

Executive Summary

District of Columbia Motorcoach Action Plan

Introduction

Motorcoach operators provide an important service both for tourists and visitors that travel to Washington, DC, and for the region's workforce who commute into the city's employment centers. The high volume of motorcoaches that travel into the District on a daily basis creates several challenges to the effective management of this activity in the city. Main challenges include:

- providing adequate and appropriate motorcoach parking;
- identifying appropriate motorcoach routes in the city;
- identifying appropriate curbside stop locations; and
- enforcing and managing the implementation of regulations across the many enforcement agencies in the District.

The plan focuses on making adjustments to parking, routing, regulations and enforcement of buses in the District over the next 18 months.

Motorcoach Service Overview

There are five distinct types of motorcoach service provided in the District on a regular basis: charter/tour, intercity, commuter, sightseeing, and shuttle services. Buses, chartered to bring tour groups into the District either on day trips or as part of a multi-day itinerary, have been estimated to serve as many as one-third of the visitors to Washington's historical and cultural attractions. Intercity bus operators provide a low cost regional transportation alternative for residents in the Washington metropolitan area, with point to point service between key destinations – primarily Washington to New York City. Commuter buses have been providing an important service to Metropolitan Washington area residents for over three decades. Annual ridership has risen from an estimated 1.9 million riders in 1999 to an estimated 6.6 million in 2009 and more than 300 commuter buses operate in the District on weekdays. Sightseeing operators provide scheduled hop-on/hop-off service between the District's key attractions. Finally, shuttle services in the District primarily refer to vehicles used to transport employees between an organization's multiple office sites or students between campuses.

Parking

There are currently 30 curbside motorcoach parking spaces, 611 off-street parking lot spaces at Union Station and RFK Stadium, and 199 motorcoach parking spaces for visitors to specific attractions such as the Washington Cathedral and the Zoo. In addition, there are 110 curbside drop-off and pick-up locations citywide, the majority of which are located on the National Mall. With over an estimated 1,000 commercial motorcoaches entering the city during peak season, the existing parking inventory does not meet demand. Addressing the motorcoach parking deficit in the city is therefore the central focus of this plan.

Through data collection efforts and analysis, it has been determined that 39 additional curbside spaces are needed for motorcoaches. This specific number of spaces was determined based on ascertaining demand for curbside capacity in proximity to major attractions using visitor volume data, estimated motorcoach volume and peak months of tourist visitation.

Routing

Routing of motorcoaches in high density areas is challenging because of the infrastructure impacts that heavy vehicles have on roads that are frequently not designed for a high volume of commercial vehicle traffic. DDOT has developed a truck and bus route system which provides suggested routing. The intent will be to integrate the truck and bus regulations into the District Code of Municipal Regulations (DCMR).

Regulations

DDOT has worked closely with industry representatives over the past year to make adjustments to the regulations governing motorcoach operations in the District. Under recently adopted regulations, intercity bus service providers will be required to apply for a permit to operate at curbside locations. The permit application will include a review process to address traffic, safety and neighborhood concerns. Adjustments are also pending for sightseeing and commuter bus regulations to allow DDOT to better manage this type of operator service.

Enforcement

Coordinating the comprehensive enforcement of regulations governing motorcoach activity is challenging because of the number of agencies with jurisdiction in the city. This is compounded by the lack of staff dedicated to commercial vehicle enforcement. DDOT recently established a pilot program with two dedicated commercial vehicle enforcement personnel to address this issue. Plans for enhancing coordination between the agencies responsible for commercial vehicle enforcement are included in the recommendations section of the plan and are focused on target enforcement areas and enhanced training for MPD and DDOT staff.

Technology

The integration of technology into the various motorcoach management areas such as parking and routing can be instrumental in creating efficiencies with operators accessing the District. Applications can be used for routing, reserving parking and data collection.

Recommendations

DDOT's approach to managing motorcoach activity in the District focuses on providing a centralized facility to accommodate motorcoach parking needs. It is anticipated that this will reduce the traffic, safety and environmental impacts of motorcoach "cruising" which currently results from a lack of available parking. The recommendations included in the report are separated into immediate term, mid-term and long-term actions.

Immediate Term (to be complete by the end of 2011)

- Identify, designate and sign 39 curbside spaces for motorcoach activity in proximity to major attractions.
- Outline a plan and proposed curbside locations to accommodate commuter bus staging at approximately 20 spaces.
- Develop an annual commercial vehicle counting program to determine more precise data regarding motorcoaches.
- Release proposed rulemaking for Bus routing system.

Mid-Term (to be complete by the end of 2012)

- Increase off-street parking to provide long-term and overnight motorcoach parking by coordinating with DMPED through a procurement process.
- Develop a robust and streamlined motorcoach online parking system to allow carrier to reserve curbside and off street parking spaces.
- Enhance coordination between the agencies regarding motorcoach operations in the District through hosting annual meetings.

Long-Term (2015)

- Develop a centralized intermodal facility focusing on future development in areas along key corridors in the District.

It is anticipated that the recommendations set forth in this plan will substantially improve the management of motorcoach activity in the District by creating improvements in the areas of traffic flow, pedestrian safety, management of public space, motorcoach routing and diesel idle reduction efforts.