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Concert Travel Offers Dress Rehearsal

By Lena H. Sun
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Traffic on the roads and transit system to and from the inaugural concert at the [Lincoln Memorial](#) yesterday was heavy and slow, but it moved about as smoothly as it usually does for major events, transportation officials said. They warned that larger crowds and tighter restrictions would likely make travel logistics for tomorrow much more daunting.

"If you thought it was crowded [yesterday], you can expect it to be two, three or possibly even four times as crowded on Tuesday," Metro spokeswoman [Lisa Farbstein](#) said. "We ask the locals to be patient, and for those of you using the system for the first time, you now understand how it works, so please help others who don't."

Widespread road and bridge restrictions, along with some Metrorail station closings tomorrow, will mean "it's going to be much more difficult finding the path that you need to get to wherever it is on the [Mall](#) or the parade route," she said.

Yesterday, for example, all 86 subway stations were open and Metro had the entire morning and early afternoon to get riders to the Lincoln Memorial, Farbstein said. Tomorrow, Metro has only the morning to get many more people to the other end of the Mall, with two key stations and a number of roads closed for security reasons.

Even with all stations and most roads open yesterday, the trip home from the concert was challenging. Thousands waited outside Metro stations as police controlled the flow onto the platforms, and downtown vehicular traffic was close to gridlocked.

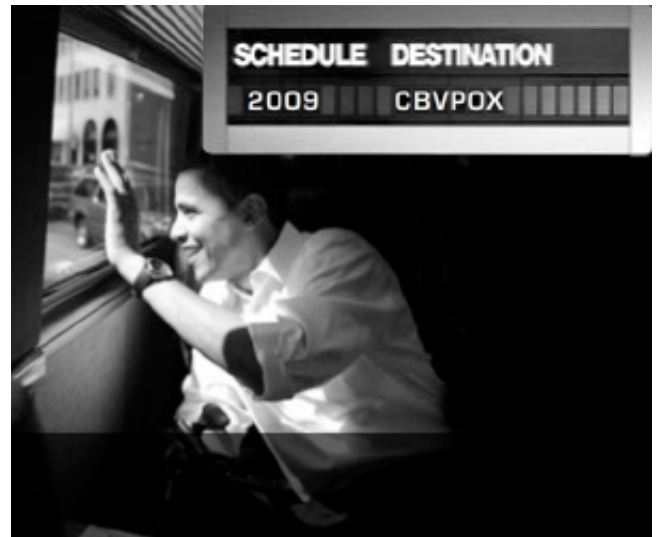
Still, many concertgoers said that they were unfazed by the congestion and cold weather and that they would make the trek again on Inauguration Day.

"A part of history's going on," said Michael Nolan, 50, of [Arlington County](#), who drove to Rosslyn and walked over the [Roosevelt Bridge](#) after he discovered it was closed to District-bound traffic. "If I don't, I won't be able to tell the stories later."

As of 7 p.m., Metro reported that riders had taken about 503,000 trips, the third-highest number for a Sunday. The highest Sunday ridership is 540,945. On an average weekday, ridership is between 700,000 and 750,000 trips.

The concert did provide a limited dress rehearsal for the transportation system and riders, especially those

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from out of town. Sparse crowds on trains in the late morning became standing-room only by noon, especially at the key downtown stations closest to the Lincoln Memorial: [Smithsonian](#), Foggy Bottom and Metro Center. Vast crowds of people continued to pour out of the Foggy Bottom station after 3 p.m. and stream down Virginia Avenue, even though public access to the concert was closed by then.

"Today, we're kind of doing a dry run," said Jeff Jeudy of Brooklyn, N.Y. "We're getting used to the route. Tuesday, we're coming back to celebrate."

Out-of-towners said they had little trouble navigating the system. "No problems, everything went really smoothly," said Fatima Zeidan, 24, who traveled to Washington from Charleston, S.C.

Metro kept trains moving constantly, and Chris Watson, 32, of Suitland said even changing trains was easy. "Everybody's going the same direction, so that helps," he said.

The scheduled shutdown of the Memorial and Roosevelt bridges across the [Potomac River](#) created traffic backups from Virginia at the [Key Bridge](#) and elsewhere. But authorities said traffic was lighter than a normal weekday rush hour on Virginia highways. They reported moderate delays on Interstate 395 approaching the 14th Street bridge and on Interstate 66 approaching the Roosevelt Bridge, which was closed to District-bound traffic. In the late afternoon, Virginia officials began pre-treating roads in anticipation of an inch or less of snow this morning.

On 16th Street and Georgia Avenue in the District, both major thoroughfares from the Beltway in Maryland into the District, traffic by 1 p.m. was also like that at rush hour, as cars, church vans, buses and luxury coaches inched downtown. One [Volkswagen Jetta](#) with West Virginia license plates was encased in a solid dusting of snow.

Drivers who were caught in gridlock during and after the concert said many police officers on duty had no information about which streets were closed and were unable to direct vehicles where to turn. Police wouldn't let vehicles cross Pennsylvania Avenue at 17th Street, and thousands of people were rerouted.

Metro ran extra trains from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., and officials were monitoring crowds to add more if necessary. In a forecast of what is almost certain to happen late tomorrow, thousands of riders waited in line after the concert to get inside downtown stations such as Smithsonian and Foggy Bottom. To keep station platforms from being overwhelmed, transit police were holding people outside the stations, as they do at Navy Yard after Nationals baseball games.

By late afternoon, the crowd, the wait and the cold were taking a toll on some people.

Janet Allen, 46, of Stone Mountain, Ga., came to the concert thinking she would also watch the inauguration in person. That plan changed when she saw the crowd trying to get into Foggy Bottom, which numbered more than 1,000 people about 5:25 p.m.

"It's certainly not the Metro's fault. It's the droves of people and the cold weather," she said.

For others, Metrobuses were also jammed but provided more options. Carl James watched two S buses packed to the gunnels drive past him as he stood at 16th and L streets NW near the Capital Hilton just after 5 p.m. He hadn't been at the concert: He was at work cleaning offices in the New Executive Office Building.

Concertgoers Tasha and Evan Parker were waiting when an S2 bus came down 16th Street and turned east on L Street. When a Metro employee wearing a neon-green vest shouted that the bus was headed north, the passengers in line in front of the Hilton sprinted over to catch it. The Parkers had taken a bus to the concert and said they would do the same tomorrow, when Metro will run rapid bus service every 10 minutes on major routes to downtown.

Others, including Ann McLeod, 37, a trade show representative, tried to take the 52 bus to the concert from her home in Logan Circle, along with her 2 1/2 -year-old son, Michael. "It was so full, they didn't stop," she said. She then hunted down a cab, but they arrived at the security gate on the south side of the Mall just as it closed. The rest of her family had gotten in earlier and were going to save her and her toddler a seat, but she couldn't enter.

"On the one hand, I wish we had just stayed home," she said. But she said she was impressed by the ambiance -- even though she is a Republican.

Officials are estimating that more than 1 million, perhaps as many as 3 million, people will head downtown for the swearing-in ceremony and the parade tomorrow. They expect the busiest stations early in the day will be those at the ends of the Metrorail lines, where there is the most parking, and where charter buses are expected to drop off visitors. Metro opens at 4 a.m. tomorrow, but parking lots are expected to fill by 5:30 or 6 a.m.

The subway's capacity is about 120,000 people an hour. If trains start carrying that many people downtown each hour from the time it opens, the system will have moved about 1 million people by noon. If all those people want to leave downtown after the swearing-in ceremony (scheduled to be over by 12:30 p.m.) and the parade (scheduled to end about 5 p.m.), the last people to leave won't get on trains until 8 or 9 p.m., officials said.

Metro will have hundreds of extra personnel working tomorrow to monitor crowds. For the trips home, riders can expect to wait at least an hour to get into the downtown stations, officials have said.

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