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## Colgan: McDonnell to call special session on transportation

By [Jonathan Hunley](#)

Published: January 7, 2010

Updated: January 7, 2010

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WOODBIDGE, Va.—State Sen. Charles J. Colgan said this morning that Gov.-elect Robert F. McDonnell will call a special session of the General Assembly to focus on Virginia's road woes, but a McDonnell spokeswoman said that decision hasn't been made.

"I talked to the governor-elect earlier about this, and he said that he plans to call a special session to address transportation," Colgan said at a breakfast meeting of the Prince William area's two chambers of commerce.

The Manassas Democrat is the senior member of the state Senate and chairman of that chamber's budget-writing Finance Committee.

In an interview after the meeting, Colgan said he had discussed the matter with McDonnell about three weeks ago.

The senator said this fall would be a likely time for a special session.

The governor-elect said last month that he wanted to address transportation in his first year in office.

However, McDonnell spokeswoman Taylor Thornley said this morning that how or when transportation would be discussed is "still to be decided."

McDonnell will start his new job Jan. 16. He laid out a detailed transportation plan when campaigning that included privatizing the state's Alcoholic Beverage Control stores.

State Sen. Linda T. "Toddy" Puller, however, said this morning that revenue generated by those stores provides money for public safety, mental health and other needs.

"I do not think selling the liquor stores is the be-all and end-all" of transportation-funding fixes, said the Democrat, who represents part of Prince William County.

*Staff writer Jonathan Hunley can be reached at 703-369-5738.*

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It would appear that Colgan could have waited for the new Governor to take the oath of office before presenting this issue to the Chambers of Commerce.

Let's give the Governor Elect a chance to perform and not expect him to be a magician in the world of politics.

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Raising the gas tax will do nothing if the tax continues to go into the general fund and county govts are able to provide zoning for stoplights along Route 1 or roads that back up to I95.

Take away a counties ability to ask for lower speed limits and creating traffic obstructions on major roads and you'll have a good, solid first step into fixing transportation.

## 10-cent fare hike proposed to help close D.C. Metro budget gap

By Ann Scott Tyson

Friday, January 8, 2010

Metro's board of directors voted unexpectedly Thursday to offer the public more options for closing the system's \$40 million budget gap, including an across-the-board fare increase of up to 10 cents that could offset the need for service cuts.

If approved, a 10-cent fare increase would start in April and bring in about \$4 million in additional revenue by the end of this fiscal year in July -- the same amount that would be saved through the proposed service cuts, Metro officials said. But the figure does not include revenue that would be lost because of the higher fares.

The board called for public comment and hearings to be held within the next two weeks on the fare increase and several other options for addressing the budget shortfall, caused largely by rail and bus ridership that was lower than expected. The board will decide on the remedies Jan. 28.

Any fare increase would be the first since January 2008, when Metro raised rush-period base fares by 30 cents, to \$1.65, and the maximum fare by 60 cents, to \$4.50. Before that, fares were unchanged for four years.

Although the board called for any fare increase to last only until July, it is scheduled to begin discussion this month about possible additional fare increases and service cuts to make up an estimated \$175 million deficit in the preliminary \$1.4 billion operating budget for fiscal 2011.

Nationwide, it is unusual for a public transit service to lower fares once it has raised them, particularly when it faces systemic financial problems, as Metro does, said William W. Millar, president of the American Public Transportation Association.

Heated debate broke out among board members about whether to allow consideration of a 20-cent fare increase -- a position favored by members from Virginia and Maryland -- and the 10-cent option backed by members from the District. Board Chairman Jim Graham of the District prevailed by vetoing the 20-cent proposal. Virginia and Maryland members said

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## 10-cent fare hike proposed to help close D.C. Metro budget gap

customers in their areas had voiced a preference for paying more rather than reducing service.

"I want to put 20 cents out there" to give riders a greater choice, said board member Chris Zimmerman of Arlington County, adding that by limiting the possible increase to 10 cents, cuts in maintenance or service would be inevitable. "Thirty-minute headways are just nonsensical on a system we have spent so much money on," Zimmerman said, referring to a Metro proposal to lengthen the time between trains to 30 minutes after 9:30 p.m. on all routes except the Red Line.

"Many riders commented that they would much prefer a fare increase during late nights and weekends, preserving ridership choice, to a service reduction," Jack Corbett and Kevin Moore, directors of MetroRiders. Org, a rider advocacy group, wrote in a letter to the board. The service cuts would "turn Metro into much more of a commuter-only system rather than a subway people can rely on at all times," they wrote.

In addition to Metro's plan for filling the budget gap, the new options for public comment include:

-- Increasing the amount of capital funds that would be shifted to the operating budget by \$4 million, for a total of \$16 million, an alternative offered by Metro

General Manager John B. Catoe Jr.

-- Reducing the hours of Metrorail service rather than the frequency of trains.

-- Restructuring bus routes rather than eliminating stops or segments.

The board had been expected to authorize rail and bus service cutbacks that would increase crowding and wait times between trains and buses starting at the end of March, Metro officials said.

The planned decreases in rail and bus service also would have started at the end of March, Metro officials said.

Last month, Metro announced that its projected budget gap this fiscal year would be almost double the previous estimate as ridership continued to shrink because of the recession and rising unemployment.

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## 10-cent fare hike proposed to help close D.C. Metro budget gap

Metrorail ridership is 6 percent lower than projected for the budget year, and bus ridership is about 9 percent lower, leading to expected revenue decreases of \$24 million and \$10 million, respectively. Riders are also making shorter trips, further eroding revenue, officials said.

The Washington area transit problems are mirrored to a degree in other large cities as nationwide ridership on transit systems fell almost 4 percent for the first nine months of last year, according to the transportation association.

"Nearly 60 percent of riders take public transportation to commute to and from work, so it is to be expected that public transit ridership would be lower when unemployment is high," Millar wrote in an e-mail. He said the trend to reduce service would probably worsen the problem.

"Raising fares and cutting service drives people away from using public transit and is counterproductive," he said.

Catoe has proposed closing the \$40 million gap for this fiscal year by several means, including shifting \$12 million in parts requirements to the capital budget and using stimulus funds rather than operating funds for \$10 million worth of preventive maintenance.

If approved, the main rail service changes would have included lengthening the time

between trains on weekends, late in the evening and at midday by three to 10 minutes, for savings of almost \$2 million. In addition, the wait time would have increased by two minutes for trains between 6 and 6:30 a.m. weekdays, saving about \$114,000.

Metro would also eliminate the use of eight-car trains during peak hours to save about \$672,000 in maintenance and electricity.

Mezzanines at 10 stations would be closed on weekends and would close at 8 p.m. at five stations on weekdays -- meaning that customers would have to walk an additional block or two to an open entrance -- for a savings of more than \$200,000.

Metrobus service would also be scaled back, saving more than \$1 million, mainly by increasing the time between buses and

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## 10-cent fare hike proposed to help close D.C. Metro budget gap

eliminating bus stops or segments that have few riders. The changes would affect about 100,000 riders in the District, 36,000 in Virginia and 16,000 in Maryland, and would lead to a reduction of 15 buses during peak hours.

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## PRTC eyes a fare increase



John Boal/News & Messenger

Riders walk away from their OmniRide bus at the Woobridge PRTC Transit Center on Telegraph Road on Wednesday.

By [Uriah A. Kiser](#)

Published: January 7, 2010

Updated: January 8, 2010

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A lack of drivers kept some local commuter buses off the roads Tuesday morning, prompting the agency that operates the buses to issue an apology to its riders.

Seven OmniRide buses that normally operate on routes in Dale City, Lake Ridge, Montclair and Manassas didn't run as scheduled Tuesday morning. The lack of service came on a day when frigid weather gripped the region, and at a time when transit officials say fares on those same buses could be going up.

"An apology is an appropriate starting point, and so please accept our apology. With these weather conditions, the missed trips caused many of you to stand outside in the cold for an extended period of time," stated Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission spokeswoman Christine Rodrigo in an e-mail to riders Tuesday afternoon.

The lack of service meant other buses were overcrowded, and that the agency's call center was flooded with multiple complaints from those left stranded, stated Rodrigo.

A rash of illnesses, and the termination and resignation of several bus drivers is to blame for Tuesday's lack of service. While those things are common for any public transportation operation, the private firm contracted to provide bus service for PRTC, First Transit Inc., in the past has always made sure there are enough extra bus drivers to deal with shortages—until this week, Rodrigo stated.

The agency filled the buses with "extra-board" operators, and supervisors, but canceled the buses as a last resort, Rodrigo stated. In light of Tuesday's shortage, the agency aims to make passengers better informed about delayed buses, and to have representatives at major boarding points, including the Horner Road commuter lot, to alert them of service changes.

The agency says five new bus drivers are expected to graduate from a training class this week. A new, larger than normal recruit class is set to begin, but the training takes up to six weeks, and will offer no immediate relief for riders. In the meantime, PRTC could tap its existing operators to work overtime, and could ask other contracted operators for other transit agencies to fill in, stated Rodrigo.

Transit officials this week are also exploring the possibility of a fare increase in response to increasing budget cuts. The agency will hold four public hearings in February to solicit public comments on PRTC's proposed \$30.4 million budget, which includes the proposed fare increase.

"This proposed budget was a difficult one to prepare because of the economic realities of these times. We are halfway through the FY 2010 budget year, and already, nearly all our resources to respond to ridership growth for the next six months have been consumed," said PRTC Executive Director Alfred H. Harf. "We recognize that local funds for fiscal year 2011 will be just as scarce, if not more so."

The balance of PRTC's budget comes from the federal government, as well as local subsidies from the region's 2.1 percent motor fuels tax.

Under the new budget, Prince William County—the transit agency's largest sponsor—will spend \$14.6 million to fund PRTC's services, more money than it recoups from funds generated from the region's 2 percent motor fuels tax, said PRTC Board Chair Michael C. May. When gas prices were higher, the agency was awarded more money from the fuels tax, and has been using a relative surplus of that money to fund operations and capital projects.

Transit officials know the surplus money won't last forever. Additionally, PRTC lowered its new operating budget when, in July, Virginia rescinded \$318,000 in funding to be used during the 2010 budget. Officials also have promised to cut \$86,000 from the 2011 budget, that was to be used for operations and capital projects.

Fares account for 34 percent of the transit agency's total revenue. A fare increase, delaying the purchase of new buses, curtailing the overhaul of existing buses, and prolonging other capital improvements would be used to balance the agency's budget, Harf said.

Talk of fare increases and late buses Tuesday had some riders saying the transit agency should do more to help their riders when the bus doesn't arrive.

"I really think they should do more when it comes to the bus being late, because every now and then you get a good driver who offers you a free ride pass when the bus is late, but other times they just come

late, and they're rude about it," said Dirky Blackwell, 27, of Dale City.

Blackwell said he was once made late to work after his bus failed to arrive, was promised a free ride voucher for his troubles via the mail, and had yet to receive it.

Franco Anderson, 30, who works as a server at a Woodbridge restaurant, also says the bus has made him late to work in the past.

"I can always blame being late on the bus, but when you tell your boss that so many times, you begin to look bad," said Anderson.

Staff writer Uriah A. Kiser can be reached at 703-878-8065.

### ***Public hearings on fare increases***

**Tuesday, Feb. 9** Online forum will begin at noon, at prtctransit.org. Scroll over "MyPRTC" on the right, select "Forums" and follow the posted instructions.

**Wednesday, Feb. 10** Public hearings at the PRTC Transit Center, 14700 Potomac Mills Road, Woodbridge. Two separate presentations beginning at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. with questions and answers following.

**Thursday, Feb. 11** Public hearings at Manassas City Hall, 9027 Center Street, Manassas. Two separate presentations beginning at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. with questions and answers following. Spanish and sign language interpreters will be present at both public hearings.

**Proposed fare increase: OmniRide** SmartTrip users pay \$5.25, up from \$4.75 per trip

**OmniRide Metro Direct** SmartTrip users pay \$2.65, up from \$2.40 per trip

**OmniLink** Riders to pay \$1.20, up from \$1.10 per trip.

\* The proposed OmniRide fare would be increased by an additional 25 cents (to \$5.50 per trip for SmartTrip card users) if congress makes permanent the increase in commuter transit benefits that was legislated by the federal stimulus bill. (The stimulus bill increased the maximum commuter transit benefit from \$120 per month to \$230 per month, but that higher figure will expire in January 2011 unless the congress approves an extension).

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## PRTC OmniRide, OmniLink and Metro Direct bus fares may rise

Washington Post Staff Writer

By Jennifer Buske

Sunday, January 10, 2010

Higher fares but no new services could be in store for Prince William area bus riders as funding dries up for a transit agency that needs to balance its budget in what looks like another grim year.

Al Harf, executive director of the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission, said the commuter-bus service might increase fares on OmniRide, OmniLink and Metro Direct buses by about 10 percent to fund a fiscal 2011 budget of about \$30.4 million. The agency, which serves Prince William County, Manassas and Manassas Park, is faced with diminishing local funding and rising fuel prices. There is also a great deal of uncertainty, Harf said, in what funding will come from the state and federal governments.

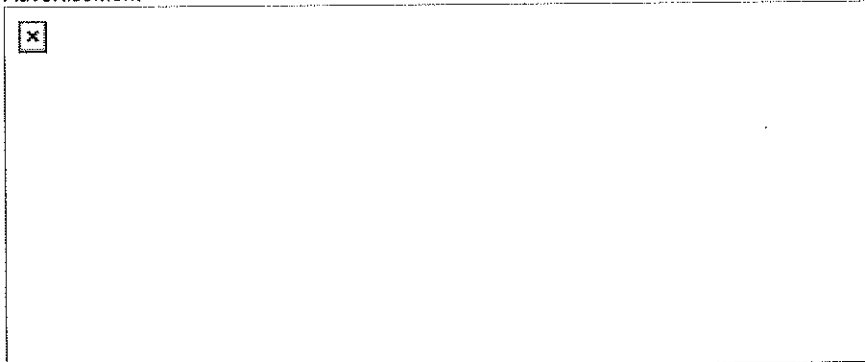
"It's another year we are all going to have to grin and bear the best we can," Harf said. "I hope riders will appreciate the fact that while we are not in a position to increase the services in ways they would like, we are sustaining the services we [offer]. I know it's always difficult to ask people to pay more for something they already have."

The state, which is expected to provide \$5.4 million to PRTC in fiscal 2010, has lowered its anticipated level of funding for fiscal 2011 by \$86,000. Harf said a lot depends on whether federal legislation that guarantees funding for public transportation is reauthorized.

Funding from the local jurisdictions, which comes from a 2 percent fuel tax, is also declining, Harf said. Under the proposed budget, Prince William, Manassas, Manassas Park, Stafford County and Fredericksburg would provide a total of about \$8.7 million, down about \$2.2 million from this fiscal year.

"Given the conditions of the local government, the fact that federal legislation . . . is in a holding pattern and the General Assembly in Richmond has tried and failed three times to get increased funding for transportation, we have to take our destiny into our own hands . . . and make some

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## PRTC OmniRide, OmniLink and Metro Direct bus fares may rise

adjustments," Harf said, noting that means either cutting services or raising fares.

Fares cover about 34 percent of PRTC's budget, and the last fare hike was in December 2008, Harf said. Under the proposal, fares for SmarTrip users on OmniRide would go from \$4.75 to \$5.25; on OmniLink, from \$1.10 to \$1.20; and on Metro Direct, from \$2.40 to \$2.65.

"If things turn out more favorable in the next General Assembly session . . . we can make a correction," and readdress the fare increase, Harf said. "But as public managers, we can only spend the money we are assured to have, and that is what we are trying to do."

Harf said that he expects the fare increase to turn some riders away but that 68 percent of OmniRide users are government employees who often get money to commute. Through the federal economic stimulus, commuters can get up to \$230 a month -- vs. \$120 before -- for transportation, Harf said. Although that increase is set to expire in 2011, Harf said, PRTC might raise fares an additional 24 cents on OmniRide if Congress makes it permanent.

With the proposed fare increase, Harf said the fiscal 2011 budget, which is about \$61,000 larger than the current one, would support the current system and not much

more. The budget halts many capital projects and delays the implementation of a system meant to provide riders with real-time passenger information. The budget doesn't support any additional buses but funds a handful of replacement buses that will arrive in a few years, Harf said.

"This budget is very flat," PRTC Chairman Michael C. May said. "The whole commission recognizes we are in very austere times, and we are trying to do the best we can to maintain the services we have."

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## McDonnell plans to delay legislative fixes on transportation

Washington Post Staff Writer

By *Anita Kumar*

Friday, January 15, 2010

RICHMOND -- Despite making transportation a top priority during last year's campaign, Gov.-elect Robert F. McDonnell (R) said Thursday that he will not propose a fix during this year's legislative session.

point during his first year."

McDonnell, who will be sworn into office Saturday, said that he might call legislators back to Richmond late this year for a special session to find road and transit funding, but only if he can forge a compromise among warring factions of the divided legislature.

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"There are only so many things the General Assembly and I can do well in a short period of time," McDonnell said in an interview. "I don't think that there are enough hours in the day for the General Assembly to evaluate that plan and for me to build the consensus to get it passed."

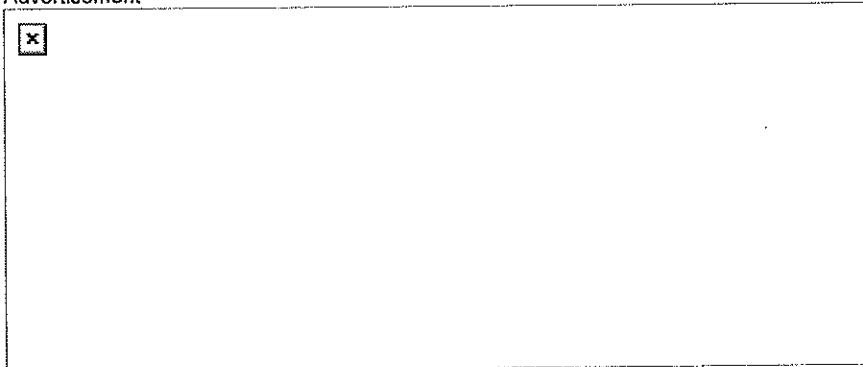
As a candidate, McDonnell pledged to tackle transportation right away, and as recently as last month he said he would propose ways to fund transportation "at some

"We are not going to go into a session and fail," he said. "That's a waste of taxpayers' money."

During his campaign, McDonnell announced a lengthy plan to pay for Virginia's growing list of traffic woes without raising taxes -- privatizing liquor sales, adding tolls on Interstates 85 and 95, starting offshore oil drilling and setting aside a portion of sales tax collections in Northern Virginia to pay for regional projects.

He said his proposal would generate about \$1.5 billion a year over 10 years, but critics

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## McDonnell plans to delay legislative fixes on transportation

accused him of diverting money from schools and other core services. "We've been talking about it now for a long time," McDonnell said during the campaign. "It's time to stop talking and start building."

McDonnell repeatedly criticized his Democratic opponent, state Sen. R. Creigh Deeds of Bath, for failing to introduce a detailed transportation plan and instead pledging to establish a bipartisan commission to reach consensus on the issue.

"That's a bombshell," Sen. J. Chapman "Chap" Petersen (D-Fairfax) said of McDonnell's delay. "I seem to recall that Governor-elect McDonnell campaigned on the idea that he had a plan -- that he beat up Creigh for not having a plan -- so I'm very surprised not to see legislation to enact that plan during this session."

The state's first Republican governor in eight years said his four top priorities for the 60-day legislative session that began Wednesday will be to create jobs and spur the economy, reform education by opening more charter schools and putting more dollars into classrooms, make government more efficient and pass a budget on time without a tax increase. He said he will announce his legislative package next week.

Bob Chase, executive director of the Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance, a

business-supported group that lobbies for transportation funding, said he was not surprised to learn of the delay, considering that the state is facing a \$4.2 billion budget shortfall over the next two years. But, he said, "it's very important that we not lose another year on this."

Virginia has struggled over where to find money for its infrastructure, with Democrats and Republicans at odds over raising taxes or finding other ways to raise money. The state's transportation budget shortfall, in the billions, has led to thousands of job cuts and hundreds of unfinished projects.

McDonnell said he will push four transportation proposals immediately, although none of them would provide new money. He said he will move quickly to reopen the 18 rest stops closed because of

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## McDonnell plans to delay legislative fixes on transportation

budget cuts, raise the speed limit on portions of rural interstates, develop partnerships for road improvements with private companies and issue bonds that were approved in 2007.

"The citizens will see some significant action in short order on transportation, but with regard to the legislative reforms, some will have to wait until another time," he said.

Del. David B. Albo (R-Fairfax), who has long tried to broker an agreement on transportation, said that legislative leaders are in the same place they have been in for the past few years: Senate Democrats want to raise taxes, House Republicans don't.

Albo said McDonnell wants to conduct a top-down review of government to show Democrats that there are some savings that could be used for transportation before he approaches them about other proposals.

"Bob is saying there's no need to have a knock-down, drag-out if he doesn't have a solution this session," he said.

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## Push for infrastructure funding in jobs bill accelerates

Transportation Secretary asks Senate to expand Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery program  
January 22, 2010

In an effort to coax unemployment down from its horrifying highs, there is a new push from the Obama Administration and lawmakers to include billions of dollars for transportation and infrastructure funding in the pending U.S. jobs bill, Reuters reported.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood met with mayors Jan. 21 and touted an alternative to stand-alone legislation for highway and transit funding. He said he is urging the Senate to expand TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery), a program included in 2009's economic stimulus package.

The effort coincides with the push from Gov. Ed Rendell (D-Pa.), Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) and Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) and industry supporters to create a National Infrastructure Bank, which would direct public and private dollars toward infrastructure projects of national or regional significance.

The House jobs bill passed in December would include \$48 billion for public works projects. The Senate's version is expected in a matter of weeks.

Source: Reuters January 22, 2010

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