New $70 million BWI airport not operating to capacity

By Robert F. Buchanan

Nearly two years after completion of $70 million in expansion and renovation work, the passenger terminal at Baltimore-Washington International airport is operating at only 35 percent of capacity.

And state officials concede they have no way of accurately predicting whether passengers volumes will increase in coming years.

"I find it next to impossible to predict what the airport will be doing," said T. James Truby, the state aviation administrator. "There are many wild cards."

Completion of the flashy steel, glass and concrete expansion project was hailed as a monumental achievement by the state, one that would allow the airport to compete directly with Dulles and National airports for air travelers in the Baltimore-Washington corridor.

The state spent $51,143 to trumpet the opening to 925 guests at Sept. 29, 1979 opening ceremonies.

The new BWI, which the state bought from the city of Baltimore in July 1972 for $36 million, can handle 11.2 million passengers. But during 1980, the first full year following project completion, the airport handled only 3.84 million passengers, down from the 3.87 million handled in 1979, state figures showed.

The airport did show a 2.2 percent increase in passenger volumes duringthe first half of this year, handling 1.91 million passengers, but the numbers remain far short of the terminal's capacity.

Thescope of the BWI remodeling project was a subject of debate in the General Assembly before final plans were approved. But today, despite the passenger levels, airport officials and some Maryland lawmakers deny a mistake was made.

"It's not a waste," said Truby. "The terminal we had was inadequate for 5 million passengers. What we have now is certainly more adequate."

"The airport had declined quite a bit prior to the purchase by the state. There was a symbolic need to express thestate's commitment over the long haul to reestablish this facility."

Del. Frank C. Robey, a Baltimore democrat who chairs the house subcommittee that overlooks BWI's finances, said: "We did what was necessary given the competitive nature of air traffic in the Baltimore area. True, we have not lived up to the levels of utilization expected, but it (the expansion project) did put us in a better position with national and Dulles.

But Del. R. Charles Avara, A Baltimore Democrat who is vice-chairman of the house appropriations committee, criticized the state's decision to build such a large facility.

Avara said he would have like to have fought the state transporation department's decision to build such a large facility. But, he said, "The only way you can question things like this is if you have a preponderance of material. We didn't have it."

Truby held out hope that airport passenger volumes will rise sharply if Maryland officials succeed in having federal officials cap passenger volumes at National at 16 million passengers.

"If that is implemented, there would be a stimulating effect on BWI," Truby said.

Robey said it's also important for Maryland to improve motorists access to BWI and in particular to build a spur highway linking I-95 with the air terminal.

Truby added, "The big thing is the economy. Air traffic is off because the economy is soft. That has to improve."

Pests force closing of county snack bar

Large numbers of a small pests have forced the closing of a Baltimore County snack bar and cafeteria leaving about 5,000 workers including scores of Social Security Administration personnel in the lurch for lunch indefinetly.

George Hummel, Baltimore County Health Department spokesman, said a "heavy roach infestation" was discovered during a routine inspection of a cafeteria and dining area located in the Dickenson Building at 1500 Woodlawn Dr.

The cafeteria, operated by ARA Food Services Co., was closed at about 2 p.m. Wednesday afternoon, Hummel said. Other than the roach problem, the cafeteria received a high inspection score of 92.

Hummel said the food service company called an exterminating firm, who will attempt to rid the cafeteria and snack bar of bugs. Some equipment will have to be dismantled to reach the pests, he said.

A follow up inspection will determine whether the cafeteria will be reissued its operating license.

He said the company who runs the cafeteria is reliable and past inspections have found no evidence of roaches. The building is inspected every six months.

A Social Security worker, who asked her name not be used, said she learned of the cafeteria's closing when the news was annouced over the building's public address system.

The woman, a record maintenance clerk, said she orders fofood from the cafeteria about three times a week. Instead of eating in the dining area, she said she usually carries her meal back to her desk.

She said she has noticed roaches in the cafeteria prior to its closing Wednesday.

"Some people have gotten stuff (food) down there and they have found roaches in their food," she said.

While this bas never happened to her, it was the case for a friend and fellow co-worker, the woman said.

A food service company spokeswoman said the cafeteria would be back in operation soon.

NAACP charges called unfounded

Prince George's county school superintendent Edward Feeney said the NAACP's charges of racial discrimination against the school system are unfounded.

He said the charges "appear to be attempts to develop legal and political arguments based on numbers, not people and educational standards."

"We do not have a segregated school system, we do not classify students by race. We do not assign students to classes because of their race, we do not suspend students by race. We do not identify whole groups of students by race and treat them differently than other students," Feeney said.

The NAACP said that the county school system had failed to comly with a 1972 court desegration order. The organization asked U. S. District Court Judge Frank Kaufman to reopen the case and force the school board to take whatever action is necessary to comply with the 1972 plan.

Specifically, the NAACP charged the board "opened and closed schools, changed attendance areas and altered transportation patterns in a manner that promoted segregation."

The organization also said school administrators assigned black personnel to primarilly black schools and white personnel to predominantly white schools. It also said black students are disciplined more often than whites.

The NAACP also charged that black students were often "steered" into special education classes for the mentally handcicapped, while white youngsters were pushed toward advanced programs.

Feeney noted that, since the county school system adopted the court ordered desegregation plan in 1973, there have been numerous investigations of alleged continuing segregation from the U. S. Office of Civil Rights, The U. S. Department of Education and the Equal Opportunity Commission. The superintendent said none of the complaints were found to be justified.

The Prince George's County school board has 15 days in which to respond to the NAACP's motion. After that, Kaufman is expected to decide wheter to reopen the case.

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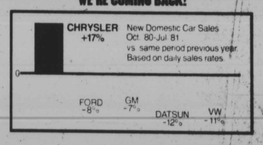

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Va. city charged with racial, sex discrimination

The federal government has charged the city of Norfolk, Virginia and the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority with widespread discrimination against women and minorities, it was reported Aug. 30.

The Norfolk-Virginian-Pilot said the accusations are contained in a confidential report city housing officials received last week from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's regional office in Philadelphia.

HUD has given Norfolk 30 days to respond to the charges and 60 days to take corrective action or face sanctions that could include the loss of federal housing funds, the newspaper said.

The charges range from shutting out minorities from meaningful involvement in city government to relegating blacks and women to largely lower-paying municipal jobs and discriminating against them in promotions, the newspaper said.

The city was also cited for allegedly failing to do enough business with minority-owned firms and for discrimination in issuing rehabilitation grants for individuals to upgrade property, the newspaper said.

The report accused the housing authority of channeling minorities to black areas in its relocation program, while offering whites multiple housing choices, the newspaper said.

The HUD report comes at a time when Norfolk is still under a federal mandate to increase minority representation in its police and fire departments.

The newspaper said the report is vague about the details of many of the instances of alleged discrimination, frequently citing statistics but not giving dates for the charges.

Top city officials, many of whom had not seen the report as of Friday, said most of the charges were inaccurate and expressed confidence they could discredit the findings. City officials are scheduled to discuss strategy for dealing with HUD at a closed-door meeting Thursday.

"The report is a hatchet job," said Assistant City Manager Ronald Massie. "It's full of lies and inaccuracies."

But City Manager Julian Hirst said the report "will be handled as a normal HUD report and without any undue exercise or consternation by the city."

Mayor Vincent J. Thomas was out of the city and NRHA Executive Director David Rice could not be reached according to the newspaper accounts.

Marvin Lee, assistant director of NRHA, said, "We're looking into this...if there's any corrective action that needs to be taken, you can be satisfied it will be taken."

The Rev. L.P. Watson, head of the Norfolk Branch of the NAACP, said that, while he agreed with some of the report's findings, he believes Norfolk has made progress involving blacks in government.

George Banks, former head of the Norfolk NAACP, said the blame for the alleged problems can't all be placed on white folks.

"It's a lack of black leadership as well. If we had put enough pressure on them, we would have gotten what we needed," Banks said.

The HUD report is the result of a routine review by the regional office. HUD officials visited Norfolk last October to monitor the city's compliance with civil rights requirements of the community block grant program, the newspaper said.

The program provides localities with funds to assist in a multitude of projects from public street improvements to constructions. Norfolk has received more than $70 million in the program's seven years.

The city is getting $7.2 million for the current fiscal year, mainly for NRHA operations.

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East Balto. blast was not explosion

Police say it's "miraculous" that no one was injured when a 6n-inch sewer line ruptured in East Baltimore this week, spewing debris over a 20n-foot area and shattered windows in nearby cars and apartments.

Police spokesman Mike Bass said, "Miraculously, no one was hurt."

He explained the Wednesday morning incident was not an explosion, but a powerful rupture of the line during a pressure test.

A Philadelphia firm, Driscoll Construction, has been working on the pipe for the past few months in East Baltimore, Bass said. The firm had excavated an open construction pit that was shored up with steel girders and wooden timbers.

The company forced air into the line from a pumping station and, "obviously something went awry," Bass said.

"This was a very powerful rupture. A steel girder that was part of the bracing was blown out and a 12-inch by 12-inch timber was literally blown across the street," he said.

"Some people here at police headquarters could hear the rupture and we're about six blocks away."

Mud,-rock and other debris showered over a 200-foot area surrounding the pit, Bass added.

Labor Day weekend opens safety week

Labor day weekend is the opening of Metro Traffic Safety week in Baltimore. The sixth annual campaign accents driving and pedestrain safety. This year's theme is "School Is Open Drive With Care."

Spearheading the event is the mayor's traffic safety commission, Mose Ottenheimer II.

It draws support from police and school officials in Baltimore city, Howard and Anne Arundel Counties in addition to the safety council of Maryland, state chapter of the National Safety Council.

"Labor day weekend is always hazardous and the reopening of schools means dramatic changes in the density of both pedestrian and vehicular traffic," said Ottenheimer.

FRANK J. BATTAGLIA was sworn in Sept. 1 as the new police commissioner. Battaglia began his career as a patrolman in January 1940. He succeeds Donald D. Pomerleau who formerly served as commissioner and is now retired. Battaglia says he plans to increase the police department's efforts against drugs.

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