

Dulles Corridor is Rail Ready

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One of the *Reston Times* articles highlighted in the Reston Regional Library exhibit, "*The Life and Times of Reston, Virginia*," is from July 17, 1969, entitled "*Rapid Rail to Dulles Study Clears Senate*." The article quotes then U.S. Senator from Virginia, William B. Spong, who patroned a successful amendment for a study of rail to Dulles, as saying that he hoped the House would act "with equal dispatch." He cited estimates that every day's delay in beginning the rapid transit system "adds \$250 thousand to its cost." Too bad Senator Spong is not around to appreciate the significant progress being made in rapid transit in the Dulles Corridor today.

At a meeting of the Dulles Corridor Rail Association (DCRA) last week I presented awards to the Counties of Fairfax and Loudoun for the highly successful bus rapid transit system they have implemented in the Dulles Corridor. Since 1998, average daily transit trips in Fairfax County have grown from 4,800 in 1998 to more than 14,000 today. Loudoun's transit trips have doubled since 1998 to 1,200 per day. When the Washington metropolitan Area Transit Authority's trips are included, there are nearly 16,000 daily transit trips being made in the corridor. Just last month, the Fairfax bus system was recognized by Metro Magazine, a transit trade publication, as being one of the country's 10 most improved transit systems.

The transit ridership success comes directly from the well-planned system the Counties have put into place. By utilizing the high occupancy vehicle lanes on the Dulles Toll Road and the limited access Dulles Airport Access Road, the trip time to the West Falls Church Metrorail station is reduced. Five major parking facilities with 4,100 spaces are available to serve transit riders. Anyone seeking a space at any of these locations after about 8:30 a.m. realizes already the success that the bus system is having. During peak hours, Fairfax Connector buses depart every 5 to 7.5 minutes and during the off-peak every 15 to 30 minutes. For Fairfax that added up to 6,813,313 passenger trips last year.

The two Counties have done an outstanding job of implementing a plan that was conceived many years ago to utilize buses to build transit ridership until rail was needed and could be fully supported. The timing could not have been more precise. As the formal process for approving a rail project that could begin opening in phases as early as 2006 is concluding, the bus system is reaching its reasonable operating maximum capacity.

Even with the current economic slump, job growth in Northern Virginia is continuing. According to the 2002 Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) report, "Metropolitan Washington Regional Activity Centers," Tysons Corner has the second largest concentration of jobs outside of the District of Columbia with 101,500 in 2000 and a projected total of 139,300 in 2025. The five activity centers in the Dulles corridor cluster – Reston East, Reston West, Herndon, Dulles Corner, and Washington Dulles International Airport – had 81,400 jobs in 2000 and are projected to have 140,000 in 2025. Each cluster has more jobs today than the Rosslyn/Ballston clusters which are served by five Metrorail stations. Recent changes to the long-range plans of Fairfax and Loudoun Counties focus on employment and encourage housing units around the rail stations located in these centers.

With the transit ridership that has been built in the Dulles Corridor, with the current and future job growth and activity in the Corridor, and with the transit-oriented comprehensive plans that are in place, the Dulles Corridor is rail ready!