

INAUGURATION 2009

Officials expect traffic nightmare

By Jason Flanagan
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Maryland transportation officials are giving this warning to Maryland residents: Unless you are attending Tuesday's inauguration or have a dire need to travel, stay off major roads.

"If you have the option to stay home, that would be a great day to do that," said state Transportation Secretary John Porcari. "We'll make it as congestion-free as possible, but we're expecting unprecedented crowds to spill over into the major highways, and that will definitely impact the Baltimore area."

The historic inauguration of President-elect Barack Obama is expected to bring more than a million to the District, causing gridlock that extends to the Baltimore area.

Highways are expected to be congested, and officials will close on-ramps to Interstate 495 and Interstate 95 from College Park to Baltimore if congestion is heavy. The closures will be temporary until traffic loosens, officials said.

Electronic signboards will inform drivers of alternate routes, but officials are pushing mass transit to help expedite commutes.

Special MARC trains from Baltimore to the District have long been sold-out, but the Maryland

Transit Administration is offering commuter buses from Baltimore to outlying Metro stations.

The \$10 round-trip tickets are first-come, first-serve, and long lines are likely, Porcari said.

Even the railways are expected to be extremely busy.

"This could be even busier than Thanksgiving weekend," which is the busiest travel period of the year; "and it could be worse because everyone is going to one destination," said Tracy Connell, a spokeswoman for Amtrak, which has sold out most of its trains heading to the District today and Tuesday and trains heading out of the District on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The State Highway Administration is trying to help motorists by offering alternate routes around the Baltimore-Washington corridor to prevent drivers from congregating on major thoroughfares.

To help motorists navigate the expected chaos, SHA will be using Twitter, a micro-blogging program that allows people to get short text messages. The agency will use Twitter to offer real-time traffic alerts.

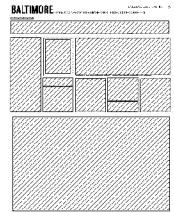
"We're doing this [as] a pilot for the inaugural, and it gives people readily available information through their cell phones," said Kellie Boulware, an SHA spokeswoman.

The state is expecting to spend more than \$5 million in transportation costs for the inauguration, which Porcari said he hopes to regain through the federal government since Maryland is facing a severe budget crisis.

But some may have no choice but to travel on the congested roads if their employers are unwilling to give them the day off.

"We have a lot of people here in Baltimore who work for corporations in and around D.C.," said Don Fry, president of the Greater Baltimore Committee. "It's our hope that those corporations are considerate enough to provide some leave or telecommuting options that day."

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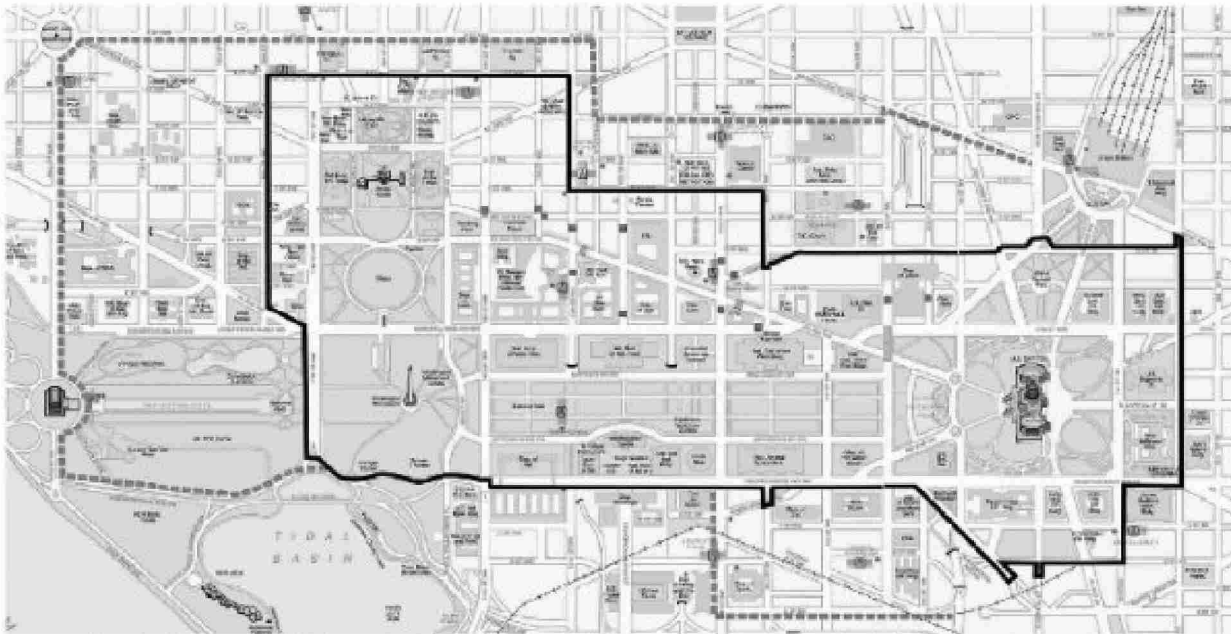
Did you know?

- » Alternate routes for travelers trying to avoid the inauguration traffic are Interstate 81 to the west, Routes 301 and 13 to the east and Interstate 97.
- » The High Occupancy Vehicle Lane restrictions along Route 50 will be in effect today and Tuesday.
- » To register for brief, 140-character traffic updates through Twitter, visit www.baltimoreexaminer.com.

SOURCE: STATE HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION



State Highway Administration officials are warning Marylanders to expect major congestion in and around the D.C. metro area during the presidential inauguration. AP FILE



Road Closures and General Public Entry Points for the 2009 Presidential Inaugural and Parade

Key:

- Vehicular Restricted Area -----
- Vehicular Road Closures ———
- General Public Entry Points ■
- Pedestrian Crossovers ▤