

EXPANSION OF D.C. CIRCULATOR WILL PUT MORE LOCAL 689 JOBS AT RISK

The District's Circulator bus network is set to have a major expansion beginning next year. The expansion will add six new routes and extend four others. These expansions will duplicate some already existing Metrobus services, which will put Local 689 jobs at risk.

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) released its 2014 Circulator Transit Development Plan in late September. According to the report, the planned Union Station-Navy Yard extension to the Southwest Waterfront would require a tax payer subsidy of \$11.80 per passenger, based on projected ridership. By comparison, extending the Rosslyn-Georgetown-Dupont line to U Street and Howard University would require a subsidy of \$1.86 per passenger. None of the lines is expected to recoup even half its costs through fares. D.C. Council are also expected to raise fares from \$1 to \$1.50 for SmarTrip users and \$2 for cash payers.

The DDOT report states that three of the proposed route extensions “are expected to fall short of several key Circulator performance metrics,” but are included in the plan because the D.C. Council voted to fund them, anyway. Some of the other proposals add capacity and connections to neighborhoods already served by Circulator routes, while others aim to expand the network and compete with existing Metrobus routes.

The Circulator, operated by the for-profit, British company First Transit, started out as a special bus service intended to move white collar workers and tourist around Washington D.C. Local 689's sister Local 1764 members operate the Circulator service. Because they are a separate local bargaining with a private employer and not WMATA, these ATU members are paid far less and receive fewer benefits.

The proposed expansion of Circulator will also undermine some of the things riders have come to like about the service, including simple routes and limited-stop service. Great expansion will also make it harder for riders to discern routes in areas suddenly served by multiple lines. Since its launch in 2005, D.C. Circulator has become responsible for cancelling several Metrobus routes and moving those tax dollars to the Circulator.