Making the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Vision a Reality

A Presentation by

The Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission

to

The Joint Subcommittee to Study the Feasibility of Creating a Regional Rapid Transportation Network (SJR 357)

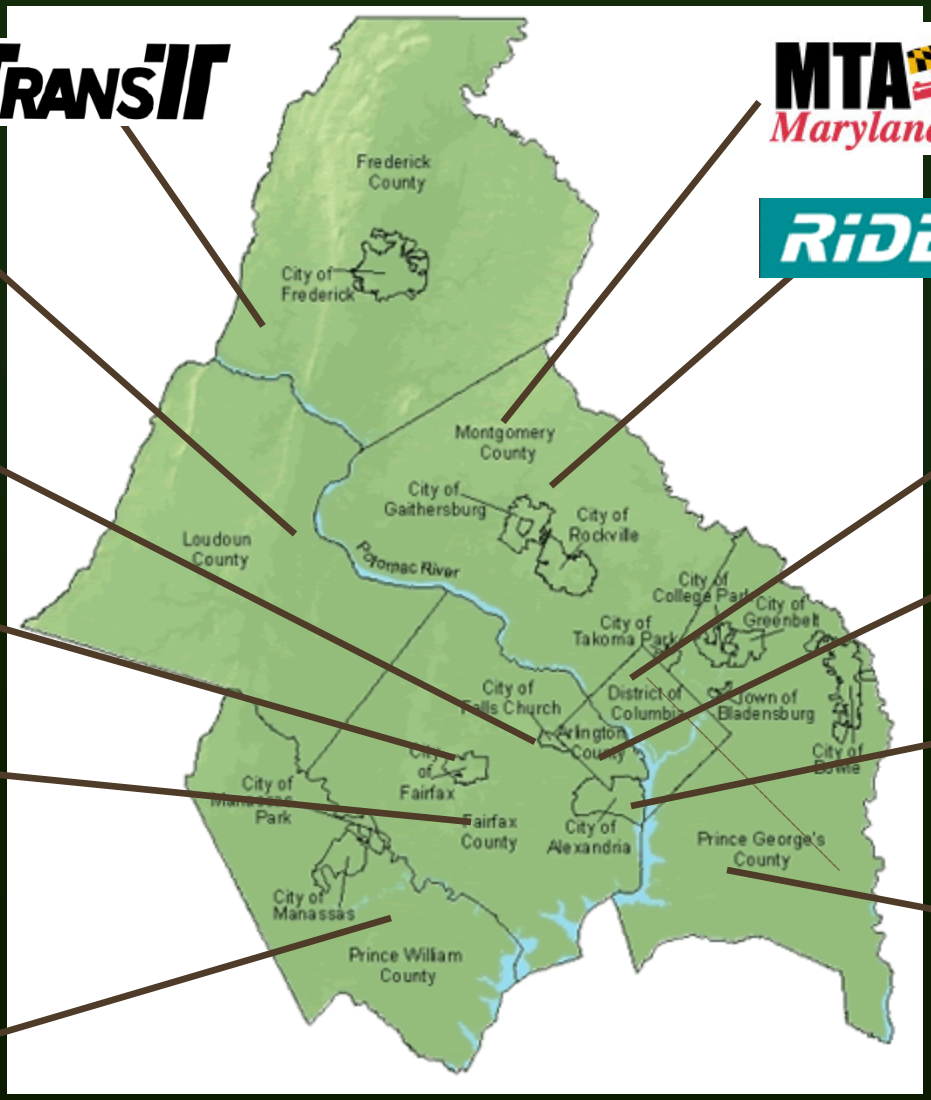
October 6, 2009

What is PRTC?

- Transportation district comprised of 5 local governments:
  - Prince William County
  - Stafford County
  - City of Manassas
  - City of Manassas Park
  - City of Fredericksburg

- Authorized under state law to plan and operate transit services for residents of member governments
- Provides express bus, local bus, ride-matching, and commuter rail services (the latter in cooperation with NVTC)

Regional Transit Providers



TransIT

MTA Maryland

RIDE ON

Loudoun County LC Transit

GEORGE

M metro

arlington transit ART
A service of Arlington County, Virginia

CUE

Keeping Alexandria Moving DASH

FAIRFAX CONNECTOR

THE BUS

PRTC

BRT – Buses are Just the Start

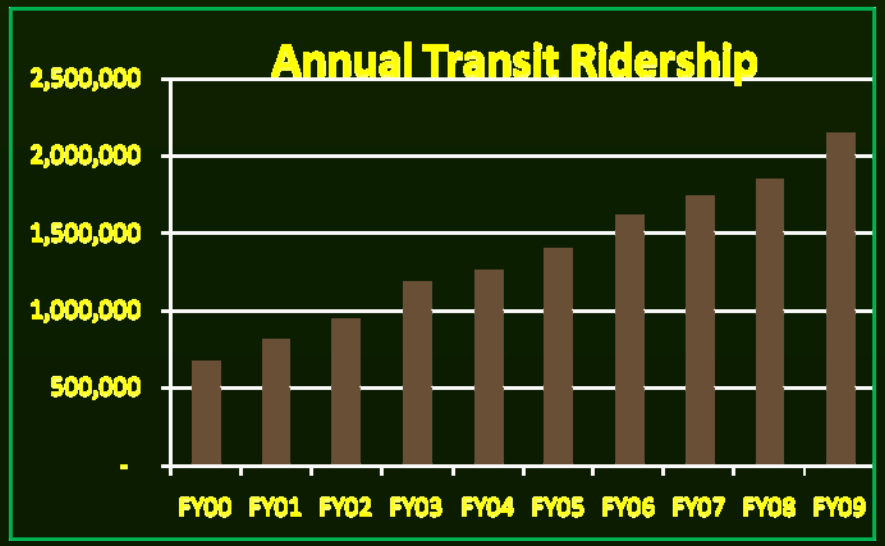
- While an attractive, comfortable vehicle is an essential feature of a truly competitive transit option, other elements are also critical
  - Travel Time Advantage (over SOVs)
  - Reliability
  - High Frequency
  - Ease of Use
  - Stations / Stops / Parking

What's Needed – a Closer Look

- Travel Time Advantage and Reliability Require Lanes that Allow Buses to have Largely Unimpeded Movement for the Majority of the Line
  - New dedicated (or shared HOV) lanes require significant capital investment
- The Higher the Frequency the more Attractive , Easy to Use, and Reliable the Service, and the Greater the Chance for Success
  - However, with fares typically covering no more than 50% of operating costs, a significant amount of new, on-going, and consistent operating subsidies are required
- Providing Access is Another Piece of the Puzzle
  - In our service environment, chances are commuters will only be able to access BRT by walking on one end of their trip. Where walking/biking is not feasible, new/expanded parking lots and/or a supplemental feeder bus system is necessary

PRTC's Approach To BRT

- Uses Existing HOV Lanes
- Operates as Frequently as Every 8 Minutes
- Comfortable, Late Model Fleet
- Well-trained Bus Operators
- Systems to Maintain on-time Performance and Keep Customers Informed



To Summarize

- Service Quality Directly Correlates to Success which can be Achieved to Varying Degrees by Differing Levels of Investment
  - "Right-size" the investment based on an assessment of the public benefits that varying levels of investment will yield
  - Exploit opportunities presented by the state's "managed lanes" projects (e.g., the I-95/395 and I-66 HOV, Beltway HOT lanes, and prospectively other HOT lanes)

Achieving a Quality BRT Service – What's Needed?

- Funding
- Proactive Efforts
- High Technology
- More Parking, Better Access, Amenities

Money is the Primary Hurdle, Particularly (but not exclusively) on the Operating Side

- Simply Maintaining Existing Service is a Challenge:
  - Local funding (for PRTC, the 2% fuel tax) accounts for the majority of operating subsidy, yet is yielding less than what's needed to sustain the service, much less fund expansion
  - Low (operating) and fluctuating (capital) state assistance makes multi-year planning difficult – recently, funding has even changed during the current operating year
    - FY10 state operating covers only 37.7% of eligible operating expenses
    - Capital funding over the past few years has ranged from ~ 35 to 74 %
  - Uncertainty of when the next federal authorization will occur and what it will yield
- What's needed is a steady source of state funding tied to achieving the General Assembly's stated aim of covering 95% of eligible costs

More Proactive Efforts are Needed to Enhance Transit's Travel Time Advantage

- Improve Existing HOV Lanes
  - Stepped up enforcement of violators
  - Sunsetting of hybrid exemption
  - Enhancements to I-66
- Increase Efforts to Keep Bus Stops Clear of Traffic and Parked Vehicles
- Require that HOT Lanes Aim to Maintain Existing Posted Speeds vs. 45 mph Federally Legislated Minimum
- Promote Greater State/Regional Cooperation in Sponsoring Suburb-to-Suburb Commuting
  - e.g., traffic signal prioritization (advanced/extended green lights) gives buses an advantage where separate right-of-way is not available

Incorporate Technology

- Equip Agencies Region-wide with CAD/AVL Systems to Provide Real-time Transit Information to Customers
- Add Amenities Such as Wi-fi to Make Commute Time Productive
  - Pursue Employer Crediting of Time Worked While Commuting to Shorten Work Hours/Week
- Install Vehicle System Remote Monitoring to Reduce Breakdowns and Catastrophic Losses (e.g., Complete Engine Failure)
- Complete Development of Regional Integrated Transit/Traffic Communication System and Provide on-going Funding for Staff and Operations (RITIS/MATOC/CapWIN)

Parking and Access

- Make Park- and-Ride Funding a Higher Priority in the Region
- Conduct a Serious Assessment of Pedestrian Needs and Fund Needed Improvements, such as Sidewalks
- Re-think Parking Policies on a Region-wide Basis (the cards are stacked against even high quality transit when free, abundant parking exists)
- Provide Funding for Passenger Amenities to Make Wait Time More Bearable, e.g., Lighted Shelters
  - Add pads and benches where shelters cannot be installed
- Consider Adding Bike Racks, Bicycle Storage, and Loaner Bike System to Extend Commuter Shed by "Getting Them the Last Mile"
- Persuade DC to Formally Recognize "Slugs" (as VA and the Pentagon have) and Consider them in Plans to Reduce Congestion

Thank you

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