

Metro will Close Three Orange Line Stations for More than Three Months this Summer

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Metro has taken great steps to make much needed improvements and updates to the system. In the summer of 2019, stations were shut down while platforms were reconstructed in the outlying stations on the Blue and Yellow Lines for much needed repairs.

WMATA is currently planning for another shutdown period for the outlying Orange Line stations. The stations of Vienna, Dunn Loring, and East Falls Church will all be shut down this summer to address platform reconstruction and other necessary repairs. West Falls Church will remain open as the western terminus. Platforms will be reconstructed, new concrete sealing will be installed, new shelters, digital screens, and other amenities like outlets for phone charging will also be added. As for the East Fall Church Station, one track will remain in service so that Silver and Orange Line trains can pass through to serve the outer stations that are still in service, but will not make passenger stops. Overall, WMATA says it aims to greatly improve to the customer experience and enhance safety with the work to be conducted over the summer. Just like the previous shutdown, the aim is to allow the contractors to get the most out of their time on the work sites by removing revenue service from the project stations. WMATA will also seize the opportunities to perform any needed fixes to the track infrastructure along the closed section. Parking changes to all of the stations except Dunn Loring will also take effect, severely curtailing the already limited capacity at the stations.

During the closures, there will be no parking available at East Falls Church. At West Falls Church, parking will be reduced by 50 percent, leaving 1,100 spots still available in the parking garage, but Metro expects that they will be filled up every day by 7 a.m. At Vienna, there will be 10 percent fewer spaces, leaving 4,200 spaces still available. There will be no parking closures at Dunn Loring.

There will be no train service available at the 3 stations; Metro plans to run shuttle buses that will link the closed stations to West Falls Church and Ballston-MU. These closures will see notable disruption to the normal flow of commuters using various services along the Orange Line route. Services on the Blue Line will also be adjusted to suit the changes in Silver and Orange line with many Orange line trains terminating at Ballston-MU. WMATA plans to maintain service on the Blue Line to near rush hour levels with services running roughly every 8 minutes.

After the work from this summer's shutdown is complete, there will be 10 stations left for work to be done in the Platform Improvement Project. These include: Addison Road, Arlington Cemetery, Cheverly, College Park, Greenbelt, Landover, New Carrollton, Prince George's Plaza, Reagan National Airport, and West Hyattsville.

So What? How Will This Impact OmniRide Operations?

The experience with the Blue line and Yellow line shutdowns this past summer provides PRTC with a helpful example to draw on. We will have to be careful with how we respond to this closure. We will likely not have to run supplementary shuttle buses since this closure is out of our immediate service corridor and PRTC busses do not serve the stations that will be shut down. However, there could be some inconvenience to passengers using the Silver Line due to reduced frequencies of those trains. We might have scenarios where ridership on some Tysons express runs could be low, but see higher ridership on others because the reduced service might cause riders to miss buses and crowd onto later trips in the afternoon. Understanding how our riders on the Linton Hall Metro Express and the Manassas Metro Express will be affected is crucial to ensuring smooth operation during the summer shutdown. In mid-February, WMATA ran a trial run of the planned service changes during the summer.

From 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, Orange Line trains are scheduled every 16 minutes between West Falls Church and New Carrollton, with additional trains running between Ballston and New Carrollton. Silver Line trains are scheduled every 16 minutes, with all stations except East Falls Church open. Like the Orange Line trains to and from West Falls Church, Silver Line trains to and from Wiehle-Reston East will pass through East Falls Church without stopping.

During the previous shutdown PRTC ran supplementary shuttle services linking the Franconia-Springfield station to other stops along the VRE corridor that parallels the Blue Line anticipating high levels of congestion. These shuttles turned out to be lightly used, but it allowed us to experiment with a different mechanism to attract riders and coordinate with other transit systems. This demonstrates how ridership on supplementary services during major system closures is difficult to gauge and riders may not react in a manner that is at first expected. PRTC will not have to engage in this level of intervention for this occasion, but the lessons learned will still apply.

We believe we have enough capacity available on all of our western Commuter Express services from Haymarket, Gainesville and Manassas to accommodate a significant amount of additional riders. Summer ridership typically declines slightly to provide even more capacity. However, we will be submitting a grant application to the Department of Rail and Public Transit (DRPT) for funding to add in supplementary trips to alleviate overcrowding, should this be necessary. We will also have a robust marketing plan in place to advertise not only the services we currently operate, but to also focus on other Transit Demand Management tools such as promoting carpools and vanpools. As a region, we are working together to coordinate a menu of options for passengers to consider, and sometimes it takes a few days for commuters to settle into a routine once they have a chance to experiment with what works best.

This shutdown will be an important exercise in our abilities to maintain consistency and keep riders moving as they negotiate what is likely to be a significant disruption for many people in the region.