



ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 19, Number 1, January 2005

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.

Please sign in at the Security Desk in the lobby when attending meetings.

Jan. 11: John Neff, American Public Transportation Association (APTA)
"Briefing on Upcoming Legislation and A Look at Light Rail in the US"

Feb. 8: Greg Gagarin, ACT Member -
"Metrorail Equipment and Recent Accidents"

March 8: Rich Kuzmyak, Baltimore Metro -
"Linking Land Use and Travel Behavior: Findings from Analyses in the Washington and Baltimore Regions"

- Panel Studies WMATA Funding (p. 4)
- ICC Study Two-Faced on Transit Among Other Issues (p. 5)
- Flaws in Travel Demand Model Favor More Roads (p. 6)

ACT Resolution On Transit North Of Shady Grove

Ben Ross

At the October ACT membership meeting the following resolution was passed in support of transit north of Shady Grove.

ACT favors the following course of action:

Feature Articles

- ACT Resolution On Transit North Of Shady Grove (p. 1)
- Purple Line Open Houses (p. 2)
- Maryland Pushes Ahead With Toll Lanes While Real Solutions Languish (p. 3)
- Ground Breaking for Anacostia Light Rail (p. 3)

1. Proceed immediately with the final EIS and engineering to build a rail line from Shady Grove through King Farm and Washingtonian Center to at least Kentlands Boulevard. Consider the possibility that this line would be opened to Kentlands served by smaller streetcar-style vehicles, but the track(s) would be built to light rail standards to make future expansion possible. The segment from Shady Grove to Kentlands may have a better cost-effectiveness rating from FTA and thus should be evaluated in order to have a more competitive project in the Federal funding process.

It's Time To Renew Your Membership

You can renew or 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

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.

2. Initiate a study of a fast, direct rail connection from Shady Grove to Germantown, Clarksburg, Urbana, and possibly Frederick. A variety of options for alignment, mode, and integration with the Kentlands line must be considered.
3. While the future rail connection is under study, increase express bus service to Shady Grove from Germantown and Clarksburg by shortening rush-hour headways and adding mid-day and evening service.

ACT plans to follow up this resolution with a campaign to build public support.

Purple Line Open Houses

Harry Sanders

The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) held five open houses on the Bi-County Transitway (Inner Purple Line) in the first two weeks of November. The purpose of these open houses was to finalize the routes and alignments for the Draft Environmental Impact Study. MTA will consider public comments as it makes its final recommendations for "Alternatives Retained for Detailed Study" (ARDS). Comments can be made to the state at the project web site at www.bi-countytransitway.com

Following community association meetings, Silver Spring residents generated plenty of questions in response to Montgomery County's Planning Board's decision to recommend continued study of two separate alignments (Wayne and Sligo Avenues) between the downtown Silver Spring Transit Center and University Boulevard. The Planning Board also recommended examining tunneling, especially under Sligo Avenue. ACT and the

CHECK IT OUT

**The Coalition to Build the Inner
 Purple Line (CBIPL)**

New Website:

www.purplelinenow.org

Coalition to Build Inner Purple Line (www.purplelinenow.org) will continue to work with neighborhoods and planners to try to find the best route for this project through the eastern Silver Spring neighborhoods.

The environmental impact study of the Purple Line will take at least 18 months and be completed, perhaps, by the spring of 2007. This is a "terrapin" pace compared to the fast-tracked ICC study [see separate article in this issue]. The ongoing study of widening the Beltway has also moved ahead of the Purple Line; it just moved into the draft environmental impact study without a public announcement following only two open houses earlier this year. The faster speed of the ICC and Beltway studies speaks volumes about the priorities of Governor Ehrlich and Maryland DOT.

Maryland Pushes Ahead With Toll Lanes While Real Solutions Languish

ACT Press Release

The Maryland Department of Transportation has quietly taken another step toward adding toll lanes to the Beltway, while it continues to let real transportation solutions languish.

The State Highway Administration (SHA) revealed its formal decision to begin detailed planning of a 10-lane Beltway in a November 30th letter to the Montgomery County Council. No public announcement was made. All new lanes will have tolls, and SHA is also considering charging tolls on two existing lanes.

Action Committee for Transit President Ben Ross pointed out several obvious flaws in the State's plan. Commuters would have to cross the backed-up traffic on 3 free lanes to reach the faster-moving toll

lanes. Even more traffic would be dumped on the overcrowded roads that lead to the Beltway. And the cost of the project would be astronomical.

Meanwhile, the State has put the real solution for Beltway commuters, the Purple Line, into a deep freeze. This light rail Metro line would run from New Carrollton to Bethesda, bypassing the most congested section of the Beltway. Governor Robert Ehrlich put the Purple Line on hold because the route crosses Columbia Country Club, where some of his campaign contributors play golf. Instead, the State is looking at a plan to run more buses on East-West Highway, Jones Bridge Road, and other local streets.

Ground Breaking for Anacostia Light Rail

Quon Kwan

The District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT), in cooperation with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, broke ground on Saturday, November 13, 2004 at 10:00 AM across from the Anacostia Metrorail station, at Howard Road and Firth Sterling St., S.E. for a new light rail line.

The new light rail line will consist of six stations along 2.7 miles of track. It is a demonstration project to serve the Anacostia area in Southeast, Washington, D.C. Known as the Anacostia Light Rail Demonstration project, the new line will use existing CSX right-of-way, extending along the east side of the Anacostia River between Bolling Air Force Base and Pennsylvania Avenue, near the John Phillip Sousa Memorial Bridge.

The project includes the construction of six stops, a maintenance facility, two power substations and three light-rail vehicles. Service will begin in fall 2006.

PANEL STUDIES WMATA FUNDING

Ben Ross

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments established a panel to recommend alternative sources of funding to meet looming shortfalls faced by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). Among the nation's transit systems, Metro is the largest without a dedicated source of revenue.

In mid-December, the panel posted a draft report on the web. The report recommended adoption of a regional sales tax or payroll tax. ACT submitted detailed comments, which follow in a shortened version:

ACT believes that the local jurisdictions can and must do more to support Metro than the panel assumes. The financial projections in the draft report assume that the local jurisdictions' real per capita contribution to WMATA's operating budget increases by only 1% per year in 2007 and 2008, and then declines in 2009 and 2010. The panel also assumes that, aside from existing commitments, real per capita local contributions to the capital budget will decrease.

Even with these miserly assumptions, the budget gap remains quite modest through the next six years, rising to \$120 million in 2010. Filling this gap requires some \$40 million from each of the three jurisdictions. Certainly, this amount can be easily accommodated in a Maryland Transportation Trust Fund whose stewards assure us that it has the capacity to spend \$2 billion on a single highway. We believe that it can be handled under current arrangements by the other jurisdictions as well.

The projected needs for capital funding rise sharply in 2011 and thereafter. In Maryland, the state has developed plans to begin construction of a new rail line, the Baltimore Red Line, in the 2011 time frame.

ACT strongly supports this project, but there must be an equal commitment to transit in the Washington area. Transit funding plans in Maryland must take into consideration the Baltimore Red Line and concomitant increases in Washington-area transit funding.

The most important finding in the entire report is that by 2015, the existing rail network will be operating at 90% of its ultimate capacity. This implies a need to begin planning new rail lines through downtown DC to come into service starting in 2015 or shortly thereafter. Construction of these expensive expansions would need to begin around 2011. The panel did not address funding for system expansions. We believe the public would be far more willing to pay for a comprehensive Metro expansion package that included new lines than an incremental program that leaves the system overcrowded almost as soon as it is finished.

Based on these considerations, we recommend the following:

1. The budget shortfalls identified by the panel through 2010 should be fully funded by increasing subsidies from the three jurisdictions. Construction of the Purple Line and Dulles Rail projects would begin under the current system where individual jurisdictions take the lead in funding major system expansions.
 2. A new panel should be established to make recommendations for 2011 and beyond. This panel should design a program of capacity expansion that will truly meet the region's needs. It should provide new downtown core capacity, completion of the Purple Line and Dulles Rail, and additional DC light rail and suburban radial and circumferential rail projects. A funding plan should be developed for this entire program. The panel's membership should be representative of transit riders, labor, and environmentalists along with the business groups that were represented on the Metro Funding Panel.
-

ICC Study Two-Faced on Transit Among Other Issues

Quon Kwan

The Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) on November 22, 2004 released the draft environmental impact statement ("ICC Study") on the InterCounty Connector (ICC) for public review and comment. The ICC is an 18-20 mile, east-west, access-controlled, grade-separated, divided toll highway to connect I-370 and US Route 1.

One purpose and need for the ICC, as alleged by the SHA, is to relieve congestion on the east-west road network. However, this is questionable because of fundamental flaws in the model used to forecast travel demand. The model forecasts too many trips, and thus, calls for more highway capacity than what is really needed [see separate article in this issue, "Flaws in Travel Demand Model Favor More Roads."

The inflated forecasts also extend to transit trips on the ICC. For example, the model forecasts 9,100 – 11,500 daily trips on circumferential, suburb-to-suburb, intercounty transit service on the ICC about 25 years after groundbreaking. One wonders how these numbers compare to the number of trips taken on the Metrobus Smartmover route 14 on the Beltway between Tyson's Corner and Montgomery County. The highest total number of daily transit trips on this circumferential, suburb-to-suburb, intercounty service numbered 600. Consider the following: this trip count occurred about 30 years after the Beltway was built, this count was so low that Metrobus route 14 was cancelled, and the Beltway carries one more lane in each direction than the ICC. Does anyone think that the forecasts of more transit trips on the ICC than on the Beltway are credible?

Another purpose and need cited by SHA is to provide a high-speed link between Montgomery County and Prince George's County so that drivers have an efficient alternative to the Beltway to reach BWI Airport. However, this is dubious because the ICC Study admits that only 25% of the travelers would come from outside the ICC Study Area and the 1997 Study for the ICC showed very few travelers (5%) would go from end to end on the ICC.

The ICC Study also cites safety as a purpose and need for the ICC. While it is true that highways, like the ICC, are generally safer than local surface streets, highways have their own problems: they are conducive to unsafe speeding and aggressive driving ("road rage"). If the SHA were serious about safety, it would realize that riding transit is a much safer travel mode than driving cars. The lack of an ICC was blamed for the fatalities in the accident of a school bus with a trailer on Muncaster Mill Road and in the accident that killed the husband of the Assistant Secretary for Policy in the Maryland Department of Transportation [who is using her position to campaign for the ICC]. Yet, the true causes of these fatalities were improper coupling in the former and improper load securement in the latter. No ICC can ever replace the need for commercial vehicle safety enforcement and inspection.

The ICC Study cites homeland security as another purpose and need for the ICC. The ICC would facilitate emergency evacuation and response. However, this is a specious argument. If terrorists were to target an attack, they would most likely target the downtown central business district where population is densest. Evacuation outbound and emergency response inbound are best facilitated by radial highways. On the other hand, the ICC is a circumferential highway, and thus, would not help.

There are a few ironic highlights in the ICC Study. At one point it states that the ICC is needed by buses to avoid congestion on surface streets and to feed the Metrorail stations. However, elsewhere in the ICC Study, the transit alternative is rejected because it asserts there is very low ridership on suburb-to-suburb service. If one wonders whether the ICC Study is two-faced on transit, then one should also wonder how transit service that runs on the ICC will feed Metrorail stations. The fact is that most transit riders generally do not live and work alongside an expressway but live and work in neighborhoods. Transit needs to circulate through both residential and business neighborhoods in order to feed Metrorail stations.

As noted before, SHA cites increasing safety as a purpose and need for the ICC. Yet, the ICC Study proposes bus stops for express transit service at interchanges of the ICC with local arterial roads. Such interchanges make for very unsafe bus stops in that they expose passengers and pedestrians to potential conflict with high-speed vehicles coming and going on entrance and exit ramps. It makes one wonder whether the ICC Study is two-faced about safety as well as about transit.

ACT readers should be concerned about the ICC for many reasons. There are serious questions about its need, its reduction of congestion, and its environment impact. Of greatest concern is the astronomical cost of \$2.1 billion. Because all other transportation projects must compete for limited capital dollars, the ICC will vastly reduce chances that transit projects, such as the Inner Purple Line or the Corridor Cities Transitway, and *Metro Matters* will be adequately funded. Be aware that Maryland Governor Ehrlich has made the ICC his #1 transportation priority – rather than transit.

ACT Vice President for Legislative Affairs, Jim Clarke, will testify against the ICC at one of the scheduled public hearings. ACT members are seriously encouraged to write comments [using any of the materials in this newsletter] opposing the ICC to:

Mr. Wesley Mitchell
Project Planning Division, Mail Stop C-301
Maryland State Highway Administration
707 North Calvert St.
Baltimore, MD 21202

Flaws in Travel Demand Model Favor More Roads

Quon Kwan

The Transportation Research Board (TRB), an arm of the prestigious National Academy of Sciences, recently critiqued the model used for forecasting travel demand in the metropolitan area. The panel of experts convened by the TRB to conduct the critique submitted reports in September 2003 & May 2004.

The travel demand model is important because it is used for long-term transportation planning and air quality conformity. It is critical that the model be sound because it is a tool for determining public policy, investing public funds in transportation [transit and highways] projects, and assuring public health [air quality].

The TRB raised the following major issues in the travel demand model [*implications of the findings are noted in italics*]:

1. The base-year forecasts made by the model does not match observed traffic counts and transit ridership.

The implication is that the model is not as accurate as it should be in forecasting travel demand; the more inaccurate a model, the less useful it is. In particular, the model estimates too many highway trips, and on average, these highway trips are too short. When too many highway trips are forecasted, more highways are called for than actually necessary.

2. The model uses too many “fudge factors” to bridge the gap between forecast and observed base-year data. An example is the model’s adding of a 7-minute time penalty on trips from Montgomery County residences to Prince George’s County workplaces even if the two locations are 1 mile apart.

Using “fudge factors” in trip generation, trip distribution, and mode choice to make the travel demand forecasts match observed counts undermines the fundamental behavior logic of the model. It forces the future model scenarios to be similar to that of the base year. By “hardwiring” adjustments to fit a set of numbers corresponding to base-year conditions, it is likely that the model will fail to predict future travel.

3. The model fails to provide proper feedback of highway and transit trips.

Feedback works by feeding the effects of congestion back into the earlier steps of the model to take into account the fact that longer travel times [due to congestion] lead to decisions to change travel mode [e.g., from auto to transit], to defer travel to non-rush hours or an alternate route, or to avoid travel altogether. Thus, failure to incorporate feedback results in overestimates of congestion and hence, in the

unnecessary need for more road capacity. The Federal government metropolitan planning organization rules [40 CFR 93.122] require feedback.

4. The model uses aggregate 24-hour daily traffic volumes instead of volumes sorted by peak and non-peak periods.

The failure to sort daily traffic volumes by peak and non-peak periods produces large errors in estimating congestion, travel time delay, and especially emissions. The input for emissions estimation requires hourly volumes by time of day. When aggregate 24-hour daily traffic volumes are used instead of the period-specific traffic volumes, the model underestimates AM peak inbound transit ridership (compared to actual ridership), underestimates AM peak traffic (compared to actual traffic counts), and likewise overestimates PM peak traffic.

In addition to these issues, the TRB staff itself have found errors of 20% in base year employment estimates. These errors can significantly skew the pattern of trip origins and destinations generated by the travel demand model. Home to workplace commuter trips comprise the majority of trips.

Without addressing the flaws in the travel demand model, we cannot be confident that the planning efforts underlying billions of dollars of public investment are valid, or whether air quality standards crucial to public health will be achieved. Unfortunately, despite the flaws in the model, the results of the model’s travel demand forecasts are being used to support the need for the ICC.

A more detailed explanation can be found in *A Citizen Guide to Critiques of the Metropolitan Washington Area Travel Model: What Does it All Mean?* released on June 15, 2004 by the Smart Mobility, Inc. [electronic copy available from your Transit Times editor].

Kudos To Our Great Volunteers

Cindy Snow

Thank you to all those members who wrote to the ombudsman of the Washington Post to complain about the unbalanced coverage of the Columbia County Club in regard to the Inner Purple Line. We definitely got their attention.

As always, our volunteers were out in force in support of the Purple Line and transit. Several members attended the opening of the Blue Line Metro extension at the new Morgan Blvd. and Largo stations. They displayed the ACT banner and passed out flyers to a positive response. Thank you to all those who helped out by staffing the ACT tables at the many Purple Line Open Houses as well as ACT tables at several other transit meetings. And to those volunteers who helped display the ACT banner at events attended by Governor Ehrlich, to keep the issue in the forefront. And to the volunteers who helped with the fall round of stuffing and delivering of neighborhood letters.

Editorial Remarks

Your Transit Times editor is Quon Kwan. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is March 13. Send your materials to him at: siufung@erols.com or call him at: (h) 301-460-7454.

ACT Officers Nominated for 2005:

President: Ben Ross
 V. Pres. (Legislative Affairs): Jim Clarke
 V. Pres. (Land Use & Pedestrian Matters):
 Richard Hoye
 Vice President: Jessica Mitchell
 Secretary: Rodolfo Perez
 Treasurer: John Carroll
 Board Member (At Large): John Fay
 Board Member (At Large): Harry Sanders

Please come prepared to vote on the nominations at the January meeting.

Staff Member: Cindy Snow
cindy@innerpurpleline.org

FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED

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

PRSR STD
 U.S. POSTAGE
 PAID
 SILVER SPRING, MD
 PERMIT # 1931