

Dulles rail project is still moving forward

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The Journal's March 21, 2003 editorial ("Losing Proposition") misses the point of what has happened with the Dulles Rapid Transit Project over the last year.

During the public hearing phase of the project, nearly 80 percent of the public comments supported the rail alternative.

Rail as the locally preferred alternative has been endorsed by Loudoun and Fairfax counties, the Town of Herndon, the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority and the Commonwealth Transportation Board.

Fairfax and Loudoun Counties revised their long-range plans to support transit-oriented development as an economic development tool.

The Arlington experience demonstrates the significant economic and social returns that come with a rail investment coupled with appropriate land development policies.

Rail also encourages the kind of mixed-use development that provides lifestyle choices to an increasingly diverse population.

The amount of financing proposed for the rail project in the six-year surface transportation reauthorization act of \$600 million is representative of the fact that the rail extension will be built over a number of years and will be financed over a number of years.

It has always been recognized that the federal share of the project would likely be provided from two reauthorizations. Your suggestion that the submission to Congress as described in newspaper accounts represents a delay in the project misses this point.

The rail project is moving forward in a financially realistic manner.

There is a highly successful bus rapid transit (BRT) system in the Dulles corridor today. Buses leave from the Herndon-Monroe and Reston East parking facilities every six and seven minutes during the morning peak.

The buses have the equivalent of a dedicated right-of-way and travel at high speed because they are permitted to use the Dulles Airport Access Road.

Enhancements to the bus system – such as real-time arrival information, bus stop amenities, use of technology to speed up payment, and attractive and comfortable buses – can be added over time.

Investments that would keep the high-capacity, high-quality rail service from advancing out the corridor to Washington Dulles International Airport and into Loudoun County as quickly as possible would not be wise.

Commitment to rail as demonstrated at every level of government gives a tremendous boost to the northern Virginia economy and increases its attractiveness as a place to live and do business.

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