

## **TRANSIT JAZZ AND MIDDAY BLUES**

By William Nicoson

Next Sunday the world may not be turning faster, but people living or working in Herndon and Reston will be able to move to and from Tysons Corner and D.C. faster than ever before. On Sunday, the Monroe Street Park & Ride opens at last, making available 1,745 free parking spaces for bus passengers. Simultaneously a new, amplified bus schedule goes into effect, including express service from Herndon-Reston to Tysons Corner. Bus service in the Dulles Corridor will more than double.

Feeder routes in Reston and Herndon will be expanded, and so will reverse commute service, bringing employees west to Reston and Herndon business centers early in the day and returning them late in the day. If Tysons Corner has surpassed D.C. in employment, Reston-Herndon is closing rapidly.

This is a fine example of government -- Fairfax County, that is -- recognizing and reacting to the changing needs of residents and employees. But of course there's a hitch. This concert's not all hot jazz: there's one wailing note of the blues.

If, as a resident of Herndon or Reston, you work part time downtown, or if you've got a midday medical, dental or business appointment downtown, or if you want to visit downtown for lunch or take in a museum or gallery exhibition, a stage-play matinee or a midday film, your midday bus ride to metrorail at West Falls Church, beginning Sunday, will likely take 35 to 45 minutes rather than today's 12 or 13 minutes. The midday express bus service will be replaced by a route that stops and waits and waits at Tysons Corner before connecting with metrorail.

Of course the same delay is faced by downtown residents with part-time employment in Herndon or Reston or the need to keep midday appointments here or to visit our growing popular attractions. Is it wise to discourage employees or prospective visitors from using transit?

For less inconvenience, bus riders have bailed out and put cars on the roads, particularly during hours of mitigated congestion. No doubt ridership can't compare at noon to commuting hours, but this is no way to encourage ridership. Experts tell me that the popularity of today's 5T (the express to metrorail) has been substantial and growing. In part this is because the reverse midday service acts as a guaranteed ride home for morning visitors to downtown. These are the calculations that prompt regular use of transit.

A Bannon Research poll conducted in mid-June found that Northern Virginia residents consider highway congestion to be their primary concern. Not only that, but highway congestion was accorded a 2-1 margin over other usual concerns of voters, such as education and taxes. Any transit initiative that encourages riders to switch to cars will likely not be greeted with favor at the ballot box.

Axing the midday express to and from metrorail deserves reconsideration by Fairfax County Supervisors.

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