

Many Hurdles Remain For Commuter System

RAIL, From C1

of which will come from fares, the rest from taxpayers.

Still in doubt is whether the trains will be permitted into the District at two planned stops—1. Enfant Plaza and Union Station. Consolidated Rail Corp. (Conrail), which owns the two miles of track from the Virginia side of the Potomac to Union Station, will not allow passengers on the line unless Congress approves and the President signs legislation that would exempt Conrail from liability.

If service to the District is not permitted, the commuter trains' northernmost stop would be Crystal City, and District-bound passengers would have to change to Metro at King Street in Alexandria. That major inconvenience would cut projected daily ridership from 8,000 a day to just more than 6,000.

Both houses of Congress, in riders to an Amtrak authorization bill, have agreed to exempt Conrail from liability, and final legislation could reach the House floor next week. However, the White House is threatening a veto of the Amtrak measure.

In the meantime, rail officials are hitting their nails because they must decide by August whether to order 10 more railroad cars—for \$5.9 million—in addition to the 28 they ordered in February from Mitsui & Co. USA Inc. Mitsui has a contract with Mafersa Inc. to assemble the 115-seat cars in Brazil. If the railway waits too long, the prices go up and the cars may not arrive on time.

"It gets a little nervous if you are sitting on the sidelines," said John J. Jontig, acting executive director of the Potomac-Rappahannock Transportation Commission, which jointly oversees the commuter rail project with the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission. The commissions, which are made up of elected officials from Northern Virginia, levy gas taxes and sponsor transportation projects.

"They should go ahead and order the cars," said Mark Strand, spokesman for Rep. Stan Parrish (R-Va.), adding that the Conrail legislation could be reintroduced as its own bill even if an Amtrak veto cannot be overridden.

The transportation commissions also are on the verge of ordering 10 locomotives. Railway officials have received two bids, both less expensive than what they had budgeted for the diesel-powered engines, and expect to award a contract in May.

The two commissions will pay for the trains, all platforms and the D.C., Alexandria and Arlington stations using state and federal money and proceeds from a January sale of \$79.35 million in bonds. The Railway Express operations board, made up of commission members, will set fares and schedules.

The six participating cities and counties must pay for the station sites and commuter parking lots in their jurisdictions, but determining where the trains will stop already has become politically charged in some localities.

The stations have the potential to be both traffic nightmares and centerpiece for development. In Manassas, Fredericksburg and the town of Quantico, officials hope commuter rail stops at existing Amtrak stations will stimulate new business, particularly if the railway eventually adds weekend trains for tourists.

Fredericksburg officials are so concerned about the traffic and the costs involved that the city council hasn't signed on to the project. However, Fredericksburg and the Potomac-Rappahannock Transportation Commission have begun discussing a plan in which the city could impose a 2-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax this year that could be used to build a commuter parking lot.

The town of Chifton asked Fairfax County not to build a station there because of traffic concerns, but Manassas Park officials say they hope their station will stimulate the growth of a new "town center," filled with stores and offices.

In eastern Prince William, two developers—Virginia Properties and Hazel/Peterson Cos.—have expressed interest in donating land for stations at Rippon and Woodbridge, said John Schofield, assistant to the county executive. Hazel/Peterson plans to build a 100-acre residential development around the Rippon station, said spokesman Robert C. Kelly.

But a developer-proposed location in Fairfax County at Lorton Road has turned out to be environmentally sensitive. "We're back to the drawing board there," said Sharon Bubova (D-Armundville), a Fairfax supervisor and NVTC secretary-treasurer, adding that Fair-

fax still plans to build a station in the Lorton area, perhaps at Pohick Road.

Fairfax County has three other sites in hand, two owned by the county and one by Metro, said Fairfax transportation planner Tom Biesiadny.

Fairfax ultimately plans to open a fifth station at a planned transportation center just southeast of Springfield Mall. The center also will include an off-ramp from the Shirley Highway HOV lanes, parking for cars and commuter buses and the planned Franconia-Springfield Metro station.

Prince William has not nailed down a site for the Manassas Airport station, which will include a train yard for overnight storage. The owner of one parcel wants the county to buy all 55 of his acres, which could be prohibitively expensive, and a second location is on the edge of the Civil War battle site of Bristow, Schofield said.

Prince William's choices are limited because the Norfolk Southern Corp., which owns the 38 miles of track between Alexandria and Manassas, won't allow the commuter trains to go beyond Bristow. Stafford County will provide at least one station by next October, probably by buying land at Leesland, said planning director Bill Shelly. Spotsylvania County, where the southern line's yard and storage area will be located, won't have a stop unless the county's lawmakers agree to join the project.

COMMUTER RAIL STATIONS EXPECTED TO OPEN IN OCTOBER 1991

WESTERN ROUTE (on Norfolk Southern tracks)

10W. Manassas Airport

The exact site is still in doubt, but it probably will be on the east side of the tracks north of Piper Lane. The site could be as far south as Route 619. This will be the train yard and will have 400 to 500 parking spaces.

9W. Manassas

At the existing depot, between West and Battle. The city will build up to four parking lots with up to 281 spaces.

8W. Manassas Park

East of the tracks at Blooms Road. The Signal Hill development company will build this station and a 300-space parking lot. City officials also hope to create a "town center" with small shops in that area.

7W. Busck Centre

South of the tracks and east of Roberts Parkway. There is a 400-space commuter parking lot on the site.

6W. Rolling Road

South of the tracks in the triangle formed by Shana Place and Burke Road. A 420-space parking lot has been designed.

5W. Backlick Road

South of the tracks and east of Backlick Road. A 220-space parking lot already has been designed.

4. King Street

In Alexandria's Union Station. Commuter rail officials are going to improve connection to the King Street Metro station, currently a three-minute walk away. There will be no parking.

3. Crystal City

South 15th Street and Crystal Drive. No parking.

2. L'Enfant Plaza

Between Sixth and Seventh streets SW. No parking.

1. Union Station

EASTERN ROUTE (on RFP Railroad tracks)

5E. Lorton/Pohick

This exact site is uncertain, but it will be east of the railroad, between Pohick Road and Lorton Road. Depending on the site, the station probably would have 200 parking spaces.

6E. Woodbridge/Dawson Beach

East of the railroad and north of Dawson Beach Road. Prince William officials anticipate a 600-space parking lot.

7E. Rippon

West of the railroad, and at the southern end of Farm Creek Drive. Access will initially be down Farm Creek Drive, and eventually on Rippon Boulevard extended. A 300-space lot is planned.

8E. Quantico

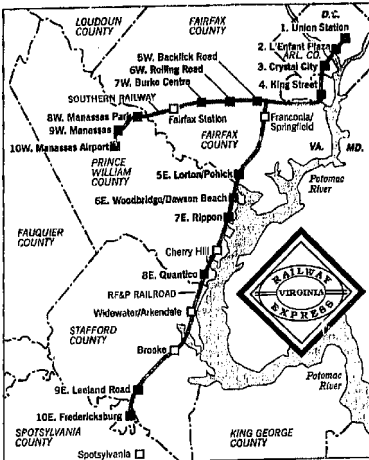
At the existing rail station on Potomac Avenue. An existing 75-car gravel parking lot will be covered with asphalt.

9E. Leesland Road

South of the rail line and west of Leesland Road. Stafford County is still negotiating to buy the land.

10E. Fredericksburg

At the existing rail station. The city is discussing a 200-car parking lot. The trains will be stored in Spotsylvania at Crossroads Business Park (on Route 17 bypass.) No passengers will be allowed to get on and off there.



POSSIBLE FUTURE STATIONS

WESTERN LINE

1. Union Station

Between Manassas and Burke. Fairfax County officials are looking at putting a station at Fairfax Station, perhaps near the Fairfax County Parkway.

EASTERN LINE

1. Union Station

A station has been designed on Route 608, but only 1.5 acres are available. Stafford County is looking at other sites.

2. L'Enfant Plaza

If Spotsylvania agrees to participate, a station would be built in the train yard.

Cherry Hill

Between Rippon and Quantico, on the Cherry Hill peninsula.

Wideawake/Arundale

Between Quantico and Leesland. East of the tracks and north of Brent Point Road.

Broske

A station has been designed on Route 608, but only 1.5 acres are available. Stafford County is looking at other sites.

Spotsylvania

If Spotsylvania agrees to participate, a station would be built in the train yard.

BY DAVID COOK—THE WASHINGTON POST