

RA Joins the Bus Battle

By William Nicoson

In the beginning, there was the gleam in Karl Ingebritsen's eye as he and fellow Restonians invented their own bus system. In those days riders usually walked a short distance from their homes to catch a bus that delivered them to downtown Washington. The bus was a hybrid feeder-express: from Reston's boundaries to major employment zones downtown, it operated without stops as an express, but within Reston the bus circulated as a self-feeder to pick up riders in the morning and drop them off in the evening.

Then came the great revolution in the area's public transit: metrorail. Rather than the long run downtown, Reston buses now shuttle to and from the metro station at West Falls Church. This means a transfer, but the wait is usually short because schedules are targeted to mesh and, if targets are missed, intervals between trains are short. The time cost for transfer is worth it: trains take less time and are more reliable than buses since trains are immune from traffic congestion.

Another revolution was the invention, with Karl Ingebritsen's participation once more, of an internal bus system for Reston, called RIBS. These buses currently circulate in four loops connecting Reston village centers, Plaza America and the Herndon K Mart center with Reston Town Center and Reston Hospital. They offer many families and senior citizens the mobility essential to appreciate the amenities of their community, thereby greatly enriching their lives.

The Fairfax County Department of Transportation now operates, through a private contractor, all of Reston's commuting and internal buses as part of the Fairfax Connector system. In September the County held public hearings on a comprehensive plan to reorganize Dulles Corridor bus service. This plan increases express service to metrorail, initiates express service to Tysons Corner, but reduces internal Reston service. Elimination of some feeder-express buses will condemn some commuters to make a second transfer at a park and ride. RIBS is eliminated entirely, and internal circulation is provided only by feeder routes or feeder-express routes.

For example, riders using RIBS Routes 2 (South Lakes) and 3 (Hunters Woods) with 37 daily trips at uniform intervals of 40 minutes would be served instead by Route Proposals 501 and 551 with 27 trips and, between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., intervals of 60 minutes. All RIBS routes include Town Center stops, but Route Proposals 501 and 551 include none, forcing passengers in South Reston bound for Town Center to transfer at a park and ride. Passengers bound for the U.S. Geological Survey, now served by RIBS Route 3, would also be obliged to transfer at a park and ride. Unlike transfers to metrorail, bus-to-bus transfers within Reston between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. will often involve long delays due to hourly intervals between buses.

Once before, in April, 1996, the County proposed the elimination of RIBS but backed away when it encountered a storm of public criticism. Among RIBS' leading defenders was the Reston Association which argued that elimination of RIBS would seriously impair the access of many

Restonians to its facilities and those of the County, though these facilities were maintained by assessments and taxes paid by these same Restonians. RA had previously contributed funds to RIBS in its early years.

At last month's board meeting, RA directors, spearheaded by Donn Dears (North Point), criticized the County's latest proposal to eliminate RIBS and proposed creation of a citizens' group to meet with County officials on the Dulles Corridor bus plan. Reston Transportation Committee Chairman Joe Stowers has expressed support for a dialogue with the County to emphasize the importance of RIBS to the community. Karl Ingebritsen, the father of Reston buses, will provide professional analysis and historical perspective for the group.

Let's hope they prevail.

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