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### Talking Transportation, County Revenue

**Frey addresses Sully District Council of Citizens Associations.**

By [Bonnie Hobbs](#)

Thursday, July 17, 2014

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Photo by Bonnie Hobbs

Michael Frey discusses the need for more Fairfax County revenue.

Transportation and Fairfax County revenue ideas were the top topics when Supervisor Michael R. Frey (R-Sully) spoke recently before the Sully District Council of Citizens Associations.

“It’s an interesting time to be in the county,” he said during the group’s June 25 meeting. “It’s

undergoing a tremendous transformation.”

Things are different, though, in the Sully District. “It’s not wide open for development, anymore,” said Frey. “We’re seeing build-out here.”

Conversely, Tysons Corner is a hotbed of activity. “The county is trying to transform Tysons into an urban downtown,” he said. “It’s concentrating development in urban areas because it’s easier to focus transportation improvements [that way]. But we can’t control the market or private landowners, so the best-laid plans don’t always jive with development.”

Frey said Metro’s Silver Line train service linking East Falls Church with Reston via Tysons is scheduled to open Saturday, July 26. The project’s 11.7-mile first phase costs \$3 billion and has been highly anticipated.

“It’s the first extension of the rail line into Fairfax County since the Orange Line in the 1980s,” said Frey. “We’re redoing the entire, feeder-bus network serving the northern part of Sully District to go to the Wiehle Avenue Metro Station.”

Since the county is always looking for new ways to bring in revenue to meet the ever-increasing needs of its residents, Frey said the big issue recently under consideration by the Board of Supervisors has been the possibility of a meals tax. The supervisors even appointed a panel to investigate the matter in depth and already received its report.

“The report doesn’t make a specific recommendation, but lays out the pros and cons of [having a meals tax], as well as the pros and cons of when to put it before the voters on a referendum,” said Frey. “We’ve discussed 4 percent as the tax amount.”

“Everybody east of us has a meals tax, and nobody west of us,” he continued. “It went to a vote here in 1992 and failed. I’ll support sending it to the voters, but I don’t expect to take a position on the tax. Let’s put it to a referendum and let people have their say. I have no idea if it would pass – there are groups on each side who feel strongly about it.”

Regarding the idea to allow FCPS high-school students to get more sleep by starting classes later in the day, Frey said it would entail major changes in both the school bell and bus schedules. “The biggest cost is transportation, and I’m not sure where the money’s going to come from,” he said.

Also driving the school system’s demand for more county dollars, said Frey, are the students’ increasing diversity and poverty levels, the rising number of students receiving free and reduced lunches, and the increased need for special-education programs.

He also noted that county residents, in general, are asking for more health-and-fitness and recreational opportunities – “And they aren’t cheap,” said Frey. “So we have some difficult budget years coming up.”

Compounding the problem is the fact that – just as the county’s income from residential property tax has declined in recent years – so, too, is its commercial-property tax base.

“A developer the other day told me that companies are downsizing and changing their methods of operations, including more telework, so they’re only leasing 70 percent of the space they used to,” said Frey. “So commercial-tax revenue isn’t something we can count on as we go forward.”

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