

FINAL REPORT
FOR
WEST FALLS CHURCH METRORAIL STATION
PARK AND RIDE PROJECT

Prepared by
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PROJECT OVERVIEW

In September 1983, the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission received an Experimental Mass Transit and Ridesharing grant from the Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation to initiate an express bus service and carpool staging area at an inactive Metrorail station. Total funding for this project was \$148,200. The West Falls Church Metrorail parking area was opened to the public on May 2, 1984 and express bus service will continue until Metrorail begins operations to the Vienna terminus in June 1986.

The express bus service is operated by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) between the West Falls Church Station parking lot and the Rosslyn Metrorail Station every 20 minutes during morning and evening commuting periods. Ridership on the bus service grew throughout the demonstration to a relatively stable level of 200 daily trips. Carpooling activity is relatively low at the parking lot and possible reasons for the lack of ridesharing activity are discussed later in the report. The demonstration accomplished its principal goal which was to develop transit ridership habits in the I-66 corridor in anticipation of the Metrorail service extension. The high travel speeds attained on I-66 permit efficient operation of the 66X express bus and the service recovers approximately half of its operating costs from fares.

PROJECT GOALS

The project had both long term and short term objectives. In the

short term, NVTC sought to encourage motorists to either carpool or to commute by transit in the I-66 corridor. The concept of locating both carpool parking and express bus service at the same location was modelled on the I-95 corridor and the carpool/bus service interface that occurs at Springfield. The goal was to achieve higher usage of both modes than otherwise might occur due to the greater flexibility of choice for commuters on a daily basis.

The long term objective for the project was to pre-market the Metrorail service that would open in 1986 by fostering shared-ride travel habits. The project's objective was to demonstrate the competitive attractiveness of travel alternatives to single-occupant commuting and thereby reduce reliance on the automobile for worktrips.

NEW PROCESS FOR BUS SERVICE ADJUSTMENTS

An important by-product of the demonstration was the development of a new process for consultation with the public during the design and implementation of service adjustments. Previous practice in Northern Virginia was to hold hearings where the public was informed of proposed service adjustments that had largely been agreed to already in the technical and political decision process. The proposed adjustments were often based on a limited ridership count of the route under consideration and a frequent objective of the adjustments was to reduce service and subsidy requirements. An alternative approach that was introduced on the 66X service was to survey riders to determine travel needs and to keep riders informed of impending changes through newsletters distributed on the bus. In light of the ridership increases that occurred after service was reduced, it appears that careful planning and ongoing communications can minimize the ridership problems associated with schedule adjustments.

THE 66X EXPRESS BUS SERVICE

Ridership on the 66X grew during the demonstration to a level of about 200 passenger-trips per day by June 1985. (See Figure 1.) As shown in Figure 2, eighty percent of the bus riders drive their own automobiles to the lot and park, while 12 percent of total riders are dropped off. The remaining eight percent either walk or bicycle to the lot to use the 66X and there are generally more riders in the morning than in the evening.

A chronological description of project highlights follows:

May 2 to September 3, 1984

The 66X commenced operations on May 2nd with 16 daily express trips to and from the inactive West Falls Church Metrorail station parking lot and the operational Rosslyn Metrorail station. Eight trips were made during the morning peak period from 6:35 A.M. to 8:20 A.M., and eight were made in the evening peak from 4:40 P.M. to 6:25 P.M. The fare for each trip was \$1.30 (with a \$.25 transfer discount for Metrorail riders in the evening only).

Several techniques were used to promote the 66X. Commercials were placed on radio, in newspapers, and in local government newsletters. Opening day press kits were also produced and distributed. Other later promotional efforts included:

1. Handbill distribution at the Parkington garage (which provided commuter parking for Ballston Metrorail riders) prior to its closure for redevelopment:

FIGURE 1

RIDERSHIP ON THE 66X EXPRESS BUS

MAY 1984 TO JUNE 1985

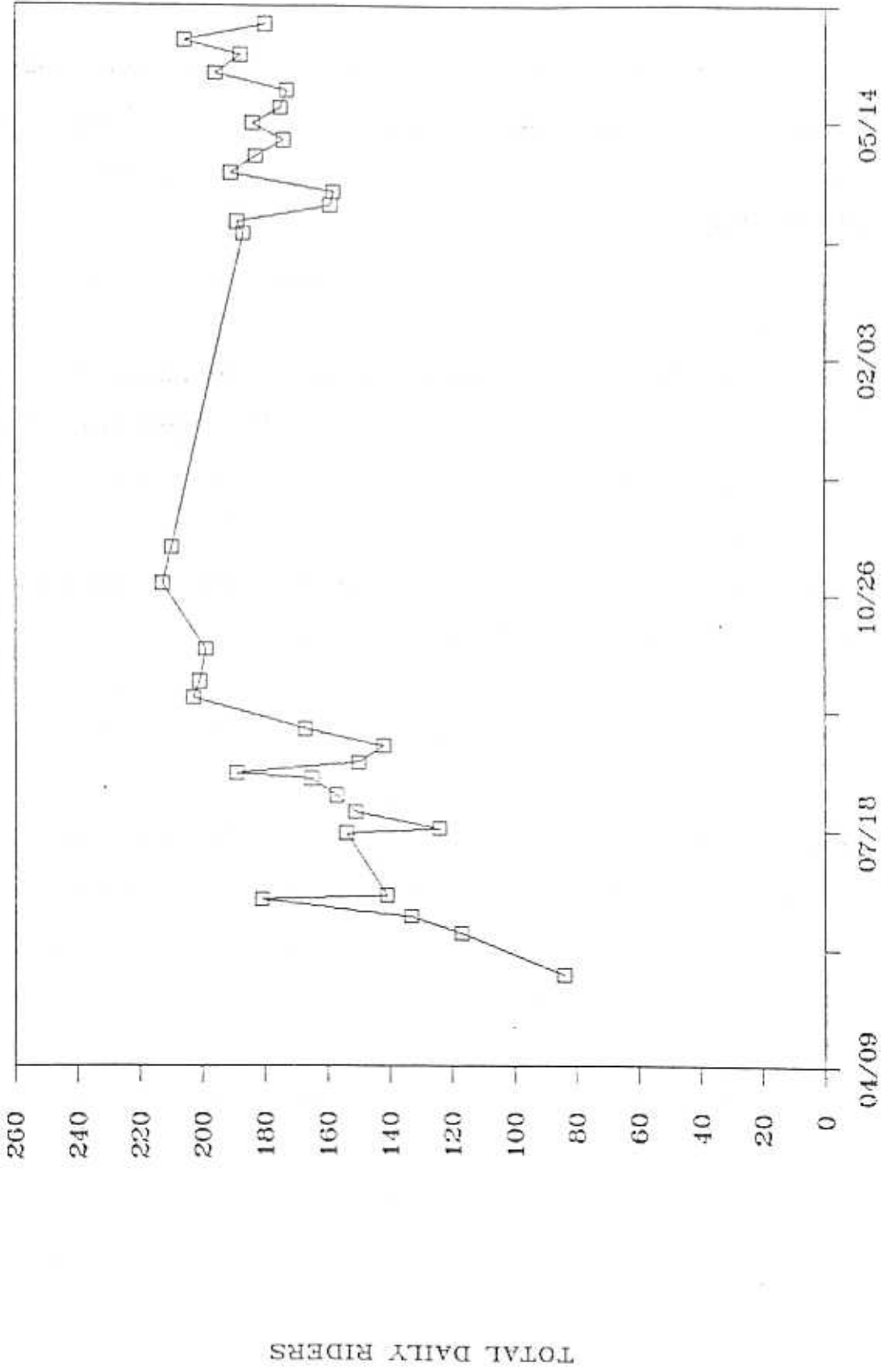


FIGURE 2

METROBUS EXPRESS ROUTE 66X
TRENDS IN ACCESSING/DEPARTING THE SERVICE

DATE OF SURVEY	PARK AND RIDE	WALKED OR BIKED	DROPPED OFF	TOTAL TRANSIT RIDERS	
3/28/85	151	81%	18 10%	17 9%	186
4/2/85	151	81%	12 6%	26 14%	189
4/9/85	139	75%	7 4%	14 8%	160
4/15/85	145	78%	9 5%	10 5%	164
4/23/85	147	79%	16 9%	28 15%	191
4/30/85	152	82%	12 6%	19 10%	183
5/7/85	149	80%	14 8%	12 6%	175
5/14/85	138	74%	15 8%	31 17%	184
5/21/85	150	81%	19 10%	16 9%	185
5/28/85	148	80%	13 7%	26 14%	187
6/4/85	156	84%	16 9%	24 13%	196
6/12/85	150	81%	14 8%	24 13%	188
6/18/85	162	87%	16 9%	28 15%	206
6/25/85	142	76%	21 11%	27 15%	190

3 MONTH AVERAGE :	80%	8%	12%		

2. A direct mailing to 350 homeowners' associations in the vicinity of Tysons Corner, Vienna and Falls Church; and,
3. A newsletter to 66X riders to encourage word-of-mouth promotion and to advise them of upcoming service and fare adjustments.

A survey of 66X riders was also undertaken on the morning of June 21, 1985. The results indicated that all 72 passengers were making work trips and that a majority had final destinations in Washington, D.C., as shown below:

<u>Destination</u>	<u>Percent of 66X Riders</u>
Rosslyn:	28%
Pentagon/Crystal City:	7%
Washington, D.C.:	61%
Unknown:	4%

The survey also revealed that most riders were very satisfied with the service -- they found it to be "very convenient" and a time saver for long distance commutes in the I-66 corridor. There were also suggestions to improve ridership and services including:

- o Additional publicity in the newspaper or on radio;
- o Reduce the \$1.30 fare;
- o Provide a telephone and bus schedules at the parking lot;
- o Provide additional signs for the West Falls Church parking lot entrances;

- o Provide a bus shelter at the parking lot; and,
- o Provide a sidewalk on Haycock Road for pedestrians approaching the parking lot entrance.

Another issue explored in the survey was whether or not ridership would be affected by a service reduction to reduce operating costs. The survey questions were phrased in a way that a new schedule could be drawn that would best fit the needs of a majority of the riders. (See Appendix.) The responses revealed that only eight riders would have major problems with a revised schedule that increased headways by five minutes—from 15 to 20 minutes. Further, none of the riders indicated that an additional five minutes in the schedule would stop him or her from using the service. Finally, there was little objection to delaying the arrival of the first morning trip by five minutes or to making the last evening trip 15 minutes earlier. However, there was substantial demand for an earlier trip in the evening rush hour.

NVTC decided to postpone any service changes on the 66X until the regional bus service adjustments were made. The purpose of the delay was to minimize confusion among existing riders over schedule changes. The service changes were programmed for implementation in early September.

September 4, 1984 to June 30, 1985.

The service was adjusted on September 4th to eliminate four trips per day, for a total of 12 daily trips. Six trips were made in the morning from 6:40 to 8:20 A.M., with six in the evening from 4:30 to 6:50 P.M. This adjustment, plus the observation that bus running times on I-66 were faster than originally estimated, allowed WMATA to reduce the number of buses needed to provide the service from three to two. As a result,

NVTC was able to realize a savings of \$46,100 in operating costs over 12 months (from \$193,500 to \$147,400). NVTC re-programmed these savings to finance 14 months of operation instead of the originally planned 12 months. NVTC terminated its financial responsibilities for the 66X on June 30, 1985.

The service reduction on the 66X had an unexpected result--ridership continued to grow. Ridership increased by 7.4 percent from a previous high of 189 trips on August 14th to 203 trips on September 12th. Ridership stabilized at around 200 daily trips by the eighth month of the demonstration.

A public hearing for continued operation of the 66X was held on June 11, 1985. Fairfax County endorsed continuation of the service with one less trip in the morning period. NVTC distributed handbills to the riders notifying them of the date and location of the hearing and WMATA put notices on the 66X buses. As a result of this publicity, 20 riders attended the hearing (representing 20 percent of the ^{daily riders} ~~ridership~~). The morning trip was eliminated as proposed but the first trip was rescheduled for 6:50 A.M. (This differed from the original WMATA proposal of 7:05 A.M.)

POST-DEMONSTRATION PERIOD

The 66X provides 5 daily morning trips from 6:50 to 8:30 A.M. and 6 evening trips from 4:30 to 6:50 P.M. The fare was increased to the current level of \$1.40 per trip (after the July 1984 fare adjustments) and ridership has remained fairly constant.

CARPOOL STAGING AT THE WEST FALLS CHURCH PARKING LOT .

There was little carpooling activity observed at the West Falls Church parking lot. A ridesharing/transit relationship did not develop as planned and some of the reasons for the lack of ridesharing activity probably had to do with the roadway access to the parking lot. Unlike Springfield, where numerous bus routes converge on the carpool parking areas, the 66X was the only bus service and most patrons required an automobile to reach the parking lot. Carpoolers in this area probably found door-to-door pick-up more convenient than meeting at a staging area and the relatively inaccessible location of the parking lot may have discouraged impromptu carpooling. A few motorists were observed trying to recruit 66X riders at the parking lot (presumably to meet the High Occupancy Vehicle 3 requirement on I-66) but generally were unsuccessful.

Appendix

66X EXPRESS BUS TRAVEL SURVEY

Sponsored by: The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC)

Dear 66X Express Bus Patron:

Please complete this brief questionnaire during your trip to Rosslyn and return it to the survey person when you depart. We are seeking your advice on ways to improve ridership on the 66X while better serving your travel needs, through adding new trips or slightly rearranging the existing schedule. The information you provide is completely confidential and the survey person will be happy to answer any questions.

1. The purpose of your trip is:

- work-related
- recreation/tourist
- shopping
- other (specify) _____

2. Your final destination is:

(nearest intersection or landmark)

3. How did you travel to the West Falls Church Metrobus stop?

- drove alone and parked
- drove with other(s) and parked → Total persons in car: _____
- dropped off
- walked
- other (specify) _____

4. In an average week, how often do you use the 66X bus?

_____ one-way trips per week

5. Compared to the present schedule (on the attached card), would your use of the 66X be affected if the morning buses began slightly later at 6:40 A.M. and ran every 20 minutes (instead of every 15 minutes)?

Sample Schedule

<u>Leave</u> <u>W.F.Church</u>	<u>Arrive</u> <u>Rosslyn</u>
6:40 a.m.	6:55 a.m.
7:00	7:15
7:20	7:35
7:40	7:55
8:00	8:15
8:20	8:35

- no effect, continue to use
- some effect, use less frequently
- major problem, discontinue use

Comments, recommendations: _____

6. Compared to the present schedule (on the attached card), would your use of the 66X be affected if the evening buses ran every 20 minutes (instead of every 15 minutes) and ended at 6:20 p.m.?

Sample Schedule

Leave <u>Rosslyn</u>	Arrive <u>W.F. Church</u>
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4:40 p.m.	4:55 p.m.
5:00	5:15
5:20	5:35
5:40	5:55
6:00	6:15
6:20	6:35

no effect, continue to use
 some effect, use less frequently
 major problem, discontinue use

Comments, recommendations: _____

7. If evening service ended at 6:00 p.m., would this affect your use of the 66X?

no effect, continue to use
 some effect, use less frequently
 major problem, discontinue use

Comments, recommendations: _____

8. If regular express bus service stopped at 6 p.m., but a late express bus was provided at 6:30 p.m. or 6:45 p.m., would this affect your use of the 66X?

no effect, continue to use
 some effect, use less frequently
 major problem, discontinue use

Comments, recommendations: _____

9. Do you recommend any changes in the current 66X schedule?

no
 yes

Recommended a.m. schedule: _____

Recommended p.m. schedule: _____

Additional comments and suggestion: _____

Thank you for your cooperation.

Call NVTC at 524-3322 for further information.