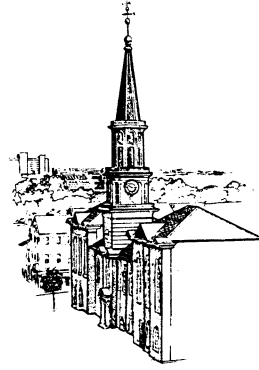


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Regional Officials Urge Transportation Infusion

By Steven Ginsberg
Washington Post Staff Writer
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Regional transportation officials urged federal, state and local governments yesterday to raise an additional \$13.2 billion over the next six years to pay for essential projects as lawmakers in Richmond and Annapolis and on Capitol Hill debate proposals to increase road and transit funds.

Officials from the District, Maryland and Virginia stood together in calling for money to improve the Capital Beltway, build the intercounty connector, widen Interstate 95 in Virginia, rework the Interstate 66-Route 29 interchange in Gainesville, construct rail service in the Dulles Corridor, fix bridges in Arlington County and the District and add buses and rail cars to the region's various transit services.

Officials also listed lower-profile projects -- such as a K Street bus lane, a light-rail line in Anacostia and a new bus maintenance facility in Alexandria -- as critical short-term needs.

"We're not talking about amenities here," Chris Zimmerman (D), an Arlington County Board member and chairman of the Transportation Planning Board of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, said at a news conference. "What we're down to is what's necessary simply to keep pace."

COG officials have printed a brochure titled "Time to Act," which they plan to distribute to all members of Congress and the Virginia and Maryland legislatures. The brochure cites \$25.4 billion required to meet "critical needs over the next six

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years." Transportation officials said yesterday that only \$12.2 million is available from current sources, and they urged lawmakers to find the rest.

Their request was aimed particularly at Capitol Hill, where lawmakers are debating how much to contribute for road and transit projects nationwide in the next six years. They are considering proposals that range from President Bush's \$256 billion plan to a \$370 billion proposal in the House. The Senate passed a \$318 billion bill last week.

District Transportation Director Dan Tangherlini said local officials were trying to "bring [the urgency] home for Congress." Tangherlini acknowledged election-year concerns in the White House and on Capitol Hill about the rising federal deficit, but he said those worries should be outweighed by the 40,000 jobs that every \$1 billion of new transportation funding creates.

As Congress weighs funding, state and local governments also are looking for ways to put more money into the region's road and rail network. Maryland Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R) announced a plan last week to increase car registration fees and fines on traffic violations and drunken driving convictions to raise \$266 million for road projects. Others in Maryland's Democrat-controlled legislature and the state's business community want to raise gas taxes to generate larger sums.

In Richmond, lawmakers are considering various tax-increase proposals that would add \$30 million to \$800 million for transportation projects. This month, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors approved spending \$100 million on transportation projects.

"These are moments in time, these are opportunities that if not seized disappear," said Richard A. White, Metro's chief executive. "The stakes are huge."

White said the agency he heads is "on the verge of failing in its ability" to provide effective transit services unless \$1.5 billion is added to buy buses and rail cars, increase security and upgrade facilities. Those needs do not include the approximately \$36 million shortfall in the upcoming Metro budget, which probably will be met by fare increases and service cuts.

The harmony that characterized the call for more money later dissipated during the planning board's regular monthly meeting,

at which officials bitterly debated whether to list the intercounty connector among the projects to be reviewed for air quality conformity. A vote on the matter isn't scheduled until next month, but some members questioned its inclusion on the list, given that construction isn't to start until at least the second half of 2005. Other members expressed concern that Maryland would have to spend so much on the connector that it would be unable to meet other transportation needs.

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