

Planes, trains and parking lots

It was a little more than a week ago that I drove to Dulles International Airport for the opening of their big, new parking garage, and I was struck by a couple of thoughts. The first was: Isn't it kind of silly that all of this attention is being paid to a big mound of concrete?

This ceremony attracted politicians, business people and developers as well as the head folks at the Airports Authority.

They had food and beverages and a big tent on the top level of this otherwise "regular" parking facility. It was a big deal, but it just seemed a little over the top. Of course for folks who regularly use the airport, like I used to in a former life, it will be nice to have such a facility so close to the terminal.

The other thing that crossed my mind as I was driving to the event was the distance from the Capital Beltway to the airport. It seems like it takes forever and yet it's only 20-some miles. When you add the distance from the Falls Church Metro stations to the Beltway, it gets closer to 30 miles.

For those of you playing along at home: Yes, my thoughts were turning to the Dulles rail project. I couldn't help wondering whether



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the addition of all the new parking spaces would aid the effort to get rail out to the airport. More parking spaces closer in would seem to make it more enticing for people to drive and reduce the outcry for more options to the airport.

Another thing that I wondered was how long it would take to get to the airport via rail, especially the light rail version that is being planned for the Dulles corridor. Those things move relatively slowly. The thing that made me wonder is that I was going no faster than the posted speed limit of 55 miles per hour, and it took the better part of 20 minutes to get there from the Beltway.

How long will it take on a light rail system that makes a number of stops? If it takes more than an hour to travel between the Falls Church Metro stations and the airport, are people going to use it? This applies even more to commuters whom it is believed will flock to this new system.

All of this makes me wonder if the express bus system that will be used as an interim step isn't the better idea. If nothing else, buses traveling in dedicated lanes at speeds approaching the limit will do better than a train that pokes along at half the limit.

Maybe this region should look north to Baltimore. The light rail system there has been in place for a number of years now and has failed to capture anywhere near the ridership that was predicted by advocates. A big part of the problem is that the light rail takes so long to get anywhere, many people have simply stopped using it. In fact, several thousand new parking spaces are now being added to Baltimore's inner city to accommodate all of the car traffic they're getting.

Workers' memorial

Veterans of the Vietnam War have their memorial wall of names, survivors of those who died from AIDS have their quilt and now the families of those killed in

work zones on the nation's highways are getting a memorial of their own. The National Work Zone Memorial will be unveiled April 9 in Capitol Heights, Md., as part of National Work Zone Awareness Week.

The Work Zone Memorial was conceived only last year as a way to bring attention to the high number of people killed every year around the country in work zone crashes. Several highway safety advocacy groups have worked very hard to get this memorial completed in time for this event.

The National Work Zone Memorial includes the names of more than 700 workers, motorists, law enforcement and public safety personnel as well as pedestrians killed in work-zone incidents, even though nearly 1,000 are killed every year.

The plan is to display the movable memorial at a dozen sites around the country each year in order to raise the awareness of drivers passing through these areas. By the way, the highest number of people killed in work zones is not the workers but rather the drivers passing through.

On the road again

Here's a little something for next time: What's your favorite "road" song? What's your favorite "road" or traveling movie? Let me know, and we'll put a list together. I'll start it off with: "Route 66" by Bobby Troup as my song and "Planes, Trains and Automobiles" as my movie. They don't have to be your all-time favorites but something that you think fits the bill.

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