs which have little or no transit services (including reverse commute).

Trends indicate that locally provided bus service will likely continue to grow and play an even greater role in the regional transit mix. Future growth of bus service is being planned for at the regional level and at local levels across the metropolitan area. From the TPB's award of nearly $60 million in USDOT TIGER Program funding, to WMATA's Priority Corridor Network Study and implementation of its recommendations, as well as various local studies to identify opportunities for bus rapid transit, bus service in the region is moving forward.

Subcommittee Activities
The Regional Bus Subcommittee (RBS) will continue to work to address the common challenges and objectives of bus operators in the Metropolitan Washington region. Specific tasks include the development of bus service planning input to the CLRP and programs to improve the regional coordination of bus services. Current projects include development of coordinated priority bus treatments, such as Transit Signal Priority, bus lanes, and queue jumpers, for application to the WMATA Priority Corridor Network, the projects of the TIGER Priority Bus grant, and other regional BRT and Transitway projects.

In 2008, the RBS issued *Moving Forward: Status of the Bus Systems in the National Capital Region* to highlight operational issues and long-range planning needs that were identified for bus transit in the metropolitan area. The subcommittee is currently working to produce an updated version of this document for the current state of bus transit in the region and to highlight existing and emerging issues. The RBS will continue to work to coordinate bus planning throughout the region and support the efforts of the TPB.

Overview of Ridership and Cost Information for Local and Regional Transit Services in the National Capital Region

(Source: FTA National Transit Database (final 2006 to 2008; as submitted for 2009.)

	Weekday		Annual									
	Bus Fleets VOMS (4)	Passenger Boardings	Passenger Trips (millions)					Operating Cost (millions)				
	FY2009	FY2009	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY06-09 % Chg	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY06-09 % Chg
Regional Transit												
Metrorail		971,490	274.767	276.441	288.040	296.857	8.0%	597.600	636.400	648.000	761.100	27.4%
Metrobus	1,285	441,452	128.416	131.490	132.849	133.770	4%	398.800	437.300	453.500	501.900	26%
Local Bus												
Circulator	24	13,338	2.073	2.405	2.798	4.001	93%	5.318	5.710	6.547	9.713	83%
Ffx Connector (1)	145	30,278	9.529	9.717	9.810	9.577	0%	31.341	36.796	46.870	45.016	44%
DASH	49	14,033	3.556	3.743	3.979	4.007	13%	8.682	9.864	10.645	10.826	25%
Cue (2)	8	3,651	1.094	1.136	1.047	1.032	-6%	2.683	2.721	2.787	2.766	3%
ART	19	3,821	0.927	1.060	1.225	1.429	54%	4.546	4.432	4.964	5.259	16%
Omni Link	22	4,926	0.843	0.945	1.009	1.025	21%	6.971	7.951	8.743	9.254	33%
Ride On	387	100,053	27.294	28.220	29.673	29.627	9%	82.602	88.842	97.579	99.778	21%
TheBus	66	13,239	2.837	2.922	3.389	3.510	24%	13.511	15.412	17.133	18.239	35%
TransIT	18	2,334	0.580	0.635	0.665	0.709	22%	3.057	3.445	3.718	3.944	29%
subtotal	*738*	185,673	*48.733*	*50.784*	*53.596*	*54.917*	*13%*	*158.711*	*175.174*	*198.987*	*204.795*	*29%*
Commuter Bus												
LC Transit	30	3,614	0.602	0.652	0.777	0.890	48%	3.820	3.834	4.875	5.963	56%
Omni Ride	98	8,817	1.609	1.739	1.841	2.155	34%	11.201	12.408	14.116	16.328	46%
MTA Commuter (3)	149	12,353	2.842	3.014	3.336	3.592	26%	26.704	29.295	32.777	33.807	27%
subtotal	*277*	24,784	*5.053*	*5.405*	*5.954*	*6.637*	*31%*	*41.725*	*45.538*	*51.768*	*56.098*	*34%*
Commuter Rail												
VRE		15,754	3.640	3.454	3.629	3.868	6%	41.039	46.192	47.656	50.793	24%
MARC (3)		26,534	6.184	6.379	6.713	6.869	11%	28.818	29.509	35.821	41.667	45%
subtotal		*42,288*	*9.824*	*9.833*	*10.342*	*10.737*	*9%*	*69.857*	*75.701*	*83.476*	*92.460*	*32%*
total (all transit)	*2,300*	*1,665,687*	*466.793*	*473.953*	*490.780*	*502.918*	*8%*	*1,266.692*	*1,370.112*	*1,435.731*	*1,616.353*	*28%*

Notes: (1) Fairfax Connector experienced a strike in 2009 that reduced ridership.

(2) CUE ridership decreased in 2009 when George Mason University started its own shuttle service.

(3) Data for MTA Commuter Bus and MARC service is estimated to show Washington DC area ridership and costs only.

(4) Vehicle Operated in Maximum Service (VOMS) is the maximum number of buses in regular operation daily and is reported for buses only. These figures are based on the latest data available.