

For Release
Sunday, January 18, 2009

BUS BACKERS CAN'T DENT PURPLE LINE NUMBERS

A pro-bus think tank has failed to put a dent in the Maryland Transit Administration's analysis of the light rail option for the Purple Line.

The World Resources Institute's [review](#) of the [air pollution section](#) of the Purple Line Draft Environmental Impact Statement reported that light rail performs slightly better than the state agency reported. The MTA compared light rail to so-called bus rapid transit for six types of air pollution. For five out of the six, light rail performed better. This finding is consistent with an [independent analysis](#) of light rail and BRT air emissions by Christopher Puchalsky of the University of Pennsylvania.

The WRI chose to look at the one pollutant out of the six for which buses outperformed rail, CO₂. WRI found that light rail's performance on CO₂ (although still worse than bus) was better than stated in the DEIS – the added emissions would be only half as much.

Furthermore, the DEIS and WRI analyses only include direct changes in energy emissions from transportation – they omit the indirect effects of mass transit in changing land use. A recent government-funded [study](#) carried out by the American Public Transportation Association finds that the indirect effects of transit on CO₂ emissions are four times larger than the direct effects.

A [posting](#) by Erika Schlaikjer on WRI's blog also asserts that “medium-investment light rail can handle only about 15 percent more passengers than BRT.” Schlaikjer does not explain how this can be so when a two- or three-car train carries many more passengers than a bus. The topic is not addressed in the WRI report.

The WRI recommends bus over light rail for the Purple Line on the grounds that bus scores better on the Federal Transit Administration's cost-effectiveness ratio.¹ The recommendation is unsurprising – WRI's list of [“transportation solutions”](#) includes private automobiles, buses, bicycles and walking, but not rail.

- end -

¹ WRI conducted a lengthy “monte carlo analysis” to estimate how likely it is that what eventually happens will be different from the model calculations. The analysis was generic – it addressed transit projects in general and did not consider anything that might make the Purple Line different from other projects – so it adds no new information about how the Purple Line ranks against competing projects. In any case, because it is the model calculations that FTA uses to make its funding decisions, this analysis is largely academic.