



ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 17, Number 1, January 2003

ACT's next monthly meetings will take place at 7:30 PM, the second Tuesday of each month, at the Silver Spring Center, 8818 Georgia Avenue:

Jan. 14: Election of ACT Officers (see p. 8); Metro Capital Improvement Program (CIP) (Speaker - TBD)

Feb. 11: Jim Clarke - Legislative Report from Annapolis

Mar. 11: Highway Improvements to Benefit Transit and Enhance Pedestrian Safety (Speaker - TBD)

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Prince George's, Montgomery Councils Join To Back Inner Purple Line

The Montgomery and Prince George's County Councils made history on December 3rd by jointly endorsing the Inner Purple Line. The two counties urged fast action to build a light rail Metro line that will connect New Carrollton, College Park, Langley Park, Silver Spring, and Bethesda, with two stops on the University of Maryland campus.

In an unprecedented action, the two newly elected councils, on their first day in office, passed parallel resolutions in support of the new transit line. The Prince George's County Council, which had never before

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Join ACT Now

You can join ACT by remitting membership dues. Your membership dues are based on the category of membership that you choose:

\$10 [rider (code R on mail label)]
 \$25 [activist (code A on mail label)]
 \$50 [conductor (code C on mail label)]

[the two digits after your category of membership code indicates year paid]

Send your check for the chosen category of membership to:

Action Committee for Transit
P.O. Box 7074
Silver Spring, MD 20907

You may also give your membership dues to Treasurer John Carroll at the next ACT meeting. The address on your check will be used as the mailing address unless otherwise indicated.

Your dues support ACT Activities and this newsletter.

taken a clear position on the route of the Purple Line, voted 9 to 0 to endorse the inner route and called for fast action to get it built. The Montgomery County Council reaffirmed its support of the Inner Purple Line by a 7 to 2 vote.

Election Results Show Support For Inner Purple Line

Ben Ross

In the recent election campaign, it was obvious that voters support the Purple Line from Bethesda to New Carrollton. Opponents of the project consistently disguised their positions -- saying that they support "a purple line" or the "Metro purple line" without mentioning that what they support is the fictional "outer purple line", let alone avowing openly that they oppose the project selected by the State of Maryland and endorsed by Metro.

A look at the detailed election return backs up this conclusion -- voters overwhelmingly support the Inner Purple Line.

Primary precinct returns show that in Legislative District 18, which includes Chevy Chase, the entire margin of victory of newly elected Delegate Ana Sol Gutierrez came from the five Silver Spring precincts targeted by ACT. Gutierrez beat out incumbent Leon Billings in a district that had never before elected a Purple Line supporter. The role of the Hispanic vote in electing Gutierrez has been widely discussed in the newspapers, but her outspoken support for the Purple Line was at least as important. Gutierrez ran first in precincts 13-7, 13-66, and 13-19 and second to fellow Purple Line supporter Sam Statland in 13-14. The Hispanic population of these precincts ranges from 5% to 12%, yet Gutierrez got the same percentage of the vote as in areas that are 25% to 40% Hispanic.

An equally clear sign of the Purple Line's support was the near-upset by Duchy Trachtenberg in the general election. Trachtenberg, running for County Council in the Bethesda - Chevy Chase district where the project's not-in-my-

backyard opponents live, featured the Inner Purple Line on her campaign literature, even making purple her campaign color. She received 49% of the vote against Howard Denis, a well-liked Republican who had first been elected to the state legislature in 1974. Denis was endorsed by some normally Democratic labor unions, including the teachers, and received a letter of all-but-endorsement from County Executive Douglas Duncan.

Trachtenberg's vocal support for the Purple Line positioned her as the transportation advocate in a year when the voters wanted transportation. Pro-ICC appeals by Denis were effectively blunted by the focus on the Purple Line. While Trachtenberg lost votes along the future light rail right of way, receiving about 40% of the vote in the four precincts directly affected, she gained countervailing votes in areas along the Beltway where the Purple Line is seen as the alternative to a neighborhood-destroying widening of that highway.

In the governor's race, blame for the defeat of Kathleen Kennedy Townsend is being widely passed around. One element was clearly Townsend's failure to campaign on the Purple Line issue. Although a Purple Line supporter, she kept silent on the issue during the campaign out of deference to project opponent Doug Duncan. Nevertheless, the effort of light rail opponents to swing votes to Bob Ehrlich was a dud. In each of the four precincts along the right of way, Ehrlich ran 4 or 5 points better than the Republican candidate for governor four years ago. Compared to the county-average swing of 1.4%, this means that Ehrlich's opposition to the project won him all of 185 votes in Chevy Chase.

A massive pro-Ehrlich mailing to Bethesda and Chevy Chase voters by the Committee to Save the Trail (with sources of

funding not reported) proved a complete dud outside the four precincts on the future light rail right of way. Precincts in Chevy Chase that directly adjoin the Capital Crescent Trail were among Townsend's strongest compared to four years ago.

A similar analysis of votes in other areas that would be served by the Purple Line is not possible -- for the simple reason that no candidate in those areas dares to oppose the project. A sign of the strength of the issue in Silver Spring is the upset victory of Tom Perez for County Council. While the primary favorite Sally Sternbach was also a strong Purple Line supporter, Perez was able to swing votes by pointing out that Sternbach had held a fundraiser at Columbia Country Club.

Speak Up, Organize, Communicate

Martin Kearns

The current effort to promote the development of the Inner Purple Line is gaining a new voice. The voice of the riders and communities, is channeled through the Inner Purple Line Communications Campaign launched by ACT at its December meeting. The Communications Campaign will last until the Fourth of July. It will focus on organizing the potential riders of the Inner Purple Line to fight for their rail and trail.

Specifically, the Communications Campaign aims to spread the message that the Inner Purple Line will benefit riders, businesses, communities and families. The Inner Purple Line will help Marylanders move smarter and smoother. Additionally, the Communications Campaign will focus some much needed attention on the misguided efforts to kill the project by a small group of country club elites and their lobbyist.

New Messages Need New Messengers

For over 15 years, ACT and the supporters of the Inner Purple Line have been attending hearings, meeting with elected officials, commenting on plans, evaluating economic impacts and promoting a new visionary connection through our communities in the form of the Inner Purple Line. However, years of progress have been threatened by significant financial contributions funneled by a small group of country club elites to oppose the Inner Purple Line. They have set up "Save the Trail" to cover the "Not Near my Country Club" position. They have hired a lobbyist to kill the project, organized a political action committee to fund their politicians and taken the State to court to steal the public lands that will carry the track (they lost the court battle.)

The time has come for the supporters of the Inner Purple Line to organize and fight for fair policy decisions. Decisions that:

- Benefit communities from New Carrollton, College Park, Silver Spring and Bethesda.
- Put working family's and voter's needs ahead of Country Club views.
- Reduce the appeal of an ever expanding beltway
- Do not limit choices of thousands of riders to protect the interests of a few political donors.

Help, Get Involved

The Communication Campaign has formed a team to plan and implement the campaign. We need many volunteers to work with us until the 4th of July to help us recruit support needed to encourage the new Governor, County Executive Doug Duncan and the federal government to give the project the support it needs. We also need volunteers to document the stories (photo,

video and narratives) that explain why the project is so important. We need volunteers to "sell" the Inner Purple Line at public meetings, bus stops, civic meetings, mom's groups, PTA meetings, and Metro stops across the area. We need volunteers to help us create materials for the sales team. We need volunteers to write content, monitor the opposition's activities and raise funds to implement the campaign.

We need the time you can give to the campaign. We need money to buy ads and produce the materials for distribution. We need YOU to sign up for this campaign by sending us your email address and contact information. We need you to put the Inner Purple Line on your priority list so we can get the Governor and County Executive to do the same.

Contact Us

Let us know how you want to help and the best way to stay in touch with you. Send an Email to volunteer@innerpurpleline.org. Visit the new campaign website www.innerpurpleline.org.

Public Meetings On Purple Line

Harry Sanders

On November 13 and 20, the MTA (Maryland Transit Administration) of the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) held the second in a series of public meetings on the Bethesda to Silver Spring segment of the Purple Line light rail and trail project. Hundreds attended the meetings in Bethesda and Silver Spring. Many of the attendees stopped by ACT's table at both meetings for more information.

The public meetings had many display boards that illustrated how the hiker-biker trail and light rail tracks would be built from Bethesda to Silver Spring. The new feature of the design is double tracks for the rail line except for a 1/4 mile section just north of the Silver Spring station. The proposed Spring Street station has been dropped and is replaced by a station at 16th Street near the Woodside communities. There was significant detail on how the light rail line users would have a direct connection at a new southern entrance to the Bethesda Metro station. There were also illustrations of the Chevy Chase Lake (Connecticut Avenue), West Silver Spring (Lytonnsville) and Silver Spring Metro stops.

The trail and rail design shows a combination of vertical and horizontal separation with various options for fences, walls, or vegetation in between. At the Silver Spring end, the trail will actually be put above the trains since space is very limited along the CSX main line. The display boards also illustrated options on how the rail and trail could cross Rock Creek.

MDOT is now recommending that the train and trail cross over Connecticut Avenue on a bridge while the rail would go under the CSX railroad (just north of Silver Spring). Due to these design changes and six years of inflation the construction cost is now estimated to be 370 million dollars (up from \$216 million).

The Silver Spring to New Carrollton phase of this study has just started with listening sessions in early December. The Bethesda to Silver Spring segment will likely have one additional public meeting in the February time frame before the release of a formal Environmental Impact Statement in early spring. ACT will continue its efforts to insure this project is authorized for federal

funds in the 2003 reauthorization of TEA-21. Contact Harry Sanders (sandersh@erols.com) if you would like to help this project move forward.

The address of the MDOT Purple Line web site to be released soon is:
<http://www.mdpurpleline.com/>

Visit ACT's Website

www.actfortransit.org

ACT Seeks Improved Snow Clearance

Ben Ross

At the December membership meeting, ACT members reacted angrily to County Executive Duncan's interview in the Washington Post about snow shoveling. Duncan announced that the new county law requiring homeowners to shovel sidewalks would not be enforced and implied that snow might as well be left on sidewalks until it melts. Just one unshoveled property can make an entire block inaccessible to pedestrians for days or weeks.

ACT did recognize that the recent snowstorm has brought to the forefront one difficulty in keeping sidewalks clear. There are places where the sidewalk is used as a dumping ground for snow plowed from the street. It is unreasonable to expect the property owner to remove what County and State snowplows deposited. However, pedestrians still need to use these sidewalks, many of which are on transit routes.

What constitutes an unreasonable accumulation of snow for property owners to remove? On roads where the sidewalk is immediately adjacent to the curb, and snow from more than one lane of roadway is being plowed onto the sidewalk, the accumulated snowpile is excessive. The County and State must assume responsibility for snow removal from these sidewalks.

Therefore, the meeting voted to request that the County obtain the necessary equipment and personnel to remove snow deposited on sidewalks by County and State snowplows. Unless snow removal for pedestrians is made as high a priority as snow removal for motor vehicles, the county will aggravate traffic congestion by forcing transit users to switch to automobiles.

Request for Help

With great fanfare the County Executive launched his "Go Montgomery" plan. ACT has been studying the plan. While it has a lot of money to increase frequency on a number of routes, the bus transit portion has two fatal flaws. It fails to fund the two things that bus riders have said are their top priorities: bus schedule information and sidewalks to bus stops.

ACT aims to address the information need. To do this we need examples of just what type of bus information is lacking. Specifically we would like from 8 to 10 pictures of the examples of the type or lack of bus schedule information. Photos will not be returned but if you have some examples send them to:

Jim Clarke,
1916 Dundee Road
Rockville, MD, 20850.

Metrobus F4 Changes Spur Growth

Excerpt from Metro Weekly

The decision earlier this year to double the number of runs on Saturday of Metrobus route F4 has resulted in a substantial growth in ridership. The F4 Metrobus, an important east-west connecting route between Silver Spring and New Carrollton Metrorail Stations, with a stop at Prince George's Plaza Metrorail Station, had been carrying standing-room crowds on Saturdays. Last April, to serve customers better, the number of runs was doubled. Now running every 30 minutes on Saturday, the F4 carries an average of 52 customers per trip. With such a high demand for service on the F4, brand-new Sunday service was started on June 30, operating once an hour. Early reviews report that each of the new Sunday trips serves about 35 passengers.

Are You Allowed to Take Off for the Holidays?

Quon Kwan

Have you ever had a job that, where over a 20-year period, you were allowed to spend only 4 Thanksgivings and 5 Christmases with your family and in no single year were you off for these two holidays? The job just described is that of your friendly Metrobus or Metrorail train operator or station manager. Can you beat that for dedication? As you enjoy your holidays with your families, keep in mind that your Metro employee is probably at work separated from his/her family. The operator and station manager are the most visible Metro employees. There are also the less visible employees who support the infrastructure: interlocking operators, passenger operations

supervisors, controllers, mechanics, track and structure repairmen, equipment operators, inspectors, and laborers.

A lot of you readers do not know this, but when your bus or train operator signed up to work in the operations division of a transit agency (which is the heartbeat of the agency), your operator virtually signed his or her life and soul away. Because of the split shifts (i.e., work during morning and evening rush hours and off during the mid-day) or long shifts they must work, almost all of the full-time bus and train operators I know do not have a "private life," (that is to say, most cannot engage intensively in an avocation or spend quality time with their families to the same degree that the 9-to-5 worker population can). Almost all of the transportation worker jobs are safety-sensitive positions; this means that they are subject to random drug or alcohol tests (tests are mandatory in the event of an incident); such tests restrict their personal life.

Furthermore, there is a general order stating that operators and station managers are to remain at their assigned posts even if they are scheduled to be off-duty but their relief does not show up. An employee may not take vacation or advanced sick leave without prior permission. If a Metro operations employee is sick, he/she needs to give one-hour notice prior to their assignment. Then on special event days, all "bets are off" that leave can be taken. For example, when protestors vowed to shut down the International Monetary Fund meeting as well as downtown Washington, DC and the Metro system on September 27 - 29, Metro cancelled all leave.

On inclement weather days, your operator is still expected to show up on time. Many employees have to work double shifts during inclement weather – sleeping or napping over in trains stored in tunnels or

station ready rooms. While many of us work at jobs where being late a matter of minutes is almost inconsequential, punctuality is absolutely critical in transit. Can you imagine the chaos that would result if operators were not punctual at running their trains?

Expectations from the public are very high, making for a lot of pressure to show up on time, to run punctual schedules, and not to have breakdowns. It is often typical for a Metro employee to face the anger of delayed customers when the employee has not caused the delay, has no control over the delay, or happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Seldom are Metro employees thanked by customers for being on time, and being on time is more often the case than not. Because I don't take service for granted, I thank my Metrobus driver for a safe and courteous ride when I alight.

Superimposed on this publicly hostile work environment is a command-and-control (military) style of management. Because of the myriad of safety and operating rules, it is the nature of command-and-control organizations, such as the transit industry, to control workplace behavior by focusing on discipline rather than rewards. This, unfortunately, results in a stigma attached to working in a transit operations environment that makes it hard to attract prospective employees. There is no doubt that an extraordinarily high level of discipline and dedication is required to work as a bus or train operator. Just think what would happen if bus and train operators all wanted to take leave around the holidays so that they can be with their families. There would be a shut down of the entire transportation system. You wouldn't be able to go anywhere on transit. So the next time you see your bus or train operator or station manager, smile, be grateful and express your appreciation! That person is working so that you can take off!

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ACT Officers Nominated for-CY2003:

President: Ben Ross

V. Pres. (Legislative Affairs): Jim Clarke

Vice President (Service): Harry Sanders

V. Pres. (Land Use & Pedestrian Matters):

Richard Hoyer

Secretary: Rodolfo Perez

Treasurer: John Carroll

Board Member (At Large): Martin Kearns

Board Mem. (At Large): Jessica Mitchell

Nominations Committee: John Carroll

Nom. Committee: Richard McArdle

Come to the Jan. 14 meeting ready to vote; nominations from the floor will be accepted.

Editorial Remarks

Your Transit Times editor is Quon Kwan. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is March 11. Send your materials to him at: siufung@erols.com or call him: (h) 301 460-7454.



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