



ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 17, Number 4, October 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:

Oct. 14: Patty Nicoson, Dulles Corridor Rail Association - "Update On Dulles Corridor Rail Project."

Nov. 18: Rodolfo Perez, ACT Secretary - "Rebuilding Transit At The World Trade Center Site - An Eyewitness Report."

Please note change in the usual 2nd Tuesday meeting date due to Nov. 11 holiday.

Dec. 9: "DC Transit Future" - speaker from DC Dept. of Transportation

Feature Articles

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Inner Purple Line Status

Quon Kwan and Harry Sanders

In an August 28 *Gazette* news article, Maryland Governor Robert L. Ehrlich stated, "It [Purple Line] will not go through the Country Club" [i.e., Columbia Country Club]. The Governor played golf with Washington Post reporter Tony Kornheiser at the Columbia Country Club a few weeks before making this statement. When Robert L. Flanagan was asked to clarify the Governor's recent statement, the Maryland Secretary of Transportation explained, "The Governor happens to love golf."

ACT President Ben Ross was quoted in the same article: "It just sweeps away all these years of pretense that it's all about the [Capital Crescent] Trail." The Governor's statement and Secretary's explanation overtly exposes the fact that the Trail is pure propaganda. The real reason for delaying the Purple Line is the raw political power of the Columbia Country Club.

Also during August, ACT members passed out leaflets warning residents that the bus rapid transit (BRT) proposal would run along Jones Bridge Road (in lieu of the light rail proposal that would run along the Capital Crescent Trail). Delegate John Hurson proposed BRT and alignment, arguing that it would "spare the neighborhoods," save the trail, and save money. However, the ACT leaflets point out that the BRT alignment diverts north of Hurson's house (which Hurson omitted to say) and protects the

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Your dues support ACT Activities and this newsletter.

Columbia Country Club (which would otherwise be traversed by the light rail alignment). In particular, Hurson proposed that the alignment veer off from the trail at the western edge of Rock Creek Park where Jones Bridge Road intersects Jones Mill Road. The BRT would then head along Jones Bridge Road to Wisconsin Avenue, stopping at Medical Center Metro Station, and turn south to the Bethesda Metro Station. The ACT leaflet asks Hurson to represent his constituents – not wealthy campaign contributors and urges residents to ask

Hurson to drop the Jones Bridge Road option.

In September, at the "Bi-County Transitway scoping sessions" in Langley Park, Silver Spring, and Bethesda attendance was light to moderate (the College Park scoping session was after press deadline). The state's consultants and Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) staff are beginning to resume work on Purple Line options, but little new work appears to have been done. For example, there are no sections or elevations showing how BRT will accommodate the hiker-biker trail in tight spots. Most alarmingly, there appears to be a new idea for an at-grade BRT option along Rt. 410 through Takoma Park, which would bypass University Blvd. as well as the University of Maryland.

ACT and the Coalition to Build the Inner Purple Line will continue efforts to ensure that a major focus of the MTA study remain on the light rail option and master plan alignments. The Coalition held a press conference Sept. 16th attended by County Council- members George Leventhal and Tom Perez, State Senator Ida Ruben, Delegate Peter Franchot, Takoma Park and College Park City Councilmembers and several organizational representatives. The strength of the coalition is indicated by the representation of both the Washington Board of Trade and Sierra Club.

MTA has established a schedule for the revised planning process for the "Bicounty Transitway:"

- Winter 2004: Approve Purpose and Need Statement
- Summer 2004: Approve Alternates Retained for Detailed Study
- Winter 2006: Issue Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), public hearings
- Winter 2007: Issue Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

This schedule suggests a 3-year delay in starting construction on this project, at a minimum.

The study has a new web site: www.Bi-CountyTransitway.com for further information. ACT's web site on the Inner Purple Line is www.innerpurpleline.org.

Two Transit Projects Added to CLRP

Quon Kwan

On May 16, 2003, the National Capital Regional Transportation Planning Board (TPB) approved adding two transit projects to the Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP): Purple Line (otherwise known as the Bi-County Transitway) and the Corridor Cities Transitway.

The Purple Line was added as a study project – not as a construction project – for the 10-miles between Silver Spring and New Carrollton. (The 4.4-mile portion between Silver Spring and Bethesda has already been in the CLRP since the late 90s.) The Prince George's County Council strongly supported the status of the Purple Line as a construction – rather than a study -- project. Moreover, the Prince George's County Executive said the Purple Line is the County's number one transit priority. At a hearing of the TPB's Citizen Advisory Board on May 20, 2003, over 100 citizens and elected officials backed the Purple Line.

In contrast, the Corridor Cities Transitway was included as a construction project. The Maryland Department of Transportation noted, "*The Corridor Cities Transitway is a higher priority project because it has gone much further than the Bi-County Transitway with respect to the environmental review process.*"

The next step after adding the Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transitways to the

CLRP is analysis for a determination of conformity with air quality. If not in conformity, either one or both will have to be modified or removed from the CLRP. In addition, the two transit projects will undergo a financial analysis to determine if funding can be reasonably obtained. If not, then they will have to be removed from the CLRP. Inclusion of a transit project in the CLRP is required for Federal funding.

ACT members concerned about the State's position on the Purple Line should write to: Mr. Robert L. Flanagan, Secretary of Transportation, P.O. Box 8755, BWI Airport, MD 21240-0755.

Secretary Flanagan Seeks to Cancel Five Metrobus Routes

Quon Kwan

In a September 8, 2003, letter to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), Maryland Secretary of Transportation, Robert L. Flanagan seeks to eliminate:

- C18 Waldorf – Branch Avenue
- G1 – Greenbelt Parking Lot Shuttle
- N11/13 – Branch Avenue – King Street
- B11 – Rosslyn – Bethesda
- N7 – Montgomery Mall – Glen Echo
Federal Triangle
- 14A,B,C,D – Lake Forest Mall –
Bethesda – Tyson's Corner

The last three Metrobus routes serve Montgomery County. The B11 is a reverse commuter route along Wisconsin Avenue (i. e., carries passengers from the inner city to the suburbs in the AM rush hours and vice versa in the PM rush hours). It would be discontinued only if Virginia and the District of Columbia do not contribute subsidies to reduce Maryland's operating cost.

The N7 is a weekday, rush-hour only express commuter route. Gordon Aoyagi (ex-Director of Transit Services in Montgomery County) unsuccessfully tried to cancel the N7 when the Metrorail Red Line was extended in 1984. County Executive Douglas Duncan tried to stop this route in 2000 but failed when more than 60 riders along with ACT activists turned out *en masse* to protest at the public hearing and wrote letters to elected officials. Ridership improved after passengers organized themselves and publicized the N7. ACT takes exception to the daily ridership count publicized as 151 because members have observed the buses to be full when riding the N7.

The 14A,B,C,D route is the only mass transit link between Montgomery County and Fairfax County and the only Metrobus route that crosses the American Legion Bridge. It was inaugurated in September 1998 to ease suburb-to-suburb traffic on the Beltway.

More important, it was inaugurated as a form of bus rapid transit (BRT) because the buses were outfitted with high-back, luxurious seats, the service was designated as "SmartMover," stops were distinctly marked signs, and especially, the buses would circumvent traffic by driving on the shoulder of the Beltway (in MD). There is no doubt that ridership on this form of BRT is low. Because BRT has to use the same lanes on the Beltway (in VA) and to get on/off the Beltway (in VA or MD) with general traffic, BRT gets stranded in the same congestion.

Strikingly inconsistent is the fact that Secretary Flanagan proposes to use the same kind of BRT on the Purple Line. At the same time, he seeks to cancel BRT because it has failed to garner ridership. ACT does not oppose re-arranging transit service to make the most cost-effective use of limited resources. However, this is not the case here. The case here is pure and simple – cutting service for the sake of cutting service.

The editor regrets not being able to report on "A Taste of the Purple Line" – an ACT fundraising activity – which occurred at the time of publication.

Pedestrian Safety in Langley Park – University Bl. Corridor

Quon Kwan

Casa de Maryland unveiled a study of pedestrian safety in the Langley Park – University Boulevard corridor. Present at the press conference hosted by Casa de Maryland were ACT activists Gideon Kantor and Don Barclay along with Montgomery County Executive Doug Duncan and Prince George's County Executive Jack Johnson. ACT is concerned about pedestrian safety because all transit riders have to be pedestrians before they begin and after they end their journey on transit.

The main conclusions of the study are as follows: education and enforcement are merely palliatives. They cannot solve the hazards posed to pedestrians. The only solution is to apply the appropriate engineering principles to re-design the corridor so that pedestrians can move about safely and conveniently. Taking into account pedestrian safety requires a fundamental paradigm shift in the mindset of road designers. Road designers are basically traffic engineers who design roads for cars – not pedestrians.

Rail Transit Beats Expectations

Maryland Public Interest Research Group

Maryland Public Interest Research Group (MaryPIRG) is a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan public interest advocacy organization. Its foundation conducted a study of rail-based public transit systems in nine U.S. cities and found (1) ridership surpassed expectations in nearly every case, (2) rail systems have boosted redevelopment around transit stations, and (3) people traveling via rail did not simply switch from buses when rail became available. It suggests Baltimore could reap many benefits from expanding its rail system.

"Rail is clearly the way to go, judging from the experiences of cities that have gone before us," said Brad Heavner, executive director of the MaryPIRG Foundation. *"People are riding rail in numbers beyond expectations, and this has led to revitalization of urban neighborhoods."*

The new report, *Rail Transit Works: Light Rail Success Stories from Across the Country*, which analyzes the popularity of transit systems in six states and Washington, D.C. found a number of transportation needs are met predominantly by transit. For example, 70% of trips to MCI Center in Washington, D.C. are via transit.

The study comes as Maryland Secretary of Transportation Robert Flanagan stated that heavy rail will not be considered for Baltimore. A wide array of organizations and decision makers are urging the Secretary to reconsider. *"This report shows what more and more people around the country are discovering—that high quality transit systems make for more transportation choices and more attractive communities,"* said Baltimore Regional Partnership Executive Director Dan Pontious. *"It also shows why state*

Transportation Secretary Robert Flanagan's decision not to explore heavy rail for Baltimore's new Red Line is so short-sighted."

"We should learn our lessons from the experiences of other cities," said Brent Flickinger of the Citizens Planning and Housing Association. *"When the Metro opened on Sunday here, ridership was more than twice the projections. Though the initial construction costs are higher than adding buses, in the long run, rail attracts more riders and is cheaper to operate, is faster and more reliable, and does not contribute to air pollution."*

The study found property values typically higher near transit stations, drawing redevelopment and increasing the tax base. Residential property close to rail stations in Washington, D.C. is worth \$6 to \$8 per sq. ft. more than comparable properties farther away.

Baltimore holds great potential for transit-oriented development, according to the report. Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) forecasts an overall increase in property values around transit stations of as much as \$1.2 billion from full realization of the Baltimore Regional Rail Plan.

"We have seen time and again that people prefer rail over buses," Heavner added. *"If we want to revitalize the areas around transit stations into vibrant communities, we have to build a transit system . . . attractive to people."*

The MaryPIRG Foundation called on the state to expand transit in Baltimore in three ways:

1. Prioritize construction of a Baltimore rail system among federally-funded transportation projects. The MTA should be granted funding for an accelerated schedule for planning and construction of the Red and Green Lines of the proposed regional rail plan.

2. Study both light and heavy rail along with increased bus service for the transit system expansion. Although rail is more expensive, it is likely to result in more redevelopment and thus a higher tax base for the city and greater financial returns in the long run.
3. Provide opportunities for transportation planners to work side by side with land use planners. Transit-oriented development should be an integral part of the rail plan.

Are There Advantages to Monorail Over Light Rail?

Quon Kwan

In response to a reader request, the following article was composed to compare the features of monorail and light rail. Light rail is the most appropriate mode of transit for the Purple Line. Monorail is now used in Japan, Germany, Australia, Newark International Airport, Seattle (downtown to Pacific Center), Disneyland and Disney World, and Las Vegas, NV.

There are two main types of monorail technologies: (1) suspended from a single horizontal beam and (2) straddle over a single horizontal beam (analogous to a rider on a horse). Because the beam is a single horizontal beam, it is called a monorail. The technology most representative of monorail is the Bombardier M-VI, as deployed in the Las Vegas, NV Resort Corridor Project. The M-VI is a straddle over a beam. The horizontal beam serves as both the support and guidance mechanism for the train. The horizontal beam is supported by vertical columns at a height of 16 – 22 ft. to allow street traffic to pass below.

The train consists of several rail cars that are coupled together. In the M-VI, the monorail cars (analogous to the horseback rider) straddle over the beam (analogous to

the horse). The wheels on the monorail cars are rubber-tired instead of steel-wheeled, as on light or heavy rail. The rubber tires are both vertically rotating and riding along the top of the support beam (to allow for support of the vehicle) and horizontally rotating and riding along the two sides of the support beam (to allow for guiding along the side of the support beam).

The rubber-tires used for monorail are much smaller in width and diameter than those on buses. Given the small space for a suspension system and small diameter for the tires, there is not much tolerance for bumpiness, and ride quality (comparable to that experienced on airport people movers) is generally worse for monorail than light rail. These features also mean that monorail has a slower acceleration rate and a lower top speed than light rail, resulting in longer trip times for monorail than light rail.

In terms of noise, on an elevated structure without a sound barrier, monorail emits 69-71 decibels (dBA) of noise at 30 mph compared to 73–75 dBA for light rail with the same conditions. [heavy traffic is 75 dBA, and jet aircraft is 133 dBA.] While monorail is less noisy than light rail the difference is barely perceptible.

The only part of the monorail car above the support beam is the passenger compartment. Equipment (i.e., motors and brakes) needed to run the car are mounted below the passenger compartment and to the sides of the beam presenting a minimum visual profile. Monorail cars receive electric power via collector shoes sliding on contact rails mounted on the beam (as opposed to an overhead wire for light rail).

The beams (without the rail cars on them) are 26 inches wide and present a minimum horizontal profile. However, adding a continuous walkway situated between the two beams (one for each direction of travel) as required by National Fire Protection Association Code 130, makes the complete

guideway for a monorail system about the same the width of a light rail system.

For turning on curves, the wheel spacing on monorail cars must be shorter than that on light rail cars. Because the vertical wheels intrude above the floor level, the passenger compartment of monorail cars is interrupted. The frequent interruptions result in an inefficient design. In the MVI, these interruptions occur about every 26 ft. compared to about 90 ft. for light rail cars. At this spacing on the monorail, the curve radius is limited to 100 - 120 ft. while a light rail curve radius can be as tight as 75 ft. Thus, light rail requires less right-of-way than monorail. Additionally, the effective passenger compartment area per length of the monorail is much less than for light rail cars, e.g., the M-VI has 4.3 sq. ft. of passenger compartment per ft. of train length vis-à-vis 5.9 sq. ft. for light rail.

What do these features mean? There is relatively less space (thus, comfort for a passenger) and less passengers can be carried on monorail than on light rail for trains of the same length running at the same headways. To get the same throughput (number of passengers moved per hour per direction) on monorail as for light rail, monorail stations have to be longer than those for light rail and more monorail cars have to be bought than for light rail. For example, a study for Orange County, CA, found that monorail stations had to be 50% longer than light rail stations and a fleet of only 24 rail cars would be required for light rail while a fleet of 104 would be required for monorail to serve the proposed Centerline transit route.

The study for Orange County, CA also concluded the Centerline project could be build at a cost of \$84 million per mile for light rail compared to a cost of \$135 million for monorail. Thus, overall, monorail technology is less cost-efficient than light rail technology, whether on a per-passenger or per-mile basis.

In addition, there is no access between adjacent passenger compartments on monorail cars, unlike light rail cars. This means that passengers cannot distribute themselves evenly to avoid crowding on monorail cars, and moreover, in an emergency, passengers can only be evacuated from each individual compartment of monorail cars rather than through the cars.

Another major difference between monorail and light rail is switching. Switching is required for reversing directions at the end of a line, diverging routes, and for bypassing a blockage. While switching is easily accomplished in a matter of a few seconds with railroad track for light rail, it is cumbersome for monorail. For monorail, switching is executed by mechanically moving a length of an entire massive horizontal support beam, requiring much heavier duty motors and taking as long as 8 - 10 sec. The total cost of the switches for monorail in the Centerline study in Orange County, CA is equal to half of the cost of the entire track work for light rail. Thus, light rail was chosen over monorail in Orange County.

Monorail must operate on an exclusive right-of-way, unlike light rail, because of the exposed high voltage contacts and clearance for the horizontal support beam. Monorail may never be street-running and must be grade separated, unlike light rail. Construction of grade-separated structures tends to be more costly than those at-grade. This cost difference between monorail and light rail is especially magnified in storage yards and maintenance facilities, which have to be accessible by service roads.

The last consideration is procurement approaches unique to monorail technology. Unlike railroad technology, there are no standards for monorail designs, and each of the various suppliers has designs that are incompatible with others. Subsequent purchase of replacement parts and new vehicles are limited to the initial supplier and the proprietary technology selected.

Thank You Volunteers

Cindy Snow

Our volunteers helped with tables at Taste of Takoma, the Takoma Park Jazz Festival, and the MTA Scoping Sessions. We had volunteers sign neighborhood letters as well as stuff and distribute the letters door-to-door. Two ACT members put together a petition drive against the Jones Bridge Rd. Alignment. Volunteers also helped with Metro leafleting and of course, with organizing our fundraiser, "A Taste of the Purple Line". Thank you for all your help.

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Editorial Remarks

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