The Judiciary Square station is crowded on Metro's opening day, March 27, 1976. Fifty-one thousand people rode the trains that day, though only five stations on the Red Line, from Rhode Island Avenue to Farragut North, and 4.6 miles of track were complete. As plans for a Washington area subway system took shape during the 1960s and early 1970s, the designers continually adapted the route map to satisfy congressional concerns and to accommodate both urban residents and suburban commuters. The result, 25 years after the first stations opened, is a network that binds together a metropolitan area spread over two states and the District of Columbia. Courtesy, Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library, © Washington Post Company.

Mapping Metro, 1955-1968

Urban, Suburban, and Metropolitan Alternatives

by Zachary M. Schrag

For two centuries, planning Washington has meant planning the federal city. From L'Enfant's original design of the 1790s through the McMillan Commission plan of 1901 and the building of the Federal Triangle in the 1930s, planners and architects poured their efforts into creating a stately home for the federal government within the District of Columbia. Even the National Capital Planning Commission's 1996 *Extending the Legacy* plan, though determined to look beyond the Mall, scarcely mentions the suburbs that house four-fifths of the urbanized area's residents. The best-known regional plan, the Commission's 1961 *Policies Plan for the Year 2000*, has long been derided as vague and utopian.[1]

But hidden in plain sight is a regional plan for Washington that is neither utopian nor vague; indeed, it is as real as concrete and has been planned down to the inch. It is Metro, a 103-mile-long rapid transit system serving Washington and its suburbs. Metro is a hybrid technology, combining the long reach of a commuter rail network with the frequent service and underground downtown stations of an urban subway. People familiar with other cities are often puzzled by this combination. Those accustomed to the New York subway expect flat fares and closely spaced stations. In contrast, those more familiar with commuter-rail systems, including San Francisco's BART, are likely to gasp at Metro's $10 billion cost, not understanding that Metro's urban sections required extensive tunneling. Only when Metro's true function is understood does its form make any sense. It is a metropolitan system, designed to serve both city and suburb and to bind them into a working whole.[2]

Metropolitan planning is not easy. However interdependent, city and suburb do have different priorities. In the 1950s and 1960s, planners and politicians mapping out routes for the new system had to reconcile the District of Columbia's demands for good service and minimal disruption with the suburbs' calls for economy. The system they eventually produced is far from perfect in either its urban or suburban sections. Yet it does work, as both a political compromise and a transportation system. In a nation where city and suburb are often seen as inevitable antagonists, such regional cooperation is no small achievement. As a physical embodiment of metropolitan identity,

Notes begin on page 90.

Metro is worthy of its name.

The first serious consideration of bringing rapid transit to the capital emerged from the suburbanization of the Washington region. Before World War II, the District of Columbia had dominated the region in population and employment. But the growth of the region during World War II, plus the postwar explosion in automobile ownership, changed that. By 1950, the Maryland and Virginia suburbs housed 40 percent of the region's population. Moreover, the construction of the Pentagon heralded a movement of federal jobs to suburban locations.

City planner Harland Bartholomew did not think that this dispersal of jobs and people was necessarily a bad thing. Born in 1889, Bartholomew had become, by midcentury, one of the nation's preeminent planners, having worked on comprehensive plans for dozens of cities. When the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPPC) began work on a comprehensive plan for the Washington region, Bartholomew was a natural choice for chief consultant. He warned that Washington's downtown could not absorb any more government employment, lest it choke to death on traffic.

Responding in large part to his advice, in 1950 the Commission proposed a decentralized plan for the region, based on the dispersal of government agencies to suburban locations, continued residential suburbanization, and increased reliance on the private automobile as the means of getting people from home to work. Judging that "the automobile is here to stay [and] its use will continue to increase as the metropolitan area continues to grow and distances become greater," the plan suggested a series of expressways and parkways throughout the region to serve its thousands of new automobile owners. With employment dispersed, the region could no longer serve all commuters with radial highways converging downtown. Therefore, the 1950 plan proposed a set of three concentric ring roads: one-way streets and expressways in an inner ring downtown, parkways and freeways in an intermediate ring three to five miles from the White House, and an outer ring outside the District of Columbia, a proposal that eventually evolved into the Capital Beltway.[3]

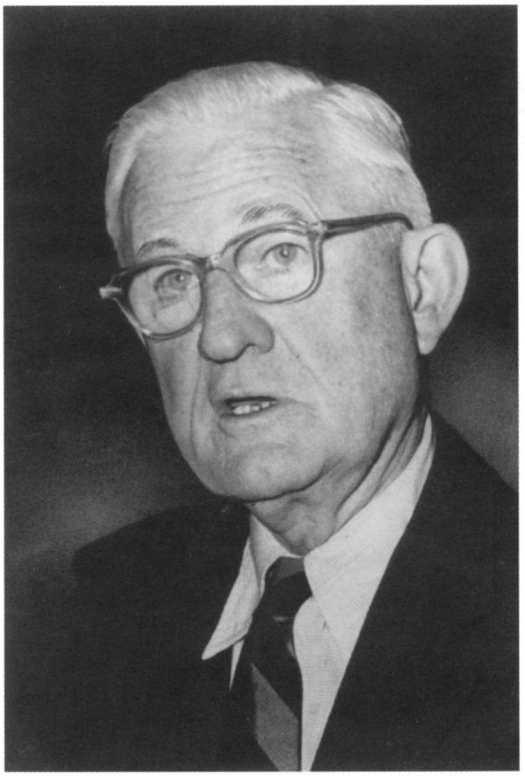
The 1950 plan was only a rough sketch based on spotty data, so Bartholomew recommended a more thorough transportation study. As it turned out, he was essentially recommending a course of action for himself. In September 1953 President Eisenhower appointed him chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), which succeeded the NCPPC. And in 1955 Congress granted his wish for a transportation study, appropriating $400,000 to create the Mass Transportation Survey. As chairman of the NCPC, a member of the National Capital Regional Planning Council, a planner with decades of experience in the region, and the man who had originally suggested a transportation survey, Bartholomew controlled the survey, setting its agenda and picking its expert staff. As one congressional observer put it, "as the dominant personality, a considerable measure of credit or blame for the outcome of the survey can be attributed to him."[4]

The biggest question on the table was if mass transit had any significant role still to play, or if, in Bartholomew's words, "individual automobile transportation can take over the full burden of transportation in a large metropolitan area such as Washington." Following a strike in the summer of 1955, the future of the city's streetcar system was in doubt. And even a healthy streetcar and bus system was no substitute for rapid transit: buses or trains running on their own right-of-way, unimpeded by automobile and pedestrian traffic, and frequent enough that schedules would be unnecessary.[5]

On this issue, Bartholomew himself was undecided. He had a record of supporting highways, sometimes to the detriment of transit. In 1945 he had advised against a proposal for streetcar subways in

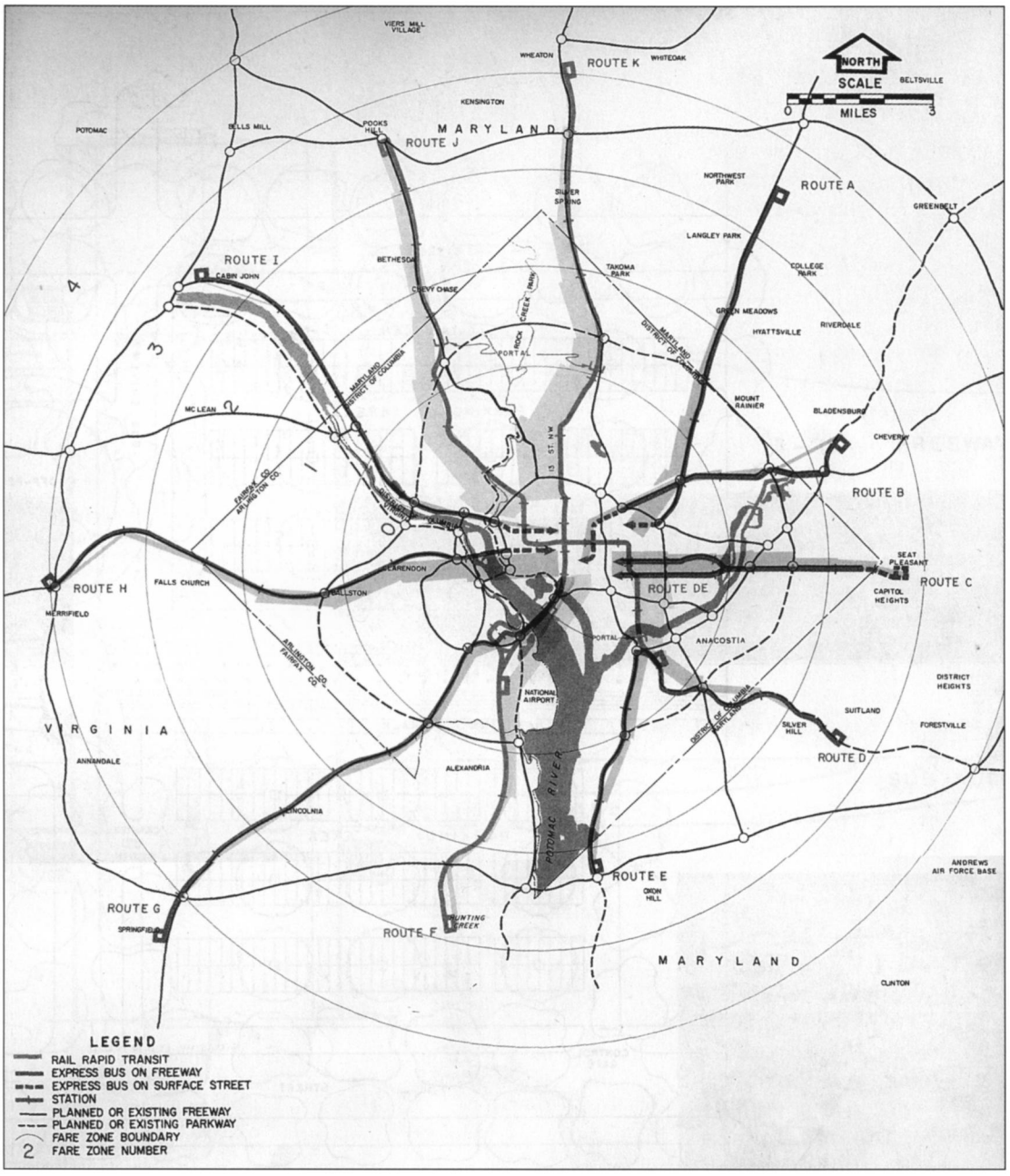
Washington, arguing that it would "over-concentrate" real estate values in a small area of downtown. The 1950 plan for which he had served as chief consultant dismissed rapid transit with a single sentence, stating that "neither the existing nor the probable future population pattern" in the area would provide the densities needed to make rapid transit economically sensible. As he would tell Congress in 1960, while some commuters could be lured to transit, "this is the age of the automobile and we cannot ignore it. People are going to have cars and they are going to wish to drive them." Yet Bartholomew was not quite ready to abandon the city to the automobile. In 1949, he had observed that "the automobile has disrupted and virtually exploded the city fully as much as would an atomic bomb could its force be spent gradually," hardly a reassuring image. And he eventually accused a colleague of a "prejudice against any form of rail transit," insisting that rail still had a role to play when demand justified it.[6]

Bartholomew's transportation proposal, released in 1959, reflected these beliefs. He held true to his conviction that decentralization was a good thing, and that a planner should accommodate commuters' wish to drive their cars. The plan accepted all the highways proposed by the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia highway departments, then giddy with the prospect of 90-percent federal financing for the new Interstate Highway System. That meant keeping the three rings of the 1950 plan, upgrading the inner ring to an all-expressway Inner Loop, and building radial highways from the Inner Loop to the suburbs in several directions. In addition, the plan called for a Northwest Freeway through Rock Creek Park to Bethesda, a North Central Freeway parallel to North Capitol Street, and other segments. All in all, the plan added 70 miles of parkways and freeways to the 81 miles already built and the 178 miles planned by the highway departments, for a total of 329 miles.[7]



Harland Bartholomew, chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission, believed that "this is the age of the automobile and we cannot ignore it," so he called for a network of circumferential and radial highways to expedite commuting. He recommended only limited rapid rail and express bus routes to supplement highways. Courtesy, WD, DCPL, © WPC.

But even as the plan proposed this massive roads program, it reflected Bartholomew's doubts that these highways could handle all the traffic predicted by his models. To supplement the freeways, the plan called for eight new routes of express buses, though these would have to push through rush-hour traffic, rather than getting their own lanes. And it included four rapid rail routes, comprising about 33 route miles. Half the mileage would be built above ground, in the median strips of the new freeways proposed by the plan. The rest would be underground downtown. Despite this underground portion, Bartholomew



had not proposed a truly urban subway, designed to get people from one part of the city to another. Rather, in the words of the plan, the express bus and rail routes would constitute "a new kind of fast, comfortable public transit between the suburbs and downtown Washington." That was Bartholomew's vision of metropolitan transportation planning: easing long commutes from suburban home to downtown job.[8]

Bartholomew's 1959 report persuaded Congress to move ahead with rapid transit, but only cautiously. In 1960, it passed the National Capital Transportation Act, creating the National Capital Transportation Agency (NCTA) as a temporary body designed to draft a more specific proposal for rail transit in the region. The act kept Bartholomew's focus on rail as a service to suburban commuters, specifying that any planned rapid transit system serve Union Station, the hub of any future commuter rail service. Had Richard Nixon won the presidential election that fall, it is quite like-

The Mass Transportation Plan of 1959 presented the first serious proposal for rapid transit in the Washington region. Four rail lines—routes J, K, F, and part of D—and eight express bus lines supplement an extensive highway network, shown in solid and dotted black lines. The shading around route lines indicates estimates of volume of commuter traffic, increasing with proximity to the city. Courtesy, WD, DCPL.

ly that the agency would have simply proposed a more detailed version of Bartholomew's plan. But the election of John F. Kennedy to the presidency made planning for rapid transit in Washington much more ambitious and controversial.

Though Kennedy famously derided Washington as a city of Southern efficiency and Northern charm, in his actual deeds he was a good friend of the city, especially in terms of architecture and planning. Having arrived in Washington in 1947 as a 29-year-old congressman, by 1961 Kennedy felt quite at home in the city. As president, he made it clear to the D.C. Board of Commissioners that he wanted "to have Washington serve as a model for the country" in municipal affairs, from the prevention and treatment of mental retardation to ensuring that the hot dogs at the baseball stadium were indeed served hot.[9]

With worries about matters of national concern, the president had little time for the myriad details of urban and regional planning, but he gave important jobs to local activists who had spent the Eisenhower years complaining about federal insensitivity. Elizabeth Rowe, a longtime resident of the District who had been horrified by three-dimensional models of proposed highways in downtown Washington, became chairman of the NCPC. Charles Horsky, a lawyer and housing activist who feared the destruction of housing in the name of freeway construction, became the first White House Adviser for National Capital Affairs. Most significantly, Kennedy chose as the National Capital Transportation Agency administrator C. (for Charles) Darwin Stolzenbach.[10]

Stolzenbach was a specialist in operations research, a method of applying economic analysis to a variety of problems. At a time when operations research and systems analysis were being adapted from their military origins to civilian tasks, this credential qualified him to manage a major engineering project. More significant than Stolzenbach's work history was his extracurricular interest in local affairs, particularly planning. After a draft of Bartholomew's plan became public in 1958, homeowners in the path of his proposed freeways had begun to organize to oppose them. Particularly vocal were the lawyers and other professionals of the Cleveland Park neighborhood of Washington, who created the Northwest Committee for Transportation Planning to fight the proposed Northwest Freeway through that neighborhood. When, as a Montgomery County civic group leader, Stolzenbach testified against that freeway, he revealed himself to be a potential ally. So following the election of 1960, the Cleveland Park protestors passed on his name to their friends on Kennedy's transition team, securing Stolzenbach his new post.[11]

Bartholomew had planned from the outside in, thinking primarily of the need to get people from the suburbs to downtown. As NCTA administrator, Stolzenbach sought to reverse that perspective, asking instead how to minimize the need for highways with their resultant disruption to the city. The 1960 Act required that "the Agency's studies shall . . . include evaluations of the transportation system recommended in the [1959] transportation plan, and of alternative facilities and kinds of service." Stolzenbach interpreted this clause to give him the power and duty to approve or reject all local highway plans. In November 1961 he asked the NCPC to defer final approval of the proposed Three Sisters Bridge over the Potomac and an Inner Loop

interchange until his agency could produce its plan. Rowe was sympathetic, worried about displacement and the disruption of neighborhoods, and reluctant to "freeze the pattern of past thinking" by building highways before the NCTA had released its report. But Stolzenbach had tipped his hand, striking at the very core of the freeway plan for the city, and the result was instant polarization. At the Bureau of the Budget, staffer Harold Seidman shook his head at the naiveté of this new agency administrator who would act without consulting other federal agencies, alienate officials whose support he would need, and project the appearance of having "been captured by the anti-highway groups in town."[12]

After November 1961, Stolzenbach got nowhere with the highway departments of the District, Maryland, and Virginia, all of which refused to cancel any highways. Brigadier General Frederick Clarke, who as the engineer commissioner of the District of Columbia was responsible for public works, had nothing against rapid transit, so he proposed to Stolzenbach that they join forces to promote both a complete highway system and a complete transit system. Appalled, Stolzenbach indignantly replied that even if he could accept such an "unholy proposition," he would not trust Clarke and the other road builders to live up to the deal. Though the technical staff of each department continued to cooperate in their traffic projections, the top officials of the NCTA and the highway departments all but stopped talking.[13]

Shrugging off the opposition, in November 1962 Stolzenbach produced his manifesto, *Transportation in the National*

National Capital Transportation Agency administrator C. Darwin Stolzenbach uses a model to explain possible subway connections at Union Station, March 1964. Reflecting many citizens' resistance to the proposed highway network, Stolzenbach recommended an expanded mass transit system, including rapid rail, in place of some of the highways. Courtesy, AP/World Wide Photos.

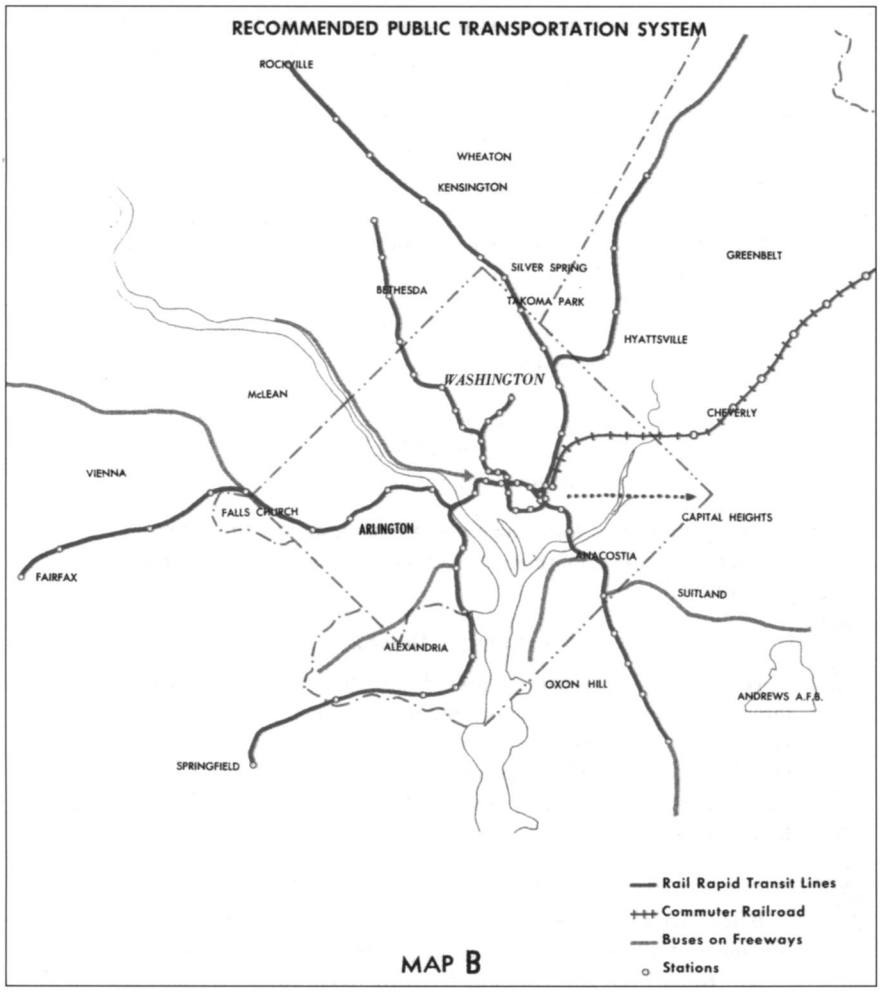
Capital Region: Finance and Organization. While it maintained a few continuities with the 1959 MTS report, Stolzenbach's plan introduced a new consideration: the desire to avoid the destruction of homes and neighborhoods by highways. Early in the introduction, it warned that many of the highways proposed by the MTS "would pass through residential areas and parks" and generally regarded highways as guilty until proven innocent.

As if to emphasize Stolzenbach's claim to jurisdiction over highways, the report placed a highway map opposite its map of proposed transit routes. Gone from this highway map was Bartholomew's intermediate loop. Gone was the northern half of the Inner Loop—the so-called North Leg and East Leg—except for enhancement of existing streets. Gone was Bartholomew's Northwest Freeway. Gone also was the Three Sisters Bridge. The NCTA acknowledged the need for some new highways, but only where they could be built with the minimum impact on established neighborhoods. Thus, it combined the North Central and Northeast Freeways of the 1959 plan with a version of the East Leg to create a Y-shaped freeway whose stem would run alongside of the B&O railroad tracks leading north from Union Station. Because these tracks had been in place since the beginning of the century, a highway alongside them would not divide neighborhoods any more than they already were divided, "avoiding the substantial relocation of persons, loss of taxable property, and disruption of neighborhoods" that would result from the 1959 plan.[14]

To make up for the substantial reduction in planned highways, Stolzenbach called for a much more ambitious rapid transit system than that envisioned by the Bartholomew's Mass Transportation Survey. In place of the 33-mile rapid transit system proposed in 1959, the NCTA envisioned an 89-mile, 65-station system, composed of two downtown trunk lines crossing twice, then splitting into seven radial branches serving termini 10 to 15 miles from the Capitol. Even with seven branches, the rail could not go everywhere, so the agency filled in the gaps with a 15-mile commuter rail line (with less frequent service) and five express bus routes totaling 52 miles. As a final afterthought, Stolzenbach added a dotted arrow showing future service to the one section of the region left unserved: the eastern corner of the District and Capitol Heights, Maryland. And he promised the whole package for a mere $793 million in capital outlays, with the new service so popular (and parking and highways so limited) that all but $180 million would be paid back from the farebox.[15]

Stolzenbach's plan retained the basic mission of Bartholomew's: to bring suburban commuters to the downtown employment core. Purely urban functions were a lower priority. Thus, because Stolzenbach was determined to propose a combined rail and road proposal that would cost less than the 1959 plan's system, his rail lines were largely constrained to cheap rights-of-way alongside railroad tracks or in the medians of those freeways the NCTA could tolerate. Only 19 miles of rail would be placed in underground tunnels. Similarly, Stolzenbach instructed his planners to serve areas of dense employment, rather than residential neighborhoods. It was this focus on bringing suburbanites to their offices, along with some tricky engineering challenges, that kept a Georgetown station off Stolzenbach's and later maps.[16]

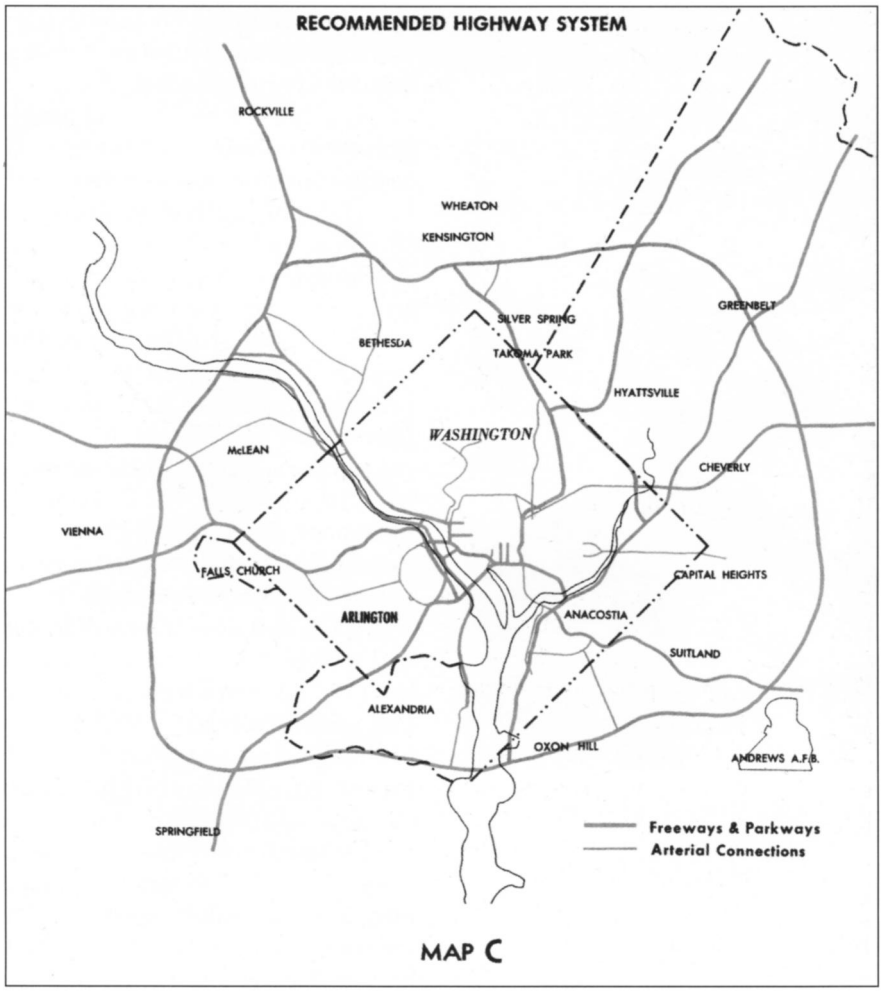
Stolzenbach's plan did serve several urban neighborhoods, including the work-



The 1962 NCTA transportation plan proposed a stunning 89-mile rapid rail system, above, but the accompanying map, opposite page, showing a cut-back highway network, earned Stolzenbach the wrath of the highway lobby and other planners in the region. Courtesy, WD, DCPL.

ing-class areas of Columbia Heights in the central city and Anacostia. More significantly, Stolzenbach had redefined the function of rapid transit. Rather than being a complement to highways, it would be a substitute. It would still serve the suburbs, but it would also serve the city, both by providing rail service and by protecting it from the freeway bulldozers. To those engineers and politicians who believed that road building meant progress, his map was a slap in the face.

Darwin Stolzenbach was a passionate man, often unable to see things from his opponents' perspective. As a result, his NCTA was unprepared for the hostile reaction that greeted its 1962 report. The city's newspapers, fearful that Washington would miss the window for 90-percent federal funding of highways, had been critical of Stolzenbach since his calls for delay in 1961. Now, with the report out, they went after the agency again, complaining that it was silly to argue



the relative merits of highways and rapid transit when the best thing to do would be to build both. Meanwhile, local officials largely stayed loyal to Bartholomew's plan of something for everybody.[17]

More antagonistic were the responses from road-building agencies and pro-automobile lobbies threatened by Stolzenbach's proposal to shift hundreds of millions of dollars from highway construction to transit, which they feared could set a national precedent of highway cancellation and diversion of funds. In February 1963, both the Department of Commerce (the parent of the Bureau of Public Roads) and the D.C. Engineer Commissioner (the parent of the D.C. Department of Highways) issued reports attacking the NCTA's methodology. The reports insisted that highways could move more people for less money than transit, but either failed to notice or could not understand Stolzenbach's alternative value system. They devoted dozens of pages to the question of whether highways or transit could satisfy the most commuters for the least cost, but barely glanced at the negative effects of highway construction, especially the issue of destruction of housing.[18]

Likewise, the D.C. branch of the American Automobile Association credited the NCTA with "the worst example of

Walter McCarter had a distinguished career in urban transit management before he came to Washington as head of the NCTA in 1965. Far less controversial than Stolzenbach, he helped convince Congress to pass a much simpler rapid rail plan within months of his arrival. Courtesy, WD, DCPL, © WPC.

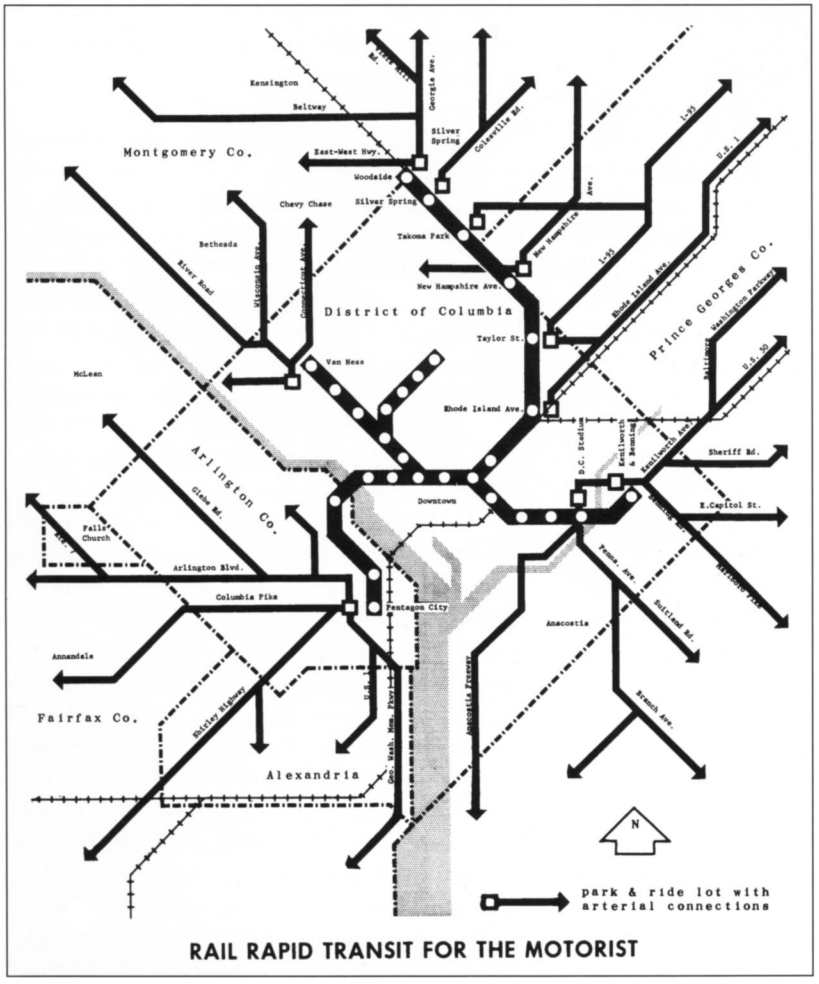
urban transportation planning in the country." Retired Major General Louis Prentiss, a former D.C. engineer commissioner now with the American Road Builders' Association, demanded that "rapid transit has to stand on its own legs and not stand on legs that are supported by taking away what careful studies by experts have indicated is absolutely essential to the solution of the transportation problems of this city." Bus mogul O. Roy Chalk—whose relationship with the NCTA had soured in 1961 when Stolzenbach rejected his proposal for a monorail to Dulles Airport—demanded that bus companies be given equal status to the NCTA administrator in planning decisions and derided Stolzenbach's vision as "an iron-age rail, subway transit system of the 19th century vintage."[19]

The NCTA had one champion, Congressman Basil Whitener, of Gastonia, North Carolina, who served on the House District Committee. Whitener had been shocked by the flattening of Southwest Washington in the name of urban renewal, and he did not want highway construction to do the same to the rest of the city. He saw the NCTA's plan as the best hope to provide an alternative. To prevent that plan from dying completely, he proposed radical surgery, specifically amputation. In July, prominent local architect Louis Justement had testified that "if you had to do something that was just a partial system I would much rather start with the body and have the downtown distribution system to which you could always add arms, but I would never try to make an arm function without a body." Whitener took him at his word. Judging that Stolzenbach had failed to rally enough support from Virginia and Maryland for a regional system, Whitener proposed instead a preliminary "bobtail" system with six lines but only 23 route miles, mostly confined to the District of Columbia. If neither Bartholomew's all-suburb system nor Stolzenbach's regional plan could please, perhaps it was time to try an all-urban map.[20]

It did not work. In the charged atmosphere surrounding Stolzenbach's attack on highways, even this plan was too controversial. On December 9, 1963, the House of Representatives voted 276-78 to reject the bobtail plan, sending the bill back to the District Committee. Stolzenbach morosely amended his agency's budget, canceling his earlier request for tens of millions of dollars to begin work on land acquisition and construction. More seriously, the agency's staff was cut in half. The administration counseled patience until the next congressional session, in the hope that passage of a bill offering transit aid to cities nationwide would clear the air. The agency's internal

motto became "Stay alive 'til '65."[21]

The agency did stay alive, and in January 1965 released a new report, *Rail Rapid Transit for the Nation's Capital*. Unlike the elegantly typeset and lavishly illustrated 1962 report, *Rail Rapid Transit* broadcast frugality. It appears to have been created on a typewriter, with only a few drawings thrown in. Inside, the plan essentially replicated the bobtail scheme defeated in 1963, refining it slightly and extending the 23 miles of rapid transit to 25 miles at a total cost of $431 million. Significantly, highways are scarcely mentioned in *Rail Rapid Transit*. It notes at the beginning that "no highway system could be designed for the central area that would be both capable of handling all peak-hour trips and compatible with the city of Washington," and at the end that rapid transit "will enable the highway system to function more effectively" by diverting some drivers, but that is all; either of these mild statements would fit in well in the 1959 plan. It mentions no highways by name and includes no highway map, and an ignorant reader would have no way of knowing that there was any controversy at all. The humbled agency that had produced this document was no place for Darwin Stolzenbach, and in May 1965 he resigned. He left dreading that the subway would never be built.[22]



Humbled by the defeat of its ambitious 1962 plan, the NCTA returned to Congress in 1965 with a rapid transit proposal that was restricted to the District of Columbia and close-in Arlington County and Silver Spring. In this map, the small rail system is overwhelmed by roads. Courtesy, WD, DCPL.

Having learned the perils of having a passionate ideologue as NCTA head, the Johnson administration sought a less controversial figure to succeed Stolzenbach. They found Walter McCarter, recently retired from the Chicago Transit Authority after 20 years of service, including years as the head of that agency. Like Bartholomew, he was a Midwesterner whose qualification for planning transportation in Washington came not from local political experience but from professional expertise—he had a tremendous reputation as one of the top experts in urban transit. As a career transit man, he was seen as less likely to go meddling in roads than loose-cannon Stolzenbach. At the White House, Charles Horsky watched with relief as the House of Representatives applauded the choice.[23]

Congressional confidence in McCarter was crucial, for in July the stripped-down bill again went before the House. With a less controversial plan and a less controversial administrator, the agency faced fewer obstacles than it had in 1963. Moreover, NCTA staff and their supporters had learned from their mistakes. For example, to defuse the complaints of both labor unions and the bus companies that a publicly operated transit system would hurt the transit industry, the 1965 bill pledged that while the subway would be built by a government agency, it would be operated by a private contractor. Whitener helped the agency tailor its bare-bones transit plan to suit Congress's frugal mood; later, after passage, he admitted that "legislative tactics," more than transit engineering, had determined the shape of the proposed system. Even with these precautions, Whitener feared the bill would lose a roll call vote, so he arranged for a voice vote. Then he persuaded several congressmen who opposed the bill but liked him to remain in the House cloakroom rather than actively opposing the bill, thus securing victory in the House. The next month the Senate approved the bill as well, and on September 8, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the 25-mile bobtail plan into law.[24]

The Rail Rapid Transit plan of 1965 had been a great plan for getting congressional approval, but as a proposed means of moving commuters, it represented a terrible design. First, it had five spur lines all feeding into a single trunk line between Farragut Square and Union Station. Every train originating at each of the five end points would pass through three stations: G and 12th streets, G and 8th, and Judiciary Square, causing tight scheduling and, in the case of any delay in that crucial stretch, catastrophic backups. This bottleneck would only worsen as the five radial lines were extended out into the suburbs, as the plan anticipated. A second flaw was that each branching would require the construction of an underground junction, a difficult and expensive task in a crowded city.

The third, and perhaps most serious, flaw was the lack of stations serving the chain of enormous federal office buildings being built in the redeveloped Southwest. These buildings were expected to house 85,000 workers in the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Health, Education, and Welfare, and the new Department of Transportation, as well as the Department of Agriculture, which had long been headquartered on Independence Avenue. The 1965 plan would require these workers to walk or take a bus the three-quarters of a mile between the G Street trunk and their Independence Avenue offices. Given that many of these riders would have begun their commute with a trip by car or bus to the rail station, an additional bus or long walk at the end was too much to ask. The NCTA plan of 1962 had proposed serving the Southwest offices with a second trunk line downtown, including a stretch along Independence Avenue, but that line had been deleted in the thrifty bobtail proposal of 1963. Now, in late 1966, the NCTA staff began thinking about adding it back, making the formal

recommendation in March 1967.[25]

To offset part of the cost, they proposed deleting the Connecticut Avenue line's Columbia Heights spur, which served mostly residential neighborhoods of relatively low-income families. The NCTA planners pointed out that while the construction costs for the Southwest line, estimated at $98 million, were double that of the Columbia Heights spur, the former would generate enough fares from all those federal workers to eventually pay for itself, whereas the latter was "uneconomic" and could never pay for itself from the farebox. Though the NCTA's critics, at the time and later, saw the agency's emphasis on farebox revenues and its desire to delete the spur as evidence of callousness toward the inner-city poor, in fact the real decision was not so much *whether* to serve Columbia Heights and adjacent neighborhoods, but *how* to serve them. Even as they erased the Columbia Heights spur, NCTA planners were penciling in a third trunk line that would serve the same general area.[26]

The idea of a third, mid-city line to serve these mostly African-American, inner-city neighborhoods of central Washington had been mooted as early as 1962, only to be rejected as too costly. Following the passage of the 1965 bill, planners regained the courage to think big. It is not clear exactly what led to the reversal. Officially, the agency explained the change as a product of the city's winning urban renewal funds for the Shaw neighborhood (between North Capitol and 15th streets, N.W.) in October 1966. As transit officials later explained to Congress, on hearing the news, "the NCTA staff immediately contacted the [Redevelopment Land Agency] and a major citizen leader (Rev. Walter Fauntroy) to suggest renewed efforts for a mid-city line capable of first class service."[27]

Perhaps a more important factor was the presence on both the NCTA advisory board and the National Capital Planning Commission of sociologist G. Franklin Edwards of Howard University, itself lo-

When subway designers considered cancelling the Columbia Heights spur to save money, Howard University sociologist and NCTA advisory board member G. Franklin Edwards argued that the system must provide a substitute route to serve mid-city residents. His persistence helped ensure the inclusion of what became the Green Line. Courtesy, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

cated in the mid-city. Edwards consistently used both of his positions to speak for the inner city, decrying freeway dislocations and pressing McCarter to consider starting construction with those lines serving low income neighborhoods. In early 1967, he put the issue point-blank to McCarter, asking, "Walter, if you eliminate the Columbia Heights Line, do you propose a substitution or some modification along the Georgia Corridor?" McCarter had little choice but to answer that yes, if funds were available, a third trunk line would be desir-

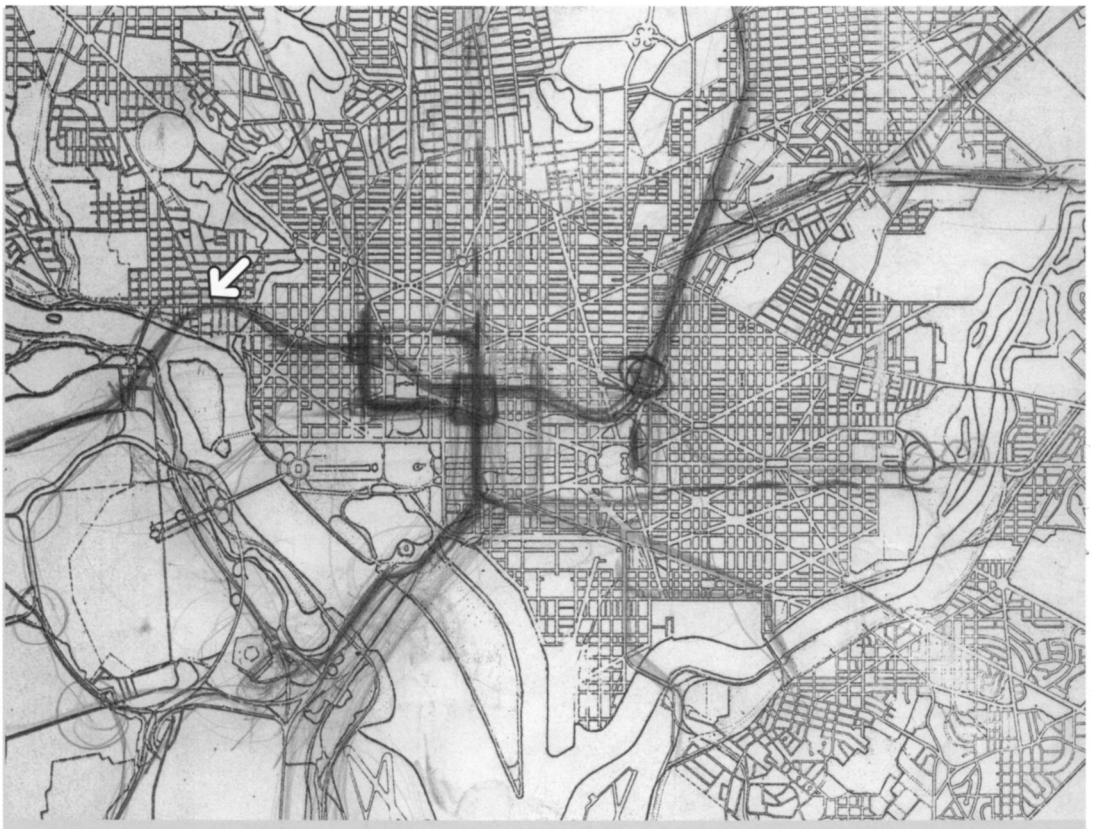
A Metro Stop in Georgetown?

There is a legend about Metro in Washington. Many believe that transportation officials planned a station for Georgetown, only to withdraw their plans in the face of opposition from influential residents who feared that the subway would bring undesirables to their exclusive neighborhood. Like any myth, this story has a kernel of truth, for many Georgetown residents did oppose a Georgetown station, and they made their opinions known to transportation planners. But the four planners most responsible for planning Metro in the key years of 1961 to 1968 tell a different story. Recent interviews with these men—Robert Keith, Thomas Deen, John Insco Williams, and William Herman—suggest that community opposition was at most a minor factor in keeping Metro out of Georgetown.[1]

Certainly, there was opposition. The four planners recall hearing about it, not through official channels, but, in Keith's words, it was "just commonly understood. And I don't mean that in any secretive way. It was just, oh, the people in Georgetown . . . don't want all that disruption." Deen recalls that Georgetown merchants were opposed to the "trauma" of construction, and Herman states that "in those days, the residents of Georgetown and the business center of Georgetown I don't think wanted a station." Moreover, it is quite possible that had the powerful residents of the neighborhood lobbied for a station, they might have gotten it, just as a station was proposed for the Capitol in the hopes of attracting congressional support. But all four planners suggest that neighborhood feeling was not the main reason that Metro dodged Georgetown.

Instead, a more important reason was that, while it would have been possible to build a subway line to Georgetown, it would have been difficult. The most promising location for a station, the busy intersection of Wisconsin Avenue and M Street, is quite close to the Potomac River. Any tunnel under the Potomac (such as the one that today connects Foggy Bottom and Rosslyn) would have been so deep when it got to the river's edge that a station there would have been impractical. Thus, the only serious proposal to put a station in Georgetown, a 1963 sketch by Williams, depended on a combined highway-transit bridge across the river. According to Williams, highway planners, not Georgetown residents, vetoed this option. Moreover, Williams's map shows that the curve up to Georgetown could not have followed the street grid, but would have to be bored under private property. And "if you get under buildings," Deen points out, "you get into all kinds of problems, digging under foundations, and settlement, and liability, and lawsuits."

These technical problems could have been overcome had planners felt a compelling need to serve Georgetown. They did not. They were building rapid transit to serve as many rush-hour commuters as possible, which meant connecting suburban parking lots, bus nodes, and clusters of apartment buildings with dense collections of office buildings in downtown Washington and Arlington. Under this logic, Woodley Park, with its hotels, apartment blocks, and bus routes, was one obvious site for a station, as was the Pentagon, with its 20,000 employees. Georgetown in the 1960s lacked apartments, employment, and parking, and much of the area within walking distance of an M Street station is under water. "We were building the system for the commuters," Herman recalls, "and there were not many people commuting to Georgetown. So why spend money on something that didn't meet our goals?" A

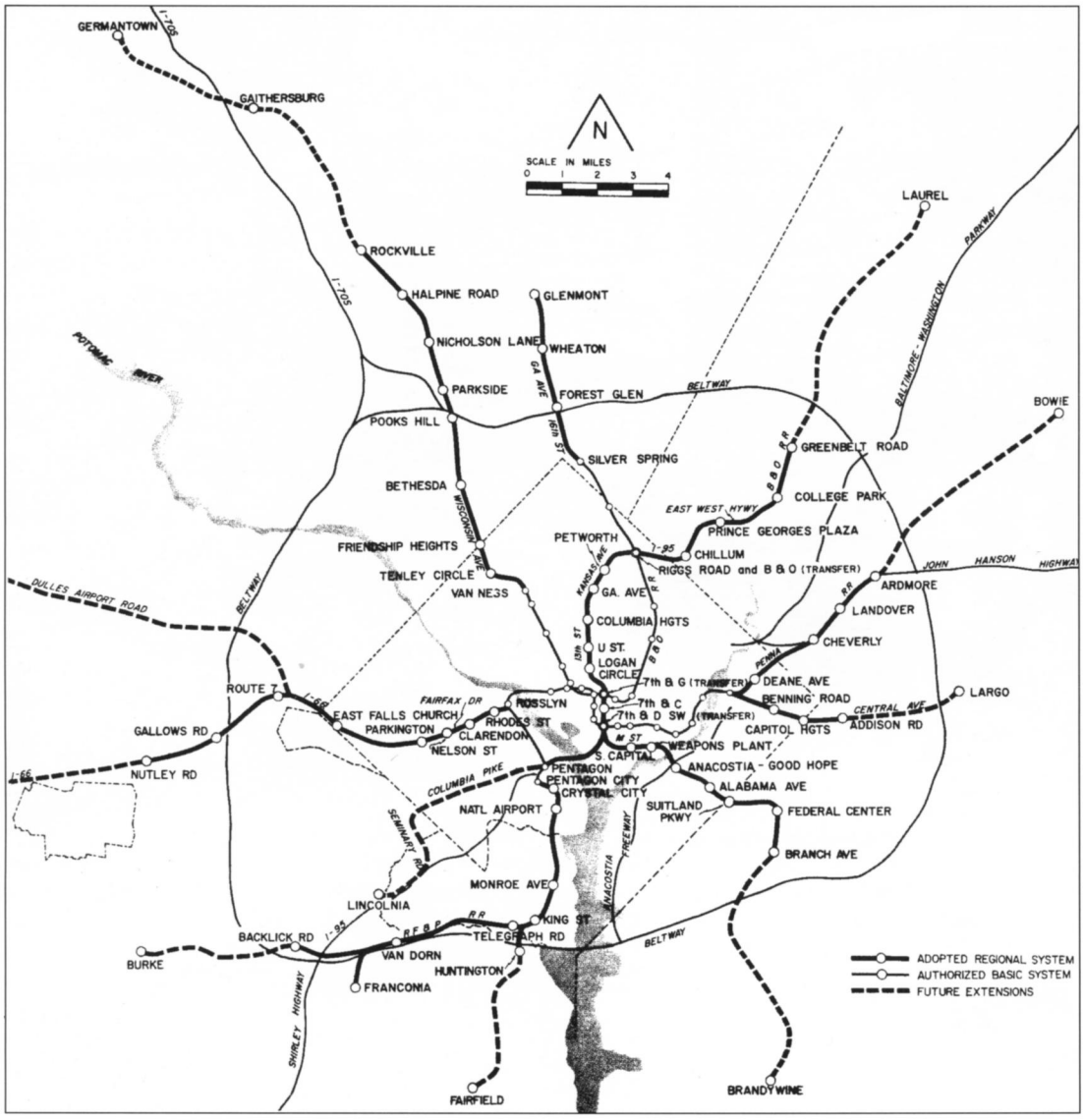


Plans for a Georgetown rail station never got past the 1963 pencil-sketch stage; arrow marks intersection of M Street and Wisconsin Avenue, the most likely location for a station. Lacking a reason to serve a neighborhood without apartment towers or office buildings, planners avoided the difficulty of running a tight curve close to the Potomac River. Detail, courtesy, Stolzenbach Collection, Special Collections, Gelman Library, George Washington University.

Georgetown curve would only have been a source of delay for Virginia commuters heading downtown.

When the first stretch of the Blue Line opened in 1977, Georgetown neighborhood leaders opposed to Metro were happy to imply that they had killed a station. But like roosters taking credit for the dawn, they had an exaggerated sense of their own influence.[2]

able. In any event, by late 1966 NCTA planners were thinking about running a trunk line along one of the mid-city's two main commercial streets, 7th or 14th. And the agency never proposed abandoning the inner city entirely. The NCPC and the District Commissioners endorsed the Columbia Heights spur deletion only with the understanding that it would make a mid-city line possible, and Congress approved the modified map only after being assured that "the 7th Street line is still an integral part of our regional plan." As it turned out, the mid-city line, the most urban line of all, would be ratified in a grand metropolitan settlement.[28]



In October 1966 Congress approved a compact between Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, creating the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) to take over rapid transit from the National Capital Transportation Agency. This transfer changed the scale of planning. City and suburb were now full partners in the transit project, working toward a regional system with less fear of having anything imposed from above by Congress.

Moreover, the financial logic of transportation planning had changed. Whereas the NCTA's thrifty proposals had been largely designed to please Congress, the WMATA map would only become a transit system if it pleased enough voters in each suburban jurisdiction to pass necessary bond referenda. And a transit system designed to pass a referendum must be, in the words of NCTA veteran Tom Deen,

The 98-mile regional system, adopted in March 1968, offered something for every major jurisdiction. To encourage support for local bond referenda, the map included dotted lines showing "future extensions" in every direction. Courtesy, WD, DCPL.

"big, bold, glamorous, fast, extensive, and, above all, [appear] to serve as much of the affected area as possible from the day the system first opens." Given these requirements, Deen observed, "it's easier to sell a billion dollar project than a hundred million dollar project." Stolzenbach's dotted arrow pointing toward Prince George's county would no longer do, and planners began to consider real routes in every direction.[29]

On the other hand, the staff had to keep some sort of check on suburban appetites for service. As Jeff O'Neill, aide to Congressman Gilbert Gude of Maryland, noted,

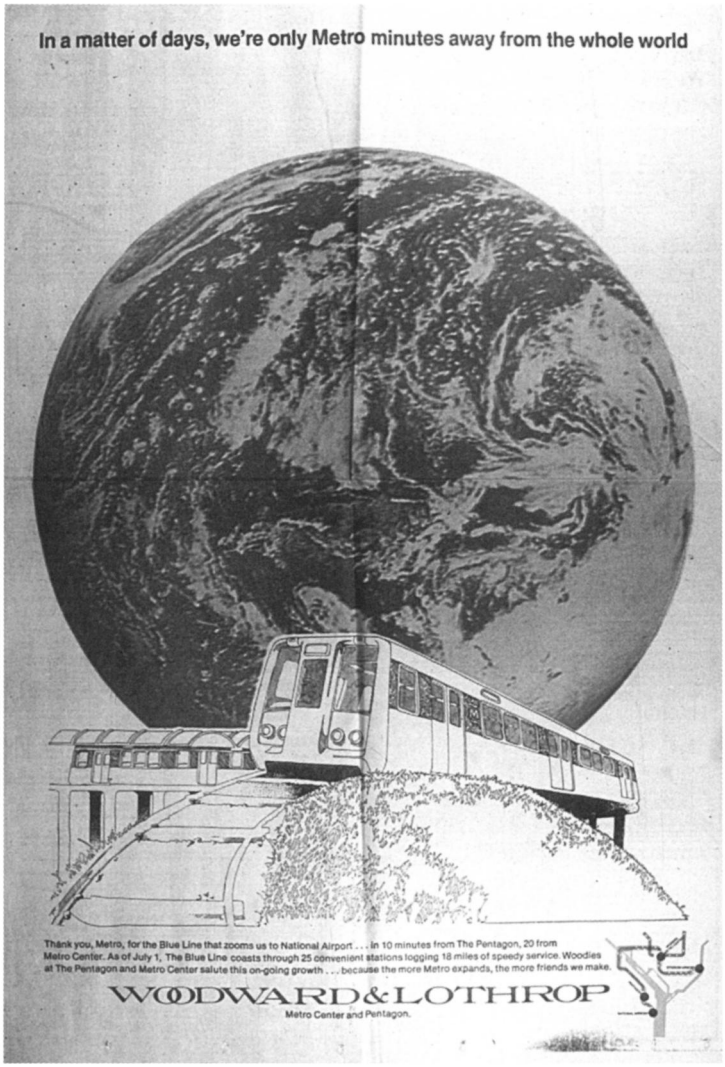
> WMATA members from each suburban jurisdiction will be under political pressure to nail down extensive facilities in their own jurisdictions for the home folks who help foot the bill. Thus there is a reasonable likelihood that pressures will be for track extensions far beyond what's economically feasible. Virginia alone is talking about seven (7) lines. Thus there arises a two-fold pressure, opposing forces which political leadership must resolve: Building and maintaining support for the system—and the tax money to pay for it—and resisting pressures to expand it beyond what's practical. If WMATA log-rolling leads to a vastly overblown system requiring an unreasonable request to Congress, we could be in trouble.[30]

The most powerful constraint on planners' ambitions was their knowledge that much of the system would have to be financed by bonds to be repaid from system revenue. They knew that to minimize right-of-way expense, subway construction (which costs roughly ten times as much as building on the surface), and dislocation of homes and businesses, they should route as many miles as possible on the surface along railroad rights-of-way and highway median strips. In the nineteenth century, several railroads had penetrated the city, and with the decline of both passenger and freight rail transportation in the twentieth century, their tracks were often lightly used or even up for abandonment.[31]

The most attractive route of all was the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) that led north from Union Station, through Northeast Washington, Silver Spring, Maryland, and on to Rockville. This ground-level and elevated route that would bring commuters from booming Montgomery County into downtown was an obvious bargain, and every proposal since 1962 had included it at least as far as Silver Spring. Other attractive railroad corridors included the B&O Washington Branch that led toward Baltimore via College Park and Greenbelt and the Pennsylvania Railroad line to Bowie, via Landover (slated for commuter rail service in the 1962 report).[32]

In Virginia, the most attractive rail corridor was the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac (RF&P) line to Colchester, which passed right by National Airport and just west of Old Town Alexandria. From Alexandria, the RF&P went west toward Springfield, paralleled by the Southern Railway. Another candidate was the Washington & Old Dominion line, stretching from Alexandria to Herndon, near Dulles Airport. As for highway medians, the most promising was the planned Interstate 66. Within the Beltway, the proposed highway was too narrow for transit tracks, but beyond the Beltway its wide median strip offered a route through outer Arlington and Falls Church and into Fairfax County, passing near Fairfax City. Where cheap rights-of-way were not available, transit was slated for tunnels under major arterial roads, with the hope of serving dense development already arrayed into neat lines.[33]

Rather than dictating where the lines would go in each jurisdiction, the staff pre-



A 1977 Woodward & Lothrop ad captures the sense of endless possibilities as Metro continued to open more lines and stations. The first Blue Line stations, from National Airport to Stadium-Armory, opened July 1, 1977. HSW.

sented local governments with choices. In Montgomery County, for example, the County Council chose to connect Rockville to downtown via Bethesda, rather than the B&O line to Silver Spring. In Virginia, some officials sought a subway line along Columbia Pike to serve residential neighborhoods, which would have been similar to the Georgia Avenue subway planned for Montgomery County. They were dissuaded by WMATA staff, who argued that the projected patronage could not justify such expensive construction. For the District of Columbia, choices were more constrained, due to everyone's reluctance to disturb the basic system approved by Congress in 1965 and modified in 1967.[34]

The last big decision to make was the scale of the system. In the summer of 1967, the planning staff and local officials agreed that most of the lines would terminate near the Capital Beltway, the new highway circling the Capitol at a radius of about ten miles. The Beltway offered a good compromise between a bobtail system and one that was overbuilt. Planners noted that as of 1962, 95 percent of commuter trips took less than 45 minutes, so few passengers would endure an hour-long rail trip in from Centreville or Laurel. On the other hand, they did want the rail system to reach beyond built-up suburbs such as Alexandria and Silver Spring. The terminus of each line was planned as a busy transportation hub, with parking garages and bus bays to collect commuters from more outlying areas and, in most cases, yards for storing and maintaining rail cars. These facilities would be less disruptive in the industrial areas of the outer suburbs.[35]

By March 1968, planners had a map that offered something for everybody. With

stations at half-mile intervals downtown and spaced up to two miles apart in the suburbs, the system promised convenience in the city and speed in more open country. The federal core got service—mostly underground—to the Southwest office complexes as well as the Capitol, White House, Navy Yard, State Department, and Federal Triangle. The District of Columbia got the mid-city line (later named the Green Line), as well as the residential sections of the Silver Spring and Connecticut Avenue lines planned earlier. Montgomery County got two long lines, one from Silver Spring to Glenmont, the other up the Wisconsin Avenue corridor—previously slated for the now-discarded Northwest Freeway—stretching to Rockville. Prince George's County, which shares a longer border with the District, got four, shorter lines, all of them ending roughly at the Beltway.

Virginia got two long lines. By relying on the median strip of I-66 to Vienna and on the RF&P and Southern Railway rights-of-way through Alexandria to Springfield, WMATA was able to plan 77 percent of the Virginia lines above ground. Some Virginia officials mourned the loss of a third Virginia line along Columbia Pike. To mollify them and anyone else who felt left out, the official map included several thick, dashed lines indicating "future extensions," including the Columbia Pike line and various extensions of proposed lines far beyond the Beltway. The final system was as delicately balanced as a china dish perched on a pole. And it was expensive, with an estimated capital cost of $1.828 billion in 1968 dollars, more than double Stolzenbach's 1962 proposal. But it worked; that November, voters in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs voted overwhelmingly in favor of the bonds.[36]

Eight years of political turmoil, construction, and inflation later, the first stretch of Metro opened for business in March 1976. Each shiny car and each monumental station displayed schematic system maps drawn by graphic designer Lance Wyman. At first glance, the map might seem to be nothing more than a tool to orient passengers. But it was something else too. Bold lines in primary colors denoted the routes that would bind neighborhoods to downtown and to one another. The old barriers of rivers and jurisdictional borders, suddenly less significant obstacles, faded to pale blue and gray. Shortening the suburban branches to fit in the frame, Wyman understated the distance from the city center to Rockville, Vienna, and New Carrollton, just as Metro promised to bring their residents effectively closer to downtown. Both a commuter rail service for the suburbs and a subway for the city, Metro was truly a metropolitan system. And looking at Wyman's map, riders could see that they were no longer just suburbanites or city dwellers, but citizens of a region.

In January 2001, WMATA began service on the Branch Avenue line, completing the plan promised in 1968. Today, after a quarter century of operation, Metro riders are more likely to complain about broken escalators and crowded trains than to reflect on the historical significance of the system's creation. But Metro is an extraordinary achievement. It is the third grand plan for Washington, every bit as visionary as the L'Enfant plan for the federal city and the McMillan Commission plan for the Mall, and much larger in geographical scope. It is proof that bitter debates can yield to negotiated compromise. And it is a massive counterpoint to those who would claim that city and suburb must be rivals, or that American society grows inevitably more atomistic. The promise of metropolitan harmony is displayed every day, as hundreds of thousands of Washingtonians, Marylanders, and Virginians gladly share one enormous machine.

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