




14700 Potomac Mills Road
Woodbridge, VA 22192

Potomac and Rappahannock
Transportation Commission

May 6, 2010

TO: Chairman May and Commissioners

FROM: Alfred H. Harf 
Executive Director

RE: Information Item – Assessment of Bus Service Enhancements Between
Gainesville and Washington, D.C.

This item has been prepared to inform the Commission of a planning analysis management is undertaking of possible bus service enhancements between Gainesville and Washington D.C. The impetus for this analysis is the imminent completion of an extension of the I-66 HOV lanes west of the Prince William Parkway to Route 29, and the opportunity this presents for increased federal formula earnings as the informational memo details later.

Presently, PRTC's Gainesville-area bus service consists of four morning and four evening trips to/from the West Falls Church Metrorail station (the "Linton Hall" Metro-Direct route). While PRTC's adopted short and long range plans envision additional service from the Gainesville/Haymarket area directly into Washington, D.C., this additional service is one among many that is on hold owing to the recession and related budgetary constraints. While additional service of any sort that would require added local subsidy is out of the question for the foreseeable future for these same reasons, management is analyzing the possibility that a more modest service addition that would not require more local subsidy might be plausible because of the HOV lanes extension.

Once the 1.5 mile HOV extension opens, PRTC would earn additional federal formula funding if its OmniRide service traverses this stretch of the HOV lanes. A full-fledged estimate of this additional earning will be a byproduct of the analysis, but management knows even before the full-fledged analysis has been completed that it would amount to more than \$100,000 annually based on a partial calculation. Service traversing this stretch of the HOV lanes would also generate additional state operating assistance (referred to as "Fuel, Tires, and Maintenance" or "FTM" funding), though neither the additional federal formula funding nor the additional FTM funding would materialize until service is operated for two years. Since the additional federal and state funds alone are not enough to fully cover the added cost of service enhancements, the question that is at the heart of the analysis is "would the combination of cost savings from possible service restructuring and additional passenger revenue resulting from the service enhancements be sufficient to make the service enhancements possible without additional local subsidy?"

An important element of this analysis is a planned survey that will be conducted within the next month to gauge how customers' commuting patterns would change if direct service between Gainesville and Washington D.C. were introduced (currently riders west of Manassas must either drive to the Manassas to catch a bus serving Washington D.C. directly [aka "the Manassas OmniRide route"], or take the Linton Hall Metro Direct route to West Falls Church and transfer to Metrorail). Management knows from prior data collection efforts that a large portion of Manassas OmniRide route riders drive from points west to access this route and a sizable number of Linton Hall Metro Direct riders continue into DC via a Metrorail transfer. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that some existing Manassas OmniRide route riders would switch to the new Gainesville-DC route (allowing PRTC to reduce the number of scheduled trips on that route) and some current Linton Hall Metro Direct riders would change to the new Gainesville-DC route (increasing farebox revenue by \$2.60 per one-way trip).

The ongoing planning analysis is also examining how the prospective Gainesville route would be routed on the DC end, and more particularly the idea of routing this prospective route differently than the Manassas OmniRide route. The first stop on the Manassas OmniRide route is the Pentagon after which it serves downtown DC, while the routing of the prospective Gainesville route under consideration would have it travel through downtown then serve the Navy Yard. The presence of both routes with different termini and routing patterns is seen as another way of boosting ridership.

Other potential cost savings that will be quantified by the analysis include a reduction in the number of leased parking spaces at the Manassas K-mart and savings made possible by thinning the Manassas OmniRide bus route (currently there are 11 AM and 11 PM trips providing service about every 15 minutes). The analysis will naturally have to examine the fleet implications of this potential service enhancement, accounting for the fact that PRTC now has two retirement-age MCI buses that are not in the active fleet.

While it could be argued that a service enhancement of this sort should not be pursued so long as overcrowding is present elsewhere on PRTC's OmniRide services, the circumstances as described here are unique because, unlike service additions elsewhere, a service addition here has the real potential to be implemented without the need for any additional local subsidy. By completing the ongoing analysis, this potential can be conclusively determined.