

Transportation

LOB #384:

TRANSIT SERVICES

Purpose

The primary purpose of this LOB is to provide management, oversight and coordination of the activities of the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR Bus System, which operates 84 routes providing primarily intra-county service and connections to Metrorail and Virginia Railway Express. The system includes an authorized fleet of 295 buses, with an approximate annual ridership of 10 million. A principal goal of the Connector is to reduce congestion by providing alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle.

This LOB also includes the promotion of telecommuting and encouraging the use of ridesharing. The County's Employer Services Program works with private companies and public agencies to implement various Travel Demand Management techniques that encourage employees to use carpooling, vanpooling, teleworking, and public transportation. These programs also seek to reduce congestion by providing alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle. This LOB also provides support to the County's contribution to the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) Commuter rail service.

Description

The FAIRFAX CONNECTOR is responding to the diverse transportation needs of the County. The CONNECTOR provides mobility. It began as a less expensive alternative to Metrobus services, but has expanded to meet the ever changing transportation needs of the community. By carrying more than 10 million passengers per year, the CONNECTOR contributes to the County's economic success by helping to reduce congestion and air pollution, increasing mobility, and supporting the County's Activity Centers. It continues to work internally, with the public, and other stakeholders to refine service in a cost effective manner to meet the goal of providing safe, reliable, customer-focused service. All FAIRFAX CONNECTOR buses are equipped with bike racks to accommodate bicyclists, meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements which promote riders with varying levels of mobility to travel and connect within the community.

Most recently, the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR expanded service in conjunction with the opening of the first phase of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project, or Silver Line, in July 2014. The majority of new FAIRFAX CONNECTOR bus service in support of the Silver Line involved restructured and new service in the Herndon, McLean, Reston, Springfield, and Tysons areas. The start of Silver Line changed more than 40 percent of the County's bus service which included the start of 16 new routes, 28 restructured routes, and the elimination of five routes. Subsequent changes to the Silver Line bus service were implemented in January and May 2015 in response to ridership and travel pattern changes, public feedback, and to reduce traffic congestion and improve connections in the Dulles Corridor.

In FY 2016, targeted service expansions and realignments were programmed in response to public feedback to reduce passenger crowding, improve frequency, and changing ridership patterns. Highlights include reducing the time between buses to the expanded Stringfellow Road Park-and-Ride in the I-66 Corridor, beginning modest weekend service in the Centreville and Chantilly areas, and improving on-time performance in response to traffic and ridership pattern changes in the Richmond Highway Corridor.

The FAIRFAX CONNECTOR, in partnership with the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), initiated the new Student Free Fare Pilot Program (SFFPP) with the start of the 2015-2016 school year. The program, which provides free rides on the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR to County middle school and high school students, is anticipated to be used by approximately eight percent of eligible students during the first year, and provides additional transportation options for students, parents, and guardians, such as for after-school activities, jobs, and other programs.

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FAIRFAX CONNECTOR and FCDOT initiated an update to the County's 2009 10-year Transit Development Plan. This new 10-year document, the 2015 Comprehensive Transit Plan (CTP), was developed with substantial public input and analysis of travel patterns, ridership, and population and job density. The 2015 CTP will guide future investments in, and changes to, FAIRFAX CONNECTOR service, and fulfill a requirement by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (VDRPT).

FAIRFAX CONNECTOR continues to invest in capital infrastructure and has major projects planned for all three operating facilities. The projects are designed to improve operating efficiencies and to increase capacity to accommodate future growth plans. Other passenger facilities programs include bus stop improvements and transit center expansion projects in key corridors.

The FAIRFAX CONNECTOR also oversees contracted service that provides a Telephone Information Center (TIC) and five "Connector Stores". The TIC and Connector Stores provide the public with trip planning assistance, regional travel information, route maps and schedules, lost and found support, and record comments, commendations, and complaints. Connector Store locations also offer on-site SmarTrip account assistance, and fare, pass and EZ-Pass sales.

This LOB also includes the County's RideSources and the Employer Services Program. The RideSources program encompasses the County's effort to encourage commuters to use carpools, vanpools, and public transit. This includes providing free ride matching services to interested commuters, as well as promoting carpooling, vanpooling, and public transit usage. This activity has been primarily funded by state grants.

The Employer Services Program works with individual employers throughout the county to implement employee commuter services, such as transit benefits, reserved parking for carpools, telework and other programs that reduce single-occupant vehicle traffic. Employers who offer a high level of commuter benefits can qualify for the Employer Services program's "Best Workplaces for Commuters" designation, which distinguishes the employer as a leader in providing commuter-friendly workplaces.

Benefits

FAIRFAX CONNECTOR helps reduce congestion and maximize travel opportunities on the County's transportation network. County residents, commuters, and visitors are using FAIRFAX CONNECTOR as part of their daily lives. It also supports economic development efforts in the County's activity centers, and provides mobility to citizens who do not own a car or have a car available for their trip.

FAIRFAX CONNECTOR Reduces Congestion.

- Use of bus service removes personal vehicles from the road network
- Provides connections for commuters who would otherwise encounter park-and-ride lots and Metro station parking garages filled to capacity, such as at the Wiehle-Reston East Metrorail station in Reston or the Gambrill Road Park-and-Ride in Springfield

FAIRFAX CONNECTOR Enhances Opportunities and Improves the Quality of Life

- Provides personal mobility and freedom for people from all demographics and abilities
- Connects people with their job, school, family, friends, medical appointments, shopping, and other destinations
- Provides an affordable, and for many, necessary, alternative to driving
- Offers a new transportation option for County middle school and high school students through the Student Free Fare Pilot Program
- According to the American Public Transportation Association, a two-person household can save, on average, more than \$10,000 a year by downsizing to one vehicle and riding FAIRFAX CONNECTOR and other transit, such as Metro and Virginia Railway Express

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FAIRFAX CONNECTOR Reduces Carbon Footprint

- Reduces overall fuel consumption by reducing single occupancy vehicles
- Supports the County's commitment to the Emission Reduction Program
- All FAIRFAX CONNECTOR buses use Ultra Low Sulfur Diesel and are equipped with the latest emissions control technologies
- One person with a 20-mile round-trip commute who switches from driving to FAIRFAX CONNECTOR can reduce his or her daily carbon emissions by 20 pounds or more than 4,800 pounds in a year

FAIRFAX CONNECTOR Supports Economic Success and Supports Community Health

- Is a key element in providing mobility and supporting the County's activity centers
- Providing mobility makes FAIRFAX CONNECTOR more attractive to businesses
- FAIRFAX CONNECTOR has bike racks on all buses. The Connector allows individuals who would rather walk or bike the opportunity to do so.

Mandates

Neither federal nor state law requires the county to operate a bus service. However, if a bus service is provided, then it must comply with the federal or state regulations listed below:

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 states that "No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." Fairfax County, as a recipient of Federal financial assistance from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), developed a Title VI compliance program as described in FTA Circular C 4702.1B. Under Title VI, any person who believes she or he has been aggrieved by any unlawful discriminatory practice may file a Title VI complaint with the Fairfax County Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs or directly with Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Title VI ensures that public services, including transit, are provided in a non-discriminatory manner and requires transit agencies to ensure meaningful access to transit-related programs by persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and low income populations.
- In compliance with Circular C 4702.1B, Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) is required to assess whether a disparate impact exists or a disproportionate burden will occur as a result of its policies, practices and service changes. Disparate impact refers to a facially neutral policy or practice that disproportionately affects members of a group identified by race, color, or national origin, where the recipient's policy or practice lacks a substantial legitimate justification and where there exists one or more alternatives that would serve the same legitimate objectives but with less disproportionate effect on the basis of race, color, or national origin. A disproportionate burden refers to a neutral policy or practice that disproportionately affects a low-income population more than non-low-income populations. A finding of disproportionate burden would require FCDOT to evaluate alternatives and mitigate burdens where practicable.
- Other mandates include those required under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) such as providing vehicles that are accessible and system information in accessible formats, and Environmental Protection Agency mandates (updated in 2007 and 2010) which require vehicles to meet high quality emission standards.

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Trends and Challenges

One of the major challenges in the provision of transportation services is competing with the automobile as a mode of choice. Many transit users today desire convenient, customer friendly services that provide more direct interaction with the transportation provider using technologies such as social media, real time information, and regular subscription updates and transit scheduling and mapping options. To meet these demands, FAIRFAX CONNECTOR is investing millions of dollars in advanced public transportation system technology. It is anticipated that the system will reach full implementation in the summer of 2016. Making this improvement will allow riders to know when a bus will arrive. Having this information makes transit more attractive to riders, especially younger riders. It also helps to improve the efficiency of bus operations and reduces costs.

To adapt to changes in ridership patterns and offer convenience that competes with the single occupant vehicle; FAIRFAX CONNECTOR is updating the Comprehensive Transit Plan (CTP). The CTP will strategically guide service types and design to ensure bus services are aligned with travel patterns, address new market opportunities, and adapt to changing demographics and urbanization efforts within the County.

Population and Development/Redevelopment

The population of Fairfax County more than doubled between 1970 and 2000. While the growth rate has since slowed, continued population increases will present new challenges as the county grows in a denser, urban fashion. Higher density is concentrated in parts of the County inside the Capital Beltway, Annandale and Falls Church; south of the Beltway and I-95, Franconia and Richmond Highway; west of the Beltway in the Fairfax, Merrifield, and Vienna areas; and in Herndon and Reston in the Dulles Corridor. These are areas where the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR service will continue to focus investments to better connect people and places. This is key to better manage congestion on the existing and future transportation network, as uncontrolled growth in single-occupancy vehicle traffic is unsustainable, impractical, and a risk to future development and investments in the County.

Over half of the County's future growth is anticipated to occur in the regional activity clusters such as Bailey's Crossroads, the Dulles Corridor, Tysons, Springfield, Fairfax, Richmond Highway Corridor, and Merrifield. Residents surveyed as part of the CTP development show over half of all travel between work and home occurs within Fairfax County, with strong patterns to Arlington County, Alexandria, and the District of Columbia. Strengthening existing bus connections between and within the County's activity centers will allow growth to better occur on the existing transportation network, offering travel choices that include other non-motorized options, such as improved bike facilities. Specifically in the Tysons area, changes are occurring at a relatively fast pace since the completion of Silver Line Phase 1, with new transit oriented development and redevelopment ongoing, requiring a continued focus on bus services offered to respond to changes in population, travel patterns, and the road network.

All non-stop FAIRFAX CONNECTOR service between Reston, Herndon, and the West Falls Church Metrorail station via the Dulles Toll Road and Dulles Airport Access Road was eliminated with the start of the Silver Line Phase 1. A significant portion of the bus ridership decline that the Connector recently experienced is attributed to a mode shift from bus to rail, including an initial decrease in ridership to and from the Herndon-Monroe Park-and-Ride. Since the initial drop in utilization, ridership between the Herndon-Monroe Park-and-Ride and the Wiehle-Reston East Metrorail Station is growing when compared with winter 2014-2015. This may be attributed to the Wiehle-Reston East Park-and-Ride filling to capacity more frequently.

Studies show Millennials and students are favorable toward transit use and by developing early transit behaviors, riders have a propensity to continue transit usage. FAIRFAX CONNECTOR and Fairfax County Public Schools are partnering together on a pilot program for high school and middle school students who can ride the Connector for free. The program has been well received, and student ridership has been increasing.

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While increased ridership is a short-term benefit of the program, there are broad and long-term benefits. As the County continues to grow into a more urbanized and densely populated locality, ridership by young adults better positions the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR to be a vital and sustainable transportation option and ultimately helping to reduce congestion on the existing and future transportation network.

The number of ridesharing applicants is trending downward, due to changes in the broader transportation landscape. New transportation services such as Uber and Lyft are becoming an alternative to traditional carpools, and the ridesharing service NuRide continues to draw customers from our target audience with its rewards program (restaurant coupons, airline discounts, etc.). A unique benefit of the ride sharing program, however is the free regional Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) program, which may help retain or increase riders with additional marketing. The GRH program offers a free taxi or transit ride home up to four times per year for employees who carpool, vanpool, take transit, bike or walk to work at least two days per week. The GRH program is an incentive to those commuters who are afraid to leave their cars at home in case an emergency arises and they need to leave work early, or stay late.

Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #384: Transit Services			
FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Compensation	\$1,556,884	\$1,627,839	\$3,207,141
Benefits	75,470	124,418	321,233
Operating Expenses	79,721,375	85,257,680	97,238,284
Work Performed for Others	11,867	13,287	(209,164)
Capital Equipment	8,899,963	8,821,778	11,525,000
Capital Projects	3,407,646	2,726,836	0
Total Expenditures	\$93,673,205	\$98,571,838	\$112,082,494
General Fund Expenditures	\$1,685,955	\$1,656,550	\$2,060,929
Total Revenue	\$73,148,080	\$82,898,201	\$53,237,046
General Fund Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0
<u>Transfers In:</u>			
Transfer In from General Fund	\$34,547,739	\$34,547,739	\$34,547,739
Transfers In from Other Funds	13,838,787	26,570,947	31,046,284
Total Transfers In	\$48,386,526	\$61,118,686	\$65,594,023
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	24 / 24	26 / 26	26 / 26
Total Positions	24 / 24	26 / 26	26 / 26

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Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Total Passengers Transported	10,650,401	10,655,021	9,764,166	9,917,787	10,016,965
Percent Change in Connector Passengers	2.25%	0.04%	-8.36%	1.57%	1.00%
Ridesharing applicants assisted by Ridesources	5194	4,197	3,797	3,873	3,950
Companies with new TDM programs	74	103	107	112	118
Increase in platform Miles/Gallon	4.2	4.1	4.3	4.6	4.6
# of Senior and Disabled Riders	570,055	648,347	652,988	662,783	669,411
Decrease in preventable accidents/100,000 miles	1.24	1.03	0.99	0.90	0.85
Decrease in Unsafe Driving Complaints	17.8%	17.7%	13.9%	10.0%	9.0%

Ridership

FAIRFAX CONNECTOR ridership has shown positive trends with increases in recent years. The ridership decrease in FY 2015 is comparable to regional peers and is attributable to several factors including:

- Reduction in federal transit subsidy
- Low average fuel prices that encourage automobile use
- A mode shift from bus to rail in response to completion of the Silver Line Phase 1
- Possible effects of employment shifts due to sequestration and the economy

FAIRFAX CONNECTOR is seeing positive trends within the ridership category such as consistent usage of bikes on buses (numbering over 10,000 annually), increases in bike room usage at the Wiehle-Reston East Metrorail station, increases in ridership among seniors and passengers with disabilities, higher utilization of park and ride facilities, and ridership increases in Tysons and McLean areas.

Riders continue to evaluate commuting options in response to the Silver Line and major county bus service modifications. In response to the decline in FY 2015 ridership, FCDOT developed several strategies to encourage new ridership on FAIRFAX CONNECTOR and Metrobus services. Strategies include the development of a robust targeted marketing campaign which began in September 2015, coinciding with the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR's 30 year anniversary and Try Transit Week. Additionally, the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR has partnered with the Fairfax County Public Schools on a student free fare pilot program designed for middle school and high school students.

Many commuters in the region have expressed interest in new technologies that allow more interaction with bus services. The FAIRFAX CONNECTOR is implementing an advanced Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) technology on the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR bus fleet. When fully implemented, the ITS system will feature real time bus arrival information that will enhance the travel experience of Connector riders who will be able to determine when a bus will arrive at their stop. Improvements in accessibility for persons with disabilities is also a key goal of the ITS system.

Finally, the department is updating the Comprehensive Transit Plan (CTP) which serves as a strategic guide for all decision making, including service to new markets and route refinements for the next ten years. The County is also heavily engaged in planning for the I-66 corridor in an effort to define new bus routes, which will mitigate traffic congestion during construction activities, and will provide new linkages with reliable running times at project completion.

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TDM Programs

Staff works closely with area employers to promote ridesharing programs with a goal of continually increasing the number of Employer Service Program participants.

Miles/Gallon

FAIRFAX CONNECTOR continues to develop policies that promote good fuel economy. The Department will continue to evaluate emerging industry technologies and evaluate bus and service types to maximize fuel usage and environmental benefits.

Accidents/Safe Driving

Transit staff is working closely with the bus service contractor to improve safety oversight and practices. Key inputs from all stakeholders and the development of continuous improvement programs have positively impacted this area. During FY 2016 the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR bus service provider installed new technology on the bus fleet that monitors driving techniques and is designed to minimize risk by improving driving habits through enhanced driver awareness, training, and coaching. It is anticipated that future investments in technology as part of the ITS implementation will result in further enhancements in service quality and safety.