

# TRANSIT FIRST!

*Coalition members (list in formation): Action Committee for Transit, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, Audubon Naturalist Society, CASA de Maryland, Clean Water Action, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Greater Greater Washington, MCGEO — UFCW Local 1994, Prince George's Advocates for Community-based Transit, Progressive Maryland, Save Maryland Area Rail Transit*

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## Transit First! calls on officials to prevent deep cuts to transit service

The Transit First! Coalition, a regional advocacy campaign composed of transit rider, environmental, and labor organizations, today called on Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley, D.C. and Virginia leaders to provide full funding for the next year's Metro budget rather than make drastic cuts to bus and rail service.

"Such severe cutbacks in bus service will make all of our commutes harder. If transit is less convenient, more people will be forced to drive, adding to traffic congestion. For those who depend on transit, they could be stranded. We need to find the extra dollars to prevent such harmful cuts," said Prince George's County Councilmember Eric Olson.

Prince George's County Councilmember Will Campos stated: "These deep reductions to transit service will cut off workers from jobs, and even more residents from opportunities and daily necessities. Rolling back transit service will slow our ability to get the region's economy back on track and get people back to work."

Today marks the beginning of Metro public hearings on service cuts. Maryland, unlike D.C. and Virginia, is balancing more of its share of the budget deficit by proposing [deep cuts to bus service in Prince George's](#) and Montgomery Counties. Virtually all jurisdictions are proposing some reductions in service to local bus and Metrobus, along with longer waits between Metrorail trains. Riders throughout the region who rely on the transit network are likely to feel at least some of the effects of a service-cut approach. Others could be forced to transfer three or four times, or not be able to reach a destination at all.

"While some riders might be inconvenienced by longer waits, others could lose their jobs or remain unemployed for longer. We urge Governor O'Malley to find the money to stave off these devastating cuts. People's livelihoods depend on it," said Karren Pope-Onwukwe, co-chair of Prince George's Advocates for Community-based Transit (PG ACT), a Transit First! Coalition member.

At the March 26, 2009 Metro board meeting, Virginia and D.C. members committed to dedicating sufficient funds to narrow most of the regional agency's budget shortfalls, thus reducing the number of overall rail and bus service reductions. While Maryland offered a

contribution increase as well, it is not enough to prevent severe cuts in bus service in Prince George's and Montgomery counties. As a result, riders in Maryland could face much more dramatic cuts to bus service than in neighboring jurisdictions. Transit First! urges Governor O'Malley to provide adequate funding to ensure transit service will continue to meet demand at current levels.

Transit First! also calls on the member jurisdictions of the transit agency to bridge any remaining budget gap with cost savings through region-wide improvements in traffic operations for buses. Bus speeds would be increased by giving transit vehicles priority at intersections and on roads. Because these improvements cannot be implemented in time to produce savings for the current budget cycle, Transit First recommends applying federal stimulus funds provided to Metro's capital budget to stave off service cuts now, and returning the savings realized by the bus priority improvements to the capital budget in subsequent years.

"By moving buses faster, Metro can simultaneously save money, improve service for bus passengers, and attract new riders," said Ben Ross, chair of Transit First, and president of Action Committee for Transit.

The Metro public hearing tonight at 6:30 pm in Maryland will be at First United Methodist Church, Fellowship Hall, 6201 Belcrest Road, in Hyattsville, Maryland.

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