

## SECOND OPINION

# Provide accurate transit facts

In an editorial on transportation problems and the role of transit published Jan. 13, *The Northern Virginia Journal* cited my Jan. 1 speech in a manner that managed to miss the point spectacularly, and then went on to make so many errors that it is difficult to know where to start.

On an issue as critical as this, daily affecting the lives of Northern Virginians, it is of vital importance that the facts be represented accurately.

*The Journal* began by saying "the news for proponents of mass transit is not good." You cited my "concession" that only 3 percent of trips in Arlington are made by transit.

But you conveniently ignored the context of my remarks, which are based on data showing that overall, transit usage in Arlington is spectacularly high.

This is especially true for daily work trips. In fact, a majority of those who travel to the District each weekday from Arlington do so by Metro.

Within the Metro station sectors, as much as 80 percent of households have at least one member who uses Metro every day.

Almost one in five people from Fairfax who come to Arlington to work do so by transit, showing the benefit of our concentration of employment centers in Metro corridors, even when workers are coming from localities with dispersed land use patterns.

To set the record straight, the 3 percent figure refers to trips both originating and terminating within Arlington. My point was that, in a jurisdiction that is second in the region in transit usage we have not done enough internally to provide transit options for our residents.

The significance is that where we have provided good transit choices (largely for daily commutes in and out of the county), usage is extremely robust, so much so that we are beginning to have trouble meeting demand.

Where we have not focused as much attention (travel within Arlington), usage is low.

So, in point of fact, "the news for proponents of mass transit" is quite good. Give people the option, and they will use it.

This is being amply demonstrated not only in Arlington, but across the nation, in striking contradiction of *The Jour-*

### In my opinion

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*nal*, which went on to state — erroneously — that nationwide transit ridership is declining, that in the Washington region, only a small and declining fraction of total commuting trips is made by transit, and that transit commuting trips take much longer than auto trips.

These are facts:

■ Transit is enjoying an unprecedented surge in ridership.

The American Public Transportation Association reports that U.S. public transit ridership grew 21 percent in the past five years, while the U.S. population grew just 4.8 percent, highway use grew 11 percent and domestic air travel grew 19 percent.

■ Throughout Northern Virginia, transit serves very large segments of our commuting population.

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments data show significant peak period transit shares, such as a third in the Interstate 395/Route 1 corridor and two-thirds in the I-66 corridor.

To serve the same number of commuters without transit would require construction of another 15 freeway lanes at an average cost of \$100 million per lane per mile.

Over a third of federal workers in the metropolitan region use Metrorail or Metrobus to reach their jobs. According to the 2000 Census, our metropolitan region's overall, peak period transit commuting share is 35 percent.

Virginia Railway Express is setting records with 20 percent annual ridership growth, and the eight transit systems serving Northern Virginia carry approximately 273,000 weekday person trips.

The Virginia Department of Transportation reports that auto drivers in conventional lanes on I-95 in peak periods require an average of 58 minutes to travel 30 miles from Dumfries to Washington, D.C. VRE takes only 40 minutes.

Transit or ride-sharing in the HOV lanes average only 31 minutes (about half of the automobile time). In the I-66 corridor, VDOT reports a similar advantage for VRE, transit and ride-sharing.

Transit investments also yield clean air dividends and have contributed to our region's strong regional economy, which is especially visible in Arlington's Orange Line Metrorail corridor.

In addition, each person using transit instead of driving to work saves 273 gallons of gasoline per year.

Based on these facts, you should be advising your readers that transit is doing an excellent job in serving commuters who wish to take advantage of a pleasant, quick, stress-free commute, while freeing road capacity and parking spaces for those who choose to drive.

The Surface Transportation Policy Project has reported that although our metropolitan region is fourth worst in traffic congestion, it ranks only 31st in burden of congestion because of the transit and ridesharing alternatives available here.

Finally, I would note that, despite its misreading of transit's performance, *The Journal* did call for mass transit improvements both inside and outside the Capital Beltway, as well as High Occupancy Vehicle lanes that also can be accessed by single-occupant drivers for a fee when capacity is available.

Indeed, our region should consider these worthwhile rail, bus and ridesharing improvements — and, in fact, is doing so.

I would also emphasize the need to promote better facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as telework opportunities. Our severe traffic congestion and air quality problems require the use of every tool available, and accurate information about all of them.

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