

Action Committee for Transit

Questionnaire for Candidates for County Council, District 4

1.) A) Do you support building the light rail Inner Purple Line from Bethesda to New Carrollton, with a hiker/biker trail running alongside it between Bethesda and Silver Spring?

I support the Purple Line in concept; however, the State Highway Administration is spending an additional \$6 million in 2008 on a continuing study to create the Purple Line. I would need to have the benefit of seeing the results of that study prior to commenting on the specifics of configuration.

B) For the Purple Line segment between Bethesda and Silver Spring, do you favor proceeding immediately with the design now under study that runs primarily at grade rather than further delaying the project to study more expensive underground options?

I favor immediately putting in place a reversible trolley between Silver Spring and Bethesda based on the county's rights to the existing track. In 1988, Montgomery County bought rights to the track, we can do this NOW. Since the 1980's there's been talk of a Georgetown Trolley, but no action. A Georgetown Trolley would provide connectivity by linking both sides of Metro's red line. In addition, link the business districts of Silver Spring and Bethesda. A Georgetown Trolley would be a precursor to any Purple Line. We need to take the time to study all options, including the below-ground "cut-and-cover" plan supported by U.S. Rep. Christopher Van Hollen (D-Dist. 8), underground options, and the Purple Line loop.

2.) All bridges over US 29 have been designed so that light rail could run in the median of the highway. There are several possible routes for a connection from White Oak to the Red Line or Purple Line. Would you support detailed study of running a light rail line that connects White Oak to the Metro system and then runs in the median of US 29 to Burtonsville, as a future project after the Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transitway? There are three mass transit projects in Montgomery County's 10-year transportation plan related to White Oak and Burtonsville: TR-2, a Bus Rapid Transitway along US 29 connecting Burtonsville to Silver Spring; TR-7, the Inner Purple Line spur connecting Langley Park to White Oak; and, TR-14, the White Oak Transit Center. All of these projects are to be completed by year 2015. Provided there's a Langley Park stop along the Inner Purple Line, TR-7 would give connectivity between White Oak and the metro system. There's significant ridership from Burtonsville to Silver Spring to justify TR-2. I am not opposed to additional transportation studies.

3.) What should the county do to increase transit ridership?

The region's jurisdictions should pledge to match federal transit aid with dedicated funding to help increase the number of Metro cars and expand station capacity. One possibility, may be to dedicate a portion of our existing sales tax to a transit trust fund, or,

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divert a portion of Intercounty Connector tolls to help fund transit. In addition, we need to examine dedicated bus lanes, make schedules user friendly and concentrate on the “nuts and bolts” of convenient scheduling while keeping fees low. Moreover, encourage mixed use development.

4.) County master plans have stated a policy of focusing development around mass transit stations. While much development has occurred that has poor transit access, the county’s planning deserves much of the credit for the emergence of Bethesda and the revival of Silver Spring as centers of activity. What smart growth projects near Metro stations have you supported even though they have had opposition?

I’m in favor of the Wheaton overlay zone, near the Wheaton Metro, which helps the county with smart growth principles; however, the “devil is in the details” and as it stands today the Zoning Text Amendment 06-11 needs revision geared toward supporting small businesses. In addition, I’m not opposed to the mixed-use development complex at Georgia Avenue and Glenallan Road; however, we clearly need to improve the Georgia Avenue and Randolph road intersection and add additional Glenmont Metro parking first and foremost prior to entertaining additional development projects in the area.

5.) Do you believe that the decision by Governors Ehrlich and O’Malley to build the Intercounty Connector was wise or unwise?

Mega-construction projects are destined to have cost overruns, and mark my words, the ICC is on a destined path.

The ICC will hollow out Maryland’s transportation budget, siphoning off much needed money for the Purple Line, improving intersections and expanding the Ride On bus system. Indeed, at an estimated \$2.4 billion, it would be Maryland’s most expensive transportation system costing approximately \$428 per Maryland household.

The ICC should have been examined after all other sensible, more prudent transportation projects had been concentrated on, like the Purple Line, Montrose Parkway, and interchange upgrades. In fact, large constructions projects may breed additional traffic congestion and the related commercial and residential development which is why I would like to look into the state of Maryland buying undeveloped land around the path of the ICC.

Much of the ICC funding is based on loans, including bonds to be honored with future federal transportation dollars. If the federal transportation pie shrinks, that will leave less and less available revenue for smaller transportation projects.

Moreover, it will be an expensive toll road with varying estimates in the neighborhood of \$7 per round trip, thus increasing the cost of living or working in Montgomery County for those who use the ICC. Tolls would rise as congestion increases. The Maryland State Highway Administration’s study indicates the ICC will have a negligible impact on the

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Beltway, I-95 and I-270. Although congestion on some local roads would improve, on other local roads it would not due to interchanges.

Gridlock is a chronic problem, with no quick fixes, that we must manage over time. The conservative choice, would have been to exhaust all other smaller transportation projects and mass-transit options prior to entertaining larger undertakings.

Name of Candidate MARK FENNEL
Signature Mark Fennel Date 3/11/08

Please return by March 20, 2008, to Action Committee for Transit, P.O. Box 7074, Silver Spring, MD 20907.

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