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## Shuttles for Tysons Metro stations in Virginia need grants

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When four new Metro stations open in Tysons Corner in 2013, Fairfax County plans to have a shuttle bus service ready to ferry riders among the [Silver Line](#) stations, office complexes and shopping malls.

But cash-strapped Fairfax has no money now to fund the proposed service. The county's silver lining could come in the form of \$280 million in new federal grants dedicated to urban circulators such as streetcars and buses -- if Fairfax can compete successfully for the money.

The grants give priority to transit projects that support the redevelopment of communities into mixed-use, high-density areas. Those guidelines seem to be in line with Fairfax's draft [blueprint](#) for redeveloping Tysons into an urban epicenter with pedestrian-friendly streets surrounded by high-rise office and residential buildings.

"It looks like someone wrote [the guidelines] with Tysons in mind," said Clark Tyler, chairman of the county-appointed Tysons Land Use Task Force, a 37-member panel that helped draft the blueprint.

The grant program, which was announced this month, is open to state and local governments. Federal officials said they don't know how competitive the process will be until all applications are submitted by the Feb. 8 deadline.

Fairfax County officials, transit experts and developers agree that a shuttle service with frequent stops would encourage motorists in Tysons to ditch their cars for the rails, relieving congestion in the traffic-choked job center.

The proposed "Tysons Link" would consist of five routes, with each one connecting office complexes and residential areas to two Silver Line stations and retail and restaurant outlets. All of the routes would serve the Tysons Central 123 station. Four would also serve Tysons West, and one would also serve Tysons East.

Preliminary estimates from transit officials indicate that Fairfax needs \$9 million to buy the new buses and \$5.8 million annually to operate the service.

The county can vie for up to \$25 million from a \$130 million federal grant designated for urban circulator systems. It also can compete for a chunk of another \$150 million allocated for the purchase, replacement or rehabilitation of buses and related equipment.

Kathy Ichter, Fairfax's transportation director, said the county considers all potential funding for its transit projects. But she said Fairfax is still studying the grant requirements to gauge whether the proposed shuttle bus service is eligible for federal money.

"If there is a match here for Tysons, we will be making a grant application," she said. "Tysons is one of our

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number one priorities."

Ichter cautioned that a federally funded shuttle service could become a cost burden for Fairfax. The county would be required to spend additional money to comply with federal regulations.

"If we take one federal dollar, that means the entire system is federalized and we'd have to go by all their rules," she said. "This is a huge cost implication."

Ichter said one option to bypass that cost burden would be to have the [Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority](#) run the shuttle service on behalf of Fairfax. WMATA is partly funded and regulated by the federal government.

Ichter said the county has not finalized its cost estimates, but that it intends to have the bus service in place when the stations open in Tysons.

"People want to know exactly what we're running at the end of 2013," she said. "We're four years out. We are entering the phase where we need to be making the decisions about ordering the buses, exactly where the routes are, getting the finances in place, with the idea that when 2013 gets here we'll be ready to deliver."

Stewart Schwartz, executive director of the [Coalition for Smarter Growth](#), said a reliable shuttle service would give commuters an incentive to use transit instead of driving into Tysons.

"If an employee knows there will readily be a circulator available as they get off the Metrorail, and that the transfer is easy and quick to the circulator, they will be more likely to use it," he said.

The Tysons task force has proposed the idea of having landowners served by the bus routes fund the operation of the shuttle-bus service; in exchange, the county would increase density guidelines for the landowners' redevelopment projects. Task force members say the federal grant could help pay for the purchase of new buses, the first step in ensuring that the service is in place when the new Metro stations open.

"The worst thing that could happen is the first train come up and [disgorges] 300 people who stare into a parking lot," Tyler said.

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