

Dulles Rail Construction to Begin

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Construction of rail transit from West Falls Church to Wiehle Avenue in Reston will begin within a year and a half under a plan announced recently by Karen J. Rae, Director of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation. Under the announced schedule, a rail station will open in Reston in 2009, and rail will extend past Dulles Airport by 2015. While the schedule is about five years longer than I had hoped, it reflects the realities of the availability of federal funding.

The eleven-mile segment to Wiehle Avenue of the twenty-four total miles of the project is expected to cost nearly two billion dollars. The federal government is being asked to meet half the costs. Congress has already allocated \$142 million to the project, and Congressman Frank Wolf announced last week that he had gotten an additional \$25 million in the 2004 transportation spending bill approved by the House Transportation Committee. The Congressman's press release announcing the additional appropriation included his common sense reason for supporting mass transit in the Dulles corridor: "Getting a workable, efficient mass transit system up and running in the Dulles corridor is critical to helping moms and dads spend less time sitting in traffic and more time at home with their families."

Other partners in funding the project will be the commercial land owners in the corridor who will foot about a quarter of the bill through additional taxes on their properties. Commuters on the existing toll road who will reap the benefit of less congestion on the road will be asked to help pay for the project through a quarter increase at the main toll plaza and at the exits. The project to Wiehle Avenue will add the equivalent capacity of four new lanes on the Dulles Toll Road. The Washington Metropolitan Airports Authority will contribute to paying for the completion of the full line through its use of passenger facility charges. Airport users are expected to be less than ten percent of the users of the system.

The corridor already has one of the most successful bus rapid transit (BRT) systems in the country. Since 1999, bus service and ridership have more than doubled in the corridor. Two new dedicated bus ramps to the Dulles Airport Access Road will be added this fall to enhance the existing BRT system. The addition of the rail line along with the BRT will help to meet the expected demand over the next twenty years when jobs in the corridor are expected to increase by 200,000, and population is estimated to increase by 200,000. Tysons Corner and the Reston-Herndon areas are the largest business centers in the entire Washington region not served by Metrorail.

As soon as construction is underway for the first phase I plan to continue working with the Dulles Corridor Rail Association and others for a financing plan that will ensure that with the opening of the Wiehle Avenue station construction will already be underway to extend the line to its full completion past Dulles Airport. For more information, visit www.dullescorridorrail.com.