



Maryland Department of Transportation
The Secretary's Office

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Deputy Secretary

May 27, 2008

The Honorable Linna Barnes
Mayor, Town of Chevy Chase
4301 Willow Lane
Chevy Chase MD 20815

Dear Mayor Barnes:

On behalf of the Maryland Department of Transportation I would like to thank you for your letter of April 17, 2008 and the accompanying analysis provided by your consultant, Sam Schwartz Engineering, on the alternatives which are being analyzed as part of the Purple Line Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS) process. Community input is a critical factor for all transportation planning projects and we appreciate the active role the Town of Chevy Chase has played throughout the study process for the proposed Purple Line. I want to emphasize that the Town's input, similar to ongoing input from other communities along the corridor, will continue to be considered within the current AA/DEIS process and project schedule.

As you are aware, the Purple Line project is proceeding through both the federal environmental process and the New Starts process - a process which is widely recognized as the most rigorous planning process in transportation planning. The guidance and processes defined by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are being followed carefully by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) and their consulting team. We are confident that their work will stand as a model for other communities as well as projects of a similar type.

The FTA defines a critical step as ensuring that alternatives developed meet the project's purpose and need. The purpose and need defined for this project, as noted in documents forwarded to your office, includes the following objectives (among others):

- Improve mobility and connections between central business districts and activity centers (Bethesda to Silver Spring, etc.)
- Reduce transit travel times in the corridor
- Increase employers' access to job pools
- Improve system connectivity to existing rail and bus services
- Support local, regional and state policies and adopted master plans
- Demonstrate that the overall benefits of the transit improvements warrant their capital and operating costs

Maryland is one of the true national beneficiaries of new employment as a result of Base Realignment and Closings (BRAC). As the Purple Line study notes, the addition of over 2,000 jobs in the Bethesda area further highlights the need to provide improved transit service for the various employment, residential, government, and retail centers not only in Bethesda but along the entire 16-mile Purple Line corridor. As a result, the MTA is assessing increased access to the Medical Center Metrorail station area as part of all of the alternatives being evaluated and considered.

The points raised by your consultant on the work completed by the MTA to date and the viability of Jones Bridge Road as an alignment option speak to the value of the excellent work done to date in selecting alternatives which follow FTA guidance. Specifically, the Purple Line alternatives consider a range of capital investment strategy options for addressing the corridor's mobility needs and related goals. Each of the alternatives developed as part of the AA/DEIS has real opportunity and can be compared as the study progresses. All alternatives include varying levels of investment in bus rapid transit (BRT) or light rail (LRT) service along the Master Plan or Jones Bridge Road alignment, providing improved connections between Bethesda and Silver Spring and along the rest of the corridor.

As opposed to what is stated in your letter, all of the BRT alternatives are "true" BRT options with traffic signal priority (TSP) where possible as well as other BRT elements consistent with each alternative's level of investment and operational strategy. In the case of the BRT alternative that runs along Jones Bridge Road, TSP was included in the development of the travel time estimates along Jones Bridge Road at its intersections with Glenbrook Parkway, Grier Road, and Platt Ridge Drive. However, as your consultant rightly points out in the report describing TSP implementation, the Jones Bridge Road "route traverses many signalized intersections with heavy cross traffic, making use of TSP difficult." This reference relates to roadways in downtown Bethesda for other alternatives, but it is certainly also the situation at the Jones Bridge Road intersections with Connecticut Avenue and Rockville Pike, where the majority of the BRT delay would occur for the Low Investment BRT option. Other BRT strategies, specifically queue jump lanes, were employed for this alternative to improve travel times at these congested locations.

The strategy is not an either/or proposition for improving transit service, but rather an opportunity to improve service to each area of Bethesda. The connectivity afforded by the Purple Line, Metrorail Red Line, and local transit systems will provide employees working in the Bethesda area with a range of options for travel, key goal of the Purple Line improvements. Based on the current and forecasted growth in residential and employment populations in and around the central business area, Bethesda remains the dominant travel market in the Purple Line corridor. However, all the Purple Line alternatives that use the Georgetown Branch right-of-way, which was purchased for and included in the master plan by Montgomery County for a transitway and trail, include improved bus service to the Medical Center area along Jones Bridge Road.

There are a few key issues with the analysis presented by your consultant that I would like to highlight:

1. The air quality analysis presented in the report relies on data analysis issued by an advocacy group and is based on methods that have been discredited in an article published by the National Research Council's Transportation Research Board (Transportation Research Record, 2005);

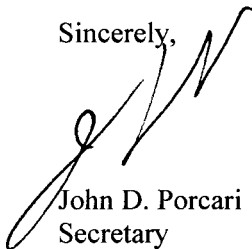
2. The fare and transfer policy for this corridor has not yet been established. The MTA views the Purple Line and Metrorail system as part of an overall system of transit service in the Washington area. Future policies, should the Purple Line be constructed, are expected to reflect that view and include the use of modern fare collections methods such as SmartCards. Therefore, the report's assertion regarding full transit fares for both systems in calculating the cost of a transfer is a policy decision that cannot be assumed;
3. The alternatives being considered for the Purple Line corridor provide a range of investment strategies to address the identified mobility and other goals developed for the corridor. The evaluation and selection of a locally preferred alternative is based not just on a single issue such as cost, but also on consideration of the effectiveness of each alternative in addressing the corridor needs and goals, its cost-effectiveness, the trade-offs among benefits, costs and impacts among affected parties, and the ability to fund the construction, operations, and maintenance of the service.

There are a number of other issues with the report's analysis which raised serious concerns among my staff and our partner agencies. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss those issues in more detail. Overall, our concern is that your consultant's report is de-emphasizing the dominant transit market in the corridor, disregarding the superior travel times afforded by alternatives using the Master Plan alignments, and overstating the benefits of the Jones Bridge Road alignment over the other five alternatives being considered.

We would ask that you continue your participation in this important planning process and keep in mind that it is a rigorous and ongoing process that will result in the selection of a locally preferred alternative that meets the needs of the citizens of Chevy Chase, as well as those living throughout Montgomery and Prince George's Counties.

Thank you, again, for your interest in the project and for your continued participation through the provision of valuable input. If you have additional comments or questions regarding the Purple Line AA/DEIS process, please do not hesitate to contact me or Mr. Michael Madden, MTA's Project Manager at 410-767-3694 or by email at mmadden@mtamaryland.com.

Sincerely,



John D. Porcari
Secretary

cc: Mr. Michael D. Madden, Chief, Project Development, Office of Planning, MTA
Mr. Paul J. Wiedefeld, Administrator, MTA