

SECOND OPINION & HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Metrorail extension cost estimates are only a start

The new preliminary cost estimates for extending Metrorail through the Dulles Corridor are higher than we would like — ranging from \$1.7 billion to \$2.4 billion.

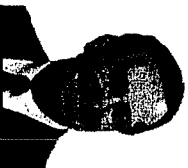
We plan to examine them very carefully. We note that this preliminary estimate is part of an ongoing process to review the progress on this project.

Before project critics use this preliminary figure to justify a renewed attack on the project, I want to make clear what this estimate is and remind everyone of the overwhelming potential the rail extension has for our region. All parties in this public-private partnership must work together to provide the management and oversight to ensure that

costs are minimized, and public and private monies are spent conservatively. The community must participate in identifying priorities. Tough choices will need to be made to deliver the Metrorail extension at the best price.

Like any project with a budget, the initial estimates are merely that. As the project proceeds through preliminary engineering, cost estimates are refined. The new materials submitted by the project contractor included a series of options for reducing costs that will be evaluated in the weeks ahead.

Much work will need to be done before the final price is determined and construction starts. While some will try to use the numbers in an effort to alarm citi-



FORUM
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zens or advance their agenda, it is imperative that we not lose sight of the numbers that matter:

Over the next 20 years, jobs in the Dulles Corridor will jump by 63 percent, and travel demand by 45 percent.

Employment and population are each expected to increase by 200,000. That's a big number — 200,000. It's also the number of vehicles the Dulles Toll Road car-

ries today and every day — even before all this new growth.

Washington Dulles International Airport, the corridors growth engine, projects 45 million passenger trips and 53,000 employees by 2015, the year rail reaches the airport.

The Metrorail extension will nearly double the capacity of the Dulles Toll Road corridor in the peak period.

The stunning growth the past 20 years has made the Dulles Corridor the engine that powers Virginia's robust economy.

But commuters know that vehicle travel is slowing with increased congestion. With residential sales trends headed upward, traffic will continue to grow. The average Northern

Virginia commuter spends nine working days a year reading the bumper stickers of the car in front of him — that's almost a full two-week vacation worth of time spent far from the beach. We need transportation alternatives.

Bringing Metrorail to the corridor is a critical part of the solution. Extending Metro to Tysons Corner, Dulles and Loudoun County will be expensive, as is any major infrastructure improvement.

But it is an investment worth making — and turning back now is a cost we cannot afford.

The author is chairman of the Dulles Corridor Rail Association and represents Reston in the state House of Delegates.