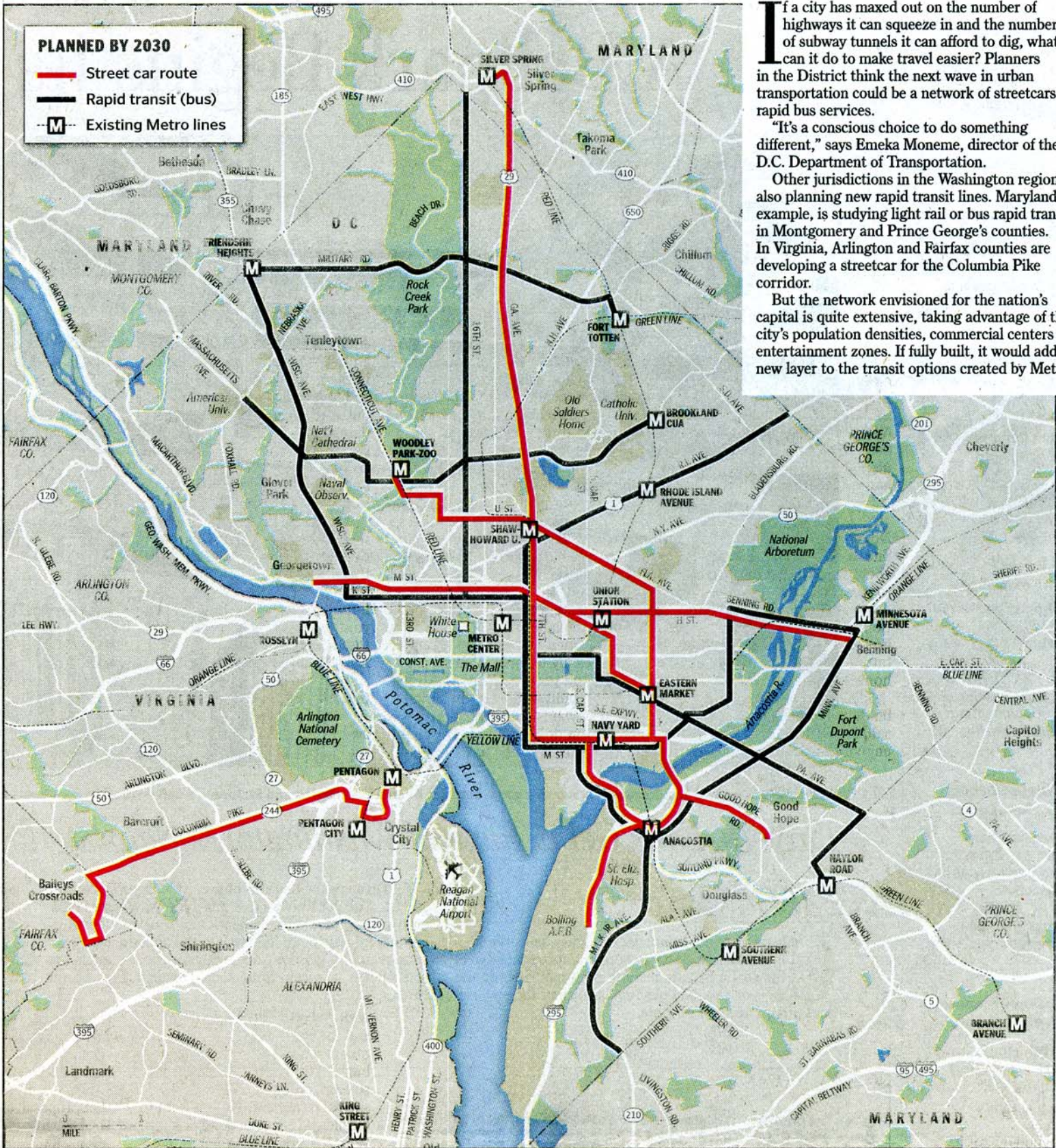


A Matter of Necessity



If a city has maxed out on the number of highways it can squeeze in and the number of subway tunnels it can afford to dig, what can it do to make travel easier? Planners in the District think the next wave in urban transportation could be a network of streetcars and rapid bus services.

"It's a conscious choice to do something different," says Emeka Moneme, director of the D.C. Department of Transportation.

Other jurisdictions in the Washington region are also planning new rapid transit lines. Maryland, for example, is studying light rail or bus rapid transit in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. In Virginia, Arlington and Fairfax counties are developing a streetcar for the Columbia Pike corridor.

But the network envisioned for the nation's capital is quite extensive, taking advantage of the city's population densities, commercial centers and entertainment zones. If fully built, it would add a new layer to the transit options created by Metro.

GOALS

- Supplement what the transit authority does by improving neighborhood-to-neighborhood connections.
- Act as a safety valve for Metro in travel corridors where demand is extremely heavy.
- Provide a focal point for community improvement projects.

The transit program of streetcars, bus rapid transit and rapid bus services is a major focus of DDOT. "It's also a necessity," Moneme said.

Rapid bus lines, such as the Metro Extra limited-stop service on Georgia Avenue and

Seventh Street NW, are comparatively easy to create. Streetcars and bus rapid transit lines would move more people more quickly but also cost more to build and operate. Streetcars are a form of light rail designed to operate in congested urban environments with smaller and lighter cars. Bus rapid transit systems generally operate in lanes set aside for their exclusive use and get priority where they encounter traffic signals. Riders pay fares before boarding.

ROUTES

After the Anacostia demonstration project, the next line in service is likely to run along H Street and Benning Road NE. As part of a significant upgrade to the streets and sidewalks that is underway along that route, the District will lay the groundwork for streetcars.

The rest of the plans probably will evolve over two decades. Other candidates for streetcar or bus rapid transit service include Georgia Avenue and Seventh Street NW, M Street, Florida Avenue, U Street and K Street. Some other corridors, such as Military Road, Wisconsin Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue and 16th Street, might be better suited to rapid bus service in the style of Metro Extra.

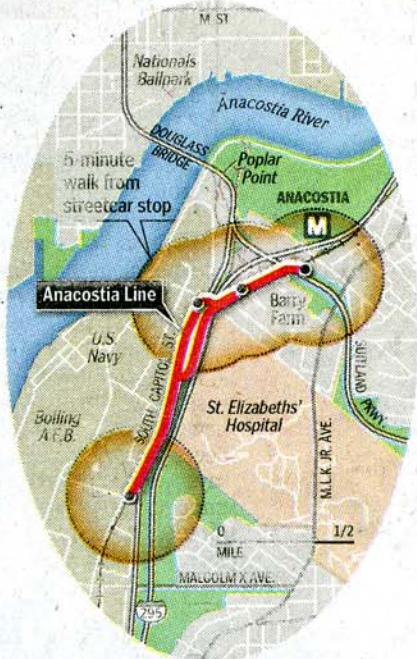
CHALLENGES

Metrail planners struggled for several decades to win approvals from Washington's many layers of government. Then they had to modify the lines and stations to meet community concerns. That was for a transit system that's largely underground in the District.

Aboveground, streetcars do not travel the path of least resistance. The old Brooklyn baseball team found this out the hard way when they had to dodge them. As Washington's first generation of streetcars disappeared in the middle of the last century, many people were glad to see the streets cleared for autos.

Today, many who like the concept of streetcars and rapid buses could feel differently when faced with the reality of streets disrupted by construction, followed by their community's everyday interaction with rail lines, special bus lanes and stations.

Although the transit plan has gone through study and development phases over the past few years, "the pace is really picking up," DDOT Associate Director Freddie Fuller said.



STRATEGY

Start small and gain experience. DDOT plans to begin with a four-stop route between Bolling Air Force Base and the Anacostia Metro station.

That's scheduled to get underway this summer and take about a year and a half to complete. DDOT needs experience building and operating transit lines, which for the past generation the District has left largely to Metro. Riders and neighbors also must experience the service and help plan improvements for the other lines.

"We need to listen to what the public says," DDOT planning manager Catondra Noye said.