

Bus Rapid Transit eyed for Woodbridge

By Uriah A. Kiser

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Prince William County transportation officials want to know if Bus Rapid Transit will help ease traffic along U.S. 1 in Woodbridge, and are scheduled to present the results of a new study about the hotly debated form of transit next month.

The study focuses on the feasibility of putting Bus Rapid Transit between Quantico and Fort Belvoir. BRT uses a dedicated lane for buses, much as light rail systems do in cities like Baltimore and Charlotte.

"It is kind of a feasibility to determine if there is a market for Bus Rapid Transit. How Bus Rapid Transit is a lot of things to a lot of different people, it could be anything from dedicating a lane for just buses, or new technology incorporation," said Prince William County Transportation Department Director Thomas J. Blaser.

Blaser said the county is coordinating with members of the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Department—the agency that provides OmniRide commuter and OmniLink local bus service, as well as transit operators in Fairfax County to identify ways BRT service could reach its potential in the area.

The county awarded the BRT study to AECOM, a global corporation that recently was awarded a \$19.3 million contract to expand a light rail system in Dallas. A public hearing about the Woodbridge BRT plan should be held later this month, with a full report about the study to be released in February, said Blaser.

BRT has long remained a facet of the proposed High Occupancy Toll lane project on interstates 95 and 395. Before the project was halted last year due to a lack of investors and concerns from local governments that oppose the lanes, construction of a BRT station in Lorton was a cornerstone of the project. It was also the impetus for the state to construct additional BRT stations at Prince William Parkway, Alexandria's Mark Center and two in Stafford County.

The Lorton BRT station and other facets of the HOT lanes project went under a scope review by the state last summer, and by the corporations vying to build the lanes—Texas-based Fluor Inc. and Australian-based Transurban Inc. Transportation officials noted that with the lack of investors in the project, the re-view could mean the end of the proposed Lorton station and the loss of additional monies for more commuter parking spaces that the companies agreed to give the state after completion of a deal.

If HOT lanes are constructed, lone drivers will be forced to pay a toll to use the lanes, while vehicles with three or more passengers will be allowed to travel free. Under the plan, High Occupancy Vehicle lanes between S. Eads Street in Arlington and Dumfries will be converted into HOT lanes, and then extended south to Spotsylvania County.

While an agreement has not been finalized, both companies could own and operate the lane for a term of about 80 years, under a similar agreement both companies made when Virginia awarded them the contract to build similar lanes on the Capital Beltway.

Staff writer Uriah A. Kiser can be reached at 703-878-8065.