

TOP NEWS

Study: Signal priority fails to ease congestion

David Francis, The Examiner

May 10, 2006 7:00 AM (6 days ago)

WASHINGTON -

A Virginia Tech traffic study on Route 1 in Northern Virginia found there is no benefit to giving transit buses signal priority, or the ability to extend green lights or shorten red lights in order to prevent traffic gridlock.

“Basically, you’re trying to reduce bus delays, but you’re increasing car delays. The buses are speeding up and the cars are slowing down,” said Hesham Rakha, an engineer at the Virginia Tech Traffic Institute.

The Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority is reviewing the final draft of the report before issuing it next week, Rakha said.

The transit authority is considering signal priority devices in highly congested areas like Route 1 and Columbia Pike as ways to prevent traffic backups, according to planner Tom Harrington.

Rakha said his group is now studying Columbia Pike to determine whether signal changes based on traffic conditions as opposed to the position of a bus are a more effective way of preventing gridlock.

Harrington said the studies are part of a transit authority plan to change the way mass transit moves people in the region. The transit authority is recommending smaller, branded buses such as the Circulator bus, which transports people from Georgetown to Union Station in the District.

“It’s a family of buses, not a one-size-fits-all thing like Metrobus,” he said.

This type of bus service is being considered for the University Boulevard corridor between Silver Spring and College Park in Maryland, along the Georgia Avenue corridor in the District, and in numerous locations in Northern Virginia, Harrington said. He added that trolley systems are being considered along H Street NE and in Anacostia near the site of the planned baseball stadium.

Robin McElhenny, a senior planning manager at the transit authority, said the branded buses and trolleys are the future of transit.

“We’re looking at a different way of moving people,” she said.

df Francis@dcexaminer.com