

## **ITEM 11 - Information**

May 18, 2011

### Briefing on Regional Priorities for Bus Services

#### **Staff**

**Recommendation:** Receive briefing on the enclosed memorandum listing regional priorities for bus services recommended for near-term implementation by the Regional Bus Subcommittee.

**Issues:** None

**Background:** In December 2008, the TPB received the first list of regional priorities for bus services recommended by the Regional Bus Subcommittee. During the past year, the Subcommittee noted projects that have been implemented since 2008, and identified new near-term bus and bus-supportive projects from a regional perspective for the 2011 list.

## National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Transportation Planning Board

**FROM:** Julie Hershorn  
Chair, TPB Regional Bus Subcommittee

**SUBJECT:** Regional Priorities for Bus Services

**DATE:** May 18, 2011

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Over 195 million trips were taken by customers in 2009 on public buses across the region, accounting for 39% of all transit trips (as shown in the attached pie charts).

Regional planning and investment in customer centers, bus facilities, and a modern bus fleet are needed to ensure that bus service is an efficient, effective, and attractive transportation choice. In the long-term, joint development projects that incorporate transit needs, such as public-private partnerships that enable ground-level transit access and bus layover locations in new buildings, will be crucial. As Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and rapid bus are added to the region's transit network, jurisdictions and agencies need to work together on integration, compatibility, customer information, and overall coordinated regional transit planning. Looking forward, the region needs to identify and plan for bus fleet and facility needs to meet forecast population and employment growth and regional goals for reducing vehicle-miles traveled (VMT) per capita and increasing transit mode share.

#### **Background & Process**

This list is intended to identify and document near-term and medium-term priority bus and bus-supportive projects from a regional perspective. The effort promotes regional communication and coordination, as well as informing long-range regional transportation planning efforts.

Participants with the TPB's Regional Bus Subcommittee (RBS) were asked to review the previous list developed in 2008, note accomplishments, and identify new needs for bus projects. Inputs were received from:

- City of Alexandria
- Arlington County
- District of Columbia
- Fairfax County
- Frederick County
- Loudoun County
- Maryland MTA & MARC/Commuter Bus
- Montgomery County
- PRTC
- Prince George's County
- WMATA
- Virginia DRPT

Jurisdictions and bus operators nominated candidate projects or needs across eight categories: funding, expansion and new service, regional congestion points, other capacity restriction, bus stops, other passenger facilities, regional marketing and customer information, and examples of good bus service.

Items submitted for the list did not have to be in a current funding pipeline, however respondents were asked to concentrate on projects reasonably expected to be within reach for short to medium-term implementation (3 to 6 years). Individual projects were not costed; many priority projects are only in the conceptual stage and might be funded locally or as part of other projects. Some projects were previously identified in the 2008 listing, but are still priorities requiring implementation. (The complete submissions from each participant are included in an appendix available on the TPB Regional Bus Subcommittee website.)

Regional projects are capital projects that provide benefits to multiple transit operators or multiple jurisdictions in the region. In 2008, the RBS developed a set of criteria for identifying bus projects with regional significance, which were used again in 2011:

- For bottlenecks or running way improvements: 5,000 passengers per day or an effective headway of 10 minutes (i.e., 6 buses/hour).
- For stops: at least 250 passengers per day.
- For park-and-ride lots: serviced by at least 4 buses per hour (15 minute frequency) and a minimum of 200 parking spaces.

### **Regional Bus Accomplishments since 2008**

Since 2008, bus agencies across the region have experienced significant financial pressures, leading to fare increases and service rationalization. In addition, capital projects across all transportation modes have been deferred. However, several projects on the 2008 list have been or are being implemented, including:

- Further introduction of Metrobus limited-stop express service on several high-ridership corridors in accordance with WMATA Priority Corridor Network (PCN) plan.
- Opening of the Shirlington Transit Center (Arlington, VA).
- New/replacement bus facilities have opened or are in construction, including for Loudoun County (Leesburg), for Metrobus at Cinder Bed Road and Shepherd Parkway; and a joint agency facility for Metrobus & Fairfax Connector at West Ox Road.
- The 2008 Priority Project list provided initial guidance in developing the region's application for a TIGER Grant, which led to the award of \$58 million for bus priority projects.

### **Regional Priorities for Bus Services**

The 2011 list is primarily intended to serve as a guide to highlight important bus projects across the region. Given current financial constraints, the TPB Regional Bus Subcommittee chose to focus on eight major themes for projects needed to meet bus customer and agency needs. Each theme includes projects considered as priorities by RBS participants.

#### **1. Serving Customers**

Improving the quality of bus service for customers is the number one priority. Quality improvements include: information, accessibility, security, and safety. By assessing customer satisfaction and traveler needs, bus agencies hope to improve coordination of regional information, using the capabilities of the WMATA trip planner, RITIS, and 511. Bus stop lighting and ADA accessibility is critical to retaining customers and attracting new riders. More surveys and market analyses are needed to meet customer needs.

## 2. Connecting the Region

Long-term, an integrated network of regional bus service needs to be developed, including commuter bus and routes connecting regional hubs. Major activity centers and commuter locations out in the suburbs need to be connected with each other and with the downtown core. Examples include:

- Service connecting to / extending Metrorail at: Branch Ave, Shady Grove, Franconia-Springfield, and other outer stations.
- Intra-regional service: Tysons-Bethesda, Frederick-Dulles, Alexandria-Woodbridge.

In addition, regional bus service should be improved through proactive technology and operations, using integrated corridor management systems that would link transit improvements with managed lanes (HOV/HOT) and active traffic management.

## 3. Bottlenecks and Hot Spots – Bus Access to Regional Hubs / Activity Centers

To provide an effective regional transportation alternative, bus service needs to be fast and reliable for customers. Bus priority treatments are needed along major arteries. In addition, access points to activity centers and/or transit hubs need to have treatments to enable high-quality service.

- Major arteries used by bus include most of the region's interstate highways and state roads, such as: I-270, I-66, I-395, US-15, US-1, MD-5, and the 14th Street Bridge.
- Critical access points to major activity centers and transit hubs include: Vienna Metro, South Eads / Pentagon, Duke Street / King St Metro, and Fern / Joyce Streets (Pentagon City).

Potential solutions for bottlenecks include managed lanes (HOV/HOT), with bus-only access ramps, transit signal priority (TSP), and queue jumps at critical access points. Unfortunately, many current access points often suffer from poor design, with buses unable to easily maneuver. Modest roadway layout improvements could provide significant benefits.

## 4. The DC Core – Downtown DC Bus Center & Bus Stops

As the urban center, downtown DC has the highest demand for transit service, with hundreds of local, commuter, tour and intercity buses. There is a critical need for mid-day commuter bus and tour bus storage and layover places. Instead, buses roam the streets, adding to congestion and emissions, in order to meet schedules. One possible solution is joint development of locations with street-level bus centers and air rights used for office or other commercial activities. A regional example of this is the Friendship Heights bus station.

Currently, DDOT is implementing a Commuter Bus Management Plan that combines some 312 transit commuter bus stops to 220. This will focus customer demand on current locations, such as 7th & Maryland (L'Enfant Plaza) growing from 500 to 700 daily boarders. However, many of these stops are relatively unimproved and will need further amenities.

An Intercity Bus Center for DC is also becoming critical, as this segment of the transportation market is witnessing explosive growth, with new entrants such as Megabus, Bolt Bus, and Vamoose. However, previous intercity bus locations in downtown DC are now undergoing redevelopment, while Union Station cannot accommodate some current vehicle types due to their height and size.

## 5. Regional Transit and Intermodal Transfer Centers

To complement improvements in downtown DC, transit customer facilities are needed across the region to improve trip connections and quality of service as use of transit increases.

- Transit centers are needed at regional hubs to provide customers with access to local activity centers and to connecting bus services: Union Station, Fort Totten, Frederick Town Mall, Ballston Common Mall, Haymarket, Gainesville, and Crystal City.
- Park & Ride Lots for long-distance commuters are needed in outer suburban locations, such as Springfield, Davidson, Monocacy, Myersville, Frederick City, and Potomac Mills. Outside jurisdictions in Calvert and St. Mary's Counties also need such lots.
- I-66 Improvements could include Park & Ride lots or transfer centers at: Haymarket, Gainesville, VA 234 Bypass, Bull Run, Centerville, Stringfellow, Fairfax Corner

## 6. Providing the Fleet – Bus Facilities

Bus fleets require adequate facilities for servicing and maintenance to keep buses in a state of good repair. Half of the public bus agencies are already exceeding intended facility capacity, imposing additional costs, including:

- ART
- DC Circulator
- Fairfax Connector
- Frederick TransIt
- PRTC
- Ride On
- WMATA

Facilities are needed for current buses as well as to meet plans for future growth of the bus transit system across the region. Often ignored or deferred, state-of-the-art facilities enable proper maintenance, introduction of new propulsion technologies (i.e., CNG, hybrid, hydrogen, etc) and provide for overall transit capacity.

## 7. Service Needs and Changes

Customer demand for transit service is increasing, not just generally but also in specific sectors, due to significant developments (i.e., new highways and urban centers), and across the time of week and day, with more requests for increased Saturday and reverse-commute service.

Within the National Capital Region, the opening of the Silver Line to Tysons and then to Dulles will lead to extensive restructuring of bus services across Fairfax County and beyond. Similarly, the opening of the ICC is introducing new bus service, as will the Virginia HOT Lanes opening. Locally, Metrobus is implementing more skip-stop express service on the Priority Corridor Network and further corridors have been identified and require funding.

## 8. Federal Relocation & BRAC

Significant developments are taking place due to the federal government moving civil offices and military bases. The changes will impact regional travel patterns and transit service will need to be restructured to accommodate these moves. But investment in additional service and facilities is needed if the region hopes to make transit a mode of choice for these locations.

The military base moves under Base Realignment and Closing (BRAC) include the Mark Center/ BRAC-133 (I-395 and Seminary Road), Bethesda Medical Center (New Walter Reed), Arlington Hall (Arlington Blvd and George Mason) and other sites at Andrews AFB, Ft. Meade, Ft. Detrick, and Ft. Belvoir.

On the civil side, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) campus to be built at St. Elizabeth's will relocate some 14,000 employees. While the DHS campus already has dense transit service in proximity, with 25 bus routes serving nearby Metrorail stations, more needs to be done, ideally including a transit center to integrate restructured bus service with the development and roadway bus priority investments (traffic signal priority, queue jump lanes) to provide effective access.

**Local and Regional Transit Services in the National Capital Region**

Many of the jurisdictions within the metropolitan area provide their own locally operated transit service to meet the needs of their residents and workers. An average of 650,000 trips were taken by customers daily on bus transit 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 annually 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.

