

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 2, 2006

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #7: A PROPOSAL TO ELIMINATE WMATA ROUTES 9B AND 10P AND PROVIDE REPLACEMENT DASH SERVICE

The following proposal will be the subject of a WMATA meeting on March 9, as well as will be covered in the March 20 Council budget work session.

The City of Alexandria, Arlington County, and WMATA have been in ongoing discussions regarding transit services in the Crystal City/Potomac Yard corridor that are needed to adequately serve existing communities and new development that is underway in Arlington County and beginning in the City. An important outcome of this service review is a determination that existing transit services in this area are underperforming, due primarily to the lack of existing demand in the corridor. This condition will change significantly as approved development occurs, beginning with the EPA occupancy of its new facility in Potomac Yard/Arlington in April, 2006. Since a significant portion of EPA staff that will be located in the new facility are currently transit riders (58% of 2,000 employees), Arlington wants to provide high-frequency bus service (every six minutes in the peak and 12 minutes in the off-peak) to serve its rapidly-developing portion of Potomac Yard and the Crystal City area. This service is proposed to begin on April 24, 2006, and will initially operate from the Crystal City Metrorail station to the EPA buildings, located near Crystal Drive and 27th Street. As additional development occurs in Arlington County, closer to Alexandria, service is eventually planned to extend south to South Glebe Road and possibly into the Potomac Yard Retail Center in Alexandria. This service is being coordinated with the City's on-going discussions regarding a dedicated transit way within the Route 1/Potomac Yard corridor.

In order to implement this service, the County and WMATA propose to use buses and manpower resources currently assigned to the underperforming WMATA Routes 9B and 10P. The proposed WMATA route changes will impact Alexandria residents and workers who currently use these routes and will reduce the City's FY 2007 Metrobus subsidy by an amount sufficient to fund proposed DASH-provided replacement service in Alexandria. These proposed bus route changes and net savings are reflected in the FY 2007 proposed budget (p.9-165).

This memorandum is to inform Council members of these proposed changes in transit service and WMATA's upcoming public hearing on this proposal, scheduled for March 9 (7 p.m. at the Charles Houston Recreation Center). City transit staff will make sure affected civic associations and Hunting Towers/Hunting Terrace tenants organizations are aware of the hearing and the City's new alternative DASH service proposal.

WMATA Routes 9B and 10P

The existing WMATA routes 9B and 10P are shown on Figure 1.

WMATA Route 9B provides weekday-only service from Hunting Towers and Old Town to the Potomac Yard Retail Center and Crystal City Metrorail station, with a headway in excess of 30 minutes between approximately 6:30 a.m. and 8:50 p.m. Much of this route's service area is also covered by Route 9A, which operates approximately every 30 minutes on weekdays and weekends. Route 9B provides unique service to the North East neighborhood near Abingdon Drive and Slater's Lane, and provides service into the Potomac Yard Retail Center. This route was previously the Route 11P, but was consolidated into Route 9A to increase awareness of its service in October 2004.

Route 10P travels between the Braddock Road and Crystal City Metrorail stations, on weekdays from approximately 6:45 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. This route connects the Braddock Road station and the Del Ray neighborhood to the Potomac Yard Retail Center and Crystal City Metrorail station.

In reviewing the performance of its bus routes, WMATA has found Route 9B and 10P to be among the lowest performing routes in its system. The following table, provided by WMATA, summarizes the current performance of routes 9B and 10P.

Route	Annual Passengers	Annual Revenue Miles	Annual Revenue Hours	Passengers per Revenue Mile	Passengers per Revenue Hour	Annual Operating Cost	Annual Revenue	Annual Subsidy	Cost Recovery
9B	69,000	68,257	5,773	1.00	11.95	\$587,700	\$39,500	\$547,670	7%
10P	115,250	70,531	5,773	1.63	19.96	\$587,000	\$66,693	\$521,308	11%

WMATA considers four factors in assessing the performance of a bus route. These are:

Average weekday ridership - At least 400 passengers per day

Cost recovery - At least 16 per cent

Load factor - At least 50 per cent

Subsidy per passenger - Less than \$2.98 per passenger

Both routes 9B and 10P fall below WMATA standards for three of four factors. Only Route 10P meets the WMATA ridership standard and Route 9B falls below all four service standards.

Historical data show that ridership on these routes is not increasing, but either relatively stable or declining. Following are the average weekday riderships for the month of March from 200, when service on these routes began, until 2005.

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Route 9B	115	368	390	228	N/A ¹
Route 10P	284	583	521	429	456

¹ Data for Route 9B is not available between September 2004 and June 2005, when Route 9B was reported jointly with Route 9A.

As seen from these data, ridership on both routes is anemic. One possible reason for this is that these routes serve the Potomac Yard Retail Center on weekdays, but not on weekends when most shopping occurs. A second reason is the irregular service on these routes, both having long headways relative to other routes operating in the same corridor. This results in buses on the 9B and 10P routes arriving and departing major destinations at almost the same time as other routes on the same roadway. Along most of their routes, the 9B and 10P are competing with higher quality transit services. A third possible reason for low ridership is that these routes, particularly the 10P, do not serve major employment destinations, such as the Patent and Trademark Office. Since the only portion of Potomac Yard built to date is the Retail Center, there is limited demand for transit in the corridor today.

Proposed Replacement Service

There are currently WMATA routes that offer alternative service for the routes proposed for elimination. In addition, DASH proposes to initiate service on a new route that will provide many of the connections now available on the 9B and 10P that are not served by alternative WMATA routes.

WMATA operates several routes which partially provide service substitutes for the routes proposed for elimination. These are routes 10A to the Pentagon and 10B to Ballston from Hunting Towers. Within Alexandria, as shown in Figure 2, both the 10A and 10B routes serve Washington and Pendleton Streets, the Braddock Road Metrorail station, and Mt. Vernon Avenue. These are high-quality service routes operating on 30-minute headways on each route, thus offering a combined headway of 15 minutes all day in Alexandria. These routes also operate on Saturdays with a 15-minute combined headway, and on Sundays with a 30-minute headway. Service on these routes begins around 5:00 a.m. and continues past midnight. These routes offer excellent service from the Braddock Road Metrorail station to Del Ray, and from Hunting Towers and Old Town to the Braddock Road Metrorail station. Route 10A also provides connections to the Crystal City Metrorail station from its stop at 18th Street. South and South Eads Street.

WMATA also operates Route 9A from the Huntington Metrorail station to the Pentagon via Huntington Avenue, Route 1, Franklin Street, Washington Street, Powhatan Street, Route 1, 20th Street South, and Eads Street (See Figure 2). This route operates every 30 minutes from around 5:00 a.m. to past midnight weekdays and Saturdays, and every 40 minutes on Sunday from 5:00 a.m. to past midnight. This route provides alternative service from Old Town to Route 1 adjacent to the retail center and the Crystal City Metrorail station.

DASH proposes to provide replacement service for the two WMATA routes proposed for elimination. Existing DASH buses would be used. A key destination that is not well-served by the alternative WMATA routes is the Potomac Yard Retail Center, which is only served by routes 9B and 10P. Furthermore, WMATA Route 9B is the only transit service along Slater's Lane, an area where residents have been requesting better transit service for some time. To serve these needs, DASH proposes to initiate service on a new route (designated DASH Route 10), that would connect the Potomac Yard Retail Center to the Del Ray and North East neighborhoods, and the Braddock Road and King Street Metrorail stations as shown in Figure 3. Service on this route is proposed to begin at 6:15 a.m. and continue to 9:15 p.m., with 30-minute headway during peak periods and 45-minute headway during off peak periods. This service will increase the City's DASH subsidy \$460,000 per year. Recognizing the need to serve travel to the Potomac Yard Retail Center on weekends, DASH proposes to provide service on Saturdays with a one-hour headway between 8:00 a.m. and 9:30 p.m. This Saturday service would increase the DASH subsidy an additional \$70,000 per year. DASH can also provide hourly service on Sundays between 9:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. for an additional subsidy of \$50,000 per year. However, this is an option and not as critical to provide as Monday through Saturday service.

The proposed DASH Route 10 offers several benefits in addition to substitute service for the WMATA routes proposed for elimination. These include: (1) convenient one-bus connection between Del Ray and North East neighborhoods and the Patent and Trademark complex; (2) direct service from the northern portion of the North East neighborhood and Braddock Metrorail station; and (3) expanded service to residents and businesses along the Slater's Lane corridor.

FISCAL IMPACT: The elimination of Routes 9B and 10P will reduce the City's FY 2007 Metrorail operating subsidy by \$629,000. The proposed DASH replacement service will cost \$460,000 per year for weekday service, an additional \$70,000 per year for Saturday service, and \$50,000 per year for the Sunday service option. Depending on the approved replacement service, the City would save \$49,000 to \$169,000 per year in transit operating subsidies. If the DASH-proposed service is approved (weekdays and Saturday), the City's transit operating subsidies would be reduced by \$99,000. While there are operational savings to the City in the short-term over the long-term because of the way the Metrobus capital program formula works, and because DASH will eventually have to buy replacement buses, the life-cycle operating and capital cost of dropping the WMATA service and adding the DASH service are about even.

ATTACHMENTS:

Figure 1: WMATA Routes Proposed for Elimination

Figure 2: Existing WMATA Substitute Routes

Figure 3: Proposed DASH Route 10 Substitute Service

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