

Response to Questions on the FY 2011 Budget

Request By: Supervisor Herrity

Question: Can funding which supports the mid-day shuttle operated by the Fairfax Connector system in Tysons be redirected to help pay for Fairfax Connector bus service proposed to be cut as a result of the loss of the Dulles Corridor bus service grant?

Response: The mid-day shuttle service in Tysons Corner (the "Tysons Connector") was identified, funded, and implemented as one of Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project's (DCMP's) Transportation Management Plan (TMP) congestion-mitigation strategies while the rail project is under construction. While the DCMP Steering Committee has partnered with Fairfax County to have the Fairfax Connector operate the Tysons mid-day shuttle, the service is fully funded out of the Metrorail project's TMP budget. County staff developed the Tysons Connector shuttle service plan from the concept outlined in the TMP along with guidance from the Transit/Transit Demand Management (TDM) Subcommittee and estimated the cost of the service to be approximately \$976,000 for FY 2010 and \$1,188,886 in FY 2011, which the DCMP agreed to pay out of the project's TMP budget.

The rail project's \$25 million TMP budget was funded in part by \$12.5 million in Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds allocated by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and \$12.5 million in non-federal funds from the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA). Fairfax County entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MWAA and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) on February 25, 2009, which states that the County will provide \$12.5 million for the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project's TMP. The MOU may only be altered, amended, or reworked by written approval of all parties.

While the Board could certainly request a redirection of funds for any of the projects within the TMP to another project or service, there is no obligation for the DCMP TMP Steering Committee to redirect the funds toward restoration of the service proposed to be cut as a result of the loss of the Dulles Corridor bus service grant. If the Tysons shuttle service were to be terminated at the direction of the DCMP TMP Steering Committee, funds allocated to the service would be returned to the TMP budget for use on other congestion-mitigation measures established by the DCMP TMP Steering Committee.

As the Board is aware, the Fairfax Connector system does not accept federal funding, such as Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) dollars, for its operations. Doing so would mean that the entire Fairfax Connector operation would have to fully comply with all federal transit operating requirements which would result in a significant increase in the cost of operating the service. Therefore, federal funds are not being used for the Tysons mid-day shuttle service or any other service operated by the Fairfax Connector.

The following attachment (previously provided to the Board of Supervisors on April 2, 2010) outlines further information on the Tysons Mid-Day Shuttle Operations.



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 2, 2010

TO: Members, Board of Supervisors

FROM: Katharine D. Ichter, P.E., Director
Department of Transportation 

SUBJECT: Tysons Mid-Day Shuttle Operation

REFERENCE: February 23, 2010, Board Matter

At the February 23, 2010, Board meeting, a number of questions were raised about the operation of the Tysons Mid-Day Shuttle Service (or Tysons Connector) which was recently implemented in the Tysons Corner area as part of the Dulles Corridor Rail Project's Transportation Management Program (TMP). Responses to those questions are provided below.

The Tysons Connector began operations on November 23, 2009. This weekday service is provided on two routes, operating on ten (10) minute headways, in the middle of the day from 10:00 AM through 2:30 PM. The routes operate with no fare to passengers and connect major employers and the Tysons Corner Center and Tysons Galleria. The service is operated using eight (8) buses from the West Ox facility.

Through February, a total of 4,414 passenger trips had been carried on the Tysons Connector. However, there were a number of mitigating circumstances that should be considered before making a final decision about the long-term viability and success of the service:

- ✓ First, the weather has not been conducive until just recently to successful implementation. Specifically, the service started during a cold winter and has operated – or not – during an historic blizzard that left a significant amount of snow on the ground throughout the County. (Through February, the service had only operated 57 days.)
- ✓ The service was announced in a “soft” marketing roll-out. A spring marketing and outreach campaign will increase the awareness of the service and its integration with the other elements of the Dulles Rail Project's TMP. This campaign will include extensive contact with major employers along the route to encourage use of the service and staff outreach to potential customers.
- ✓ The timing of construction in Tysons is also an issue. Congestion associated with the construction of the rail line extension and the Beltway High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes project is not anticipated to peak until later this year, which, as it worsens, should make the service a more attractive mid-day travel option.

Staff anticipates an increase in ridership on the service during the spring and summer of 2010 with the advent of warmer weather, an increase in congestion due to the intensification of construction activities and impacts in the Tysons area, the implementation of the marketing and outreach program for the TMP and associated bus service, and implementation of the full complement of Transit and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies described in more detail below.

For the first ten days in March, ridership on the Tysons Connector had increased to an average of 97 passenger trips per day, an increase of 27% over the average daily passenger trips through February. It is speculative, at best, to attempt to estimate possible ridership numbers on a limited service of this kind; however, staff does recommend that the service be allowed to mature before any action is taken to significantly adjust service.

A Steering Committee of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Partnership (DCMP) developed the rail project's Transportation Management Plan (TMP) to help alleviate traffic congestion during construction of the rail project. While the DCMP Steering Committee has partnered with Fairfax County to have the Fairfax Connector operate the Tysons mid-day shuttle, the service was implemented as one of several TMP congestion-mitigation strategies and is funded out of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project's TMP budget. The entire \$25 million TMP budget has been funded by \$12.5 million in Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds allocated by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and \$12.5 million from the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA). County staff developed the Connector shuttle service plan from the concept outlined in the TMP along with guidance from the Transit/TDM Subcommittee and estimated the cost of the service to be approximately \$976,000 for FY2010, which the DCMP agreed to pay.

Fairfax County entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MWAA and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) on February 25, 2009, which states that the County will provide \$12.5 million for the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project's TMP. The MOU may only be altered, amended or reworked by written approval of all parties. This MOU outlines that elements of the TMP budget are to be approved on an annual basis.

It is important to recognize that the purpose to the current limited-operation shuttle is different than the more extensive and comprehensive collector and feeder bus service network planned, pending the availability of funding, for implementation in Tysons with the commencement of rail operations to Tysons. The current shuttle, by design, is a limited, short-term transportation element of the broader effort to address congestion resulting from major projects such as the Dulles Corridor Metrorail and the Capital Beltway HOT lanes project simultaneously under construction in and around Tysons.

The rail project's TMP consists of four parts: (1) Local Network Operations, (2) Transit and TDM, (3) Communications, and (4) Incident Management/Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS). The four components of the TMP are comprised of numerous strategies which are designed to support and complement each other in order to reduce single-occupant vehicle (SOV) use in Tysons Corner and on I-495 and achieve maximum effectiveness in maintaining traffic flow during the construction project. The Tysons Connector is one of ten coordinated

strategies in the Transit and TDM component of the project's TMP. When implemented with the other TMP strategies, the Tysons Connector is intended to:

- ✓ Divert SOVs to ridesharing alternatives (carpool, vanpool, transit)
- ✓ Provide a convenient means of travel for targeted employees during the middle of the day, thereby reducing the number of employee vehicles on the streets
- ✓ Help establish a behavior pattern of using transit instead of driving
- ✓ Increase pedestrian activity, which is necessary for a thriving urban center

At the request of the Virginia MegaProjects, the Department of Transportation was requested to launch the Tysons Connector service in November 2009, 9 months earlier than originally planned. The request for earlier implementation was due to the advancement of Beltway HOT lane construction (without construction delays) and resulting increased traffic congestion in and near Tysons Corner, coupled with the approach of the end of year holiday season, which significantly delays traffic in central Tysons even without the on-going construction. As a result of this 9-month advancement in the start of Tysons Connector operations, the full complement of TMP strategies were not in place in November 2009 when the service began. Significant pieces of the Transit and TDM component – which were intended to draw riders to the bus service – were incomplete or not fully developed, vetted, and approved when the Tysons Connector service was implemented.

The buses were also supposed to be “wrapped” in a unique branded design intended to identify them as a FREE lunchtime shuttle alternative to driving. The bus wrap draws attention to the special service as the buses roll past major employers and malls, and distinguishes it from the other Fairfax Connector, Metrobus, and private shuttles common in Tysons. However the branding process - which was rushed through development and multi-jurisdictional approval, and which produced a name, logo, route map, and web site – could not produce the bus wrap design in time for the November launch. The bus wraps have now been designed, vetted, approved, printed, and installed on the Tysons Connector buses.

The Tysons Connector service was not intended to be a significant time-saver; rather, it was intended to be an alternative for employees who otherwise would have no choice but to use their cars to go to lunch or run errands. The mid-day shuttle travels the same busy streets that single-occupant vehicles travel, but the advantage of the shuttle is that employees and other visitors to Tysons can leave their cars parked at home or at Tysons sites, and take the bus or carpool, vanpool, bike or walk to work or other Tysons destinations, and still have a way to get around during the middle of the day. Other advantages include not having to give up your parking space in the office garage when you leave for lunch, not having to hunt for parking spaces when running mid-day errands, and not having to drive in Tysons traffic.

The population in Tysons during the hours that the shuttle operates (10 AM – 2:30 PM weekdays) is approximately 100,000 (mostly workforce); the population of residents, who are there mostly evenings and weekends, is 20,000. Most of the 100,000 people populating Tysons during the day drive cars and travel to Tysons from distances greater than 10 miles. These are exactly the people the TMP is targeting – drivers who are not fully informed about other options. The purpose of the TMP is to keep traffic flowing during construction, and the TMP's

Transit/TDM component specifically seeks to remove vehicles from clogged traffic by providing those drivers with alternatives and incentives.

The Tysons Connector is just one piece of the broad array of Transit and TDM options that are being provided by the TMP, and it is important to note that these options work best when provided all together. Singling out the Tysons circulator as a stand-alone service and judging its effectiveness outside the greater TMP is not a complete, comprehensive measure. The intention is to offer a variety of choices, options, and alternatives – not one single strategy – so commuters don't feel pressured to abandon their cars for a mode that doesn't suit them. The comprehensive program is intended to provide drivers with a sense of relief when they see how many choices they have regarding their commute:

- ✓ The TMP includes express buses from Prince William and Loudoun Counties (Loudoun has 180 people so far signed onto the Tysons Service).
- ✓ The alternatives promoted by the TMP include telework, flexible work schedules, carpooling, vanpooling, riding bus and rail, walking or biking, and other mobility methods that remove single-occupant vehicles from traffic.
- ✓ The incentives offered by the TMP include subsidies to help employers set up telework programs, assistance covering the cost of starting or saving a vanpool that is looking for passengers, funding to match an employer's contribution toward employee transit fares, and information on how to take advantage of commuter-related tax breaks.
- ✓ The TMP also provides staff to assist employers with developing a transportation benefit plan for employees. Recommendations include such things as employee transit subsidies, carpool and vanpool matching, telework programs, premium reserved parking spaces for carpools, showers/lockers for pedestrians and cyclists, a "Guaranteed Ride Home" program for car-less employees who have an emergency during the work day, setting up an information center where employees can get specifics about bus schedules, park-and-ride locations, and high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane hours, and other travel opportunities, and information sharing via web sites, listservs, etc.
- ✓ "Soft" incentives – the non-tangible perks that are a result of Transit and TDM strategies – are also promoted, and include things like being able to nap or read or surf the web on your way to work instead of driving in stressful traffic, saving money from reduced fuel and auto maintenance / repair costs, improving the environment by reducing air pollution and conserving energy, being able to work comfortably at home on telework days, and – in some cases – saving time by using HOV lanes and by-passing traffic back-ups.

In summary, staff does not believe that there has been a sufficient length of time or adequate marketing of the service and the other Transit and TDM strategies to determine whether the Tysons mid-day shuttle service is effective in addressing the purpose for which it was designed. Staff recommends that ridership on the service continue to be closely monitored throughout the spring and summer of 2010, including bi-monthly reports on ridership to the Board, followed by recommendations to the Board in fall 2010 on whether the service should be continued until rail service is in place in Tysons, as originally envisioned, or until construction-related congestion subsides in Tysons.

Members, Board of Supervisors

April 2, 2010

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cc: Anthony H. Griffin, County Executive
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