

## **County Explores Fairfax Connector Service Changes as Silver Line Expands**

Summary of Article by Fatimah Waseem of [restonnow.com](http://restonnow.com)

By Lukas Camby, PRTC's Professional Development Fellow

As our region awaits the opening of the much anticipated WMATA Silver Metrorail Line Phase II to Loudoun County, regional transit agencies have had to prepare and make adaptations to service to accommodate the new line. The Silver Line has presented an immense opportunity to improve transit services in the areas of Fairfax and Loudoun counties around Reston, Dulles Airport, the Technology Corridor, and Ashburn. As will any rapid transit line, bus connections dramatically increase its utility by providing connections to surrounding neighborhoods and communities.

Buses also play an important role in providing connections to other transit services. Loudoun County has taken the initiative and has planned and prepared a layout for bus service in the eastern portion of the county to commence around the time of opening. Fairfax County transportation officials, through Fairfax Connector, have also developed a new system of bus routes that will serve the new stations and make connections with the various neighborhoods in the area.

The opening of the Silver Line will allow for increased service frequency and more centrally concentrated service long the Dulles toll road and Silver Line stations. This “transformative” option is one of three possibilities to alter bus route patterns to meet expected demand from the opening of the expanded line. The new bus route proposals include extensions into areas that were not previously served by Fairfax Connector buses such as the area around the new Innovation Station. The new routing prioritizes the dense sections of Reston and Herndon with service running in loop-like patterns that branch off to the north and south. Sunrise Valley Drive and Reston Town Center are used extensively for their transfer potential in the new route proposal.

Common concerns among many riders have also been considered in the new service proposals. Many commuters have indicated desires for more frequent service, service both earlier and later in the day, as well as increased express bus service. Assuming the project is completed by late 2020, pending corrective actions that have resulted in delays, the new service around Reston and Herndon should begin at that time.

## **So What? How Can OMNIRIDE Expand Operations To Serve The New Silver Line Stations?**

PRTC has been paying close attention to the progress being made on the second phase of the Silver Line project. The project has been delayed by a few defects in the engineering work that WMATA is collaborating with its contractors to correct. PRTC has exchanged dialogue with Loudoun and Fairfax counties to bring about the potential for further integration with its services in the Western portions of Prince William County, and has been briefed on the various restructuring of services Fairfax County is proposing.

After PRTC began service to the Tyson's corner station in 2014, the agency has explored further options for to expand service in the route 28 area, commonly called the "Dulles Technology Corridor", as it has become a major employment center. Opportunities for service from the new Gainesville commuter lot on University Boulevard or Cushing Road are being explored. This represents a major leap in the transit connectivity of the Northern Virginia area as it has never been possible to travel directly from Gainesville to Dulles by bus before. Securing funding for these routes is crucial. There will be opportunities to either apply for the next round of I-66 Inside the Beltway Commuter Choice funding or reexamine the current recommendations for services in the I-66 Traffic Mitigation Plan to identify further enhancements to services following the opening of the I-66 express lanes in 2022.

The routing and scheduling decisions will be made in conjunction with WMATA, Fairfax Connector, and Loudoun County Transit to allow for coordinated scheduling and to avoid service overlaps, when possible. Steps are also being taken to evaluate possible transfer point locations. The coordination efforts are an important step for PRTC as the region's transit providers continue to increase cooperation to improve the overall commuting experience.

Studies of traffic patterns in the area will play an important role in determining routing and scheduling as VA-28 is notorious for congestion during rush hour periods. As the Dulles Technology/Route 28 corridor becomes a more important center for employment and business, PRTC stands poised to take advantage of projected travel demands in this area.