

Rush Hour Was Heaven On Wheels

Federal Shutdown Made The Commuting Easier

By Alice Reid
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The Beltway has been breezy, the parkways a piece of cake.

Yesterday Washingtonians, at least those who were working, finished off a week of rush hours that actually moved, of grid that unlocked—mostly, say the traffic specialists, because large parts of the federal government were shut down.

While drivers may have loved it, the shutdown, which kept about 110,000 local federal workers at home, was costly for the region's Metro system. It lost about 25,000 riders a day. That translates to at least \$55,000 a day in lost fares.

"It was not just because federal workers were not going to work, but the museums were closed, and the tourists weren't using the system," said Cheryl Johnson, a Metro spokeswoman.

Metro ridership usually drops by 18 percent between Christmas and New Year's, from the average of 500,000 daily subway trips. The shutdown has caused an additional and unplanned loss at the financially strapped transit authority. To save some money, Metro ran four-car trains, instead of six-car trains, during the shutdown.

Washingtonians have the second-longest commuting time in the nation, after New York area residents, and although there was no proof that rush hour had progressed from

dio and television, said most of the week's traffic tie-ups have been caused by breakdowns, not by bottlenecks, and congestion has evaporated quickly—a sign of less-than-normal activity.

"I think the furlough has had an effect," he said, "but exactly how much has been due to the shutdown, I cannot say. Generally speaking, it has been lighter."

While those commuting to work may have had an easier time of it, those who couldn't work and tried to run errands sometimes found themselves fighting what looked like all-day rush hours close to home, said Lucy Caldwell, a spokeswoman for the Virginia State Police.

"It was heavy—particularly in Prince William County," Caldwell said.

In the District, which uses devices embedded in the pavement to monitor traffic in more than two dozen locations, the flow has been about normal in most places, according to John Payne, chief of traffic operations for the D.C. Department of Public Works.

There has been a drop of about 10 percent along Connecticut Avenue, he said, not much of a dip. "But I ride around every day at rush hour," Payne said, "and it has definitely been lighter on New York Avenue and Kenilworth [Avenue]."

Payne and others pointed out that during

the Christmas and New Year's holidays, traffic is usually lighter because people take vacations.

"In fact, we try not to count traffic during those periods," said Ron Kirby, who directs transportation planning at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

But officials warn that things will change if everyone heads back to the office Monday.

"It's sort of like the summertime," said Gene Donaldson, chief of transportation systems management for Montgomery County. "It's a shock to everyone come September."

TRAFFIC, From B1

a crawl to a cruise last week, many suburbanites said their drives into the city were a snap.

"It has been taking between 15 and 20 minutes off my trip," said Patti Hunt, who usually faces a 55-minute commute from Springfield to her job as a secretary at the National Soft Drink Association at 16th and L streets NW. "I love it! The only problem is that once I get into the city, I can't say I move much faster."

Jerry Edwards, an anchor with Metro Networks, which provides traffic reports for ra-