

Millions more for FRED buses

BY SCOTT SHENK / THE FREE LANCE-STAR | Posted: Wednesday, July 17, 2013 5:43 pm

Some localities' loss has turned into a big gain for the FREDericksburg Regional Transit Service, which will get millions in additional federal funding starting this fiscal year.

FRED's funding windfall also will have a positive impact for the city and a proposal to build a parking deck for Virginia Railway Express commuters.

Because of a change in how the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation divvies out federal funding, millions of dollars will be added to FRED's annual budget.

The Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization voted on Monday night to endorse the funding change for FRED, which provides bus service for Fredericksburg and the counties of Stafford, Spotsylvania and Caroline.

DRPT made the funding formula change last year, but the difference in funding wasn't known until April. DRPT now uses only federal formulas, which are determined by information provided by transit providers like FRED, and cuts out state adjustments.

The new approach means FRED gets more and transit providers in other localities get less.

So, instead of getting a little more than \$1 million through DRPT this fiscal year, FRED will get \$2.3 million. That is a pretty nice chunk of change added to FRED's \$4.89 million budget this fiscal year, which started July 1.

"They're giving us what we should've gotten all along," said Kathy Beck, FRED's director.

FRED should continue to get an extra \$1 million annually for the foreseeable future—depending on the federal budget allocation to the state.

The bus service will use the added funding to buy new buses and maintain existing ones, Beck said.

FRED had been awarded \$1 million to buy new buses over the next six years through the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement program.



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New buses are being added to the Fredericksburg Regional Transit fleet in Fredericksburg, VA on May 4, 2010. All FRED buses are being equipped with GPS locators and multiples cameras. (Mike Morones/The Free Lance-Star) -- slug: -- NIKON D300 | #3109731::20mm, f10, 1/640sec, ISO400 ----- color 4cols

That \$1 million will be rerouted to the city for design and planning of a VRE parking deck. FAMPO will vote on that change at its next meeting.

“It’s something that’s got to be addressed,” said Fredericksburg Councilman Matt Kelly, who is also the FAMPO policy board chairman and a member of the VRE Operations Board.

He and other city officials say there aren’t enough spaces to handle VRE commuters in the city. Kelly said he has been talking with the commuter rail officials about new parking options in the city.

A FAMPO study has floated the idea of building three parking decks in the city. The first one would handle VRE commuters.

Although city officials are looking at numerous locations for new decks, the VRE structure could be built on a current rail commuter lot, the combination paved and gravel space off Prince Edward Street.

The FAMPO study shows a four-level, 1,200-space structure that could be built on that spot at a cost of \$29 million. Kelly said the city probably will have to scale back the size and cost of the new deck.

Kelly called the \$1 million the city will get to move forward with the VRE deck “a step in the right direction,” but said the city will need more help to get it done.

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