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Monday, April 13, 2009 |

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Prince William bus riders get one new service

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By [URIAH A. KISER](#)

Published: April 12, 2009

Things aren't looking good for bus service in Prince William County.

The Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission, which oversees OmniRide commuter buses, OmniLink buses and the Virginia Railway Express, has proposed a \$30.3 million operating budget for fiscal 2010.

The budget, which includes \$3.8 million in federal economic stimulus funding, calls for reducing bus service by 5 percent next year.

It also proposes reducing trips on popular OmniRide commuter routes like Dale City and Montclair, and postpones for at least two years the overhaul of 47 commuter buses.

PRTC's plan for lining area roads with more bus shelters will also be halted under the proposed budget, said PRTC spokeswoman Christine Rodrigo.

There will also be no new service for at least five years, except for a new bus to Tysons Corner that is designed to take more Virginia drivers off the Capital Beltway during the construction of High Occupancy Toll lanes from Springfield to McLean.

That new route will be funded by a grant from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, said Rodrigo.

And OmniRide's North Route 1 commuter bus service, which serves stops along Cardinal Drive and in Dale City, will end May 11.

That move is expected to save the agency \$750,000 in operating costs, said Alfred H. Harf, PRTC's executive director.

The silver lining in all of this: The transit agency said there are no plans to raise fares in 2010, as they did the past January.

PRTC also plans to purchase at least five buses for use on heavily travelled routes such as the Falls

Church Metro Direct bus. It also plans to complete parking lot improvements at the Woodbridge transit center, said Rodrigo.

And where having \$3.8 million in federal stimulus money is nice, PRTC officials said at least \$3 million of it will go directly to relieve their already stressed operating budget.

When it comes to local funding, the agency said it expects to get less money over the next five years from the municipalities that it serves.

Prince William County, the system's largest municipality, will reduce funding by 10 percent next year, according to figures from PRTC.

Manassas and Manassas Park are also expected to reduce their funding.

The reduction in money is blamed on lower gas prices, said Harf.

The funding comes from the region's 2 percent motor fuels tax.

When gas prices fell last fall, so did the revenue the tax generated.

In March 2008, it was projected that the commuter bus service would receive \$69.3 million in local funding over the next five years.

When transit officials took a second look at those figures in January, the projections dropped to \$48.5 million over the next five years, according to PRTC's released figures.

The agency will look for more opportunities to get federal money and hopes the state will do more to address the transportation problem in Northern Virginia, said Harf.

The public can comment on the proposed budget and on how the agency plans to use the money at a public hearing at 6 p.m. April 22, at the PRTC Transit Center, 14700 Potomac Mills Road in Woodbridge.

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