

# Action Committee for Transit

[www.actfortransit.org](http://www.actfortransit.org)

P.O. Box 7074, Silver Spring, MD 20907

December 14, 2008

Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board  
4805 Edgemoor Lane  
Bethesda, Maryland 20814

To the Board:

I am writing to supplement my oral testimony about the Bus Rapid Transit alternative for the Purple Line that uses Jones Bridge Road and continues into Silver Spring along the Georgetown Branch right of way. The arguments for this route, as presented by the Town of Chevy Chase and its consultants, are wrong in substance and disingenuous.

We have summarized the history of this route and linked to reports which expose its substantive weaknesses in detail [on our web site](#). I pointed out in my oral testimony the impossibility of providing signal preemption at Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues. Another grievous defect in the arguments for this alternative is the comparison between the number of jobs in downtown Bethesda and the medical area. The Town claims that MTA overstates the number of jobs in downtown Bethesda by including buildings located more than half a mile from the future station. Yet the Town does the same thing when it counts jobs near its route. The entrances to the NIH Clinical Center and the Building 31 administrative complex are more than half a mile from where a bus would stop on Jones Bridge Road (somewhat to the east of Wisconsin Ave., to allow a left turn).

At the time the DEIS alternatives were selected, the route now endorsed by the Town was denounced as “monstrous” by the very people who currently promote it. In early 2003 — when the MTA was selecting the options that it would study in detail in the DEIS — Del. John Hurson proposed that Jones Bridge Road could be used for bus rapid transit. The Planning Board evaluated the Jones Bridge Road routing, assuming that the BRT line would continue east of Jones Mill Road next to the trail. Mr. Wolf, then the Town's Mayor, wrote in the Town's April 2003 newsletter that:

Pam Browning, Ed Finn, and I from the Town continue to work hard to prevent the placing of a bus or train route down the Capital Crescent Trail between Bethesda and Silver Spring.

Mr. Wolf did endorse study of Jones Bridge Road, but only if the buses went on existing streets from Jones Mill Road to Silver Spring and did not use any portion of the Georgetown Branch right of way.

At the end of 2003, the Greater Bethesda Chevy Chase Coalition, in which the Town is a leading member and whose current president is Mr. Wolf,<sup>1</sup> issued a newsletter that was even more explicit. It denounced the route the Town and Mr. Wolf now endorse as a “destructive proposal” and a “monstrous intrusion... into the neighborhoods.” It also printed a message from

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<sup>1</sup> In an earlier town newsletter, Mayor Wolf made clear that the GBCCC spoke for the Town: “The Town independently and through the Greater Bethesda Chevy Chase Coalition has strongly opposed the building of this project.”

Del. Hurson responding to Purple Line supporters who “alleged that I suggested and supported running ‘buses on the Georgetown Branch.’” “This statement is absolutely false,” Del. Hurson emphasized, adding that

I will continue to oppose any options that would use any portion of the Georgetown Branch for these buses, and have told the Secretary of Transportation that I will vigorously oppose any options that would involve using portions of the trail right-of-way east of Jones Bridge Road for the mass transit project.

When Mr. Wolf now tries to explain away this stunning reversal of position, he implicitly concedes that the earlier position was advanced in bad faith. An e-mail from Webb Smedley to members of the Planning Board's advisory committee on the Purple Line pointed out the inconsistency between the past and present positions. Mr. Wolf responded that

...the advent of BRAC has changed the dialogue for the Purple Line alignment. Whereas we couldn't justify the placement of transit next to the trail before BRAC, we see that the service to Medical Center might require that configuration for a portion of the trail east of Jones Mill Road.

The trail-plus-Jones Bridge Road BRT alignment that the Town of Chevy Chase now favors and the alignment it proposed in 2003 are identical between Jones Mill Road and Bethesda Metro. The newly favored route has no more advantage over the 2003 route for BRAC-related travel than for travel to any other destination in the medical area or Bethesda. If the alignment originally proposed by the Town does not provide adequate service with BRAC, it did not provide adequate service without BRAC. The conclusion is inescapable: the Town in 2003 proposed a Jones Bridge Road route that it knew was impractical.

I urge the Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board to reject the Jones Bridge Road alignment and endorse the light rail Purple Line. As residents of Bethesda and Chevy Chase, we should cooperate with our neighbors to create better transportation and a cleaner environment for us all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Ross", is centered on a light blue rectangular background.

Ben Ross  
President