

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit, Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 13, Number 1, January 1999

ACT's next monthly meetings will take place at 7:30 PM, February 9, 1999 and March 9, 1999 at the Silver Spring Center, 8818 Georgia Avenue.

February Topic: Georgetown Branch Update

March Topic: To Be Determined

Feature Articles

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Georgetown Branch Trolley & Trail

Harry Sanders

On Tuesday, December 8, 1998, the new Montgomery County Council gave the Silver Spring-Bethesda light rail line a strong boost. On their first meeting day, the Council voted 6-3 to recommend that the Maryland Department of Transportation quickly fund and complete the Final Environmental Impact Study (Final EIS) for the light rail at-grade option. The key argument for early action was that this could be done in our lifetime, while the Purple Line options were years away, if at all.

Councilmember Michael Subin moved the action with the motion seconded and strongly supported by Derick Berlage. New Silver Spring Councilmember Steve Silverman also made key supportive arguments. The remaining three "trolley"

votes were Council members Marilyn Praisner, Blair Ewing, and Phil Andrews. Note, that all three new Councilmembers voted to support the light rail option, fulfilling their campaign questionnaire responses, of which ACT members distributed 20,000 copies around Metrorail stations during the primary election.

On the following Thursday night's State Delegation hearing, hard-line positions on the Georgetown Branch seemed to be modified leaving the project in a state of flux. County Executive Doug Duncan appeared to have backed away from flatly opposing state funding of the Final EIS for the Georgetown Branch. The Governor's staff appears more supportive of the Final EIS funding partially due to the strong support of Senator Ida Ruben, Head of the County's Senate Delegation.

Another remarkable observation was the lack of opposition to the Georgetown Branch transit at the state hearing. Only one witness spoke against the trolley, and the project was supported by groups not previously involved. Delegate Dana Dembrow and other Delegation members also supported the project. Although House of Delegates Majority Leader John Hurson, a long-time opponent, inferred the Planning Board was requesting a delay, Planning Board Chairman Hussmann had actually sent in a letter expressing support for quick action on light rail. Harry Sanders read portions of

On January 14, 1999 Maryland State Transportation Secretary Porcari wrote to Senator Ida Ruben, who has been battling for the trolley funding, with a commitment to "initiate work" on the Final EIS for the Georgetown Branch. Porcari said, "The EIS will be completed as soon as possible." However, at press time, light rail supporters were seeking clarification.

Husmann's supportive letter during his testimony, debunking Hurson's inferences.

On December 15, 1998, County Council President Ike Leggett sent a letter to request Governor Glendening to proceed with the Final EIS (at a cost of about \$4 million) on the Georgetown Branch project. Leggett's letter urges the Governor to select the master-planned light rail/trail alternative (over the other alternatives) as the preferred alternative. The light rail/trail alternative would attract more riders, be more reliable, and better improve mobility between Bethesda and Silver Spring and the two branches of the Red Line. The letter also notes that while there has been visible public support for light rail, there has been no visible public support for the busway. The letter also intimates support for the I-270 and Georgia Avenue transitways.

On January 19, eight of the nine State Senators from Montgomery County wrote to the Governor requesting funding for light rail on the Georgetown Branch.

Status of ACT's Newly Created Metrobus C8 Route

Ben Ross

The C8 bus from College Park to Glenmont, which ACT championed before the County Council in spring of 1998, is steadily gaining ridership. After switching on September 28 from rush-hour only service (as proposed by the County) to all-day service (as ACT convinced the County Council to fund), daily ridership jumped from 237 to 475. Ridership has continued to increase steadily since then.

The level of 600 was broken for the first time the week of December 7, when average daily ridership was 627. [Note: the editor rode this route for the first time on a non-school weekday in December and counted a peak of 16 passengers between Hillandale and Colesville on the trip departing College Park at 4:00 PM]. The ridership on the new C8 fares very well when compared to

the ridership on the new Metrobus route 14, "Smartmover," between Tyson's Corner and Lakeforest Mall. In spite of the fact that the "Smartmover" has been touted with much more fanfare, provides free rides (free until December 31, 1998), and offers much more service (15 minutes during rush hours), the "Smartmover" has only attracted 300 regular riders making 600 trips.

In response to a letter from ACT, WMATA has decided to begin advertising the C8 in the Maryland student newspaper, the *Diamondback*. We can look forward to continued growth in ridership when students return to school after the new year.

ACT will continue to advocate extending the route to White Flint. We are convinced that this would greatly increase ridership by providing a direct bus route for commuters from White Oak to White Flint instead of currently changing buses [transfers are not timed] at Glenmont.

A copy of the Metrobus C8 schedule (with ACT's first advertisement made possible with financial support from the Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 689) is included with this newsletter. You are urged to use the C8 whenever possible, which would help avoid overcrowding the C2.

Have you paid your membership dues for 1999 yet? If not, they are \$10 (regular), \$ 25 (activist), and \$ 50 (conductor).

Send your dues to Action Committee for Transit, P.O. Box 7074, Silver Spring, MD 20907 or give them to ACT Treasurer John Carroll at the next ACT meeting!

ACT Position on Georgia Ave. Busway

Quon Kwan

Inadvertently omitted from the last issue of *Transit Times* was a report on the Georgia Avenue Busway Study by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC). After a period of two years, MNCPPC concluded that a busway should be constructed along the median of Georgia Avenue between Olney and the Glenmont Metrorail Station.

The busway service would consist of mini-buses operating express in an exclusive right-of-way between Glenmont and Olney and circulating through neighborhoods north of Aspen Hill as collector-distributors. The express service is intended to divert commuters from single-occupant vehicles in order to relieve congestion along Georgia Avenue. Trunk and branch Y-route Metrobuses serving Georgia Avenue would not use the busway.

ACT commented on the proposal. First, the use of 22-passenger vans is not cost-effective because of the extremely high worker-to-passenger ratio. The high worker-to-passenger ratio makes this busway as inefficient as the San Francisco Municipal Railway cable car, which carries about 40 passengers and requires two workers (brakeman and conductor). While San Francisco has been willing to pay for this inefficiency due to historical reasons (the cable cars are protected by the City Charter and as a National Historical Landmark), there is no similar justification for creating a modern-day inefficiency in this county.

Second and more important, ACT's position is that while we support further study of transit options in the corridor, the Georgia Avenue Busway has a lower priority than other projects, such as the Georgetown Branch Light Rail/Trail and I-270 Light Rail.

At this time, MNCPPC is re-studying the Georgia Avenue Busway after the County Council recommended that the busway be bi-

directional instead of uni-directional, as proposed.

Did you know if all transit riders in the National Capital Region used automobiles instead, there probably would be 30 more highway fatalities per year in the area?

-- Washington Regional Network of Livable Communities' Fact Sheet *Public Transit Saves Deaths, Taxes, and Traffic*

Pushing Transit in the I-270 Corridor

Quon Kwan

Ed Tennyson testified on behalf of ACT at the December 18, 1998 National Capital Regional Transportation Planning Board (NCRTPB) on the Major Investment Study (MIS) for the I-270 Corridor. He pointed out that all participants in the final Focus Group meeting favored light rail in lieu of widening the freeway. Glenn Orlin, testifying on behalf of the County Council, relayed the Council's support for having the Corridor Cities Transitway terminate at Clarksburg instead of COMSAT, as proposed.

At this particular NCRTPB meeting, the Maryland State Highway Administration sought concurrence on the I-270 Corridor MIS. As mentioned in the previous issue, the NCRTPB is the Metropolitan Planning Organization, which, under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), must concur on all MISs for the region before proceeding with the draft environmental impact statement or placing the project on the Constrained Long-Range Plan.

The NCRTPB did not delay concurrence of the MIS until interested parties could review State Highway's final report, as requested by Ed Tennyson. Also, the NCRTPB did not act on the County Council's request for the Clarksburg extension. Although the NCRTPB concurred

on the MIS, indicating that the proposed alternatives were acceptable for proceeding with the draft environmental impact analysis (draft EIS), NCRTPB's concurrence was moot. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), which supersedes ISTEA, no longer makes MISs mandatory.

At the December 17, 1998 I-270 Focus Group Meeting, the State Highway Administration repeated a summary of the alternatives (see the last issue of *Transit Times*) to be studied in the draft EIS and presented the goals, objectives, and measures of effectiveness for comparing the different alternatives. When ACT member, Quon Kwan, raised the issue of including impact on "Greenhouse" warming gases and ozone precursors (such as hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxides), the State Highway Administration representative appeared reluctant. Hydrocarbon and nitrogen oxide emissions were studied in the draft EIS for the Georgetown Branch project. ACT will be receiving a copy of the draft EIS when it is released in 2000.

The State Highway Administration has proposed the next I-270 Focus Group meeting for March. If you are interested in attending, contact Quon Kwan (301) 621-8432 or Jim Clarke (301) 340-8994. Ed Tennyson, who is from Vienna, Virginia, will continue to contribute his valuable *pro bono* services as our technical consultant on the I-270 multi-modal corridor study and draft EIS. Before the Record of Decision is reached (in 2001), ACT encourages you to attend the forthcoming public workshops on the I-270 Corridor Study and to **support light rail** when filling out the comment cards, writing to your elected officials, or testifying.

Transportation Solutions Group: ACT Members Testify

Quon Kwan

On Thursday, September 17, 1998, ACT members testified in front of the Transportation Solutions Group (TSG). The TSG is advisory group appointed by Governor

Glendening to address the issue of east-west transportation, including the need for the InterCounty Connector (ICC) and alternatives. Many ICC opponents testified that evening. Quon Kwan, spoke about "The Case for East West Transit," pointing out that the area through which the ICC would traverse, is suitable for transit service by buses operating at 30 minute headways. This suitability is based on thresholds for minimum service given data on population density and mode share compiled by Pushkarev and Zupan and the Institute of Transportation Engineers. ACT member Richard Hoyer, who does not own a car, testified on the overcrowding and inadequacies of the existing J2 bus route in meeting east-west transit needs down county. ACT President Ben Ross concentrated on the need for light rail along the Georgetown Branch. Because of higher population densities, higher priorities for transit are justified down county. ACT member John Wetmore spoke about the most forgotten part of the east-west transportation infrastructure -- the pedestrian. (See excerpts from his talk on next page.)

After allowing an hour and half for the Board of Trade, the TSG on December 17, 1998 voted that the Master Plan alignment would not fulfill the purpose and need for an ICC. By no means does this rule out the ICC entirely. At this time, the TSG is considering alternative alignments and options, including a toll four-lane parkway.

"A healthy walking environment can succeed without transit, but a transit system cannot exist without the pedestrian. The growth of pedestrian-friendly developments, if coordinated at a regional scale, can form the armature for future transit growth. In fact, this type of development must precede, not just follow the growth of transit networks. . ."

-- *Design for Efficient Suburban Activity Centers*,
March 1997, p. 14

The Most Forgotten Part of the Transportation System

John Wetmore

Excerpts from John Wetmore's talk to the Transportation Solutions Group on September 17, 1998 at University College at the University of Maryland at College Park are presented here. He focused on the pedestrian as the most forgotten part of the transportation system infrastructure, explaining what we have done to discourage walking:

"We build streets with no sidewalks. The choice given to us is to use a worn goat trail by the side of the road, or to dodge cars out in the street. We design intersections just for automobiles, with pedestrians at best an afterthought. We leave out pedestrian signals. We leave out crosswalks."

"We force pedestrians to cross three lanes when they want to cross one. We build high speed right turn lanes. And we keep adding lane after lane after lane for the hapless pedestrian to get across. We make pedestrians go half a mile out of their way to cross an arterial road."

"We design hierarchical road systems of *cul de sacs* and collectors, with no provisions for pedestrian access, other than a long detour out to the very unfriendly arterial roads. We mandate land use patterns that completely isolate functions so that no shopping opportunities are within walking distance of any residence, and no employment centers are within walking distance of either houses or stores. And we teach our children early on that driving is the only way to go . . ."

The *Access 2000* Report, for the first time, inventories the shortcomings in the pedestrian infrastructure that feed our transit system. In conclusion, he urges "don't forget the lowly pedestrian. Don't forget the small pieces of infrastructure that will make life more livable in our neighborhoods."

At readers' request, a brief column entitled "News Across the Nation" will be featured. Avoided will be items already reported, such as mass transit in Yosemite and Grand Canyon National Parks.

News Across the Nation: Light Rail for the Home of Disneyland and Monorail

Quon Kwan

Five new urban rail systems have opened up in California -- Los Angeles - Long Beach, Sacramento, San Diego, San Jose (Santa Clara Valley), and San Francisco Bay Area (BART) in the past 20 years. Orange County (home of America's Disneyland and first monorail) is next in line as it sees light rail as the key to future transportation. Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTD) has proposed a \$ 1.5 billion light rail line to ease its congestion as well as its evolution from a Los Angeles suburb into an urban metropolis in its own right.

The at-grade light rail would start near downtown Fullerton (which is an AMTRAK stop for Pacific Coast trains going to San Diego as well as a commuter rail stop for Los Angeles trains). Then it would head south along Harbor Boulevard to Disneyland before veering sharply to the east for stops at Edison International Field -- home of the Anaheim Angels and the adjacent Anaheim Pond, home of the Mighty Ducks. It would then zigzag through the Cities of Orange, Garden Grove, and Santa Ana. Stops would be near Santa Ana Main Place Mall, South Coast Plaza (the Irvine corporate hub), John Wayne Airport, and the Irvine Spectrum.

Editorial Remarks

Your Transit Times editor is Quon Kwan (w) 301 621-8432, (h) 301 460-7454; please direct your comments, criticism, and submission of articles for the next issue.

Glenmont Metrorail Yard -- Behind the Scenes

Wes Vernon

Thirty-six people participated in a tour of the newly-opened Metrorail Glenmont Storage Yard on November 14, 1999. The tour was sponsored by the Chesapeake Division, Railroad Enthusiasts, Inc. Mark Miller, WMATA's Assistant Superintendent of Rail, escorted the group out on a two-car train to be welcomed by Rita Davis, WMATA's General Superintendent of the Glenmont Division.

Tower operator Alvin Porch described yard operations. The yard is primarily for storage of trains when they are not in use. Thus, the yard is empty during rush hours, partly empty during mid-day, and full at night. There are eleven storage tracks, each of which can hold up to 10 cars. Both the older "Rohr" cars and newer "Breda" are assigned to Glenmont. Cars must operate in consists of two car trains (so-called "married couples") because all the necessary electrical equipment needed to run a single car cannot be put onto one car and have to be split or shared between two cars.

Minimal maintenance is performed at the storage yard. This maintenance consists of a car wash before the train leaves revenue service and emerges from the tunnel into the yard. The car wash is subterranean to collect run-off and prevent it from spewing into the adjacent residential community. In the yard, maintenance crews pick up the trash, vacuum the car floors, and polish the glass. If heavy maintenance (e.g., wheel truing) is required, the cars are sent to the Brentwood Yard just south of the Rhode Island Avenue Station on the Red Line. There are a couple of work cars stored in the yard. This includes a crane car.

Once a train leaves revenue service from the Glenmont Station and is headed for the yard, it is no longer under Automatic Train Control (which in turn is ultimately under the oversight of the Operations Control Center at

WMATA Headquarters (Jackson Graham Building). At this point, control of the trains is turned over to the yard tower. This is analogous to handing over control of a flight from the Federal Aviation Administration's Leesburg (Virginia) Regional Control Center to the Dulles Airport Control Tower (assuming the flight is landing at Dulles).

The storage yard at Glenmont is very functional, efficient, and goes beyond the "call of duty" from being hidden from nearby neighborhoods. NIMBYs who think nothing of being invaded by automobile and truck traffic all day long, but who gag at the thought of (Gasp!) a train in their neighborhood, need not worry. They don't even have to look at it. But it works.

Three months since the July 25, 1998 opening of the Glenmont Metrorail Station, ridership has been averaging 7,900 trips per day. This exceeds WMATA's projected level of 7,200 daily trips after the first six months of operation. On October 25, 1998, free fares ended for passengers transferring from Metrorail to buses at Glenmont.

The next two Metrorail stations scheduled to open (in late 1999) are on the Green Line in Washington, DC: Georgia Ave. - Petworth (at Georgia and New Hampshire Avenues, NW) and Columbia Heights (at 14th and Harvard Streets).

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