

ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 19, Number 2, April 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 (near the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Spring Street).

The Silver Spring Center is a ten minute walk north of the Silver Spring Metro Station; it is a two-block walk from the nearest Ride-On #5 stop; and, the Metrobus "Q" and "Y" routes pass in front of the Center.

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

April 12: Philip McLaughlan, Montgomery County DPWT - "Recent Changes in Bus Service".

May 10: Mike Madden, Maryland Transit Administration – Purple Line in East Silver Spring.

June 14: TBD

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- Washington Post Poll Shows Support For Transit (p. 4)
- A Short History of Light Rail (p. 4)
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Silver Spring Community Meeting Held On New Purple Line Option

Harry Sanders

On March 10th Mike Madden of the Maryland Mass Transit Administration (MTA) returned to Silver Spring to present a project update on the Purple Line (Bi-County Transitway) study. The audience was the Seven Oaks-Evanswood Civic Association, and the update was better received than the one last year. The graphics were much better, and consultant Dave Esch (Zimmer Gunsul Franca) gave an excellent "big picture" overview. Webb Smedley and Harry Sanders also spoke about the vision of the Purple Line.

Feature Articles

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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

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.

The meeting was the first community presentation of a new option for the Purple Line east of the Silver Spring Metro. The new Thayer Avenue option was presented as cut-and-cover undergrounding behind single-family homes and at grade on a wider stretch of Thayer Avenue near the Sligo Parkway. The cut-and-cover section would be in the far rear of 200' foot lots along Silver Spring Avenue or possibly Thayer Avenue. There is already a sewer pipe and property easement in this area. Harry Sanders explained that he proposed that the MTA look at this option because it allowed faster transit trips while

reducing potential impacts. Several members of the Seven Oaks Civic Oaks citizens association expressed a preference for this option over the Wayne Avenue option.

On March 15th MTA will make a similar presentation to the Save Our Sligo Avenue (SOSA) Citizens Group which was organized to oppose the Sligo Avenue alignment. Also, MTA reports that community workgroups will be set up later this year as the Environmental Impact Study moves forward with detailed analysis of options that MTA is carrying forward.

Columbia Country Club Aimed To Block Purple Line

ACT Press Release

The Action Committee for Transit challenged Columbia Country Club's claim on January 16, 2005 in the Washington Post that its campaign fundraisers for Governor Ehrlich and County Executive Doug Duncan "had nothing to do with" its efforts to block the Purple Line. "*Campaign finance records show just the opposite,*" ACT president Ben Ross said this morning.

Edward Finn and Anthony Czajkowski each contributed \$100 to the Duncan campaign on November 16, 1999, the date of the Country Club's fundraiser for Duncan. Czajkowski and Finn were then the co-chairs of the anti-Purple Line "Committee to Save the Trail." Both live alongside the Purple Line right of way, and both have said repeatedly that they are not members of the Country Club.

Duncan's 1994 and 1998 campaigns also received contributions from a Political Action Committee called SMARTPAC, which raised funds from many of the same individuals who gave to the November 1999 fundraiser and got a \$1500 donation from the Country Club itself in the 1990 election cycle. SMARTPAC's sole purpose was to oppose light rail between Bethesda and Silver Spring.

ACT challenged the Country Club to make its membership list available to the media so that all of its campaign contributions can be identified. *"Every commuter sitting in a traffic jam on the Beltway needs to know exactly what Columbia Country Club's influence is,"* Ross said.

Clues Signal Changes in Bus Schedule

Tom Fuchs

Several ACT members have noted transit operators are not providing enough information about changes in service and certainly not telling customers about new service. First were the Ride-On changes at the beginning of the year when management failed to have new schedules printed or posted for several weeks.

Now it is the wording of the Metrobus Service Changes Brochure, stating, *"Schedules will change on the following routes to reflect traffic conditions and improve schedule reliability."* That certainly reflects the changes to the Georgia Avenue buses during the week. However, the Saturday changes involve much more than that.

Saturday service on the F4 is included in the same section of the brochure. Nowhere does it mention that a new run has been added that leaves Silver Spring at 6:50 AM.

The first clue to changes regarding bus service on Veirs Mill Road is that the web edition of the Q2 schedule has increased from 11 pages to 12 pages. There is no change in the weekend service, as the brochure suggests. The weekday service involves more than just realigning the schedule. Northbound - add three runs in the AM peak. Southbound - add 1 run in the AM peak from the Rockville station and add 1 run in the PM peak. (The service between 8 and 9 PM is also increased by 1 run.) The Veirs Mill Road schedules, like those on Georgia

Avenue, have significantly changed their departure times, too.

Metrobus has done a very good job of putting added service where it's most needed. But the public needs to know. It's too bad that transit operators are relying on "word of mouth" to market their new service.

ACT Letter on WMATA Surplus Revenues

Ben Ross

We were very pleased to see the WMATA press release announcing that passenger revenues this year are running \$9.5 above budget.

When passenger revenues are above projections, the money should be used to fund additional service (or possibly fare reductions). This is especially true in the current situation where WMATA is operating on a constrained budget that is insufficient to make its maximum possible contribution to solving the region's transportation needs.

In particular, \$3 million should be used to restore the "bus service corrections" item in the Metrobus operating budget. This item formerly provided for bus service needs that arise in the course of the year — either a bus becomes overcrowded, or an extra bus is needed on a route because traffic congestion makes it necessary to lengthen the scheduled running time. The budget item was discontinued about two years ago to save money.

Using extra fare revenue to add service is part of running Metro in a businesslike way. If a business sells more widgets than it expected, it doesn't put all the revenue in the bank. It uses part of the money to make more widgets and replenish its inventory. When WMATA revenues are above forecast, it means that more people are riding, and service should be added to accommodate them.

Washington Post Poll Shows Support For Transit

Ben Ross

A Washington Post telephone poll taken January 27-31 showed a strong preference for transit as the best solution for transportation problems. The poll surveyed 1003 adults living in the Washington region.

While the Post in its article tried to spin the poll as showing that Americans remain wedded to their cars, the actual results show just the opposite. Persons who are not regular Metro riders were asked "Which of these is the biggest reason why you, personally, do not ride Metro more often?" A total of 47% answered either that they live or work too far from a Metro station or that Metro doesn't go where they want to go. Only 17% said they preferred driving.

52% of poll respondents said that building or expanding public transit is very effective in easing traffic congestion, compared to 44% who said that building new roads is very effective. New funding to expand Metro's budget, even if it meant raising taxes, was favored by 58% to 36%. But raising gasoline taxes for both roads and transit was narrowly opposed by 49% to 48%.

These strongly pro-transit results were obtained even though transit riders - especially bus riders - were underrepresented in the poll. Among the people who answered the poll, the number who ride a bus to work was less than one-third the number who take Metrorail. Ridership figures (which are quite accurate because they are based on fare collection) show that the number of daily bus commuters in the Washington area is actually more than half of the number of Metrorail commuters. One reason that bus commuters were undercounted is that questions were asked only in English.

Did you check out the new revised ACT Brochure that came with your dues renewal notice? The inside contains an updated transit map presenting "*An Achievable Vision for Montgomery County*".

* * * * *

ACT wishes to thank Bethesda artist Barbara Siegel, who generously contributed the drawing on the front cover of our new brochure. If you want to see more of Barbara Siegel's art, go to www.barbsiegel.com. And if you would like a few copies of the brochure to give to friends, contact Cindy Snow at 240-308-1209.

A Short History of Light Rail

Excerpt from *TR News* No. 235

In the 1950s, the recent past would have offered little hope for a new type of rail transit. Yet long after the triumph of the automobile and the disappearance of the streetcar, an anti-freeway, pro-rail movement started up, spurred by the political activism of the 1960s.

The visionaries responsible for the renaissance included Steward Taylor, a transportation consultant in Pennsylvania who read *Modern Tramways*, a magazine that featured articles about the light rail movement in Germany and other Northern European countries. Taylor visited Germany, met with transit experts, then returned and wrote an article that appeared in a 1970 issue of *Traffic Quarterly*.

He cast his story in the contexts of the anti-freeway movement, the widely perceived horrors of sprawl, and the need for an intermediate form of transit between automobiles and heavy rail that would be less expensive to build than regional rapid transit lines. Taylor advocated the "rapid tramway," which came to be called light rail.

In 1978, Edmonton, Alberta, became the first city in North America to implement modern light rail. Contributing to the breakthrough were the city's healthy, municipally owned transit system, an unpopular freeway plan that would have obliterated several city parks, and the energy crisis of 1973, which enabled Alberta to command high prices for its oil reserves and to commit substantial funds to the light rail system.

No prophet could have foretold the success of light rail in San Diego, however, according to Gregory L. Thompson (Associate Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at Florida State University). Unlike Edmonton, San Diego was large and decentralized, served by a massive freeway system. Car ownership was high, and the city's arterial system was well-developed.

But California State Senator James R. Mills of San Diego County was also a reader of *Modern Tramways*, and he also visited Germany. State Senator Mills convinced the San Diego planning agency to consider light rail. Since the launch in the summer of 1981, weekday boardings on the 47-mile system have reached 75,000.

Professor Thompson described the early proponents of light rail as visionaries who were "highly enthusiastic about their mission, public servants in the best sense of the word." None was motivated by personal financial gain.

This excerpt was taken out of "The Future That Never Was: Lessons from Visions of Transportation" by Christine Cosgrove and Phyllis Orrick in *TR News* No. 235, Nov.-Dec. 2004, pp. 6 – 7, reproduced here with explicit permission from and sincere thanks to the Transportation Research Board Publications Office, Assistant Editor David Altstadt.

The *TR News* article, in turn, was based on a panel discussion entitled "Yesterday's Tomorrows: Past Visions of America's Transportation Future," Session 499 of the Transportation Research Board 82nd Annual Meeting in Washington, DC on January 14, 2003.

Federal Transportation Policy Favors Roads Over Transit

Quon Kwan

The Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy of the Brookings Institution published *Highways and Transit: Leveling the Playing Field in Federal Transportation Policy*, the eighth report in its Transportation Reform Series.

The 19-page report, written by Edward Beimborn (University of Wisconsin) and Robert Puentes (Brookings Institution), points out that Federal policy is essentially an unfair competition between highways and transit. In spite of reforms, Federal rules remain stacked against transit, making it far easier to fund highway projects. This favoritism exists in spite of the fact that the 43,000-mile system of interstate highways [aka "the largest engineered structure in the world"] is essentially completed [In other words, no new highways are needed].

The authors note the significant difference in the transportation modal agencies. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) [originally Urban Mass Transportation Administration] was created on bureaucratic par with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). However, the FTA is about 1/10 the size of FHWA and is much less funded.

The authors point out that although the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1990 was passed to bring more parity between highways and transit, it did not succeed. While ISTEA set the Federal/state match ratio for most highway and transit projects at 80% Federal/20% state, the ratio for funding highways was retained at 90% Federal/10% state.

FTA recommends only transit projects with a maximum of 60% Federal share/ 40% state share. The Bush Administration proposed a 50% or less Federal match for transit projects. On the other hand, the

Federal match for highways continues at 80%–90% Federal. Clearly, these conditions skew decisions towards highways.

The authors found that, unlike for highways, new fixed guideway transit projects are subjected to intense scrutiny, multiple project criteria and justifications. Transit projects require detailed alternatives analysis and cost effectiveness in addition to an environmental impact statement. No such requirements are imposed on new highway investments: environmental impact statements are done after engineering starts; detailed alternatives and cost effectiveness are not analyzed at all for highways.

Transit “New Start” projects must be evaluated on their ability to serve low-income households, generate employment near transit stations, and support land use development. Such evaluation criteria are broad and reach well beyond the transportation system itself; they go beyond judging a transit project simply on the ability to reduce congestion. Seldom is there any attempt for analysis of highway projects to deal with impacts on low-income households, employment generation, and land use development.

The authors recommend that the land use development analysis required for transit projects be applied to highway projects. Also recommended are rigorous cost-effectiveness analyses for all highway projects. They urge removing the inequity in Federal match ratios between highways and transit.

Area Transit Websites:

Metro: www.wmata.com

MTA/MARC: www.mtmaryland.com

Ride-On : www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/dpwt/

Purple Line: www.innerpurpleline.org
www.purplelinenow.org

Distance Based Auto Insurance: A Tool For Our Times

Carl Henn

Distance Based Auto Insurance is an idea whose time has come. Also known as Per Mile Auto insurance, Mile Based Car insurance, Per Mile premiums, or Pay as you drive insurance, the plan proposes to convert a large fixed cost of auto ownership into a variable cost of automobile use. Large fixed costs and low marginal costs create an incentive to drive more. If insurance costs the same whether 10,000 miles are driven or 20,000, then that insurance costs half as much per mile if one drives the 20,000 miles. On the other hand, high variable costs provide a financial incentive to reduce total miles driven.

Currently most insurance policies provide a tiny reduction in rates for people who claim to drive fewer miles. Since they don't verify these claims, they don't provide more than a couple percentage points off premiums. Per Mile insurance offers a new paradigm. Instead of buying 6 months worth of insurance, you buy 10,000 miles worth. Under the current system, your insurance runs out in 6 months. Under the per mile system, you don't buy more insurance till you have driven 10,000 miles, whether that takes 6 months or 6 years.

Such a system requires a means to verify the number of miles a car is driven. This can be done through odometer checks, use of Global Positioning System (GPS) transponders or through other means specifically developed for the purpose.

Giving people the ability to save significantly on insurance costs by driving less would cause many people to choose to drive less. The Victoria Transport Policy Institute has estimated that if everyone had per mile auto insurance, vehicle miles driven would fall by around 10%. Per Mile would reduce traffic more in areas with a stronger transit alternative and less where there are few options other than driving.

For years per mile insurance was just an idea in waiting. Then in 2002, Texas passed a law authorizing this form of insurance. Embarrassed by the notion that Texas could now claim to be a more progressive state, Oregon passed its own version, titled Pay as you drive or PAYD, in 2003. Both these laws allow rather than require distance-based insurance. At least one company is now offering per mile insurance, though it is limited to cars that have GPS.

Requiring that insurance be charged by the mile would face stiff resistance from those who currently enjoy subsidy under the current system, as well as from those resistant to having their odometer checked. But merely allowing the option for people to purchase per mile insurance should be a much easier sell. Over time, the free choice model could result in substantial improvement.

Change has been slow in coming, but may have tremendous impact over time. Any car owner who drives significantly less than average is likely to pay less for insurance under a per mile system. When these drivers choose to move to distance based insurance,

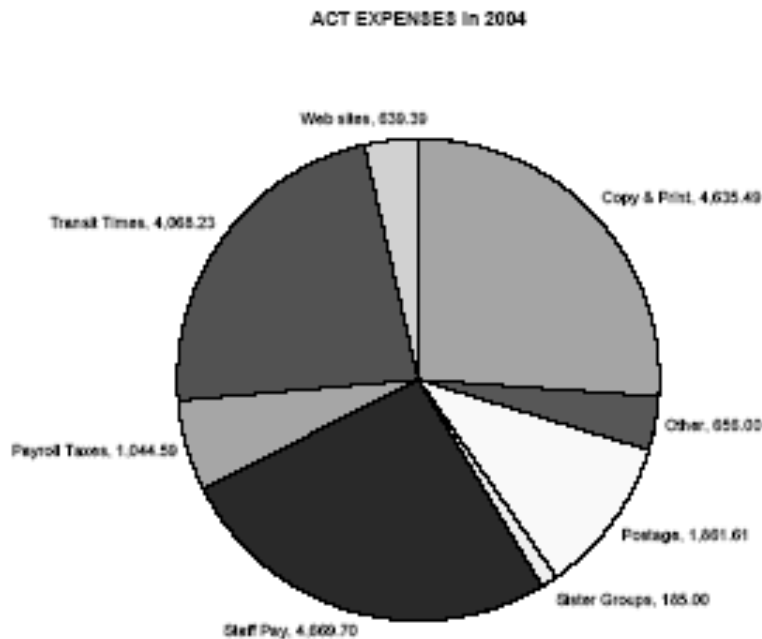
they will stop subsidizing the other drivers. When the remaining drivers experience a rate hike due to the loss of subsidy, some average distance drivers will switch to per mile and work to reduce the miles they drive. Eventually, those who drive less than average will switch to per mile and long distance drivers will experience higher rates whether they switch to per mile or not. Thus the public at large could experience a greater incentive to drive fewer miles even through a voluntary per mile insurance system.

(Cont. on Pg. 8)

ACT Finances in 2004

John Carroll, Treasurer

ACT started 2004 with \$7,675 and ended the year with \$7,940 in our account at BB&T Bank. In 2004 an income of \$18,025 came from dues (\$13,415), donations (\$4,601) and a small amount of interest (\$10). Our expenses were \$17,760. The pie chart shows ACT's distribution of expenses in 2004.



(Cont. from Pg. 7)

Per mile insurance is a more fair way to charge for insurance since risks match more closely to miles driven than to the passage of time. Higher rates for higher risk drivers and lower rates for safer drivers can be retained under a per mile system since the rate charged per mile can still vary based on driver risk factors.

Per Mile insurance isn't poised to breakthrough to the mainstream quite yet. It faces opposition from insurance companies who fear this system will reduce their profits, and from long distance drivers who enjoy subsidy under the current system.

But if we are serious about reducing oil consumption, pollution and traffic, per mile insurance is a powerful tool for progress.

[This article was reprinted with permission from the July 2004 issue of *Energy Security* published by the Institute for Analysis of Global Security]

Editorial Remarks

Your Transit Times editor is Quon Kwan. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is June 14. Send your materials to him at: siufung@erols.com or call him at: (h) 301-460-7454.

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