

Response to Questions on the FY 2006 Advertised Budget Plan

Request By: Supervisors McConnell, Frey and Hudgins

Question: What is the potential expansion of the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR bus service throughout the County? What is expansion contingent upon?

Response: In looking at expansion opportunities, the Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) has divided the review in two categories:

- Short-term expansions to be implemented in the next three to five years; and
- Long-term Transit Planning, to be implemented six or more years from now.

One of the main drivers of expansion is the construction of the West Ox Bus Operating Facility, currently under design and scheduled to open in late calendar year 2007. As the Board is aware, funding is available in Fund 311, County Bond Construction, to construct the first phase of this 300-bus facility which will be jointly used by Fairfax County and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). The first phase will provide for the servicing of approximately 150 buses (75 FAIRFAX CONNECTOR and 75 WMATA). All short-term scenarios discussed below assume that the West Ox Bus Facility will open as scheduled; however it should be noted that the Camp 30 land acquisition issue will impact the construction timeframe of this garage and the County and WMATA will need to negotiate a joint use agreement for the operation of the facility prior to the opening date.

An issue of concern to the Department that should be addressed prior to expanding the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR bus system is the need to stabilize the existing fleet and service by returning the spare ratio to 20 percent. In FY 2005, the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR expanded service in the Huntington Division. This expansion required a reallocation of the existing fleet. Due to unanticipated service adjustments after implementation, the fleet spare ratio was reduced to 16 percent. The FAIRFAX CONNECTOR requires six additional buses to return to a transit industry standard for spare ratios of 20 percent. FCDOT staff is developing options to acquire these additional buses and will return to the Board with a proposal in the near future.

Potential Short-term (3 to 5 years) Expansion Scenarios

In order to implement any expansion of CONNECTOR service, the following factors must be considered:

- Adequate operating facilities with sufficient space must be available;
- A sufficient number of buses to provide the service and maintain a minimum spare ratio;
- Adequate funds must be available to provide the actual bus service at a level consistent with other CONNECTOR service being provided; and
- Adequate staffing to manage additional service.

The following three options are available for expansion consideration in the short term:

Option 1 – Conversion of Metrobus local service to CONNECTOR service in Central/Western County:

As the Board is aware, WMATA currently operates local Metrobus service in the middle portion of the County primarily in the Braddock, Lee, Providence, Springfield and Sully Magisterial Districts. This local Metrobus service is oriented to provide rush hour service to Metrorail stations. The following table (A) identifies existing local Metrobus service in the I-66 Corridor which could be converted to FAIRFAX CONNECTOR in the short-term. Other conversions of Metrobus local service would be dependent on securing adequate funding for a second phase of the West Ox Bus Operating Facility.

Table A

Metrobus Route Number/Service Destination	Earliest Possible Implementation Timeframe (FY)	Buses Required	Primary Magisterial District Served	Annual Revenue Hours
2W/Vienna Metro, Oakton Shuttle	2008	1*	Providence/ Hunter Mill	1,677*
12 series/Centreville, Vienna Metro	2008	15*	Sully	17,106*
20 series/Chantilly, Vienna Metro	2008	5*	Sully	4,578*
Spare Ratio		5		
Totals		26		23,361

* Data verification required, request made to WMATA

Converting this service and/or portions thereof to the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR bus system is projected to provide the County with reduced operational costs for the same levels of service. While an exact savings is difficult to compute, an FY 2002 cost comparison between Metrobus and CONNECTOR included in the July 7, 2003 Board package showed a difference of nearly 18.1 percent in cost per platform hour. This is not meant to imply that the County could achieve this level of savings by taking over the routes noted above as there would be a substantial initial cost requirement to purchase buses for this service, there would need to be consideration of annual bus replacement costs, and there would be a reduced level of NVTC aid to the County that all need to be considered as part of the overall cost analysis of this option. FCDOT staff is in the process of developing this cost analysis and will share it with the Board once it is completed.

Option 2 – Potential Additional Service Expansions in South County

In the table below (B), FCDOT has identified, based on the internal application of draft service standards, maintenance of comparable/complimentary service levels, and issues that have remained from the implementation of the South County Bus Plan, the following expansion options to existing FAIRFAX CONNECTOR bus service levels in South County:

Table B

CONNECTOR Bus Route Number/Service Destination	Earliest Possible Implementation Timeframe (FY)	Buses Required	Primary Magisterial District Served	Annual Revenue Hours
171/Richmond Hwy, Lorton	2007	None	Lee/Mt. Vernon	12,000
171/Richmond Hwy, Lorton	2008	6	Lee/Mt. Vernon	15,000
401/Cross County, Franconia/ Springfield Metro, Tysons Corner	2009	5	Lee/Mason/ Providence	25,000
621/622/623 Vienna Metro, Government Center	2009	4	Providence/ Springfield	12,000
383/385/Lorton, Gambрил/ Sydenstricker, Pentagon	2010	7	Mt. Vernon	15,000
Spare Ratio		5		
Totals		27		79,000

Unlike Option 1 above, there are no operational savings associated with the proposed service enhancements in Table B. Similar to Option 1 above, there would be a substantial initial cost requirement to purchase buses for these service enhancements and then there would need to be consideration of annual bus replacement costs as well. FCDOT staff is developing a cost analysis to determine the fiscal impact of this option.

Option 3 – Other Expansion Options/Issues to Address:

FCDOT has identified additional opportunities for expansion of FAIRFAX CONNECTOR service, which could be implemented in the short-term. These service expansions and bus fleet modifications are listed below in Table C:

Table C

Metrobus and/or CONNECTOR Route Number/Service Destination	Earliest Possible Implementation Timeframe (FY)	Buses Required	Primary Magisterial District Served	Annual Revenue Hours
VRE EZ Burke Centre Parking Garage Shuttle during construction *	2006	2	Braddock	6,000
585/Reston South, West Falls Church Metro	2006	1	Hunter Mill	1,000
980/Herndon-Monroe, West Falls Church Metro	2006	4	Hunter Mill	2,783
RIBS 2/South Reston, Hunters Woods, Reston Town Center	2007	2	Hunter Mill District	10,638
Enhanced service on Metrobus Routes 12/20/Centreville, Chantilly	2008	2	Sully	5,500
Fairfax County Pkwy Cross County/Franconia/Springfield Metro, Reston Town Center	2009	5	Lee/Springfield District	27,400
303/Mount Air, Island Creek, Franconia/Springfield Metro	2010	None	Lee/Mt. Vernon	1,000
108 (Deferred)/South County Bus Plan, Richmond Highway, Kingstowne	2010	4	Lee/Mt. Vernon	20,400
Spare Ratio		5		
Totals		25		74,721

* FCDOT is exploring options to provide this service without requiring additional buses; including Fastran and other options.

Again, unlike Option 1 above, there are no operational savings associated with the proposed service enhancements in Table C. Similar to Option 1, there would be a substantial initial cost requirement to purchase buses for these service enhancements and then there would need to be consideration of annual bus replacement costs as well. FCDOT staff is developing a cost analysis to determine the fiscal impact of this option.

Taken as a whole, implementing these three short-term options would require a projected fleet addition of 80 buses including spares (the three tables total 78 buses, which along with the initial 6 buses needed for spare ratio would equal 84 total buses, some fleet economies would be realized through consolidation in spare ratio computations). With the exception of the Burke VRE shuttle in Table C, there is currently no funding included in the FY 2006 Advertised Budget Plan to implement any of these options.

Potential Long-Term (6 or more years) Expansion Opportunities

FCDOT has identified areas of potential service expansion for the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR in the long-term (Table D). In identifying service areas for expansion, FCDOT has utilized the following reports - FEIS Operations and Maintenance Report dated December 2004, and the WMATA Regional Bus Study completed in September 2003. *It should be noted that expansion beyond the three Short-Term Options noted above (Dulles Rail excepted) would require completion of the second phase of the West Ox Bus Operating Facility with full build out to 300 buses.* However, funding is only currently available for Phase I for 150 buses of which WMATA would operate 75 units.

Table D

Project	Service Area
Dulles Rail	North/Western Fairfax County
Remaining existing local Metrobus Service	Southern Fairfax County
West Ox Bus Operating Facility Phase II	Central/Northern Fairfax County

The above service expansions of FAIRFAX CONNECTOR would provide Fairfax County with a viable bus service to provide transportation alternatives and options to the single occupant vehicle. Table D above would require an implementation period extending over several years and will be influenced by a number of factors.

FCDOT is in the process of initiating a Transit Plan to identify the long-term transit needs for the next 20 years in Fairfax County. Once complete, this plan will be used as a guide to establish the long-term direction for the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR, and will show areas of opportunity to meet the changing traffic patterns and demands in Fairfax County.