



ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 19, Number 3, July 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. For meeting updates check our website listed on pg. 2.

July 12: Walter Mergelberg or other representative of The Dr. Sauer Group, experts on modern tunneling techniques.

Aug 9: TBD

Sept 13: TBD



Photo: ACT member Shawn Rolland, Mt. Vernon Metro stop

Will Soon Be A Reality

Feature Articles

- Summary of ACT Meeting on Purple Line Study (p. 2)
- Rock Creek Coalition Opposes Beltway Widening (p. 3)
- Purple Line Poll at the Takoma Park Jazz Festival (p. 3)
- ACT Letter on Purple Line to Flanagan (p. 4)
- Commentary on Controversy over Alternative Fuel Buses (p. 4)
- Milestones in Dulles Metrorail Project (p. 6)
- Rally for AMTRAK (p. 6)
- Ehrlich Administration Backs "Train AND Trail" In Allegany County (p. 7)

Summary of ACT Meeting on Purple Line Study

Harry Sanders

On May 10, 2005, Mike Madden of the Maryland Mass Transit Administration (MTA) and consultant David Esch spoke at the ACT meeting about the progress on the Purple Line (Bi-County Transitway) study. The presentation was mostly the same as that given at the Seven Oaks-Evanswood Civic

Association (reported in the last issue of Transit Times), but there were three interesting new items, as follows:

First, Prince George's County government has requested that the first Purple Line segment be built within their jurisdiction. The study team replied that a different rail yard would be necessary to begin on the eastern side. As a result, the study team is now looking at yard locations in the College Park area near the CSX rail line and College Park Metro station.

Second, Madden mentioned that bored tunneling could be considered for any of the three East Silver Spring alignments (Sligo, Thayer, or Wayne Avenues) as the alignments undergo ridership and impact analysis. When asked if the study team had determined if there were favorable conditions for bored tunneling in East Silver Spring, Madden indicated geotechnical issues had yet to be considered. WMATA's earlier study required a tunnel to go deep under Sligo Creek. Even if the Thayer Avenue alignment is a bored tunnel, it would still have an advantage in that the alignment could rise to street level at east Thayer Avenue and then cross Sligo Creek on a bridge.

Third, Madden said written comments to the state are still in order despite the absence of public workshops at this time. He seemed to say that they hear a lot from the opponents and constructive comments would be useful.

Following the MTA presentation, ACT members in attendance passed the following resolution unanimously:

"One of the advantages of light rail technology is its flexibility. Light rail can be built in a wide range of environments with varying speeds and capacities, ranging from streetcar lines to systems that approach the characteristics of heavy rail.

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

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.

ACT believes that the Purple Line should be a light rail Metro line, at the high-capacity, high-speed end of the light rail spectrum. Where dedicated surface right-of-way is available, as in the segments between Bethesda and Silver Spring and between College Park and New Carrollton, these characteristics are consistent with at-grade construction. In East Silver Spring where there is no existing right-of-way, a variety of alignments including surface and shallow and deep underground construction should be evaluated with the objective of finding cost-effective means of obtaining the needed performance. In this study, alternatives that are too slow or have insufficient capacity (such as running on streets in mixed traffic) should be rejected even if they have lowest cost."

Rock Creek Coalition Opposes Beltway Widening

Ben Ross

The Rock Creek Coalition, a coalition of civic organizations opposed to widening the Beltway, has begun to reorganize in response to the State Highway Administration's plan to add two toll lanes, and convert two existing lanes to toll. (Between Rockville Pike and Greentree Road, four new lanes would be built under the state's plan.)

A meeting at Wyngate Elementary School in May was attended by more than 50 representatives of neighborhoods along the entire length of the Beltway in Montgomery County. State Senator Brian Frosh and Delegates Bill Bronrott, Ana Sol Gutierrez, and Susan Lee attended and emphasized their strong opposition to the state plan.

Purple Line Poll at the Takoma Park Jazz Festival

Harry Sanders

ACT sponsored a table on Saturday, June 11, 2005 at the Takoma Park Jazz Festival. The venue was a few blocks south of the proposed East Silver Spring rail alignments. ACT exhibited pictures of existing light rail lines and displayed its *Transit Vision* map along with the ACT brochure and handout maps. Thanks to ACT member John Carroll and League of Women Voters volunteers, Barbara Sanders and Elaine Apter, for helping out.

Attendance was a little less than expected, but more people were attracted by the offer to take a poll about the line – it seemed more popular than the photos, maps, or literature. There probably were about 40 people who stopped by; almost everyone was supportive, although a few people wanted to read our literature before expressing an opinion.

The first poll question was "*Do you believe the Purple Line should be converted to a bus line in order to avoid the cost of going underground in East Silver Spring?*" No one answered, "Yes;" 23 responded, "No, Purple Line should be rail," and 8 responded, "Don't care, just build it." The totals include 4 responses with both "No" and "Don't care."

The second poll question was "*Do you feel an additional Purple Line stop is needed, in the vicinity of Dale Drive and/or Fenton Street?*" Seventeen responded, "Yes," three responded, "No," and seven had no response.

The 27 poll responses were completed by residents primarily from Takoma Park and "downtown" Silver Spring.

ACT Letter on Purple Line to Flanagan

Ben Ross

On May 28, 2005, ACT President Ben Ross addressed a letter to Maryland Secretary of Transportation, Robert Flanagan, with copies to Montgomery County Executive Doug Duncan, Council President Tom Perez, and others.

We applaud the efforts of the MTA staff in reaching out to obtain community input about the Bi-County Transitway Study. The MTA's presentation about alignment options between Silver Spring Metro and University Boulevard has been heard with interest by many community groups, including our membership meeting earlier this month. After hearing the presentation, we reaffirmed our support for light rail and adopted the following statement of position concerning the selection of an alignment:

Statement of the Resolution adopted at the May 10, 2005 ACT Meeting was inserted here in the letter [see article, "Summary of ACT Meeting on Purple Line Study," for the statement].

We look forward to further progress in the Purple Line/Bi-County Transitway Study, which we hope will move rapidly toward design and construction.

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

Commentary on Controversy over Alternative Fuel Buses

Quon Kwan

One of the major recent controversies concerns the cancellation of more alternative fuel buses by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). Alternative fuel buses consist of buses propelled by compressed natural gas (CNG) and hybrid-electric systems.

Alternative fuel buses have attracted attention for their advantage of reducing emissions, particularly, particulate matter and oxides of nitrogen. For example, natural gas, which is mostly the one-carbon molecule methane, is a "cleaner" fuel than diesel, which is a complex mixture of long-chained hydrocarbons.

Hybrid-electric buses reduce emissions through a different technology. Although such buses basically use diesel as fuel, the fuel is burned at a steady rate (instead of at varying rates occurring in conventional diesel buses). Second, hybrid-electric buses are able to run on a smaller diesel engine than conventional diesel buses. (See *Transit Times*, vol. 15, n. 4, October 2001, p. 9 for "How Hybrid-Electric Buses Work"). A bus with a smaller diesel engine and operating at a steady load significantly reduces emissions compared to a conventional diesel bus (of the same capacity).

- The negative issue that caught public attention was WMATA's apparent "insensitivity" to the environment in its decision not to procure alternative buses. The newspaper media failed to shed some light on the following salient issues related to cost: Whether ridership capacity should be traded-off for emissions reduction,

- Whether transit agencies should be forced to pay a disproportionate share of cleaning the air.

Let's first examine costs. The cost of a conventional, 40-foot diesel transit bus is about \$300,000. The same bus with CNG propulsion costs about \$50,000 to 75,000 more. A hybrid-electric bus can cost about \$100,000 more than a diesel bus of the same size. In other words, alternative fuel buses cost about 75% to 33% more than diesel buses.

However, what has been discussed is just the vehicle costs. **Not** included are the infrastructure costs. The cost of infrastructure for CNG buses – that is, natural gas compressors, buffers, cascade systems, filters, piping, flow meters, and pumps – can run just over a \$1,000,000.

Furthermore, the cost of retrofitting a garage to enable maintenance of such buses requires methane detection and alarm systems, enhanced ventilation, and other equipment in order to comply with fire codes (regulating natural gas) can add another \$500,000.

Lastly, mechanics have to be re-trained and different sets of tools have to be acquired for CNG propulsion. While such infrastructure has been in place at the Metrobus Bladensburg Division, such entirely new infrastructure would have to be installed at the Metrobus Montgomery Division even before CNG buses could be procured.

The capital grants administered by the Federal Transit Administration that can be used for bus procurement offer neither any incentives nor extra money for alternative fuel buses that significantly reduce emissions. In other words, the transit agencies have “to cough up” the extra money (at least 25% to 33%) to pay for higher-priced buses that reduce emissions.

Another way of looking at this is that to pay for buses that reduce emissions, transit agencies will have to procure fewer buses than the number of diesel buses that they could buy for the same price. In turn, this means reducing the ability to accommodate increasing ridership capacity in order to reduce emissions. Is this fair to the transit agencies or ultimately – the riders? In the end, it is the riders who will be affected by reduced number of buses in the form of longer waits or more overcrowding.

Almost all transit agencies, including WMATA, are strapped for cash. It is questionable whether transit agencies strapped for cash should trade off ridership capacity for increased emissions reduction.

We might ask should transit agencies pay a disproportionate share for cleaning the air? Let's look at what has already been done to clean the air.

First of all, riders have already done their share for clean air by taking transit. For every passenger mile traveled, transit produces 5% of the carbon monoxide, 8% of the volatile organic compounds, 52% of the nitrogen oxides, and 55% of the carbon dioxide compared to cars. (See “Transit Saves Fuel and Cuts Pollution” in *Transit Times*, vol. 16, n. 4, October 2002). Should riders, who have already done their share for clean air by taking transit, be penalized by the added costs of alternative fuel buses?

Second, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency imposed its Heavy-Duty Clean Fuel Standard on particulate matter earlier on buses (1998) than on trucks (2007). In other words, buses will have been doing their share for clean air (with respect to particulate matter) for nine years before trucks will be required to do their share. Yet, on the other hand, transit buses account for only 5% of emissions from all heavy-duty diesel vehicles. Furthermore, transit buses comprise less than 0.5% of all heavy-duty diesel vehicles. Must transit agencies pay a disproportionate share of cleaning the air?

Milestones in Dulles Metrorail Project

Quon Kwan

The plan for the Dulles Metrorail Project is comprised of two Phases. Phase I is an 11-mile extension of Metrorail from East Falls Church to Wiehle Avenue, consisting of 5 new stations. Phase II is from Wiehle Avenue to the Loudon County line. Ridership is estimated to be 56,000 by 2011 and 71,300 by 2025. The peak hour capacity will be equivalent to four additional lanes on the Dulles Toll Road.

On February 8, 2005, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) announced that the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project had been included as a recommended project in its FY 2006 New Starts report to Congress. The Dulles Metrorail project will be earmarked for funding in the re-authorization of the six-year surface transportation-funding bill [i.e., the bill superceding the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)].

The Dulles Metrorail project reached another significant milestone on February 17, 2005, when the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) approved an increase in tolls on the Dulles Toll Road to fund the state's share of Phase I. As indicated in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, the State of Virginia was to contribute 25% of the \$1.5 billion cost of the Phase I. The State's share is envisioned to be paid for by increases in these tolls. Tolls have not risen since 1984. The increase took effect on May 22, 2005.

To fund its 25% share of total construction costs, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors approved a tax district for Phase I in February 2004. The western property owners plan to submit a petition to create a second tax district to the Town of Herndon and Fairfax County for approval in 2005. This would fund Fairfax County's share of the Phase II rail segment (Wiehle Avenue to the Loudoun County line).

On March 3, 2005, the Federal Transit Administration issued a Record of Decision confirming that the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project met all the requirements needed to close out the environmental phase of the project. The Federal share is 50% or \$750 million of the \$1.5 billion cost of the Phase I extension. A Full-Funding Grant Agreement is expected from the FTA in September 2006.

The Virginia (State) Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) has been working closely with DTP on Preliminary Engineering since last October 2004. Construction of Phase I is to begin in 2006. Completion of Phase I and Metrorail operation is set for 2011.

Rally for AMTRAK

Wes Vernon

In a rally at Washington's Union Station March 15, pro-Amtrak speakers weighed in. Senator Jon Corzine (R-N.J.) vowed to "fight like hell" to see that Amtrak continues to serve the 4 million New Jersey riders each year. Senator Lincoln Chaffee (R-R.I.) said security considerations argue for allowing Americans transportation options. Mayor Patrick Henry Hayes of North Little Rock, AR said he spoke for "over 1200 mayors" nationwide in urging that the trains continue.

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) said the DOT proposal is taking us from "All aboard" to "Everybody off." Ed Wytkind of the AFL-CIO said, "It's big country, Mr. President. You can't always walk it." As to funding Amtrak "like the airlines," as Mineta has urged—Senator Tom Carper (D-Del.) asked, "Which airlines? Braniff? Eastern? U. S. Air?" and "others that disappeared after going broke?"

Before Congress adjourned for the Easter break, the Senate on a 52-46 vote failed to pass a budget amendment by Senator Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.) that would have added \$1.04 billion to the Amtrak budget. Only four Republicans voted in favor: Specter, Pa.; Chaffee, R.I.; Snowe and Collins, both Maine. Several Republicans said they voted against Byrd only because they believed the offsetting "savings" that were required were "phony." Senator Trent Lott (R-Miss.) promised to push hard for Amtrak funding when the appropriations bill comes up. That is where the real decision will be made. A budget resolution is just an advisory outline of intent. The appropriations bill (later in the year) is when it's time to "walk the walk."

Ehrlich Administration Backs "Train AND Trail" In Allegany County

Ben Ross

What does the Ehrlich administration think about trains running next to hiker-biker trails? It depends on what part of Maryland you live in -- and on who plays golf next to the trail.

In Western Maryland, the state loves the idea of a railroad running alongside an extension of the Allegheny Highlands Trail. June 9th, the state's Assistant Secretary of Business and Economic Development, Dennis M. Castleman, had this to say at a meeting with the Allegany County Commissioners:

"The train-versus-trail thought process really needs to stop, and it needs to be train AND trail."

In Montgomery County, though, the Ehrlich administration opposes the plan to build a new Metro line, the light rail Purple Line, and an extension of the Capital Crescent Trail in the same corridor. State

officials claim to be concerned about the quality of the trail. But the news from Allegany County is one more proof that the trail is a smoke screen that obscures the real reasons for opposition to the Purple Line. The real reason is that the Purple Line would be visible from Columbia Country Club, where lobbyists and campaign contributors play golf. Governor Ehrlich, in a moment of candor, even admitted it, "It will not go through the country club," he told the Gazette.

Members and Volunteers

Cindy Snow

Our volunteers have been hard at work this past season to help get the word out about the Purple Line. Our envelope stuffers prepared 6000 neighborhood leaflets for our deliverers to drop door-to-door. They did great work!

Stuffers: David Cohen, Charles & Nancy Connors, Jodi Herman, Marilyn Jay, Charles Lietwiler, Judy Ratcliff, Barbara Shaw and Lydia Thorndyke.

Deliverers: Gail Boyar, Jean Buegler, John Carroll, Jim Clarke, David & Ellen Cohen, Linda Cornelius & Russell Damtoft, John Fay, Peter Galvin, Jon Gubits, Lauren Hammer, Jennifer Hess, Richard Hoyer, Jo Ann Kester, Joan King, Joanne Luechinger, Roxane Panarella, Ian Plenderleith, Shawn Rolland, Ben Ross, Nancy Sahli, Harry Sanders, Yosefi Seltzer, Jo Tunstall and Jerry Yokoyama.

To get all this started, we had 11 volunteers that signed letters for their neighborhoods: Gail Boyar, Ruth & Horst Brand, Sidney Brounstein, Judith Hallett, Daniel Meijer, Richard Meyersburg, Roxane Panarella, John Rice & Dawne Deppe, Sara Robinson, Gina Smallwood, Robin Thieme and Lem Thomas.

WELCOME to the 87 new members who joined ACT in April - June. We're glad to have you on board.

ACT member Jon Gubits had a Letter to the Editor he wrote in support of the Purple Line printed in the Gazette. Good going.

On May 25th ACT members John Fay, Ruth Fort, Jon Gubits, Richard Hoye, Ben Ross and Sierra Club member Chris Carney took the opportunity to promote the Purple Line with the ACT banners and flyers in front of the Columbia Country Club (a major opponent of the P.L.). They received a positive response from passing motorists. The event also got noted in the Gazette. To keep awareness of the Purple Line strong we will be organizing this event several times during the summer.

And speaking of Ruth Fort, ACT member and long time activist. She received a big surprise on June 16th with a surprise birthday party. Many people came to extend their birthday wishes. We hope you had a **Happy Birthday Ruth!**

Editorial Remarks

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

ACT Officers/Staff for CY2005:

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
 Program Chair: Richard McArdle
 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

PRSR1 STD
 U.S. POSTAGE
 PAID
 SILVER SPRING, MD
 PERMIT # 1931