



City Officials Prepare for Record Inauguration Crowds

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WASHINGTON -- With just over 40 days to go before the presidential inauguration, there are growing concerns about the size of the upcoming event.

In fact, with an estimated five million people expected to be in the district, experts say local roads, phone networks, and emergency services could be pushed past their breaking points.

Those in charge of the the National Mall, however, are saying they'll somehow handle it.

"We expect large crowds," said Bill Line of the National Park Service. "People should, in addition to dressing appropriately [on the] day, bring a large amount of patience."

Those in charge of getting spectators to the event, the owners of the estimated 10,000 buses expected, are full of questions.

"Our members are calling us daily saying, what do we do, where are we going to park, where are we going to drop people off," said Peter Pantuso of the American Bus Association. "And we don't have the answers."

RFK Stadium, for example, can handle fewer than 20 percent of the spectators. Now, some locals are saying that the best place to view the inauguration festivities will be from their living rooms.

District Heights resident and Obama supporter Sonia Smith contemplated making the trip at first, but now has changed her mind. "I'm glad Barack Obama is the president, [but] I will just be celebrating from home," she said.

"I've never seen that many people and I've lived in the city [for] 20 years," said D.C. resident Peggy Bosch. "I'd really like to go down and see some of the activities, but I'm nervous about crowd control," she added. "You know, the whole thing is overwhelming."

City leaders warn cell phone towers may be overwhelmed on Jan. 20 and the Internet will

be slow. Metro is expecting a record number of riders, so their options are limited. Also, it's still uncertain, given the security concerns, which streets will be open going into the city.

Bob Marbourg, a WTOP radio traffic reporter has been studying the maps and severe traffic restrictions. "[There's] every reason to believe people are going to have to walk rather long distances," he said.

D.C. residents, meanwhile, have mixed feelings about whether or not city officials will be able to handle the inauguration crowds.

D.C. City Administrator Dan Tangherlini said they have no choice. "It's not a question about whether it's doable or not, we're just going to have to do it," he said. "The fact is we are going to have this event. A lot of people are going to come and we're excited about hosting it."