

Action Committee for Transit

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TRANSIT TIMES: THE NEWSLETTER OF ACT

SUCCESSFUL 1989 CAPPED BY 6-1 COUNCIL VOTE ON G'TOWN BRANCH TROLLEY AND TRAIL, INCREASE IN SIDEWALKS, FORAY INTO U.S. 29 UNDERPASS/TRANSIT STUDY ISSUES

In explaining their votes for the Bethesda to Silver Spring trolley, several County Council members made cryptic reference to a toy "Lego" model demonstrating the feasibility of the proposed single track with passing sidings. Built by Harry Sanders from pieces scavenged from his son, Gregory, the model showed the single and double track sections, the stations, and had pieces representing the several operating trolleys that could be moved by hand, in ten-second increments. The model proved to be a simple and effective way of demonstrating visually where the trolleys would pass and what contingencies were made for delays to individual trolleys.

A series of display boards made for another effective presentation at the formal Council hearing in October: Ralph Braskett and Ben Ross set up a series of maps and overlays showing the large blue and green circles around the stations where the trolley would have a major impact on travel time by transit. They ended by showing the favorable poll results in voting areas of the County and left the board up at the end of the testimony; the ten to fifteen minutes that it stayed there gave everyone enough time to absorb the good news.

While the "Lego" model and boards would not have been convincing on their own, they succeeded as supplements to the extensive technical testimony that the County DOT and others provided. Throughout the debate in 1989 ACT built similar bridges between the technical and political experts on a wide variety of issues from ridership to financial evaluation.

This activity complemented the more traditional and critical role of a citizen's group of testimony and letters supporting the project: many ACT members testified at the Planning Board hearings in the summer, met with and wrote Council members and delegates, and wrote thoughtful and/or forceful letters to the editors of papers covering the debate. And between ACT members Ted Gordon, Ralph Braskett, Ben Ross, Tom Fuchs, Harry Sanders, Nick Brand, Dick McArdle, we were able to cover all of the Council's two months of public deliberations and hearings! The effort is not yet over (*see 1990 goals article*), but a major hurdle was cleared successfully. Many thanks to all of you who helped make it possible!

Sidewalks proved to be another area where significant progress was made. ACT member Ben Ross helped coordinate activities of local groups from all around the County to form a Coalition for Sidewalks. That group has obtained the commitment of DOT Director McGarry to insist that sidewalks be included in all new subdivisions, and appears to have made headway in raising the amount of County funding for building new sidewalks in neighborhoods where earlier County policy had neglected to require them.

At the end of the year, with the major G'town Branch activity behind us, we were able to concentrate on another corridor of transit opportunity and controversy – U.S. 29. The major controversy surrounds an MD DOT proposal for an underpass at Four Corners, and the associated grade separations northeast of White Oak. However, the proposal also includes a "wrong-side-of-the-median" counterflow bus lane from White Oak to Silver Spring, justified by a faulty study of bus lanes and light rail done two to three years ago. Ross Capon and Nick Brand presented testimony to the Council in November urging a balanced re-study of the options. (*More on this in the Route 29 article, page 4.*)

Several other activities will become more intense in 1990; these are discussed in the 1990 goals article.

COUNTY CAPITAL BUDGET PROPOSES LESS ROAD BUILDING; PUBLIC INPUT SOUGHT BY COUNCIL

Hearings on the capital budget will have been held by the time that this reaches you, but the County Council always leaves the record open for letters. Because of generally tight resources, the capital budget proposed by Mr. Kramer to the Council cuts several large road projects in the up-county area. This is a perfect opportunity for us to make the point that the whole transportation plan for the next ten years should be reviewed with an eye to emphasizing transit use and transit construction. We can't afford to build major new roads and parallel transit; the choice should be made to emphasize the latter. If this strikes a chord with any of you letter writers, the correspondence should go to Council President William Hanna, 100 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, MD, 20850. 208015.

NEXT MEETING, TUESDAY JANUARY 23, 7:45 PM, AT SILVER SPRING COMMUNITY CENTER

Featured items will include review of:

- 1990 goals
- U.S. 29 activities
- Meetings with delegates/senators
- Bus additions/deletions for Wheaton opening

and of course contributions from the floor.

The Community Center is at 8818 Georgia Avenue, just north of Spring St., catty-corner from the Planning Board offices.

ACT GOALS STATEMENT FOR 1990 SLATED FOR CONSIDERATION AT JANUARY 23RD MEETING

The following statement of goals for ACT to pursue in the coming year was drafted in order to try and focus our efforts on several achievable projects. Naturally other items will arise in the course of the year, and there may be priorities askew in this listing. If you can't make the meeting, and have strong feelings about this listing, please drop a note, or call one of the Board members.

Ensure smooth implementation of Georgetown Branch

Although the favorable Council vote virtually assures that the trolley will be a high priority for the County in the next four or five years, there are still ways for it to stumble or be delayed. Apart from lawsuits, in which ACT can only play a marginal role, there continue to be attempts to end-run the local County decision and ACT must continue to follow the issues and encourage elected officials and other groups.

The costing difficulties of the Baltimore light rail project provide an example. The problems there must not be made to be an excuse for a "take-away" of funds for Montgomery County to benefit Baltimore. The condition for support by our delegation of the Baltimore line was the reciprocal funding of a project in our area. The Governor must be held to his part of the bargain.

The Georgetown Branch remains the best line in the County and should be supported by the State. Cost predictions for I-270 Clarksburg line, which is years off, have climbed to \$400 to \$500 million, or over 5 times the cost of the G'town Branch. Predicted ridership of the I-270 line remains only slightly higher than the Silver Spring to Bethesda line.

Cost over-runs on the order of the Baltimore project are unlikely given the amount of scrutiny, pressure, and mitigation already in the Montgomery project. Unlike Baltimore, where costing engineers were unable to access the line to study roadbed and bridge conditions, Montgomery County has had full access and ownership during the last cost studies. In fact the typical cost inflation has already occurred, from \$45 million in 1988 to \$75 million in 1989, primarily because of mitigation, trail accommodation, bridges and tunnels, and similar items!

ACT should work to implement the trolley and trail portions of the project as a high priority.

Obtain a fair and impartial assessment of transit options on U.S. 29

To date, MD DOT has advocated bus lanes running against traffic in the rush hours, based on a flawed study of options made in 1986-8. The study compared an 18 mile double-track light rail line to a nine-mile HOV facility on U.S. 29, and costed a light rail operation that provided much more service than could be justified by the forecast traffic.

The study did not assess the impacts of hundreds of buses

during rush hour in the Silver Spring downtown, nor the ability of light rail to supplant so many buses by virtue of greater capacity for each vehicle (a trolley every four minutes will carry the same number of patrons as a bus every minute) and by through-running on the Georgetown Branch to Bethesda.

The safety of "wrong-way" bus lanes (on the opposite side of the median) has not been thoroughly enough investigated in the light of unsuccessful and fatality-plagued operations in Boston and Philadelphia.

ACT should work to obtain a fair study of the merits of all transit options in this rapidly developing corridor.

Contribute to the planning of Wheaton area Ride-On and Metrobus service

As part of the opening of the Red Line to Wheaton this fall, the County has proposed significant additional bus service, as well as the reduction of line-haul service parallel to the new Metro extension. Dozens of bus lines and neighborhoods are involved.

ACT has critiqued the existing plans, and is suggesting more frequent high-quality service rather than extending half-hourly buses over a wider geographical area. This will result in a better expenditure of operational dollars and better service for areas that will more heavily use transit.

ACT should continue to work with communities and the operating authorities to improve the proposed new services.

Support County-wide activities that improve transit

ACT participates in a new umbrella group seeking more County attention to sidewalks for pedestrians and bicyclists. The group has succeeded in obtaining strong commitment from the County DOT to not allow new road construction without sidewalks, both in new sub-divisions, and in traditional road design. The group is also seeking at least a doubling to \$1 million of County funding to remedy past omissions of sidewalks.

The Comprehensive Growth Policy, Master Plan revisions, and other planning activities provide an opportunity to redesign community infrastructure to support more transit use. ACT follows these in part through membership in other major community umbrella groups, such as Allied Civic, Montgomery Civic Federation, and the I-270 transit study group. ACT's efforts should help to ensure that transit accessibility remains an important feature of the policy recommendations of these groups.

Finally, ACT reaches out to many ordinary citizens with local and special concerns. ACT can help magnify their voice and efforts, while increased membership makes the organization more effective. ACT's goal for 1990 should be to increase its active membership to 150 persons.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE PROPOSES NEW BOARD TO SERVE DURING 1990

At the December meeting, the nominating committee of Harry Sanders, Ted Gordon, and Dick McArdle suggested the following Board of Directors for 1990:

- Chairman: Nick Brand
- Vice Chairman: Tom Fuchs
(shared position)
- Secretary: Bruce Gilson
- Treasurer: Paul Goldman

According to the by-laws, this Board will take office at the January meeting, unless there are competing nominations from other members.

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR 1989

Harry Sanders reports that our financial condition is pretty healthy, albeit not large...

On hand Jan. 1, 1989	\$ 321.60
Dues received 1989	873.00
Savings Interest, 1989	24.62
 Total income available	 1,219.22
1988 expenses	\$ 125.00
Newsletter costs	110.00
Misc. mailings	76.56
Membership fees	80.00
Brochure	43.00
Other	82.54
 Total expenses	 517.10
 On hand end of 1989	 \$ 702.12

CONNECTICUT AVENUE BUS CUT-BACKS PROPOSED AMIDST WHEATON RED LINE SERVICE ADDITIONS

Sixteen percent more bus service is being proposed for bus lines in and around the Wheaton area when the Red Line opens later this year, but for some areas there will be reductions in service.

Perhaps the most affected will be service in the Connecticut Avenue corridor south of the intersection with Viers Mill Road, with changes to the L6, L7, and L8 Metrobus routes. The rush hour results: riders from Viers Mill to Kensington see service drop from every 10 minutes to every 30 minutes; from Kensington to East West Highway service drops from every eight/ten minutes to every fifteen minutes alternating between Bethesda and Friendship Heights; south of East West Highway service down from every four minutes (including Ride-On) to every six minutes.

The mainstay L8 would be re-routed from Aspen Hill to the Wheaton Red Line station on Viers Mill Road and would no longer run on Connecticut Avenue to Friendship Heights. Viers Mill to Kensington would be served by a new Ride-On every half-hour to the new Forest Glen station.

Taking up part of the slack south of Kensington, the L6 would be added as a rush hour bus and rerouted onto Connecticut Avenue and East-West Highway to reach the Bethesda Metro station instead of the current Van Ness station. The L7 would turn onto Western Avenue to reach Friendship Heights instead of Van Ness. Service on Kensington Parkway would be provided by a new Ride-On route between Wheaton and the Medical Center Metro.

ACT is currently working on a more concentrated pattern of new service that would keep frequency of service nearer its current levels. If you are interested on working on this, please contact Tom Fuchs at 443-7151.

MEMBERS RENEW BY PAYING DUES FOR 1990 * * BECOME A MEMBER BY JOINING NOW

Just a reminder that 1990 membership dues help keep us getting the word out on transit issues of interest to us all. As a group we can pool our resources and talents to do what no one of us could do on our own. If you haven't rejoined yet, please fill out the form below and enclose a check made out to ACT. If you know of someone else who would like to join, or who would be a good member to add, please pass this newsletter on to him or her so that they can see what we've been doing and be encouraged to build up our strength.

If you are not yet a member and would like to know more about who we are, how we operate, or have ideas/projects that you would like to work on, feel free to attend one of our meetings; they are generally the 4th Tuesday of each month at 7:45 at the Silver Spring Community Center, 8181 Georgia Avenue across from the Planning Board near Spring Street.

Name _____	Dues Category
Address _____	Citizen @ \$5.00 per year []
_____	Activist @ \$15.00/year []
Phone #(s) _____	Business/Professional \$25/yr []

ACT JOINS IN OPPOSITION TO U.S. 29 UNDERPASS AT FOUR CORNERS AND URGES UNBIASED LIGHT RAIL STUDY OF COSTS AND REVENUES, AND OF COMPATIBILITY WITH PLANNING FOR THE COUNTY

At a recent meeting with MD DOT officials, ACT was asked to put in writing its concerns about weaknesses in their study of U.S. 29 transit alternatives. The full effort filled 10 pages, so a cover letter was sent to policy makers summarizing some of the key points. The following excerpt is taken from the letter sent to Council President Hanna.

... ACT feels that problems with the study are serious enough that the study should be extensively revised. The likely outcome will be that the busway is in fact more expensive to operate than a light rail line; moreover light rail will better further planning goals of the U.S. 29 corridor and downtown Silver Spring.

Illustrative weaknesses with the MD DOT study include:

- does not present revenues and costs of busway carrying passengers into local neighborhoods; half of buses stop at park and ride lots, forcing a transfer, as in light rail scenario.
- does not consider G'town Branch in costing or revenues of either light rail or busway; light rail has possibility of run-through, eliminating transfers for an important market segment.
- does not consider light rail ability to provide service between White Oak and Silver Spring, which affects local bus service needs, and thus costs and revenues.

- costing practices favor busway: assumed twice as long a light rail line (19 miles to Columbia) as busway (9 miles to Burtonsville). Used cheaper private contracting cost for busway, but not for new light rail.
- ignores recent policies that encourage transit, which increase advantages of high-capacity light rail; e.g. parking cost increases, reworking of sector master plans to encourage clustered development (Eastern Montgomery due in next year).
- does not assure that the counter-flow bus lane will be sufficiently safe to protect pedestrians, workers, and vehicles from the kinds of accidents that have occurred in Philadelphia and Boston.

ACT estimates that the busway operations will cost \$11 million compared to \$4.3 million for light rail. These operating costs must be borne by the County, and need to be carefully understood and agreed to before allowing the state to undertake capital construction.

While we expect that MD DOT should be the lead on the study, the County Council needs to provide a strong expression of the planning context along this highway (or maybe more aptly, this transportation corridor!) to make sure that MD DOT works to achieve County goals rather than maximize highway utility.

*Action Committee for Transit
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