

VIEWPOINT

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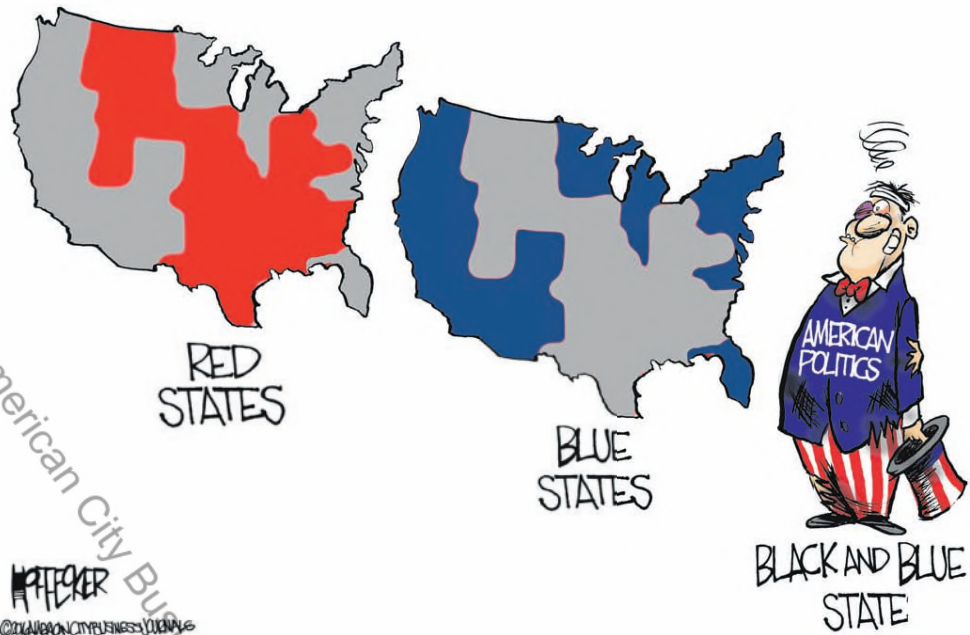
VERBATIM

THE POST ON METRO

It is time to consider a radical step to arrest what looks increasingly like a death spiral for Washington's transit system: federal intervention and control. It is not just folly, but willful neglect, to wait any longer to see if Metro's problems will somehow solve themselves. They won't. ...

One option is to continue allowing Metro to wither, ensuring the Washington metropolitan area's economic degeneration and imperiling the federal workforce. Maybe it is time to consider Option B: a federal control board, modeled on those that intervened to manage the District of Columbia amid its fiscal meltdown in the 1990s.

—Washington Post
editorial board, Nov. 1



GUEST COMMENT

How to change Reston parking plan

The owners of Reston Town Center made a wise election in September – they delayed implementation of their new parking policy until after Jan. 1, stating that they needed more time to make a convincing case for the plan to the Reston community.

But without a compromise, the polarizing standoff over the parking issue is not going away anytime soon. Not for the Reston community, not for the retail merchants in RTC and not for Boston Properties, owners of Reston Town Center.

My wife and I live less than one mile from RTC and have been residents of Reston since 1985. We have supported the town center since it opened in 1991, visiting RTC an average of three to four times a week. And like most Restonians, we feel that the proposed parking policy will effectively build a wall around Reston Town Center, excluding the Reston community that has supported it for the past 25 years.

On the flip side of this discussion, I am a big fan of Boston Properties. As a career restaurant real estate specialist, I have negotiated across the table with their senior executives on many occasions. They are good people and responsible developers. I support their desire to restrict commuters from parking on site and I even defend their right to obtain parking revenue. But I am puzzled by their resistance to recognizing the furor over this proposed parking plan



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and how it is alienating the entire community.

I believe that fences can be mended by making two changes to the proposed plan. One seems obvious and easy, the other more complicated.

First, the plan needs to provide for a minimum of two hours of free parking at all times so that local residents can continue to use the center as their everyday downtown, spending money in their favorite stores and restaurants. That would not open the door to commuter abuse, and these two hours of lost revenue can largely be recouped by charging for parking after two hours on the weekend (the current plan calls for free parking all weekend). Weekends largely attract regional visitors from outside the community who do not support RTC with the frequency, or volume, of spending that the local Reston community does. There are also many commuters who use Metro on the weekends.

We have many retail choices here in Reston. For instance, there are six grocers within 10 minutes of our home and none charge for parking. And many retail categories already provide us with comparable or same brand alternatives in nearby projects, such as Spectrum, Plaza America or North Point Village Center. Consider the impact of adding a \$3 parking surcharge tax to a spend of less than \$10 at impulse retailers such as Starbucks, CVS or Chipotle.

The second, more complex issue is with the parking surveillance and payment system itself. Recognizing that a significant investment has already been made to purchase and install the proposed system, it seems only natural that there is resistance to replacing it altogether. We can be fairly certain that it provides benefits to ownership, such as labor and administrative cost savings and the potential to use or sell valuable consumer tracking data, that make their battle to keep it worth fighting for. However, the personally invasive manner in which it tracks vehicles, the proprietary and inconvenient limits on payment options, and the enforcement consequences seem to be at the core of the entire problem. There are better alternatives.

For instance, Metro parking at Wiehle Avenue seems to function fine with a fob card system that users can add value to, using cash or credit, at one's own convenience. It is fast, convenient and minimally invasive.

It does not require one's every move to be personally tracked, recorded and photographed once inside the garage. Perhaps it, or an alternative system like it, needs to be considered instead?

The fact is, and will remain, that people do NOT want any part of being tracked and photographed, much less maintaining a proprietary account for this purpose that requires posting credit card and phone information that can be hacked by a third party. There is no amount of "educating the public" about the technology that is likely to change that for most people.

Reston locals want to continue to use and embrace RTC as their downtown, as original developer Robert Simon intended. However, if the proposed parking system is activated in its current form, people in the Reston community will dramatically alter the frequency and circumstances under which they visit their favorite retailers and restaurants at the town center. Sadly, many Reston residents are already doing so in anticipation of what may come. Retailers and their employees are already witnessing this.

RTC ownership should have the right to protect its asset from abuse and enhance revenue by implementing a reasonable pay parking policy. The one on the table and the system that supports it, however, is not in the best interests of any Reston stakeholder, including Boston Properties.