



## **ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT**

# **Transit Times**

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland  
Volume 17, Number 3, July 2003

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**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:**

**July 8: Del. Peter Franchot, Chair, Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee - "Is Maryland Doing Enough for Mass Transit?"**

**Aug. 12: Len Foxwell, Transportation Director, Downtown D.C Business Improvement District - "Proposed Downtown Circulator Bus System."**

**Sept. 9: James Raszewski, Chief, Division of Transit, Prince Georges County - " Prince Georges County Transit Needs and How to Meet Them."**

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### **Purple Line Update**

Coalition to Build Inner Purple Line

Maryland Governor Ehrlich's administration continues to sort out its approach to the Inner Purple Line. The contract managed by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority for the eastern segment (Silver Spring to New Carrollton) has been terminated. The State of Maryland is working with Montgomery County's Planning Board to evaluate the Jones Bridge/Jones Mill Road alignment. Concern about the slow pace of events is mounting among Purple Line supporters.

The Maryland Department of Transportation is working on how to evaluate the various alternatives Governor Ehrlich wants considered for the Inner Purple Line. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) will be examined in addition to light rail. Additionally, an

### **Feature Articles**

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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**  
**[www.actfortransit.org](http://www.actfortransit.org)**

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.

Jones Bridge and Jones Mill roads - crossing over (or under Connecticut Ave.) and connecting to the Georgetown Branch where it would continue to the CSX main line. The Montgomery County Council has asked the Planning Board to look at this option. (See next article.)

The Prince George's County Transportation Policy Citizen's Advisory Board meeting in New Carrollton on May 23, 2003 was well attended, and the message in support of the Purple Line was clear: this is the top transit priority for Prince George's County and efforts to prioritize it below the Corridor Cities Transitway are not looked upon favorably by Council or County Executive alike.

Prince George's County Councilmember Tom Hendershot clarified that, if Montgomery County cannot agree on a route for the Purple Line, the project can begin in Prince George's County. Peter Shapiro, current Prince George's County Council President, joined with Prince George's County Executive Jack Johnson in stressing that the two branches of government were working closely together to make sure this project gets funded. Maryland Transit Administration Director of Planning, Henry Kay, indicated that he is optimistic that the Inner Purple Line can gain federal funding support. He also expressed the belief that that the State can successfully move both Inner Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transitway forward towards construction.

alignment in Bethesda, referred to as the Hurson alignment because it was first proposed by Delegate John Hurson of Dist. 18, is being looked at. This would have a busway extending up Woodmont Ave. at grade from downtown Bethesda, with some land proposed to be purchased from NIH along the right (east) side of the road. An alternative route would go south starting from Medical Center. A tunnel or bridge would get the BRT over Wisconsin Avenue. From Wisconsin the project would extend along

Maryland Department of Transportation Secretary Robert Flanagan spoke to the Montgomery County State Delegation on May 22, 2003 about the evolving thinking on the Purple Line. Secretary Flanagan indicated that it will be BRT, be built first between Silver Spring and Langley Park, and not go underground all the way but rather travel along roads with short underpasses designed to avoid select bottlenecks. Many questions were raised by the Delegates about these assumptions.

## **New Purple Line Options Under Study**

Harry Sanders

On June 18, the Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning held a community forum on an evaluation of two new Purple Line options: busway from Bethesda to Silver Spring on either the Georgetown Branch right-of-way or a combination of the Georgetown Branch right-of-way and Jones Bridge Road between Jones Mill Road and MD 355. Park and Planning is undertaking this work at the request of the Montgomery County Council and in cooperation with the State DOT. At this forum significant opposition was expressed to the Jones Bridge Road busway option.

ACT does not support either busway alternative and is scheduled to testify against the Jones Bridge Road busway alternative, reiterating its support for the light rail Purple Line between Bethesda and New Carrollton, at a Park and Planning public hearing on June 26 (As this hearing is after the press deadline, we are unable to give the results of the Planning Board vote.) ACT is opposed to the busway alternative which is slower than rail, historically attracts fewer riders than rail, and with the Jones Bridge Road alternative would get bogged down in the traffic congestion of Bethesda.

In addition to this effort, the Coalition to Build the Inner Purple Line is scheduling meetings with members of the U.S. Senate and Congress to ensure the importance of the light rail project is understood by them.

## **ACT Supports Trail Maintenance**

Cindy Snow

At the April ACT meeting a motion was passed in support of restoration of trail maintenance funds that were cut from the

County budget and also inclusion of funds for snow clearance on the Maryland portion of the Capital Crescent Trail. DC clears snow from its portion of the trail but Montgomery County does not.

## **Purple Line Supporters Show Flag At Trestle Opening**

Harry Sanders

Members of ACT and the Coalition to Build the Inner Purple Line mixed with bike trail advocates at the ribbon cutting for the Rock Creek trestle reopening on Saturday, June 1st, with signs reading "Finish the Trail/ Build Light Rail," in both Spanish and English.

The trestle, which took the Georgetown Branch railroad spur across the Rock Creek gorge, has been temporarily shored up at a cost of more than \$1 million to extend the interim hiker-biker trail from Chevy Chase across Rock Creek Park into West Silver Spring. The trestle is slightly less than 1/2 the distance between Bethesda and Silver Spring. The remaining 2.3 miles is one of the more challenging segments of the proposed bicycle beltway, and CSX railroad has not been open to inclusion of a trail on the right of way in North Silver Spring.

The proposed joint trolley/trail would place the light rail tracks between the freight line and the trail in some places, and otherwise, provide for a safe bike trail all the way into the Silver Spring Transit Center, which is being reconstructed in the next few years with provisions for both trolley and trail. At the Transit Center, the bike trail will connect with the Green Trail linking to the Sligo Creek Trail and providing important access to East Silver Spring and Long Branch. It also gives access to the Metropolitan Branch Trail, which follows the CSX/Metro Red Line south to Union Station. The "longest mile" is, in many ways that to be shared by trolley and trail, north of the Silver Spring Transit Center.

### **Taste of the Purple Line**

A fundraiser is being planned for late September. It will feature food from restaurants located at proposed Purple Line stations.

#### **Stay Tuned for Details**

Volunteers needed. Please contact Cindy at [cindys@myself.com](mailto:cindys@myself.com) or 301-391-6872.

### **Civic Association Votes to Oppose Busway**

Webb Smedley

The Woodside Civic Association voted unanimously to sustain its previous opposition against a busway on the Georgetown Branch. The association studied this option in the mid-1990s before the Montgomery County Council selected the light rail alternative for the (then) Bethesda to Silver Spring transit project.

Concerns are as follows:

- The paved road busway option opened up the possibility of the connection being used for other rubber-tired vehicles (diesel buses, emergency vehicles, etc.)
- The proposal would complicate completion of the trail into Silver Spring and the multimodal transit center;
- There is no evidence of positive impact of busways on value of adjoining properties
- Opposition to buses on the Georgetown Branch as well as streets like Jones Bridge Rd is likely to be even greater, result in missing the window for funding under the current six year federal new starts period; and

- The bus option requires even more space - putting it closer to Woodside homes in the constrained right of way along the CSX rail line. The Silver Spring neighborhood association affirmed its support for the light rail/trail option for the Inner Purple Line.

### **MTA Hikes Spark Massive Backlash**

Caroline Harmon, Exec. Dir.  
Baltimore Transit Riders League

State Transportation Secretary Bob Flanagan announced on June 5th that he would proceed with steep fare increases and key transit service cuts on buses and MARC trains across Maryland. Against the testimony and letters of hundreds of riders, and against the hopes of many legislators, and despite protests, Flanagan proceeded with his plan.

As of June 30th, the Ehrlich administration will raise Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) transit fares from \$1.35 to \$1.60 (with monthly passes going up to \$64) on buses, light rail & subway. For a family of five, that's \$50 a month or \$600 a year! MARC round trip train fares will be raised by an average of 36%, neighborhood Shuttle fares will go from 50 cents to \$1.00, and senior / disabled fares will go up from 45 cents to 55 cents. Service cuts in largely suburban locations are equally problematic. Twelve bus lines will be cut as well as three runs on the Camden and Brunswick MARC lines. The Neighborhood Shuttles will come half as often - every 34 minutes, not every 17.

Are we making this a region of great opportunity or leaving our elders, students, people with disabilities and low income workers out in the cold? Transit Fares were raised in 1996, but the gas tax (which funds transit) has not been raised since 1992. This is a matter of social justice! The state

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legislature approved a smaller fare increase this winter, but Secretary Flanagan wants to overturn the will of the legislature and charge the higher fares!

[Editor's Note: The MTA cutbacks include elimination of the last evening MARC train on the Brunswick Line which runs through Montgomery County. ACT testified against the fare increases and service cuts.]

## Metro Proposes Fare & Service Changes

WMATA Press Release

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Board of Directors Budget Committee made recommendations for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2004 (July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004) budget and submitted them to the local jurisdictions for review. The Board of Directors is expected to consider comments from the local jurisdictions before granting final approval. Final approval was granted in June 2003.

For the first time in eight years, the fiscal year budget calls for a change in Metro's fare structure. The fare changes are as follows:

### Metrorail

- Increase the peak period boarding charge to \$1.20
- Increase the maximum peak period fare to \$3.60
- Increase the off-peak fares to \$1.20, \$1.70 & \$2.20

### Metrobus

- Increase the boarding charge to \$1.20
- Increase the express bus fare charge to \$2.50
- Keep the \$0.85 rail-to-bus transfer discount.

### Metroaccess

- Increase Metroaccess base fares to \$2.40

### Parking

- Increase the daily parking rates by \$0.75
- Set the monthly reserved parking permits at \$35
- Increase the parking meter rate to 25¢ for 1 hr.

The Budget Committee also voted to retain the elderly and handicapped fares on Metrobus and Metrorail at one-half the peak period fare all day, with a maximum Metrorail fare not exceeding one-half the regular maximum fare; eliminate the high-value 10% bonus on Metrorail; and to retain the Metrobus and Metrorail one-day passes and one-week pass. The combined Metrobus/Metrorail passes will be discontinued. In addition to the fare structure change, the FY 2004 budget:

- Extends late night Metrorail weekend service by one additional hour to 3 a. m. (This will be funded separately by the District of Columbia as an 18 month demonstration project.)
- Opens the Metrorail system at 7 a.m. instead of 8 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday mornings.
- Provides \$6 million for escalator and elevator enhancements under the Infrastructure Renewal Program in accord with the Blue Ribbon Panel report for Metro's Vertical Transportation Units.

ACT testified against the WMATA fare increases at the public hearing conducted by WMATA for that purpose on March 5, 2003. Additionally, on April 14, ACT testified against the proposed Ride-On fare increases at a public forum held by Montgomery County.

## Why Does Transit Work in Europe in Contrast to U.S. ?

Quon Kwan

Have you ever vacationed in Western Europe only to be awed by the popularity of public transit in contrast to that in the U.S.? The National Research Council in late 2001 disseminated Transportation Research Board Special Report 257, *Making Transit Work: Insight from Western Europe, Canada, and the United States*. This special report is the culmination of a two year study funded by the Federal Transit Administration through the Transit Cooperative Research Program.

Transit ridership levels in Western Europe are higher than the U.S. by five-fold. Ridership levels in Canadian cities are roughly double those of American cities. Overall, transit accounts for 10 to 20% of urban trips in Western Europe and Canada, but only 2% in the U.S.

Several key factors (practices and policies) explain this dramatic difference in making transit work:

- (1) history;
- (2) reliability and frequency;
- (3) comfort, safety, and convenience;
- (4) making transit competitive with cars;
- (5) land use.

### History

At one time, the U.S. led the world in public transit use. In 1920, Americans averaged over 250 transit trips/yr, mostly on the nation's 65,000 km of electric railways. Soon the automobile replaced the streetcar as the dominant mode of transportation. However, not only did the automobile change commuting and travel patterns; it decentralized cities, intensified suburbanization, and profoundly changed the nature of urban development – creating an automobile-centered way of life. A host of U. S. and local government policies, from tax incentives that fostered home ownership to

freeway construction, reinforced the decline of urban city centers.

By the time of the electric railways in America (early 1900s), most Western European cities were already mature. Many Western European cities preserved historic centers. Furthermore, recovering from two devastating world wars, few Western Europeans could afford automobiles before the 1960s. Government reconstruction and housing programs helped keep populations high in the central cities. Thus, Western Europe did not follow the dispersed and decentralized patterns of development prevalent in the U.S. Instead, Western European countries strongly supported investments in bus and rail transit with both capital and operating assistance.

### Reliability and Frequency

In Western Europe, bus speeds are faster than in the U.S. because of wide spacing between bus stops, short dwell times at bus stops, prepaid fares, and priority in traffic. In Western Europe, bus stops are 300 to 500 meters apart while in the U.S., stops are typically every 200 meters. This means less stops, less time for deceleration and acceleration, and less time spent leaving and re-entering mainstream traffic.

Dwell times for buses in Western Europe are shorter than in the U.S. for several reasons. One is bus loading on median islands or bus bulbs (extensions of the sidewalk into the parking or traffic lanes) that reduce the need to leave and re-enter traffic. Dwell times are also reduced with low-floor buses (no steps), extra wide doors, and three (instead of two) doors in Western Europe in contrast to the U.S.

Pre-paid transit passes and tickets are customary, thus, divorcing the driver from collecting fares and eliminating fumbling for change at boarding in Western Europe. Moreover, this allows boarding through all doors, accelerating boarding in Western

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Europe. In the U.S., exact change, not prepaid fares, is customary. Buses in Western Europe receive priority in traffic, providing an incentive for transit. This priority includes right-of-way when re-entering traffic, staggered stop lines, special bus lanes, queue jumpers, and signal pre-emption. In the U.S., traffic engineers favor moving cars over people.

### **Comfort, Safety, and Convenience**

Western Europeans spare no expense in equipping transit vehicles with state-of-the-art suspension systems and ergonomic seats. Other amenities, (e.g., clocks) are standard on vehicles and at shelters, telephones, mailboxes. Bicycle storage is standard at bus stops. Transit stations in Western European cities serve as connecting points for a variety of activities, including eating, shopping, and entertaining.

Transit agencies in Western Europe assure safety by assuring well-lit and secure waiting areas as well as placing sidewalks leading to transit stops and intersection controls at the appropriate spots. Transit is made convenient in Western Europe through making the purchase of fare media as easy as possible, tailoring discounted passes to individual needs, disseminating transit information as broadly as possible, and making trips across different modes and providers as seamless as possible.

Fare media and discounted transit passes are nearly universally sold at post offices, student unions, retail shops as well as vending machines at rail and bus stations. Transit agencies work with museums, theaters, and sports events to incorporate heavily discounted fares into the price of admission. Hotels include multi-day transit passes in their room rates.

Operators make transit information as widely available as possible by publishing easy-to-read system maps and schedules in newspapers, posting the same at transit

stops, and painting buses to match route map colors. Schedules are based on easy-to-remember clock times (e.g., on the hour, 10, 15, or 20 minutes afterwards).

The most amazing Western European transit convenience is integrating and coordinating transit region-wide so that routes complement each other, fare structures are uniform, transfers are accepted among all modes, connections are eased among trams, buses, airports, and intercity train stations. There is also car sharing as well as provisions that allow a train or bus operator to call for a taxi.

### **Making Transit Competitive with Cars**

Western Europeans have made transit competitive with cars by imposing high automobile taxes, high motor fuel taxes, and strict parking limits. In the U.S., automobile taxes, such as taxes on sales of motor vehicle, excise taxes, registration fees, and license fees, do not amount to more than 10% of the vehicle sales cost. In Western Europe, value-added taxes are as much as 180% of a car's purchase price

Prices of motor fuel are three to four times higher in Western Europe than in the U. S. Perhaps, the single most important factor in making transit competitive with cars is the price and supply of parking. In Western Europe, regulations are frequently aimed at limiting the supply of workplace parking in the central city cores. In addition, Western Europe has implemented widespread traffic calming (since the 60s), banned traffic in downtown areas, and converted streets into pedestrian malls.

### **Land Use**

Land use decisions are shared among local, regional, and national governments in Western Europe, unlike in the U.S. where they are local. In addition, in Western Europe, unlike the U.S., transportation is integrated into land use plans. Finally, in

Western Europe, common rules and guidance on street use and site development designs favor transit as opposed to those in the U.S. that favor cars.

In the U.S., the federal government provides financial and technical aid for transportation facilities but leaves land use decisions completely to the local decision makers. Beginning in the 1960s, the federal government required states to establish, at the regional level, metropolitan planning organizations to coordinate local transportation planning and to allocate funds for local transportation projects. However, the effectiveness of metropolitan planning organizations to function at the regional level is compromised by the fact that the local communities that make up the metropolitan region are generally unwilling to relinquish any authority over land use planning and decision making. In fact, they compete among each other for tax-producing developments.

## Editorial Remarks

Your Transit Times editor is Quon Kwan. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is September 12. Send your materials to him at: [siufung@erols.com](mailto:siufung@erols.com) or call him at: (h) 301-460-7454.

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