



METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON
AIRPORTS AUTHORITY

DULLES TOLL ROAD

Dulles Toll Road Proposed Toll Rate Increases

Report on Public Comments

October 2012

DRIVE TO RIDE

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INTRODUCTION

In early July 2012, the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (Airports Authority) initiated its regulatory amendment process in connection with a proposal to increase toll rates on the Dulles Toll Road (DTR) over the next three years.

Under the proposal, effective January 1, 2013, toll rates for two-axle vehicles¹ would increase by \$0.25 at the DTR mainline plaza (from the current \$1.50 to \$1.75) and by \$0.25 at the entrance/exit ramps (from the current \$0.75 to \$1.00). As to rate increases beginning in January 2014 and January 2015, the proposal set out two options.

Under Option A, beginning on January 1, 2014, toll rates would increase by \$.75 at the DTR mainline plaza (from \$1.75 to \$2.50) and, beginning on January 1, 2015, rates would increase by \$.25 at the DTR mainline plaza (from \$2.50 to \$2.75) and by \$.75 at the entrance/exit ramps (from \$1.00 to \$1.75). Under Option B, beginning on January 1, 2014, rates would increase by \$.50 at the mainline plaza (from \$1.75 to \$2.25) and by \$.25 at the entrance/exit ramps (from \$1.00 to \$1.25), and beginning January 1, 2015 rates would increase by \$.75 at the mainline plaza (from \$2.25 to \$3.00) and by \$.25 at the entrance/exit ramps (from \$1.25 to \$1.50).

Under both Option A and Option B, in 2015 the combined toll rate at the mainline plaza and the ramps would be the same (\$4.50).

Notification of Public Hearings

As part of this regulatory amendment process, the Airports Authority conducted three public hearings on the proposed toll rate increases. Notice of these hearings was provided in a variety of ways: advertisements in The Washington Post, El Tiempo Latino, Washington Examiner, Fairfax Times, Loudoun Times-Mirror, Connection Newspapers, Sun Gazette, Leesburg Today, and Ashburn Today;² a press release; public service announcements on local TV and radio stations; email announcements to transportation organizations with a request that they disseminate the announcements to their membership; and announcements on the Airports Authority's website (www.mwaa.com/tollroad).

¹ The proposed increased toll rates for motor vehicles with more than two axles are shown in the July 2012 proposed regulatory amendment which is set out in Appendix E. All toll rates stated in the paper are for two-axle vehicles.

² Altogether, 25 notices of the public hearings were published in newspapers with circulation in the Dulles Corridor.

The notices provided the location, dates, and time (5:00 PM to 8:00 PM) of the public hearings. They stated that there would be informational exhibits about the Dulles Metrorail Project, the cost and financing of the Dulles Metrorail Project, the Dulles Toll Road and potential improvements that may be made to the Toll Road, the revenue anticipated to be raised as a result of the proposed toll rate increases, and how this additional revenue would be spent. It also noted that representatives from the Airports Authority would be present to discuss these items. The notices indicated the hearings would be conducted using an open house format.

Public Hearings

The Airports Authority conducted three public hearings on different days over the course of two weeks and at different locations within the Dulles Corridor. The purpose of the hearings was twofold: (i) to inform members of the community about the proposed DTR toll rate increases and the primary uses to which the increased toll revenue would be put (primarily, to support the construction of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project (Metrorail Project) and DTR improvements), and (ii) to provide opportunities for attendees to submit comments on the proposed toll rate increases.

Each hearing included a number of stations with display boards. These boards provided information on the following topics:

- Dulles Toll Road Operations (e.g., service to customers and dedicated safety service patrols)
- Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project (e.g., Phase 1 and 2 maps, construction progress, and key events)
- Dulles Corridor Improvements 2010-2012 (e.g., projects in the planning or study stage, ongoing highway studies, and ongoing toll system planning)
- Dulles Corridor Noise Wall Program 2012-2013 (e.g., noise wall replacements and new noise walls)
- Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project Finance Plan and Proposed Toll Rate Adjustments (e.g., finance plan, current and anticipated debt service, proposed toll rate increases, use of toll revenue, current toll rates in the region, and toll mitigation strategies)

Representatives from the Airports Authority were available at each station to discuss this information with hearing participants.

One individual was available at each public hearing to record citizens' comments. Also, every participant was given a comment form that could be completed and dropped in a comment box at the hearing or returned by mail. There was also a specific comment form that requested comments on the noise wall program. In addition to these comment forms, copies of the display boards in an 8 1/2" x 11" format and a set of "Frequently Asked Questions" were distributed to hearing participants.

Twenty days before the first hearing, the Authority's website was updated to include a video of the display boards with narration, the display boards, and an online comment form for people who were unable to attend a public hearing. A "Frequently Asked Questions" document was added later to the website to help inform the public about the proposed toll rate increases.

The first public hearing was held on September 6, 2012, at Stone Bridge High School in Ashburn. It was attended by 56 individuals, 15 of whom submitted comments (either in writing using the comment form, in a written letter, or orally to an individual with a recorder). The second hearing was held on September 12 at South Lakes High School in Reston. It was attended by 94 individuals, 30 of whom submitted comments. The final hearing was held on September 13 at Spring Hill Elementary School in McLean. It was attended by 45 individuals, nine of whom submitted comments.

In total, 195 individuals attended the three public hearings.³ Attendees submitted a total of 54 comments using various venues: comment form, letters, and/or oral statements given to an individual. Outside of the public hearings, the Airports Authority received 530 written comments, this included comment forms, letters, direct emails containing comments, and online comments that were submitted through the Authority's website www.mwaa.com/tollroad.

Public Comments

The formal period for commenting on the proposed DTR toll rate increases was from August 17 through September 16, 2012. During this period, a total of 567 individuals or entities submitted 584 comments. These included written comments on the comment form, letters, emails, oral statements provided during the hearings, and comments made online. In several cases, individuals commented on more than one occasion, using more than one medium.

Of the 584 comments, 56% were from residents of Fairfax County, 32% were from residents of Loudoun County, and the remaining individuals either gave a residence outside of these counties or did not indicate their residence. Eighty-nine percent of the comments were from individuals who currently use the DTR, while 40% of these DTR users indicated that they plan to use the new Metrorail line once it is operational. Thus, overall, 37% of the comments were from individuals who plan to use the Metrorail.

This report summarizes the comments submitted by members of the public on the proposed toll rate increases. The report is organized into seven sections. Each section addresses one of the major topics related to the proposed toll rate increases that have been raised or presented by the comments. These topics, along with the number of comments that addressed them, are as follows:

³ Included in this total number are 14 media representatives who attended the hearings.

<u>Topics</u>	<u>Number of Topics Addressed by Comments⁴</u>
Impacts of the Toll Increase	334
Alternatives to the Toll Increase	316
Fairness of the Toll Increase	309
Operational Issues with the Toll Increase	62
Tax Character of the Toll Increase	61
Noise Wall Program and the Toll Increase	3
Support of the Toll Increase	16

Each section of this report contains a summary of the comments that address the section's particular topic. Within each section, its topic is identified and the particular points made by the comments are summarized into the most often cited themes.

Five appendices are attached to this report. As explained below, Appendices A, B and C provide information about the submitted comments and the individuals making the comments. Appendix D contains comments from the Reston Citizens Association, which include graphics that could not be added to Appendix A. Appendix E contains the July 2012 proposed amendment to the Airports Authority's regulation that establishes toll rates on the DTR. By referring to Appendix A, Comments by ID Number, a reader of the report can learn the name of individuals who submitted the comments, review information relating to these individuals that may be helpful in evaluating their remarks, and see a verbatim statement of their comments.

Appendix A, Comments by ID Number, is organized in order of the identification numbers that have been assigned to all individuals submitting comments. The numbers were assigned on an as-received basis. For each identification number, Appendix A provides the following information with respect to the individual making the comment:

- The name of the individual (last name, first name)
- The city/town/area in which the individual resides
- The individual's answers to two questions: "Do you use the Dulles Toll Road?" and "Do you plan to use Metrorail in the Dulles Corridor?"
- The source or manner in which the individual submitted the comment (e.g., at a public hearing or online)
- The topic or topics addressed by the individual's comment
- The verbatim comment made by the individual

Appendix B, Commenter ID Number by Topic and Themes, is organized in the order of the topics in this report. For each topic, this appendix summarizes the main themes advanced by the comments and, in addition, gives the Commenter ID Numbers of the individuals submitting those

⁴ The number of topics in this column exceeds the number of comments because most comments addressed more than one topic.

comments. A reader of this report may review a particular topic in the report and its theme summaries, and then turn to Appendix A to read the verbatim comments of the commenting individuals, as well as other information about the individual.

Appendix C, Commenters Arranged by Last Name, is organized in the order of the last names of the individuals who have submitted comments, and provides the identification numbers assigned to these individuals. If the reader is interested in reviewing comments of a specific individual, the reader can find the individual's last name and Commenter ID number from Appendix C and then refer to Appendix A for the individual's verbatim comments.

Appendix D, Comment on Proposed Dulles Toll Road Toll Increases, Reston Citizens Association – Reston 2020 Committee, are the comments from the Reston Citizens Association. They are included as a separate Appendix because they contained numerous graphics, and due to the size and format, could not be included in Appendix A (Comments by ID Number). With the exception of the graphics, all of the text of the Reston Citizens Association's comments was included in Appendix A.

Appendix E, Airports Authority July 2012 Proposed Regulation Increasing Dulles Toll Road Toll Rates, contains the schedule of toll rate increases proposed in July 2012.

This report and the appendices are available on the Authority's website www.mwaa.com/tollroad.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Section A. Impacts of the Toll Increase

Comments in this section addressed the impacts that the proposed DTR toll rate increases would, or could, have. Most comments were premised on the belief that the current toll rates are already too high and that the proposal to double the fees is not reasonable and will cause DTR ridership and revenue to decline. Some commenters indicated they would take alternate highway routes and thus increase congestion on these secondary roads. Others stated that making the rates even higher will have negative consequences for themselves, their families, and other toll road users, as well as the local economy. Some commenters indicated they would consider relocating. Others opposed the idea of the Metrorail Project rail itself, characterizing it as a waste of time and money, and stating that it will cause more harm than good.

Three hundred thirty four (334) comments addressed the topic of the Impacts of the Toll Increase. The comments made the following points:

1. These are difficult economic times (e.g., the economy is bad, people are not receiving salary increases, businesses are suffering, and the cost of living is rising), and the present DTR tolls are already too high. Making the tolls even higher at this time will have an adverse effect on local businesses and the personal finances of toll road users (including forcing workers and other local residents to move from the area). The increase will make

homes and businesses less appealing and will lower property values. Daily road-based transportation access along the Dulles Corridor will become excessively expensive, leading to Northern Virginia losing its ability to attract jobs and businesses. Combined with the Dulles Greenway, people in Loudoun County will be looking at a daily round trip cost of more than \$20.

2. A toll rate increase will not improve traffic, and neither will the addition of the new Metrorail line. The rate increase will cause many DTR users to take alternative routes and travel on neighborhood roads (e.g., Route 7, Georgetown Pike, Route 28, Route 50, I-66, and the Fairfax County Parkway), thus increasing congestion on those routes. This will result in more accidents, increased pollution, wasted gas, and increased road rage. Decreased DTR ridership will in turn bring in less money to fund the Metrorail Project. The rate increase will also cause other DTR users to travel, shop at local businesses, and visit certain areas less often. Shoppers from inside the Beltway will choose to not visit businesses in Reston and Loudoun due to the high tolls.
3. Previous actions by the Airports Authority Board and management give rise to doubts about the Authority's ability to efficiently operate the DTR and construct the Metrorail Project. The Airports Authority appears to be spending money without any responsibility, at the cost of the public, and has shown little concern for the cost of Silver Line (e.g., its proposal for a below ground station at Dulles, its requirement to use union labor, and its procurement processes).⁵

Section B. Alternatives to the Toll Increase

Comments in this section identified and addressed other ways that funds for the Metrorail Project could be raised. The comments urged that alternative means of financing the project should be pursued, either in lieu of toll rate increases or in order to reduce the size of the increases.

Three hundred sixteen (316) comments addressed this topic of Alternatives to the Toll Increase. The comments made the following points:

1. Federal, state and local taxes that have already been collected, and/or will continue to be collected, as well as other sources of funds (e.g., Fairfax County, Loudoun County, travelers to/from Dulles Airport, issuance of bonds) should be used to pay for the Dulles Metrorail Project. At the very least, these sources should be used to reduce any DTR toll rate increases that may be needed in the future. There is overwhelming agreement that the Federal government needs to contribute more toward the Metrorail Project (e.g., TIFIA loans and DOT grants), as does the Commonwealth of Virginia. The burden of funding the project should be placed on its beneficiaries. Since the Commonwealth will substantially benefit, in the form of higher taxes, from the project and the economic development impact it will have in Northern Virginia, the entire Commonwealth should be responsible

⁵ The comments also show that there is confusion in the public's mind as to the difference between MWAA and WMATA and the different roles each organization plays in the Metrorail Project.

for sharing the funding burden. Residents of Arlington, Alexandria, Falls Church, and the District of Columbia will most likely use the completed Metrorail project, and therefore these municipalities should contribute to the project's funding.

2. Users of the Dulles Airport Access Road and of facilities at Dulles Airport (e.g., taxis, airlines, passengers, rental cars, concessionaires, users of parking garages) should be required to pay a toll or surcharge/fee, with the resulting revenue being used to reduce any increases that may be needed in the DTR toll rates. New revenue could also be generated by the sale or lease of airport property and advertising, and in other ways, which could be used to help fund the Metrorail Project.
3. Commercial interests, especially those along the Dulles Corridor, which stand to benefit financially from the Dulles Metrorail Project, should be required to contribute to the project's construction costs. Commercial landowners will gain the most from increased land values, rents and development. Fairfax and Loudoun Counties will gain more taxes from development that will be prompted by the Metrorail Project, as will the Commonwealth, and all these governmental units should contribute more toward the project.
4. Tolls for E-ZPass users and cash customers should be redesigned, with a discount being provided to E-ZPass drivers and an increased toll charged to cash customers. Tolls should be reduced in order to increase the number of DTR users and DTR revenue. Local commuters and low-income users should be given a discounted rate. A break on the proposed rate increases should be given to drivers who use the toll road during non-rush hour/weekends. In addition, toll plazas should be built in other locations along the DTR. These alternatives would help offset the need for raising the tolls for DTR drivers.
5. A system on the Dulles Airport Access Road similar to the HOT/Express Lanes on I-495/95 should be constructed. Also, drivers of HOVs should be allowed to use the DTR for free.
6. Instead of increasing tolls on the DTR, funds for construction of the Metrorail Project could be obtained from raising Metrorail fares, increasing fares on upcoming Silver Line users, imposing a tax on the entire metropolitan area, enforcing the speed limit/HOV regulations on the DTR, and/or fining violators who illegally use the Dulles Airport Access Road as a turn-around. Other alternatives to lower the cost of the Metrorail Project and the amount of the toll increase include competitively bidding Phase 2 of the Metrorail Project so it will be less expensive, not building Phase 2 at all, or building light rail or using buses for Phase 2.
7. The Dulles Airport Access Road should be open to all drivers. This could result in DTR users supporting the proposed toll rate increases for they would feel that they would be getting something in return for the rate increases.

8. If toll rate increases are necessary, they should be imposed gradually, as opposed to doubling at once. Most likely, the tolls will never decrease, even after the Metrorail Project is built. It was not a good decision to have the Airports Authority take over responsibility for the DTR and Metrorail Project, the public was not consulted, and the Commonwealth of Virginia should take responsibility back.
9. If toll rates increases occur, there is more interest in having the increase occur at the mainline toll plaza rather than at the entrance/exit ramp, so travelers are encouraged to use the DTR within the corridor for short trips.

Section C. Fairness of the Toll Increase

Comments in this section addressed the fairness of the proposed toll rate increases and, for various reasons, characterized the toll rate increases as unfair to the users of the DTR or others.

Three hundred nine (309) comments addressed the topic of the Fairness of the Toll Increase. The comments made the following points:

1. The original purpose of tolls on the DTR was to obtain funds needed to pay for the road's initial construction, subsequent widening and other toll road improvements. Once the cost of this construction, widening and other improvements was paid for, there should be no further assessment of tolls.
2. DTR users who will be unable to use, or who will choose not to use, the new Metrorail line should not be required to pay for its construction. No other part of the Washington, DC Metrorail system was funded the way the Silver Line extension is being funded. The current Silver Line finance plan places a large financial burden on current DTR users, while others, such as those who use the Dulles Airport Access Road or who enter and exit the DTR through areas that don't have a toll, will not be required to contribute to the funding of this extension project. Metrorail construction costs for the Tysons Corner area are the greatest, but the residents in that area are not being required to pay for the construction even though they will benefit from Metrorail Project once it is completed.
3. People who use the DTR, including residents and businesses of Fairfax and Loudoun Counties, should not be required to contribute so substantially to the construction of the Metrorail Project, when people living throughout the metropolitan area will contribute nothing, but will benefit from the project. DTR drivers should not need to pay for the "privilege" of riding on a road; they can drive through many states without paying a toll. The increases in toll rates will, at some point, cause the tolls to be so high that the toll road will only be available to the well-to-do.
4. Businesses in the DTR corridor will see an increase in the value of their business and property as a result of the Metrorail Project, and therefore should be contributing to the project's cost. If this were done, there could be a decrease in the major contribution now being required of DTR commuters.

5. All revenue that is derived from the DTR should only be used for maintenance and upkeep of the actual toll road.
6. The public hearing open house meetings served no purpose since the Authority will do whatever it wants to do. The format of the public hearing process should have included an opportunity for individuals to speak in an open forum and to hear the comments of other speakers.

Section D. Operational Issues with the Toll Increase

Comments in this section urged that the additional revenue produced from the toll rate increases be used for purposes other than, or in addition to, the Metrorail Project, and suggested variations in the ways in which the toll rate increases might be applied.

Sixty-two (62) comments addressed the topic of Operational Issues with the Toll Increase. The comments made the following points.

1. Before revenues from the DTR are set aside for the Metrorail Project they should be used to upgrade the DTR, such as improved toll booth operations. The construction of exits is sub-par and causes large backups on the roads. Leaving the exit ramps, the traffic lights are often not synchronized. The DTR's mainline toll plazas and certain entrance/exit ramps (e.g., at the I-495 North and South interchanges and Route 7) are challenging and need improvement. There should be a toll ramp at Route 123. No improvements to the DTR have been seen despite the ever-increasing tolls. There have been no upgrades that justify the increased cost to use the road.
2. The traffic is bad on the DTR, and increasing the toll rates to help fund the Metrorail Project has the potential to make it worse due to the growth in development that will occur as a result of the new Metrorail stations. Therefore, new DTR revenue should first be used to improve DTR traffic conditions. The ongoing construction of Phase 1 of the Metrorail Project makes traveling the DTR difficult. If traffic conditions were better on the DTR, the increased tolls would be more tolerable.
3. The toll rate increases should be limited to peak-direction rush hour commuters, rather than be applied to all users at all times of the day. Alternatively, fees for using the toll road should be based on distance-tolling; toll road users should not pay for the entire length of the road when they only need to travel to one exit. Additional revenue could be derived by assessing different toll rates at different times of the day and week, by adopting peak and non-peak period pricing, by going to all-electronic tolling, and/or by imposing a toll on currently un-tolled locations. This additional revenue would reduce the burden of the proposed toll rate increases on some DTR users. Further, the toll rate increases should be different for different drivers based on the location from which they begin their trip, with the smallest increase being assessed to drivers who are most distant from the first phase of the Metrorail Project since they are least likely to benefit from it.

4. The Authority should consider using all electronic toll collection and video tolling to save operating costs, to lessen the need for toll increases, and to improve traffic flow. Eliminate exact change booths at toll plazas. The Authority also should consider having one dedicated lane for E-ZPass users at each entrance/exit ramp to avoid long lines at the toll booths.
5. The toll rate increases should only be applied to cash-paying DTR users and those who speed since these individuals add more cost to the toll road than E-ZPass users and those who obey the law.
6. DTR users now face not only the toll rate increases proposed by the Authority, but also the new E-ZPass monthly maintenance fee. This fee is not justified; if it was not needed before, it should not be needed now.

Section E. Tax Character of the Toll Increase

Comments in this section argued that DTR toll rate increases to fund the Metrorail Project are, in effect, a tax upon the users of the DTR, and that the increase should be called a tax, should be imposed as a tax in a legally valid manner, and should be imposed upon a different and wider group of individuals.

Sixty-one (61) comments addressed the topic of the Tax Character of the Toll Increase. The comments made the following points.

1. The toll rates being proposed are a hidden tax, unfairly imposed on a limited group of individuals (the DTR users), rather than on all taxpayers of the area whose tax dollars typically fund transportation projects. To raise the toll rates is “Taxation without Representation.”
2. Because the proposed DTR toll rate increases constitute a tax and because the Airports Authority is unable to assess taxes, the Airports Authority lacks the power to increase the toll rates.

Section F. Noise Wall Program and the Toll Increase

Three (3) comments focused on the Noise Wall Program. The comments made the following points:

1. The Authority should use increased DTR revenue to assist communities affected by increased noise levels on the toll road. Sufficient additional toll revenues need to be collected to bridge the gap between what these communities qualify for under the Authority’s noise policy and its “cost effectiveness” requirement and what is needed to construct a noise wall. At the Wiehle station, the Authority should consider whether a noise abatement wall needs to be included in the plans to limit the noise that may exist.

Section G. Support of the Toll Increase

Comments in this section generally supported the DTR toll rate increases. The comments recognized that the increases were necessary to fund the Metrorail project, which was viewed as a positive addition to the transportation infrastructure of Northern Virginia and, in particular, of the Dulles Corridor

Sixteen (16) comments reflected Support of the Toll Increase. The comments made the following points:

1. Increasing the DTR toll rates to provide funds to finance the Metrorail Project is an appropriate use of toll revenue. The Metrorail Project will significantly improve the Dulles Corridor, and it is important that the project be completed.
2. The toll rates increases are appropriate because the revenue they will produce will, in addition to helping fund the Metrorail Project, be used to pay for improvements to the DTR.
3. However, the Authority should continue to pursue additional federal and state funding and low cost financing to offset the toll increases.