

AUGUST 2003

# Executive Summary

## Downtown **CIRCULATOR**



## Why We Need the Downtown Circulator

Washington, D.C. attracts an average of 20 million visitors each year, yet there is no transit system in place to move them easily and inexpensively around the Monumental Core. The District is home



to more than half a million residents, and another half a million suburban residents commute into the city each day—including some 375,000 federal workers—yet there is no transit service designed to move them around downtown. Washington's Metrorail and bus systems do an extraordinary job of getting residents, commuters and visitors into downtown D.C., but they are not efficient at moving them around once they arrive. The Downtown Circulator can fill this void.



A simple, inexpensive, and easy to navigate surface transit system that complements Metrobus and Metrorail can help stimulate economic activity downtown, reduce traffic congestion, allow visitors safe and easy access between the Mall and downtown, and move federal employees and other workers quickly and inexpensively between offices during the workday.

Of the 20 million visitors to the nation's capital, approximately 10 percent choose to experience the premium interpretive tour service offered by Tourmobile. The remaining 18 million visitors however do not have access to basic public transportation to reach the monuments, the National Mall and downtown D.C. Long walking distances discourage pedestrian circulation among these attractions and many visitors resort to using their personal automobiles, adding to traffic congestion, and further degrading the quality of the air.

Downtown D.C. lies just a few blocks from the National Mall, but for the occasional visitor to the District, it might as well be miles away. The monumental buildings lining Constitution and Pennsylvania Avenues belie the pedestrian-friendly downtown that is rapidly redeveloping just beyond, and there is no apparent surface transit system to link the National Mall to the District's safe, convenient and friendly downtown.



Workers in the District of Columbia also need to get around downtown to attend meetings, grab lunch, run errands, and shop. Many destinations are often out of reach of Metrorail stations, and the descent into Metrorail's underground stations can discourage its use for short trips. The Circulator will make Downtown more accessible to more people.

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**T**he region's public transportation system has a gap, which the Downtown Circulator can easily fill, complementing Metrorail, Metrobus and other regional transit services. The Circulator will connect the National Mall to Downtown D.C., extend the reach of Metrorail and Metrobus commutes, and offer frequent, convenient, and inexpensive trips across downtown. This new component of the regional transit system will accommodate not only visitors, but also workers, and residents of the city and region.

**Downtown Circulator service will satisfy many currently unmet needs:**



■ Visitor Mobility – There is a need for a coherent visitor transportation system that is not being met by the current mix of private tour companies and public transit services. Public transit services connect the National Mall with the larger metropolitan region, while private tour buses provide guided tours and attractions-based transportation along the Mall. Yet many tourists end up driving cars, walking greater distances than they would like to, or skipping destinations that are difficult to get to. Visitors need an efficient, friendly, and inexpensive means of transportation that is easy to understand and that serves numerous visitor destinations, while connecting to the Metrorail system.



■ Downtown Worker Mobility – There is an unmet need for a public transportation system serving short trips within the downtown area of Washington. Downtown contains a large concentration of federal government and private offices where thousands of federal workers and other employees work and make short trips during the course of the day for meetings, shopping, dining, and entertainment. Many downtown workers end up using their cars or taxis for short trips, and numerous federal agencies have found the need to operate their own shuttle van services for employees. Federal and non-federal workers need a transportation option that is a fast, efficient, and inexpensive means of transportation for such trips within the downtown.

■ Economic Development – There is a need to stimulate economic development downtown. A world-class transit system is the centerpiece of any great city and can stimulate economic activity and revitalization. In the Washington area, there is a clear need for a supplemental transportation system component that connects visitor attractions to downtown, and to the city's convention center. While the downtown is a place where workers shop, dine, and go for entertainment, the existing transportation system does little to encourage visitors along the Mall to take advantage of dining and entertainment venues located nearby within the downtown area.

■ Congestion and Air Quality – There is a continuing need to decrease traffic congestion and improve air quality in the District of Columbia. Improved transit services within the National Mall area and downtown will allow visitors and downtown workers to avoid using their automobiles. Additionally, an improved system will also allow tour buses the option of parking at the edge of downtown, thus reducing traffic congestion along the Mall. Fewer personal vehicles and tour buses downtown and along the Mall will also improve local air quality.



■ Homeland Security – There is an unmet need to address the reduction in roadway and parking capacity resulting from federal security measures in the District. These security measures have caused increased travel times and congestion, increasing the need for transit alternatives to automobile use in the downtown. A supplementary surface transit system circulating in the downtown area can help mitigate the impacts of the restrictions imposed on the local transportation system in order to protect key federal facilities.

**T**he Downtown Circulator will benefit the District of Columbia by reducing traffic congestion, improving air quality, and supporting economic development in the downtown. The federal government will benefit through improved services for visitors to federal facilities and attractions, reduced congestion along the Mall, a reduction in the costs and administration of federal shuttle van services, and mitigation of the negative impacts resulting from the street closures surrounding federal security measures.

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## ***The Downtown Circulator Implementation Plan***

Recognizing the need for a Downtown Circulator, four agencies formed a partnership to oversee the implementation of this project. The Downtown Circulator Partner Group (DCPG) is funding and guiding the Downtown Circulator Implementation Plan.

- National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC)
- District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT)
- Downtown D.C. Business Improvement District (DBID)
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)

**Based on the identified needs, the DCPG outlined several goals for the project:**

- Improve connectivity between the Monumental Core and the Central Business District
- Mitigate federal security measures
- Circulate visitors within the downtown and Monumental Core
- Enable downtown workers to make business and shopping trips
- Supplement Metrobus and Metrorail
- Reduce traffic congestion

These goals guided the development of this Implementation Plan. The plan includes an analysis of the market for the Circulator, an Operations Plan, a Fare Structure Plan, a Capital Plan, a Financing Plan, and a Marketing Plan.

## **Market Analysis**

The market analysis demonstrated that significant markets exist for the Circulator, both for visitors and for downtown workers. The market analysis identified and quantified these markets, including trips by visitors traveling into and within the Monumental Core area, as well as trips made by downtown workers and shoppers for a variety of purposes. Only existing data sources were used, including information such as monthly visitor counts at attractions. More detailed information on travel patterns for visitors was not available. The market estimates included in the analysis can be considered as a conservative estimate since new developments and redevelopment in the downtown area could bring about increased use of the circulator, and the presence of circulator service could result in new travel.

The market analysis also included an examination of downtown circulators in nine other U.S. cities. This research led to several conclusions regarding the design and implementation of a circulator for Washington, D.C.. The examination found that:

- Direct, fast, and reliable service was noted as an important factor in attracting the downtown worker market. Several circulators offer peak service every 5 minutes and the majority operate at least every ten minutes.
- Circulators should be low cost. Four of the nine circulator services contacted are provided free of charge. The remainder charge much less than a regular transit trip, with the highest at 50-cents.
- Unique-looking vehicles are important in attracting the visitor market. Some operators opted for the unique look of diesel-powered trolleys while the remainder have gone with compressed natural gas (CNG), electric, or hybrid engines on low-floor buses that have a more innovative look. None use conventional diesel buses.
- The public must be provided with adequate information about the service.

## Operations Plan

Four circulator routes are proposed for implementation. Two options for combining these routes are being considered. These are shown in Figures 1 and 2. The four routes, and the areas they serve, are:

- White House-Capitol Route – serves the White House, Foggy Bottom, the State Department area, the National Mall, the Capitol, Union Station, and downtown.
- Monuments Route – serves the Washington Monument, Jefferson, Roosevelt, Korean War, Lincoln, Vietnam Veterans, and World War II Memorials and connects them to Metrorail and the White-House Capitol Loop.
- North-South Route – serves the new convention center, the downtown area, the National Mall, the L'Enfant Plaza area, the Southwest Waterfront, and connects to the White House-Capitol Route.
- K Street Route – serves Union Station, the new convention center, K Street, and Georgetown, and connects to the North-South Route.

Two options for combining the routes result from the two variations of the White-House Capitol Route and Monuments Route, with different streets being used in the vicinity of the White House. Each of the system's routes will operate from 8:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m., seven days a week, with the Monuments Route operating until 11:00 p.m. during peak visitor seasons. Service will be provided every five minutes on all routes at most times on weekdays. During the evenings and on weekends some routes will operate every ten minutes, rather than every five. During peak tourist seasons, the White House-Capitol Route and Monuments Route may need to operate as frequently as every three minutes during certain hours.

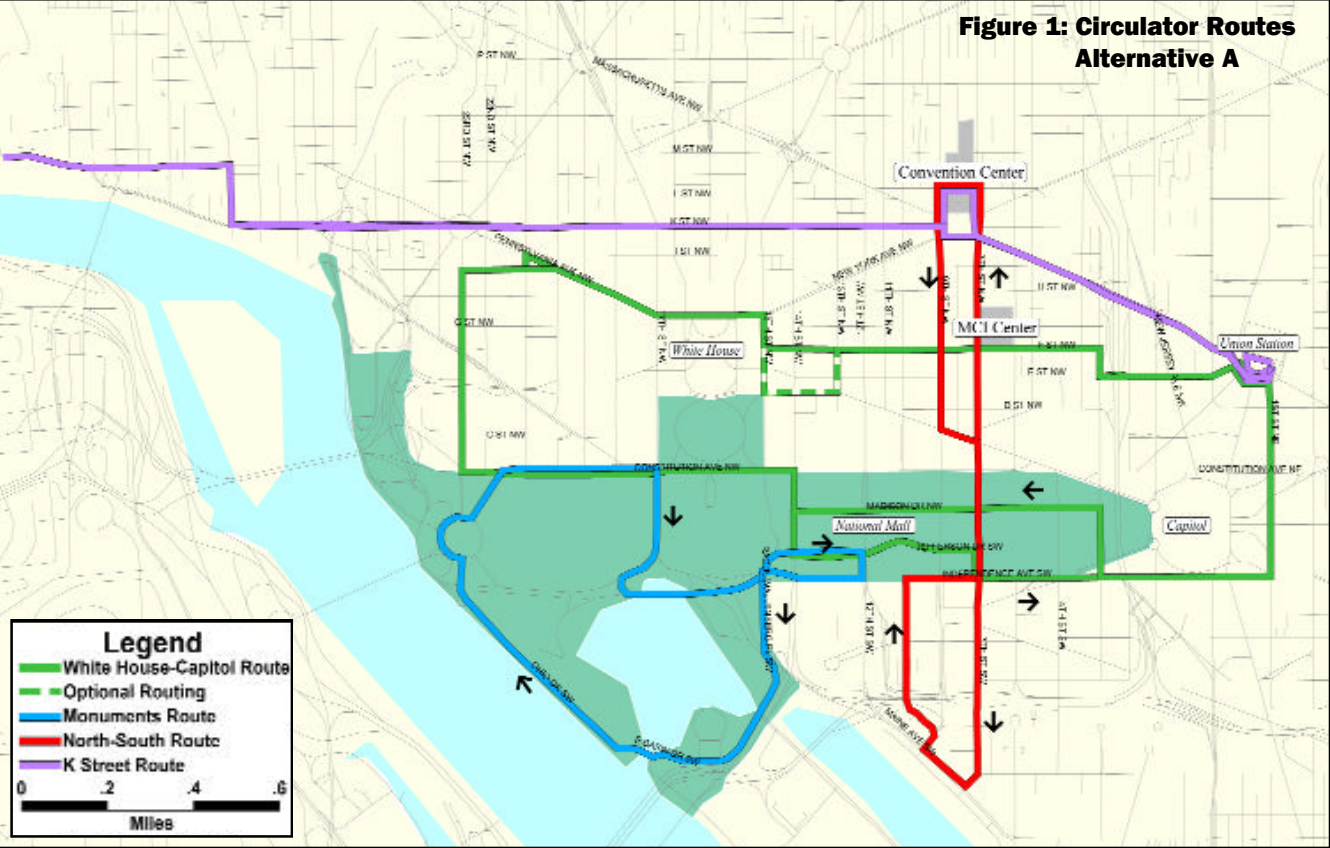
### Operation of the Circulator is projected to have the following characteristics:

- Annual operating cost of approximately \$17 million
- An estimated 45 percent of operating costs recovered through fares
- An estimated 45,000 riders on an average weekday
- An estimated 16.3 million riders annually
- Over 410,000 employees (including 195,000 federal workers) within walking distance
- 91 percent of all downtown federal employees within walking distance

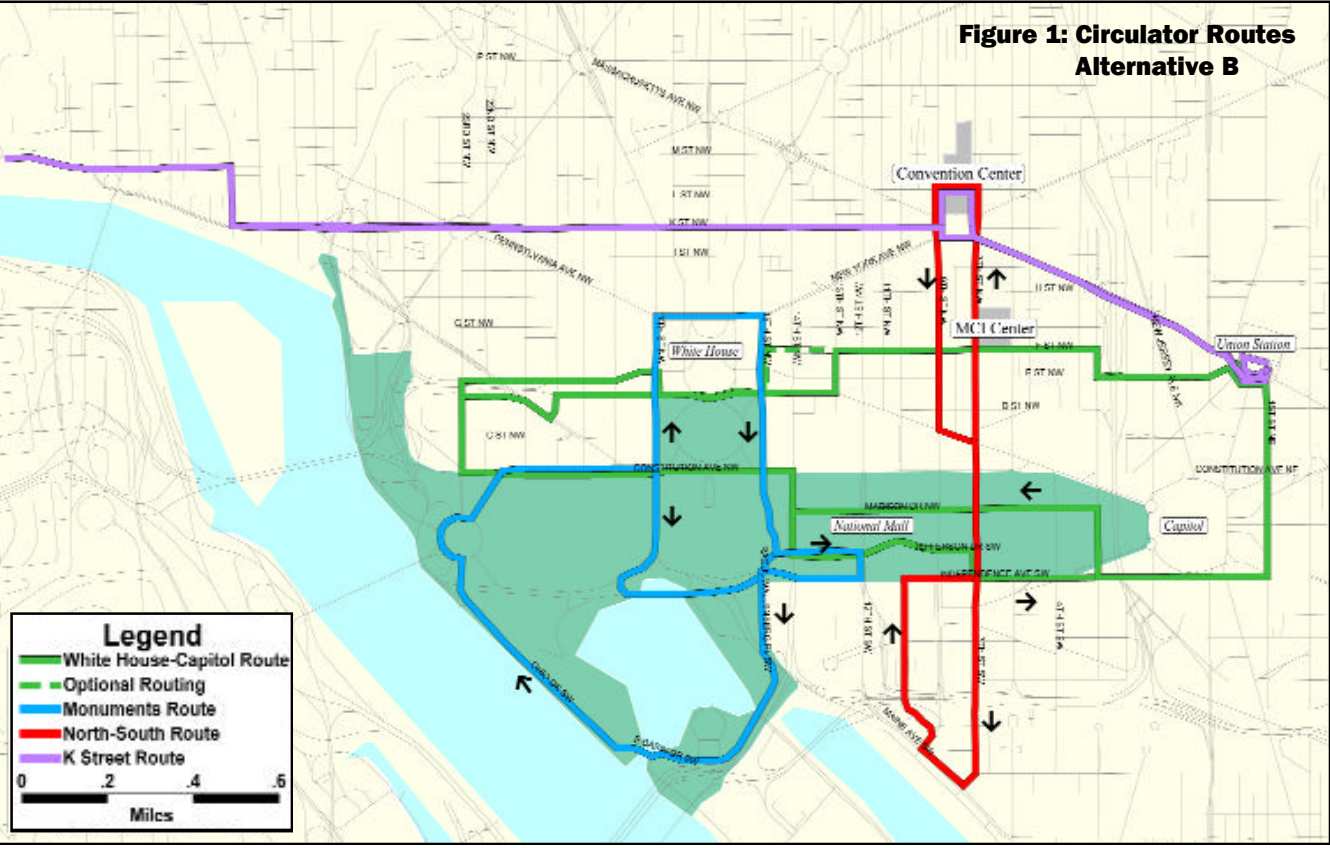
It is proposed that the North-South and K Street routes be implemented during the first phase of operations at an annual estimated operating cost of \$6.1 million.

The success of all of the routes will depend on good overall management of the city's physical transportation infrastructure, as well as enforcement of traffic regulations along the rights-of-way used by the Circulator. At a minimum, several minor roadway improvements and changes in roadway restrictions will be necessary. Additionally, implementation of exclusive bus lanes could improve the service. While the system will make use of many existing bus stops, approximately 50 new stops will be required, which will eliminate about 144 parking spaces in the downtown area.

**Figure 1: Circulator Routes Alternative A**



**Figure 1: Circulator Routes Alternative B**



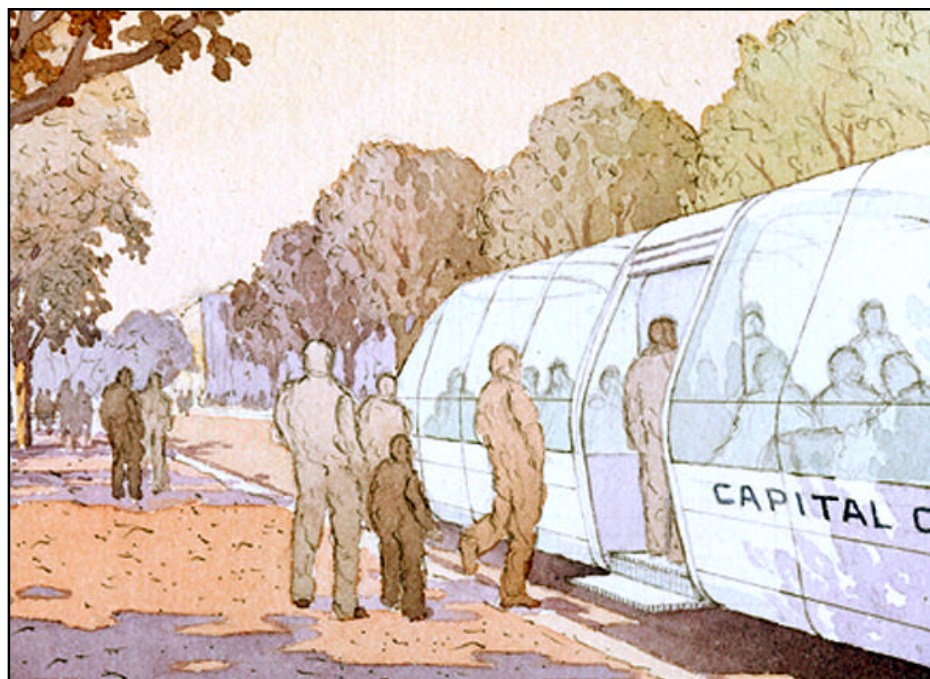


## Fare Structure Plan

The proposed fare structure and fare payment system are compatible with the SmarTrip-based fare payment system used by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. Cash, SmarTrip cards, and visitor flash passes will be accepted on the Circulator. These three fare media will be used to offer the following fare products:

- Single Ride Fare - 50 cents in cash or from a SmarTrip card.
- Transfers - discount only for riders with SmarTrip cards.
- 1-Day and 7-Day Combined Metro/Circulator Passes - \$1 (1-Day) or \$3 (7-Day) would be added to the Metro pass price. Available only to holders of SmarTrip cards.
- Circulator-Only Flash Passes - unlimited use flash passes as follows: 1-day (\$2), 3-day (\$4), 7-day (\$8), and monthly (\$12).
- Circulator-Only SmarTrip Passes - unlimited use monthly (\$12), and annual (\$120) passes available on SmarTrip.

Despite the number of pass products offered, single ride fares are still expected to account for just over half of all Circulator trips. The remainder will consist primarily of weekly Metro Combo pass holders for downtown workers and flash pass users for visitors. The average revenue per passenger is projected to be 47-cents.



## Capital Plan

Vehicles will be the most significant capital expense for the Circulator, and the Capital Plan investigates a number of vehicles for possible use in the system. The DCPG established the following criteria for the identification of an appropriate vehicle:

- Low floor
- Large windows
- Clean fuels (natural gas, electric, electric-hybrid)
- Adequate capacity (55 passengers)

The DCPG was also interested in vehicles with unique body types that would make circulator vehicles more easily recognizable; therefore, several were investigated in the process. After review of 19 different vehicles, the plan recommends a vehicle that is at least 35' long, uses clean fuels, and has a proven track record of use in North America. Using these criteria, all of the possible candidate vehicles recommended for further consideration are standard buses already in wide use that offer natural gas fuel options.

The Circulator will require a fleet of 90 vehicles. Depending on the vehicle selected, the vehicle costs will be between \$23.4 and \$25.7 million. Bus stops and shelters will be provided through the District of Columbia's existing bus shelter contract so there will be no cost to the Circulator. The Circulator operator will be responsible for providing an appropriate storage and maintenance facility in the District of Columbia. Therefore, this cost will be borne by the operator and is not included as part of the Circulator implementation plan.

## Financing Plan

The Financing Plan focuses on the funding sources used by the nine other downtown circulators that were reviewed as part of the market analysis. The Downtown Circulator is expected to cover about 45 percent of operating costs through fare box revenues. While this percentage is quite high relative to other public transit services and downtown circulators in other cities, it still leaves just over half of all operating costs to be paid through other sources. The DCPG is working to establish a financing plan to establish a stable set of funding sources for the service.

## Marketing Plan

Selecting a name and identity for a service is one of the most important decisions to be made. The project name will help determine the circulator's "place" in the market and be decisive in determining how people will react to the service. While the DCPG is continuing efforts to develop a name and identity for the Downtown Circulator, the Marketing Plan proposes several alternatives for consideration. The name selected for the service should illustrate several desirable characteristics in a name and identity for the Downtown Circulator:

- The name itself should be short and quick.
- It should suggest rides that are short and quick, not circuitous tour bus excursions.
- It should reinforce the idea that D.C. and its downtown are experiencing an exciting transformation.
- Riders should be able to use the service name as both a noun and a verb.

The Marketing Plan presents an overall marketing strategy that supports a convenient, and inexpensive transportation service utilizing clean-fuel vehicles and offering tourists, business travelers, and downtown workers direct, frequent, and easy-to-understand access to key Washington, D.C. destinations. The strategy includes:

- An identity that suggests benefits for tourists, business travelers, and downtown workers, while also calling attention to the capital's revitalized downtown.
- A corporate identity that differentiates the service from regular transit alternatives, while suggesting that it provides important links with other travel modes.
- A vehicle paint scheme that is highly visible and that provides visitors and other downtown pedestrians with a clear picture of why the service is special.
- Distinctive route maps in both a schematic and a full street-map format.
- Route-specific bus stop signs.
- An internet web site, plus graphic elements that can be incorporated in the web sites of neighboring businesses and agencies.
- Encouraging visitor attractions and the downtown BID to include routes on maps displayed on the Mall and on downtown streets.
- Developing graphic concepts that can be incorporated in Metrorail maps and brochures and in privately published D.C. maps and tour guides.
- Producing a full color visitor guide and shuttle map in a single-sheet tabloid format for distribution in hotels, at Metrorail stations, and on the Mall.

The Marketing Plan also identifies individual marketing elements needed for successful implementation of the Downtown Circulator.

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## ***Implementation Plan Contents***

**T**he Downtown Circulator Implementation Plan contains greater detail on each of the aforementioned elements. The plan is structured as follows:

- Section 1 **Introduction**
- Section 2 **Project Background**
- Section 3 **Market Analysis**
- Section 4 **Operations Plan**
- Section 5 **Fare Structure Plan**
- Section 6 **Capital Plan**
- Section 7 **Financing Plan**
- Section 8 **Marketing Plan**