

Metro Encounters Station Problems

STATIONS, From C1

• The National Airport station dumps suitcase-carrying passengers beyond easy walking distance from the main terminal.

• The Franconia and Vienna station sites in Fairfax County are in the middle of areas planned for low-density development and just outside of areas planned for high-density commercial and residential uses.

These design anomalies exist despite a planning process that began in the early 1960s and exhaustive public hearings on route alignment and station locations in each metropolitan area jurisdiction before the system was adopted in 1968.

Some major changes were made by local governments during this period in both alignments and station locations that had been proposed by the Metro staff and its consultants. But indifference in the mid-1960s let some obvious design faults slip through, planners say.

As the result of a court order, a second round of hearings is being held on each station as it goes into final design. The latitude for changes now, however, is narrow.

At this point, one jurisdiction cannot make changes that would require new station locations or alignments in other jurisdictions. Moreover, any changes made now that add to the cost of the entire system must be borne entirely by the jurisdiction requesting the new design.

This add-on cost agreement among Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority members already is having its impact. The Federal Aviation Administration, for instance, would like to put Metro underground at National Airport in order to place the station entrance at the main terminal.

The planned elevated station is northwest of the north terminal and cannot be moved south because the elevated line must curve to miss the terminal building and runways. Stations cannot be located on a curve.

The federal government is the major contributor to the \$3-billion Metro construction fund, but the added cost—\$30 million—of putting the airport segment underground would have to come out of FAA's own budget.

As described by Metro and local government planners, the basic theory of Metro route alignment and station location is simple. It called for splitting corridors of intensive development with rapid transit routes and placing stations at locations that would either feed passengers from high-density residential areas or attract them to high-density employment centers.

The theory had not changed since the system was adopted four years ago, but the public awareness of it has increased.

Objections have come from officials and community groups who feel the theory was poorly applied in their areas.

The Alexandria City Council has been the loudest objector. It has threatened to back out of Metro if changes are not made in Metro's route within the city and, in fact, has not made the Jan. 1 installment on its \$30.6-million share.

The Alexandria segment of the Huntington line follows the east side of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad tracks. Although an earlier City Council approved this route, the present Council believes it inhibits development around two of the city's four stations.

Some councilmen feel that development around the Madison Street station will be im-

possible and will be limited to a half-circle on the east side of the tracks at King Street.

At both stations, the RF&P tracks will form a barrier to the west. At King Street, development to the west and north is further limited by the existence of a single-family neighborhood, Rosemont, and the George Washington Masonic Memorial.

The Madison site is unusual in that it is sandwiched between two schools, Parker Gray on the east side of the tracks and George Washington Secondary School on the west. Development around the station would require relocation of one or both schools.

Access is possible only from the east and traffic looping into the station from the west will have to pass under the tracks at the narrow Braddock Road underpass.

This tunnel is often thronged with children walking between a public housing project and the schools.

Alexandria is in the midst of design change studies with the Metro staff. One proposal calls for shifting the line between Monroe Street and King Street from the railroad eastward to Rte. 1, which courses through a predominantly black residential area, and putting both the highway and tracks underground or in an open cut.

The council has been told, however, that this change could add from \$15 million to \$50 million to the city's Metro bill, depending on how much of the line is put underground.

Alexandria's problem with access to stations on railroad right-of-ways and development around them is shared by other suburbs and the District of Columbia. Metro planners concede that the convenience and economy of following both railroad and planned freeway right-of-ways into the suburbs was purchased at the price of station design headaches.

Both railroads and freeways prove formidable barriers in planning pedestrian and automobile routes to the stations.

Montgomery and Arlington counties avoided many of these problems by placing major segments of their routes underground along major but unlimited access arteries like Wilson Boulevard and Fairfax Drive in Arlington and Wisconsin and Georgia Avenues in Montgomery.

These stations, however, as well as those located on railroad lines or freeways, require street improvements to provide adequate access. Planners and local government budget officials point out that the capital costs of these access road improvements near stations must be borne by the local governments alone although they are a direct result of Metro construction.

The opportunity for intensive development around stations located in existing transportation corridors in Arlington and Montgomery are so great that both jurisdictions have tried to dampen some proposals for fear of creating too much congestion.

"We can't afford to let every station become an intensive development center," said William H. Hussman Jr., Montgomery's deputy administrator and a member of the Washington Suburban Transit Commission.

Arlington planners have already recommended a cutback of previously planned densities in the Jefferson Davis Highway corridor served by Metro stops at Pentagon City and Crystal City.

In Fairfax, Metro routes miss all nine of the planned regional centers in the county, but planners hope to see the Franconia station, in the heart of a low-density area, shifted to the Springfield regional center on Rte. 95.

Few of the Prince George's

stations are located at planned or existing intensive development centers. Prince George's Plaza is an exception, but here pedestrians will have to cross Belcrest Road and East-West Highway after leaving the station to reach the plaza.

The New Carrollton station in Prince George's could develop into a major center, planners feel, if the Metro-liner stop there is combined with the Metro station and 100 acres of state-owned land is developed commercially.

Access to the area, however, is complicated by the Penn Central Railroad tracks, limited-access John Hanson Highway and a dispute between Prince George's County and the town of New Carrollton over improvement and maintenance of 85th Road between the station area and Annapolis Road.

Proposals for new development and access improvements around stations got off to a slow start in Washington partly because of the difficulty of assembling large tracts and partly because no city agency was working on station designs until last year.

Finally, a transit development team, headed by planner John Fondersmith, was formed to develop station proposals for the city's WMATA representatives. The team's work has resulted in access improvement to far Northeast stations and provisions for better pedestrian access to possible future developments around stations in commercial areas.

As an example of the latter, Fondersmith persuaded Metro planners to incorporate a mezzanine break in the escalator to the surface from the McPherson Square station. The mezzanine can then provide underground access to future redevelopment on both sides of 14th Street.

Every Metro station will have at least one entrance that opens onto a public sidewalk, but commercial developments, such as department stores, may gain direct access to stations by paying for construction of entrances that meet WMATA specifications. Use of these entrances may not be restricted.

Early in its existence, the WMATA board of directors delegated to its general manager and real estate director the authority to make contracts for the purchase of land needed for track right-of-way and stations. The theory was that the politically appointed board members should be insulated from private interest pressures on Metro land deals.

The board, however, does pass on special property deals with private interests that might affect the functioning of the transit system. Examples are the approved station entrance connecting to Woodward and Lothrop's downtown store and a proposal to let de-

veloper Hubert Hoffman retain air rights above the Eisenhower Avenue station in Alexandria in exchange for Hoffman's donation of the station site.

In these instances, the board can consider the financial aspects of the agreement on deciding whether to approve the deal. Final identification of property to be bought and price paid, however, is left to the staff.

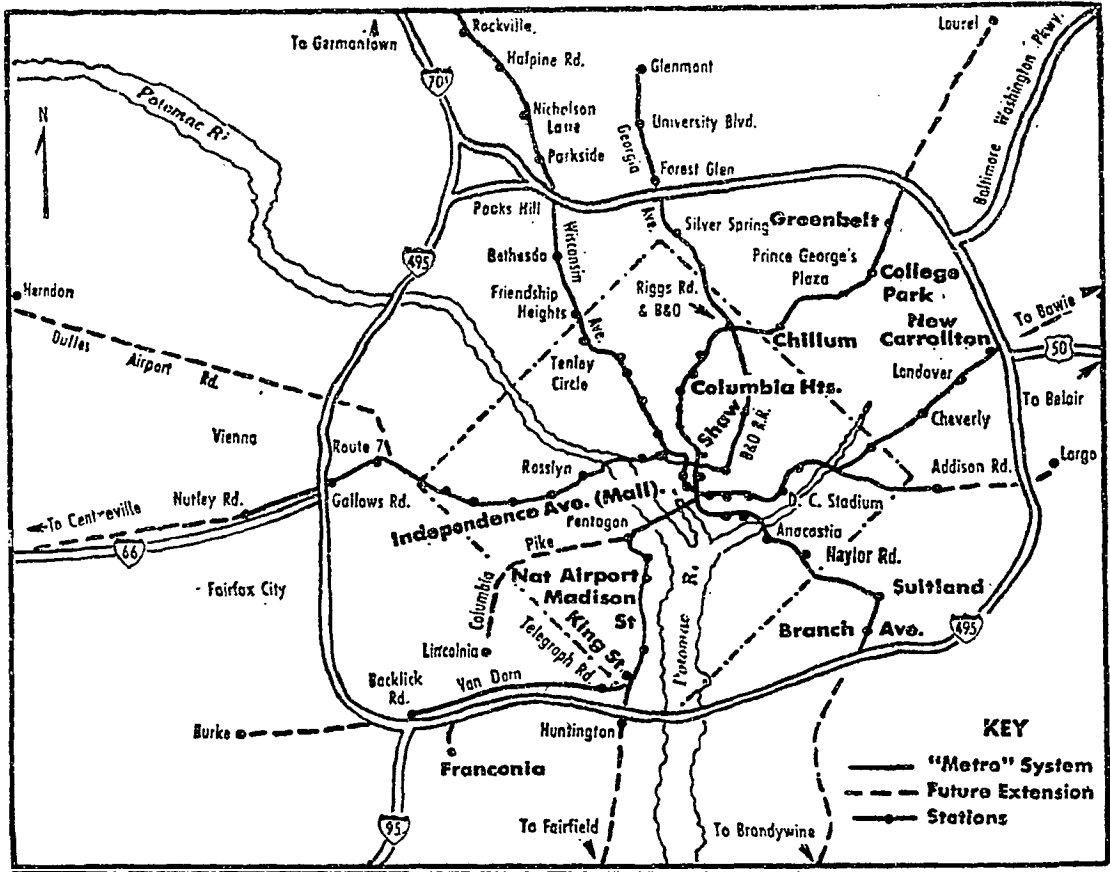
Some of the private proposals complicate final station design immensely. An example is the Friendship Heights station on Wisconsin Avenue at the D.C.-Montgomery line.

Commercial links to the station are being sought by landowners on three corners of

the Western and Wisconsin Avenue intersection. The Washington Suburban Transit Commission finally adopted a station design that was flexible enough to adjust to several plans for development of the area that must be approved by both D.C. and Montgomery officials.

The flexible plan was adopted before all the development and access questions were resolved to avoid delaying Metro's design and construction timetable.

The expectation is that every suburban jurisdiction will find itself struggling with final station designs in the face of construction timetables as Metro's radial routes reach out from the District.



Map shows some of the Metro stations that pose design problems.