

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

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**FULL COMMITTEE HEARING
EXAMINING THE ROLE OF FERRIES IN IMPROVING MOBILITY**

SEPTEMBER 28, 2021

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**ORAL STATEMENT OF FRANK J. PRINCIPI
CHAIRMAN
NORTHERN VIRGINIA REGIONAL COMMISSION
M-495 FAST FERRY STAKEHOLDER GROUP**

I. Introduction

Good morning Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee. My name is Frank J. Principi. I am a former local elected official from Prince William County, Virginia and serve as the Chairman of the Northern Virginia Regional Commission's M-495 Fast Ferry Stakeholder Group. The Stakeholder Group is comprised of 60+ public, private, and military organizations that support the launch of fast ferry transit service in the National Capital Region. The Stakeholder Group has conducted route proving exercises, market analyses, and an assessment of our infrastructure gaps.

The Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) is a regional planning council of thirteen-member local governments in the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC. NVRC serves as a mechanism for regional coordination in the region. My testimony today highlights the challenges associated with transforming our regional planning effort into a start-up operation. What is clear to us at this point, is that Congress and the Administration must become an equal partner to launch this service.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for their leadership in these policy and budget matters and conducting this hearing. I would also like to thank Madam Chairman Norton on her continued support and leadership of our efforts.

II. Mobility In The National Capital Region

The National Capital Region is the 10th largest region in the United States with 6.5 million residents. today. We anticipate the region will grow to 8 million residents by 2040.

From a pre-pandemic perspective, the National Capital Region has some of the worst traffic congestion in the country! D.C.-area drivers waste an average of 102 hours stuck in traffic. That's more than two full work weeks spent behind the wheel, annually. For this region, that translates into \$4.6 billion in lost time and fuel because of congestion.

I would also add – and I think we have all experienced this locally - that we have some of the most reliably, unreliable commutes in the region when it comes to travel time. A trip that normally takes 30 minutes in non-rush hour traffic could take 2 hours during rush hour.

While we have a transit system we are proud of in the region, transit services are still limited and/or at capacity from a pre-pandemic perspective. For example, both Virginia and Maryland's commuter trains do not operate all day, or go two ways, they don't operate on holidays, and only one offers limited weekend service. Just last month, WMATA's Metrorail's red line trains were delayed and had standing room-only capacity. While bus systems are designed to carry commuters to large employment centers, they don't serve all the employment centers in this region, and the ridership economics (farebox recovery) is a permanent challenge.

From a policy and budget standpoint, the ability to move goods and people around the country at relatively low cost represents a substantial benefit for both our economy and our quality of life. Congested roads only increase these costs by eating up time and fuel; by reducing worker productivity; exacerbating road and vehicle wear-and-tear; and increasing driver stress, aggression, and certain types of vehicle accidents. High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes, while an option for some, are cost-prohibitive for most.

III. Vision

Our vision is to provide safe, reliable, and efficient ferry vessel transit service on the Occoquan, Potomac, and Anacostia Rivers. These three navigable waterways were designated as the "M-495 Marine Highway" by the US Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration. The proposed service is intended to meet the needs of commuters, tourists, and small freight. The system of vessels and terminals would be supplemented with a vessel maintenance facility on the Potomac River that would produce even more jobs.

Vessel amenities will include contactless ticketing, free WIFI, reclining seats, onboard concessions, and a relaxing waterfront view. Passenger fares are expected to be competitive with existing transit and toll lanes in the region, particularly given the existing transit subsidy in the region. Early planning suggests a fleet of 149-passenger vessels with service to, and from, Virginia (Prince William County, Fort Belvoir, Pentagon, National Airport, National Landing); Maryland (Indian Head, National Harbor and MGM Grand Hotel) and the District of Columbia (Joint Base Anacostia Bolling, Department of Homeland Security, Wharf, Poplar Point). If you are familiar with the region, you can appreciate that our service will serve both the north-south and cross-river commutes.

Early market-driven expansion plans include consideration for the establishment of additional tourist routes for off-peak, night, and weekend excursions to other points of interest. As well, the Stakeholder Group is exploring the potential for small freight package deliveries on behalf of companies like Federal Express, DHL, UPS, USPS (Postal Service), and Amazon. Given the significant population densities and recent efforts to provide customers with real-time package deliveries, this service is expected to drive significant revenues.

The fleet of vessels could also provide the region with expanded emergency management and homeland security capacity, when needed. During an emergency, the fleet of vessels, could be used to help evacuate individuals in Washington, DC, move military personnel and supplies, and help respond to river rescues.

The marine highway will be an important link connecting commuters to work, medical appointments, school, shopping, and tourist destinations. The fast ferry system will also generate direct investment and additional tax revenue for the three states and the local governments. Ultimately, the ferry system will be a source of job creation, local revenue, and tax creation. It will provide economic and quality-of-life benefits for its passengers accessing communities along the region's extensive river system. While we have not honed-in on the estimated job creation benefits the service will bring, it is safe to say that once the system is launched, it will provide substantial labor income from direct, indirect, and induced jobs and tax revenues.

Our proposed ferry service is envisioned to provide critical transportation links for areas currently underserved by transit and to connect them to job centers. Our system will provide fairness in mobility and accessibility and meet the needs of all community members, including low-income individuals, minorities, elderly, children, persons with disabilities, and those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). We align ourselves with

the National Academy of Science's 5-Step Framework For Equity and will strive to meet these new principles.

IV. Public-Private-Military Partnership

The Stakeholder Group believes the construction and operation of our new transit service should be conducted through a public-private-military partnership. All partners would be expected to help finance the initial start-up costs - capital and operating expenses - and participate in the governance structure. While the military is challenged to finance off-site transportation projects, their personnel make-up 24% of daily commuters in this region and these federal facilities would be expected to expand their existing shuttle bus service to move their personnel from their on-base terminals to their office buildings.

V. Request To Congress

While we thought we were making real progress in our vision with \$17 million in an FTA grant and a Committee earmark, both were ultimately not awarded. The FTA awarded \$4.2 million but later rescinded the funding as JBAB Marina was not considered publicly accessible, while carrying military personnel, contractors, and civilians who all live in our communities. The Stakeholder Group put up the 20% match.

We would also like to see the \$13 million earmark to the M-495 project be restored by this Committee. While Congresswoman Norton submitted the request, it fell off the list of projects. In this case, the Stakeholder Group was willing to put up \$8.5 million, or a 38% match. These funding sources, together with a time-limited operating subsidy – something included in the House version of the infrastructure bill – would allow us to launch service.

Finally, we ask that the final version of the infrastructure bill include the House provision entitled, "Projects of National and Regional Significance," projects that cannot be funded through annual apportionments or other discretionary sources. Given that the M-495 fast ferry transit service would quantitatively improve throughput and provide long-term congestion relief for both commuters and small freight movement in the National Capital Region. Ferry service would be a great example of "building back better."

VI. Conclusion

Thank you again for your continued leadership on our country's infrastructure needs and respectfully ask the Committee consider support of the M-495 Fast Ferry Service here in the National Capital Region. I would be pleased to take any questions.