

**Email Record: Comments and suggestions for the RMPSS Task Force based on discussion at the April 13 meeting**

**From:** Joe Stowers

**Sent:** Monday, April 19, 2010 7:17 PM

**To:** Smith, Sandi M.; Merkel, Heidi T.; Nicoson, Patty

**Cc:** Carter, John; de la Fe, Frank; Thompson-Deahl, Claudia ; Simon, Bob; Harrison, Goldie; Goudie, Robert ; Looney, Mark; Keefe, Bill; Alcorn, Dan; Schlichting, John; Kennedy, Dick; Stevens, Richard F.

**Subject:** Comments and suggestions for the RMPSS Task Force based on discussion at the April 13 meeting

Heidi and Patty,

Please circulate the following to RMPSS Task Force members as a set of follow-up comments and suggestions related to the April 13 meeting:

**Task Force members,**

Please consider the following comments and suggestions as a follow-up to your April 13 meeting:

**Parking at Stations**

The concerns about the amount of parking planned for both the Herndon-Monroe and Wiehle Avenue stations are serious and should be addressed head-on by the Task Force. As starters, please note the following:

(1) A generation of regional and national policy has led to an unfortunate overemphasis on providing very heavy subsidies for parking at suburban Metro stations (see first attachment which is part of a paper I prepared for the Task Force a month ago).

(2) Rail system planning through the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process has resulted in formal commitments to provide about 2300 parking spaces at Wiehle and about 3500 at Herndon-Monroe. It would be extremely difficult, time-consuming, and costly to try to reduce these commitments. In the end such an effort would probably be unsuccessful. However, after the rail system is in full operation in 2016 or 2017, it makes sense for Reston to have its east and west stations transition from auto-oriented stations to transit-oriented stations as the market begins to make transit-oriented development (TOD) a reality.

(3) My second attachment, taken from material I submitted for the record for the March 25 Fairfax County Planning Commission hearing on the Comstock rezoning application for joint development at the Wiehle Avenue station,

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argues that the most effective way of achieving this transition is for Fairfax County to begin planning now for a gradual shift in station access by auto to station access by walking, bicycle, and bus by making regular annual increases in parking fees from about \$5 per day in 2013 to about \$10 per day. This would (a) reduce congestion, (b) increase revenue available for improving pedestrian-bicycle-bus access facilities, and (c) reduce substantially the number of parking spaces people would use for station access. These parking spaces could then be made available to support TOD.

(4) Obviously, if such a County policy can lead to making roughly 3000 parking spaces available to support TOD, it can much more easily attract new investment that would create continuing County revenues, while making it easy for the County to attract, or directly provide, a wide variety of affordable and workforce housing.

(5) The Dulles rail project should be requested to investigate how this transition can most easily be provided for in phases in the future by physically separating access to the rail commuter portion of the garage from the other parking that would support TOD. <!--[endif]-->

### **Future Joint Development at Herndon-Monroe**

Connecting the dots: Comments by 2 or 3 people at the last Task Force meeting regarding elements of an improved grid of streets are quite complementary with my April 2 email to the Task Force as a follow-up to our tour of the Sunrise Valley Wetlands. As Claudia Thompson-Deahl agreed in response to my question on our March 31 Sunrise Valley Wetlands tour, residential development surrounding the wetlands could be very complementary with Reston Association's environmental and related programs.

Such residential development surrounding the wetlands would be supported by (a) a new street from Monroe Street near the bridge over the Toll Road to the rail station, and (b) a new street from Sunrise Valley Drive north between the eastern edge of the Monroe Street portion of the Arboretum development and the wetlands. Additional access to this residential development might be provided from (c) an access easement off of Sunrise Valley Drive through the existing ASG Arboretum office development property (where we parked for the wetlands tour), and (d) access through the existing Herndon-Monroe park-and-ride facility.

Potentially this residential development around the wetlands might circle all or nearly all of it, depending on flood plain restrictions. However, the street access to these residential areas does not have to be continuous around the wetlands. Access to this new residential development might be provided by a

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series of cul de sacs that might be more in keeping with the wetlands and its related type of residential character, rather than by a ring road or partial ring road around the wetlands.

**Can a Community or Village Center Be Created at Herndon-Monroe?**

There are few places in the world, if any, where any sense of community has or can be created in, or close to, the center of 3500 parking spaces. It is far too late to repeat the several year long process of trying to achieve this at Wiehle Avenue, where all the highly subsidized parking spaces are going to be built below grade to provide space for TOD above grade. However, most or all of these spaces might be gradually converted to provide support for TOD.

The Task Force should recommend that most or all of these 3500 spaces be converted to support TOD in stages as market conditions provide by gradually increasing parking fees.

What can be done to provide TOD with a sense of place at Herndon-Monroe given the current status?

- (1) Future retail can be provided for at ground level or future above-ground level on the face of the parking structures by adjustments in parking structure design.
- (2) Parking structures can be built with structural strength to support several levels of development above the top level of parking.<!--[endif]-->
- (3) Parking structure additions to what currently exists can be re-positioned so as to provide space for a future plaza or other type of community space at ground level or one or more levels the above current ground level.
- (4) Station design might provide for a plaza level above ground level operation of bus bays, kiss-and-ride operations, and related spaces.
- (5) Space for a community or village center might be provided at the eastern edge of the residential development surrounding the wetlands described above.

The Task Force should request that Parsons Brinckerhoff, the contractor for the preliminary engineering for 2nd phase of Dulles rail, be asked to have its subsidiary, PB Placemaking, perform a conceptual engineering review of opportunities to create such a joint development project. PB Placemaking performed a somewhat similar effort for Lake Anne Village Center less than 2

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years ago, showing how an attractive revitalized center could be built over and around and within a new 4-story 1000 car parking garage (see the link to the Lake Anne Village Center Parking and Transportation Study Final Report [which is too big to attach to this email -- more than 12 megs] <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/projects/lakeanne.htm>).

**Air Rights and Connections to Herndon**

It may already be getting too late to provide for air rights development over the stations and Toll Road at Town Center and Herndon-Monroe because the achievement of this is very complicated. The Task Force should immediately ask our Supervisor and others on the County Board of Supervisors to take action to facilitate the possibility of such air rights development in the future.

From a standpoint of timing, the following may be the most important things to accomplish in the next few weeks and months:

- (1) Request that the Dulles rail project immediately identify what changes in preliminary engineering design need to be made to provide space for, and design for, foundations for possible future air rights development over the station platform and the Dulles Toll Road at both Town Center and Herndon-Monroe.
- (2) Request that the Airports Authority immediately develop and adopt a policy and set of procedures for Fairfax County to apply for and be granted permission to build and operate development on air rights.
- (3) Such policy and procedures should address all concerned legal issues, terms of air rights leases, and responsibilities for provision of utilities and emergency services for air rights development.

In addition to air rights development, the Task Force should consider the possibility of creating a two-way vehicle crossing of the Toll Road at the station. It may be possible to achieve this by converting the existing one-way bus-only ramp into a two-way auto and bus bridge. Its width appears to be adequate for this and the volume of bus traffic should be substantially reduced when rail operations into western Fairfax County and Loudoun County begin.

This bridge could be fairly easily extended to link with Herndon Parkway by adding a 2-way auto and bus ramp about 200 feet west of the existing bus-only bridge connecting with it at a new elevated signalized "T" intersection. This new ramp could be built with relatively little disruption by locating it between

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the two existing parking lots off of Herndon Parkway serving adjoining buildings just west of where the existing bus-only ramp curves to the west to merge with traffic on the Dulles Toll Road.

The Task Force should ask Fairfax County to discuss this possible new all-purpose vehicle crossing of the Toll Road soon with Herndon officials. The required new construction and reconstruction of the existing bus-only bridge and ramp need not be completed as immediately as the other construction work required for building the rail station, but should be provided for in the final design if a decision is made to do so as soon as feasible.

**Two final suggestions** regarding the Task Force discussions at the April 13 meeting:

(1) A new grade-separated motor vehicle crossing of Monroe Street just south of the Toll Road should be considered and evaluated as a means for connecting Woodland Park development with the Herndon-Monroe rail station. This should be located so that it can conveniently connect with the existing street into the northeastern part of Woodland Park and with a new street connecting Monroe Street near the bridge over the Toll Road with the Herndon-Monroe rail station.

(2) A refinement should be made to John Carter's suggestion that transit oriented development in the Herndon-Monroe station area ought to be of lower density than the other two Reston stations. I suggest that, after considering all of the above suggestions, this recommendation be modified to say that the total amount of new TOD might be substantially less for the Herndon-Monroe station area than that of the other 2 station areas even though the overall average density of the new development might be comparable with the TOD at the other two Reston stations.

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# Parking Decision-Making History

**(Part of what was prepared for the RMPSS Task Force on March 15 by Joe Stowers)**

Reston has benefited significantly from Dulles corridor transit planning in the late 1980s and 1990s with regard to parking policies and investment, but over the last decade Reston has probably been negatively impacted by recent rail-related planning decisions, and has begun to realize it may be substantially negatively impacted as these decisions are implemented.

A big part of these threats is a direct result of the fact that the two existing park and ride facilities were planned as end-of-the-line stations: (1) Herndon-Monroe as the western-most, bus-oriented park and ride in the late 1980s-early 1990s, and (2) Wiehle Avenue as the end-of-the-line rail station for the First Phase of Dulles rail in the mid 2000s.

Metro's policy of over-investment in parking can be traced to (a) the fact that the original 103-mile system was constructed with a huge incentive to do so because almost 80% of the construction cost came from federal funding (more than \$10 billion in current dollars and probably more than double that in 2010 dollars, all of which came from special legislation which exempted it from Urban Mass Transit Administration's (now FTA's) cost effectiveness criteria, rather than being subject to the ordinary competitive pressures created within the regular federal New Starts program), and (b) the geography of the 103-mile system, which included very long suburban arms extending questionably far into low density, auto-oriented areas (contrasted with the higher density Tysons-Reston corridor). This second factor was compounded by suburban domination of the Metro Board which supported uniformly low parking prices heavily subsidizing auto park and ride commuting.

The nearly continuous recent process of Dulles transit development started in 1983 when Congressman Frank Wolf held a major public meeting on Dulles transit development. This occurred when Jack Herrity was running for re-election for Fairfax County Chairman, near the end of a series of ill-fated private initiatives to organize public-private transit development projects in the corridor.

Near the end of that meeting I called attention to the formal federal transit planning and development process and recommended that the most promising approach would be for Fairfax County or some other appropriate agency to apply to the UMTA/FTA for a grant to perform an "Alternatives Analysis," the appropriate step in the federal process at that time.

Congressman Wolf called me the next morning to discuss this, and this led fairly quickly to the start of Fairfax County's "Dulles International Airport Access Highway Corridor Transit Alternatives Study."

That study was finally completed in 1990 and, with a big push from the Reston community, led to the rapid development of the corridor's highly successful current commuter bus rapid transit system supported by the newly built park-and-ride facilities at Wiehle Avenue and Herndon-Monroe (and supported for several years by surplus toll revenues, thanks to

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During that process Reston played a leading role in shaping the plan that would serve Reston best, looking forward to phasing that system toward the development of rail in the future and to facilitating development of urban rail stations at Wiehle and Town Center. We were successful in that effort in (a) moving an old (going nowhere) County proposal to build a park-and-ride lot at the Hunter Mill Road interchange to Wiehle Avenue (a far more logical rail station location), (b) putting an end to ill-advised consideration of any park-and-ride at Town Center in order to facilitate its continuing development as an urban town center, (c) building a major park-and-ride on the western side of Reston to serve Herndon and Loudoun County and keep western auto commuter traffic out of Reston, and to the extent possible out of Herndon.

What we unfortunately did not foresee in the late 1980s is what Arlington County has learned and wisely avoided – translating Arlington's lesson into ours: "if you plan to have lots of cars you will be successful in getting far more cars than you planned for"!

During the early development of Dulles rail we were successful in limiting the amount of parking at Wiehle to just what would serve Reston and its northern and southern periphery. Now, despite some efforts of our County Board, we are stuck with the congestion threat of 2300 parking spaces to serve Wiehle station – a number that is apparently the result of (a) that's about how many spaces can be squeezed in there, and (b) the fact that Wiehle was unfortunately located as far west as money could go with available federal funding for the First Phase, matched by available state and local funding. We worried that Wiehle was going to be the end-of-the-line station for an indefinitely long period, but thanks to the leadership of the Airports Authority, it is fairly certain now that Wiehle will be an end-of-the-line station for only about three years.

Our planning challenge at Wiehle is to control the damage done to our community during that three-year period and plan now for its subsequent transition to a more urban station after 2016.

If the Dulles rail project could add about 1500 more spaces at Wiehle it was much easier to add about 1700 more spaces at Herndon-Monroe because there is an existing parking structure designed to permit expansion, and there is more acreage there. This is happening despite questionable demand for that much parking, as John Carter and others noted at the March 9 Task Force meeting. Because those numbers of parking spaces are embedded in the formal FTA "Record of Decision," it is likely to very difficult, costly, and time consuming to reduce those numbers at this time.

Fortunately, we have a potential solution as a result of finally understanding the threat of what has been imposed on Reston in the last few years. We have been successful, after years of effort, in convincing Fairfax County to retain ownership of those two park and ride facilities. Hopefully, we can also be successful soon in convincing Fairfax County to price the parking spaces high enough at both stations to substantially limit parking demand, while raising much needed revenue, most or all of which hopefully can be put to use implementing recommendations of RMAG (and this TF?). Ideally, over a several year period, parking prices can be increased to levels that would limit rail-oriented parking demand to about half those

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## Appendix B

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# Transition of Parking Spaces from Rail Access to Other Uses

**(Part of Joe Stowers' supplementary testimony prepared on March 30 for the Public Hearing on the Rezoning Application for the Wiehle Avenue Joint Development by Comstock)**

I'm glad you asked Rick Stevens about where the 2,300 parking spaces came from. My recollection of his response is consistent with my recollection of the history of the traffic forecasting and EIS process. However, he left out what is probably the most important aspect of that forecasting process – i.e., a critically important implicit assumption was that most of the cost of providing parking spaces of that magnitude would be subsidized by setting parking prices at a very low level. As this Wiehle Avenue station plan has evolved that assumption translates into a subsidy of roughly 70 to 80% of the cost, or about \$8 to \$10 per day per vehicle per day.

Why should the subsidy for parking by auto users be many times higher than the subsidy for pedestrian, bicyclists, and bus users? Part of the answer to this is contained in my understanding of the history of Metro's parking policies, as described in my March 9 email to the RMPSS Task Force (copy attached).

I recommend that Fairfax County reduce this subsidy by a small amount initially (charging about \$5 per day), and then gradually reduce that subsidy annually to perhaps about 50% (roughly \$7 or \$8) by 2016 when Wiehle Avenue will no longer be the end-of-the-line station.

After that, an attractive policy for Fairfax County and the community would be to adopt a policy of monopolistic pricing – i.e., setting the price of parking to maximize net revenue. That price could be fairly accurately estimated by monitoring the effect of raising parking charges as they are increased between 2013 and 2016. My guess, based on experience in other areas, is that this would result in a parking price of somewhere around \$10 per day, increasing the annual County revenue from roughly \$2.5 to close to \$3 million (\*).

If this policy is pursued it would not only maximize the revenue that might be used for amenities such as access improvements for all modes of transportation, but would also greatly decrease congestion and free up parking spaces to be used to support other joint development uses, especially affordable housing.

I would guess, based on experience elsewhere, that perhaps 1,000 of the 2300 parking spaces might be made available for other uses, the cost of which might otherwise be about \$40 to \$50 million. Using just a fraction of that savings in spaces to greatly reduce the cost of affordable housing would be very helpful!

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\* Todd Litman, introduced the section on "Parking Price" in his excellent 2009 research report on "Transportation Elasticities" says "Motorists tend to be particularly sensitive to parking price because it is such a direct charge... Compared with other out-of-pocket expenses, parking fees are found to have a greater effect on vehicle trips, typically by a factor of 1.5 to 2.0... For

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example, a \$1.00 per trip parking charge is likely to cause the same reduction in vehicle travel as a fuel price increase averaging \$1.50 to \$2.00 per trip."

I advocate that similar policies be implemented for the Herndon-Monroe station parking, but would recommend delaying the staging of the price increases for about 3 years in order to achieve the objectives described above first at Wiehle station ("Reston station" [?]) as Comstock's planners would like to name it, before the start of 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase operations.

One final item -- an old very-well done piece of research I've lost track of showed pretty conclusively that it is counter-productive to build lots of rail access parking close to stations, compared to the alternative of using that same amount of space for transit-oriented development. The research showed that the well-planned T.O.D. resulted in far more rail trips compared with the auto-oriented stations, without causing most of the negative impacts resulting from building and using large rail access parking facilities. I don't remember whether that research evaluated a mixed semi auto-oriented plus T.O.D. like what I'm advocating, and I'm not aware of any good assessments ever having been made for comparable stations elsewhere.