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[Return to story](#)

## Vanpool riders may be counted

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By KELLY HANNON

Counting the number of Fredericksburg-area residents riding to work in vanpools could add up to \$5 million a year in new federal transportation funding.

The Fredericksburg area intends to apply for the money, distributed by the Federal Transit Administration to agencies that count their vanpools and other forms of public transit.

Nationally, about 600 transit agencies already submit these commuter numbers to the FTA's National Transit Database, which serves as a central place for U.S. transit statistics.

To participate, the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization board voted Monday night to use \$100,000 in federal funds to design a counting program for the region's vanpool and private-bus riders. The start-up costs are \$200,000, but FAMPO is splitting the bill with the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, which will also start to submit vanpool numbers.

Approximately 350 vanpools are based in the Fredericksburg area.

The \$5 million a year the program could generate--an average of \$15,000 per vanpool--could be used for subsidizing vanpools and regional public-transit projects and services, such as commuter parking, FREDericksburg Regional Transit and Virginia Railway Express.

Commuter-related funding is currently at a premium in the Fredericksburg area. Nearly \$200 million in transit funding connected with the High Occupancy Toll lanes project on Interstate 95 is on hold as Virginia and the private partners contend with a tough credit market, a lawsuit filed by Arlington County and community concerns over traffic.

"This program holds great promise for our region," said Lloyd Robinson, director of transportation planning for the George Washington Regional Commission and FAMPO administrator.

A slate of improvements to Lafayette Boulevard were approved by FAMPO's board Monday night, following a multi-year study of the road that runs from Sophia Street in downtown Fredericksburg to Four-Mile Fork in Spotsylvania.

The study's recommendations call for \$86.1 million in improvements between 2010 and 2035. It calls for sidewalks lining the road, crosswalks, bus stops, roundabouts in key locations to help drivers emerge

from the side streets without impeding traffic flow, and landscaped medians. The Blue and Gray Parkway intersection at Lafayette would become an overpass/underpass for better traffic movement.

Board members asked to see a list of inexpensive improvements that could be culled from the study's larger list of possibilities, with changes that could be executed more rapidly.

The quicker, cheaper list of improvements are concentrated in the downtown area, scheduled between 2010 and 2016. That list calls for bicycle and pedestrian crosswalks near the train station, streetscape improvements, new angled parking between Sophia and Caroline streets, where drivers would reverse into spaces, and a "modern roundabout" where Lafayette, Prince Edward Street and Kenmore Avenue currently converge.

The shorter list also calls for a \$1.4 million bicycle/pedestrian bridge over the Blue and Gray Parkway.

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