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Search is under way for additional lots HOT LANES PLAN MAY HELP PARKING

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By KELLY HANNON

Persuading commuters to carpool up Interstate 95 is not a problem in North Stafford.

Workers want to rideshare--catch a van, bus or form instant carpools in slug lines. After all, these alternatives save money, help the environment and offer a break from the stress of driving.

But the region is running out of places for people to park at some of the eight Interstate 95 commuter lots between Caroline County and North Stafford.

The two Park & Ride lots near Garrisonville are overflowing, according to state and local surveys of commuter spaces.

"Parking is just a horrendous problem," said Mark Dudenhefer, a Stafford supervisor who's been trying to expand commuter lots along State Route 610.

Some solutions are on the horizon:

LEASING SOME LOTS

First, there is \$150,000 in federal money available to lease parking spaces in North Stafford.

Dudenhefer and Stafford Supervisor Paul Milde are scouting private lots to rent on Route 610.

An ideal spot is Stafford Marketplace, which is across the street from a popular lot on Staffordborough Boulevard, where slug lines meet.

But the owner said no, Dudenhefer and Milde said.

Most of Stafford Marketplace is owned by Kimco Realty Corp.



The Staffordborough commuter lot is full to the point that people are parking illegally. The county is considering a deck at the Aquia Towne Centre to accommodate the increasing need for commuter parking.

"I'm still very disappointed in Stafford Marketplace's decision not to work with us on this," Dudenhefer said. "They were really by far the best short-term solution."

Kimco Realty spokesman Tom Simmons did not return calls seeking comment.

The next step could be talking to churches further west on Route 610, and seeing whether FREDericksburg Regional Transit could run a weekday morning and afternoon shuttle service to commuter lots with slug lines.

"We'd have to analyze and make sure that if we did that, people would be willing to park further out and catch a shuttle bus," Dudenhefer said.

PARKING DECK AN OPTION?

Stafford supervisors are debating whether plans for 200 privately built commuter parking spaces at Aquia Towne Center would be worth the price.

The shopping center's developer, Ramco-Gershenson Properties Trust, wants to build several parking decks as part of the shopping center's transformation into a mixed residential, retail and commercial hub. One parking deck would have 200 parking spaces set aside for commuter use.

Ramco-Gershenson proposes paying for the garage, and in return, it would get a discount on county taxes in the future, equivalent to the cost of construction, plus interest.

Supervisors are expected to vote this month on zoning for the development, but the commuter parking proposal will be taken up later.

Dudenhefer said the location needs to be studied. He's concerned that the deck would be east of I-95 when slug lines form in lots on the west side.

"Are 200 parking spaces enough to sustain another slug line? It might be difficult we could go ahead and move people in vanpools and carpools over there, and maybe that would be helpful. It would require a lot more study," Dudenhefer said.

Ramco-Gershenson already allows commuters to park in the shopping center, as long as they avoid areas with signs prohibiting all-day parking. No one has a firm count of how many commuters park there, but Milde estimates it is between 100 and 150 vehicles a day. That surface parking will disappear when the shopping center is redeveloped.

Milde said the lot is ideally located to serve Aquia Harbour residents.

The county would lose some future revenue under the proposal, but Stafford will still get more tax revenue from the redevelopment of Aquia Towne Center, Milde said.

"I'm not saying it's the way to go, but I'm certainly saying it should be listened to," Milde said. "The commuter parking problem, if it hasn't already, has reached critical mass."

SOME SPACES AVAILABLE

GWRideConnect, the area's free commuter carpool and vanpool matching service, did a survey of Park

& Ride lots in November.

It found empty spaces in in Spotsylvania, and on U.S. 17 in Stafford, but North Stafford is squeaking by with several dozen open spaces on Courthouse Road.

People in North Stafford are "really, really committed to ridesharing, and we need to provide them with some parking," said GWRideConnect director Diana Utz.

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Route 610/Staffordborough Boulevard:

1,008 spaces, over capacity

State Route 610/Mine Road

773 spaces, at capacity

State Route 630/Courthouse Road

530 spaces

462 spaces in use

U.S. 17

1,041 spaces

741 spaces in use

In coming years, the proposed High Occupancy Toll lanes project on Interstate 95 could generate \$250 million or more for transit improvements. Construction of the lanes could begin in 2010 in Northern Virginia.

The Fredericksburg area could benefit by getting additional Park & Ride spots.

An advisory committee is still ironing out where the lots would go, but traffic studies show Stafford will need another 2,000 spaces by 2030, and the rest of the Fredericksburg area will need about 1,000 new spaces, said Tanya Husick, program manager at the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation.

--Kelly Hannon

U.S. 1/State Route 658 in Carmel Church 43 spaces

33 spaces in use

--GWRideConnect, according to a Wednesday, Nov. 7, hand-counted survey

State Route 3/Salem Church Road 673 spaces 647 spaces in use

State Route 3/Gordon Road 603 spaces 443 spaces in use

State Route 208/ Courthouse Road 743 spaces 386 spaces in use

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