

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

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**FULL COMMITTEE HEARING
EXAMINING THE ROLE OF FERRIES IN IMPROVING MOBILITY**

SEPTEMBER 28, 2021

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ORAL STATEMENT OF FRANK J. PRINCIPI

CHAIRMAN

NORTHERN VIRGINIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

M-495 FAST FERRY STAKEHOLDER GROUP

I. Introduction

Good morning, Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee. My name is Frank J. Principi. I am a former local elected official from Prince William County, Virginia and serve as the Chairman of the Northern Virginia Regional Commission's M-495 Fast Ferry Stakeholder Group. The Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) is a regional planning council of thirteen local governments in the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC. The Fast Ferry Stakeholder Group is comprised of 60+ public, private, and military organizations that support the launch of fast ferry transit service in the National Capital Region.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for their leadership in these policy and budget matters and conducting this hearing. I would also like to thank Madam Chairman Norton on her continued support and leadership of our efforts.

II. Mobility in The National Capital Region

Today people in the National Capital Region waste an average of 102 hours stuck in traffic, translating into \$4.6 billion in lost time and fuel. I would add that we have some of the most reliably, unreliable commutes in the nation. While we have a transit system, we are proud of in the region, transit services are often time or place limited and/or at capacity. Diversification is key to improving mobility in the region. The ability to move

goods and people at relatively low cost represents a substantial benefit for both our economy and our quality of life.

III. Vision

Our vision is to provide safe, reliable, and efficient passenger ferry vessel transit service on the Occoquan, Potomac, and Anacostia Rivers. These waterways were designated as the “M-495 Marine Highway” by the US Department of Transportation’s Maritime Administration. The service is intended to meet the needs of residents, tourists, and small freight. The system would be supported with a local commercial vessel maintenance and repair facility.

Rider amenities will be substantial and passenger fares are expected to be competitive with existing transit and toll lanes in the region. The envisioned service will serve both the north-south and cross-river commutes with a fleet of 149-passenger vessels to provide links connecting residents to work, medical appointments, school, shopping, and tourist destinations. The service will enhance fairness in mobility and will provide critical transportation links for areas currently underserved by transit to connect people directly to job centers. Service focal points include locations in Virginia (Prince William County, Fort Belvoir, Pentagon, National Airport, National Landing); Maryland (Indian Head, National Harbor and MGM Grand Hotel) and the District of Columbia (Joint Base Anacostia Bolling, Department of Homeland Security, Wharf, Poplar Point). At full development, the system could provide mobility to accommodate about 10,000 daily regional trips.

Given the significant and growing waterfront population densities and recent efforts to provide customers with near real-time package deliveries, the service has the potential to improve freight mobility and provide revenue to support passenger service. The fleet of vessels could also provide the region with expanded emergency management.

The ferry system will support job creation and job training opportunities and be a source of revenue creation for the three states and local governments. Once the system is launched, it will provide substantial labor income from direct, indirect, and induced jobs as well as opportunities for job training in maritime skills that are in high demand nationally. We estimate primary job creation in a range of 100 to 200 jobs, with the ability to offer training opportunities on an on-going basis.

IV. Public-Private-Military Partnership

The Stakeholder Group has endorsed the principle that the construction and operation of this new transit service should be conducted through a public-private-military partnership. All partners would be expected to help finance the initial start-up costs -

capital and operating expenses - and participate in the governance structure. While the military is challenged to finance off-site transportation projects, their personnel make-up 24% of daily commuters in this region and these federal facilities would contribute through adaptation of existing shuttle bus services as well as technical support for installation of ferry terminals at military installations.

V. Request To Congress

Starting this new service requires substantial up-front investment. Despite our best efforts we have had up to \$17 million in federal grant funds in the pipeline but have not been able to finalize any of those grants or that level of funding.

We are asking Congress to consider a \$13 million earmark for the M-495. Congresswoman Norton earlier sponsored an earmark request in that amount, but it was not awarded. The Stakeholder Group has been willing to create up to a 40% match. The earmark and the local match, together with a time-limited operating subsidy – something included in the House version of the infrastructure bill – would provide the upfront financial “bow wave” and allow us to launch this regional service.

We also request that the final version of the infrastructure bill include the House provision entitled, “Projects of National and Regional Significance,” projects that cannot be funded through annual apportionments or other discretionary sources. Given that the M-495 fast ferry transit service would quantitatively improve throughput and provide long-term congestion relief this ferry service would be a great example of “building back better.”

VI. Conclusion

Thank you again for your continued leadership on our country’s infrastructure needs and respectfully ask the Committee consider support of the M-495 Fast Ferry Service. I would be pleased to take any questions.