



ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 20, Number 2, April 2006

ACT's monthly meetings are held 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), in the Woodside Conference Room.

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.

April 11: Speaker TBD

May 9: Shri Gondhalekar, Montgomery County Department of Public Works & Transportation - "Update on the Silver Spring Transit Center"

June 13: Speaker TBD

Feature Articles

- ... Purple Line Popular at Transportation Forum (p. 2)
- ... ACT Supports Traffic Light for Ride-On Route 1 (p. 3)
- ... Purple Line Right-of-Way Is Preserved! (p. 3)
- ... How Should Montgomery County Grow? (p. 4)
- ... ACT on Library Parking (p. 4)
- ... Items of Interest in MTA-CSX Agreement on MARC Service (p. 5)
- ... How Does FTA Select Rail Projects for Funding? (p. 5)
- ... ACT Finances in 2005 (p. 7)

Hearing on Glenmont Garage

A Public Hearing will be held on the expansion of the Parking Garage for Glenmont Metrorail Station on Wed., Apr. 26 at 7:30 PM at the County Council Office Bldg., 7th floor, 100 Maryland Ave., Rockville [3 blocks from Rockville Metro].



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.

Purple Line Popular at Transportation Forum

Harry Sanders

The Montgomery County League of Women Voters sponsored a March 7th educational forum on Beltway Widening and Transit Plans at Montgomery Blair High School. Attendance was excellent with 146 people signing in and total attendance approaching 200. ACT's table was well visited there.

Presentations were made by representatives of Maryland State Highway Administration (Beltway Widening Study) and the Maryland Transit Administration (Purple Line/Bi-County Transitway and the Corridor Cities Transitway - Shady Grove to Clarksburg). The main new information in the presentations was that toll revenues will not be enough to pay for building express toll lanes on the Beltway. They will have to be subsidized with tax money.

About half the attendees returned a survey distributed at the sign-in, asking opinions about the discussed projects and the format and value of the forum. Over 80% of the respondents indicated they favored the Purple Line and were unfavorable regarding Beltway widening, as shown in the table below. This is especially good news for the Purple Line as it shows support for the project from a broader base of residents.

March 7th Forum Survey Results

	Percent Favorable	Percent Unfavorable	Percent Don't Know
Beltway Widening	9%	87%	4%
Bi-County Transitway (Purple Line)	85%	7%	7%
Corridor Cities Transitway	29%	8%	63%

ACT Supports Traffic Light for Ride-On Route 1

Ben Ross

On February 16, 2006, ACT sent the following letter to State Sen. Grosfeld and Dels. Gutierrez, Madaleno, and Lawton in the Maryland General Assembly:

The Action Committee for Transit urges you to take action to get a traffic signal installed at Connecticut Avenue and Leland Street.

Ride-On Route 1 runs into excessive delays when making the left turn from Leland Street onto Connecticut Avenue. This route carries over 480 passengers daily in each direction. If 480 more cars were turning left from Leland Street onto Connecticut every day, State Highway Administration (SHA) would surely take action.

But SHA decides whether to install traffic signals by counting vehicles, not by counting people. This is grossly unfair to bus riders, who are delayed by traffic in exactly the same way as drivers.

A traffic signal would also contribute to traffic calming on Connecticut Avenue. This would be a major benefit to pedestrians, and to bus riders who now find it hard to get across Connecticut when they get on or off the bus.

Ride-On has now proposed to deal with this problem by rerouting the #1 bus along Brookeville Road. This route would take two minutes longer than the existing route with a traffic light. It has also encountered some community opposition.

It is ironic that MDOT is touting "Bus Rapid Transit" -- a system in which buses get special priority at backed-up intersections -- as an alternative to the Purple Line through Chevy Chase. Yet when it comes to action rather than talk, the Department is unwilling to install even an ordinary traffic light for the benefit of bus riders.

Please take action on this issue, in the interests of better transportation and of equal treatment for bus riders.

[Editor's note: Senator Grosfeld and all three delegates from District 18 have supported ACT's position in letters to SHA.]

Purple Line Right-of-Way Is Preserved!

Harry Sanders

Two sites are needed to provide maintenance and service space for the Purple Line between Bethesda and New Carrollton. A location in Montgomery County was identified more than a decade ago next to the Ride On bus depot in Silver Spring near Brookville Road. Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) has not identified alternative locations in Montgomery County and is having difficulty finding a site for the Prince George's end of this project. The Purple Line cannot operate without a facility near the tracks

Earlier this year, the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) proposed building a bus fueling station where the proposed Purple Line tracks would lead to a car storage building. However, on March 9th, the Montgomery County Council Transportation and Environment Committee, by a 2-to-1 vote, rejected this location and told DPWT to find another place. At this point ACT, the county's League of Women Voters, and the Sierra Cub activated e-mail action alerts. Several letters and over 120 e-mails were sent to the County Council. As a result, DPWT is now working on another location! The new location, supposedly off the Purple Line right-of-way, will be brought to the Council in a week or two. Chalk up this success to fast action by many supporters of the Purple Line.

How Should Montgomery County Grow?

Pamela Lindstrom

It's hard to say this in a way that doesn't sound pretentious. During May, the Planning Board will initiate a series of community roundtable meetings giving us the opportunity to discuss the question in the headline – How should Montgomery County grow?

Montgomery County is approaching build-out of the land planned for development. The planners and elected officials are proposing to continue growth, though at a slower rate, by redeveloping selected commercial centers into mixed use urban centers, along selected arterials which would be redesigned into multi-use urban boulevards. They want public buy-in to this concept, called Centers and Boulevards. Thus, these three roundtable meetings are planned to collect public input on whether, how and how much to pursue this concept.

To me, this is a great opportunity for Montgomery County to become the next smart growth success story, after Portland and Arlington. It is how to remodel the County to allow all of us to live more sustainably in the different world of the 21st Century. It's exciting that the Planning Board has asked the public to help design this urban transition.

To transit advocates, it's our chance to remodel the County into a place with a genuine network of facilities that means that a lot more of us can use transit as a viable alternative to the car. The network would include not only a couple of big projects like the Purple Line, but also more efficient express bus service and a better pedestrian environment on the chosen boulevards, like Georgia Avenue, University Boulevard, Viers Mill Road. It is our chance to clarify to officials that this network has higher priority than building big roads.

Centers and Boulevards is a shifting target, given the planners' obsession with the development review problems in Clarksburg. Currently two roundtables are scheduled for the evenings of May 3 and May 17, at the Johns Hopkins building off Shady Grove Road, with a third roundtable at an undetermined date. All are invited. All who participate will fill out a survey of opinions about the form and scope of redevelopment, public facility priorities, etc. Just the survey results will be a valuable policy and advocacy tool. The sign up process is not specified yet, but please save the dates, and contact Park and Planning or watch the web site for details: www.mc-mncppc.org.

It is our job to insure that Centers and Boulevards does not become another pretentious, forgettable visioning exercise. We can insure that genuine policy direction emerges and implementation proceeds, but that will only happen if we pay attention.

ACT on Library Parking

Ben Ross

On February 25, 2006, ACT sent the following letter to the Montgomery County Council regarding the issue of parking at public libraries:

Encouraging access to libraries is an important goal. Taxpayer-subsidized free parking at county libraries certainly advances this goal.

But subsidies must be equitable. Transit riders use our libraries intensively - at the Long Branch library, for example, Ride-On buses are a major mode of access - and they are entitled to equal treatment. If the county adopts a policy of subsidizing free parking at all libraries, it must also provide free fares for those who use transit to reach the libraries.

Items of Interest in MTA-CSX Agreement on MARC Service

Miriam Schoenbaum

There are at least three items of interest in the CSX-MTA 2005 Operating Agreement, which Save Maryland Area Rail Transit (SMART) recently obtained a copy of.

First, MTA may add 3 trains, total, to MARC service on the Brunswick and Camden Lines, according to Article 3.3(a).

Second, MTA must spend \$30 million on capital improvements before negotiating for additional trains above those 3, according to Article 3.3(b). Article 15 specifies the improvements:

1. Acquisition or long-term lease of CSX's Riverside Shop in South Baltimore;
2. A third track on the Brunswick Line between PEPCO (near Dickerson) and Buck Lodge (near Boyds);
3. A third track on the Camden Line between Dorsey and Savage.

SMART has submitted a Maryland Public Information Act request for CSX's appraisal of the Riverside Shop property. Constructing the third track on the Brunswick Line may cost up to \$1 million per mile and will affect parking at Dickerson and Barnesville.

Third, MTA plans to put the contract for ticket sales and on-train and equipment maintenance services out to bid, according to Article 4. CSX currently performs these services under contract to MTA. This may explain MTA's decision to end the practice of selling tickets on the train.

Finally, there is one item which is not in the Operating Agreement, despite Maryland Transportation Secretary Robert Flanagan's implication in his oral testimony to the Senate Finance Committee in February,

opposing the emergency legislation to keep open the MARC stations scheduled for closing. Secretary Flanagan implied that the time savings – 1.5 minutes per station on the Brunswick Line – gained by closing the stations were a quid pro quo in the Operating Agreement for being allowed to increase service. However, there is no mention of either station closing or time savings in the agreement. There is a quid pro quo for increases in service beyond the three trains allowed in Article 3.3(a), but it's the \$30 million spent on capital improvements, not time savings.

People who want an electronic copy of the CSX-MTA Operating Agreement should e-mail Miriam Schoenbaum at mwschoenbaum@yahoo.com.

How Does FTA Select Rail Projects for Funding?

Quon Kwan

A Federal Transit Administration program, called New Starts, funds the capital costs of new rail projects (such as the Purple Line) through the Full Funding Grant Agreements (FFGA).

To obtain an FFGA, a proposed project (such as the Purple Line) must emerge from a regional multimodal transportation planning process and meet a number of Federal requirements, which involve a rating process.

The regional multimodal transportation planning process involves system planning and alternatives analysis phases. The system planning phase identifies the transportation needs of a region while the alternatives analysis phase examines the benefits, costs, and impacts of different options, such rail lines or bus routes.

The result of the alternatives analysis phase is the selection of a locally preferred alternative. In other words, the Purple Line must be selected and shown to be preferred against a variety of other alternatives, such as Beltway widening or bus service expansion. Second, the project, such as the Purple Line, must be included in the region's National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board's Constrained Long-Range Plan (CLRP). Third, the project must meet the statutorily defined project justification and financial criteria. Fourth, the project sponsors must submit a request with justification information to the FTA for entry into preliminary engineering if Federal funding is desired. Preliminary engineering is the refinement of the design of the project, taking into consideration all reasonable design alternatives, which results in estimates of costs, benefits, and impacts.

After receipt of a request for Federal funding, FTA evaluates the proposed project if the project costs over \$25 million. The evaluation criteria consist of two main parts: (i) financial commitment summary rating and (ii) project justification summary rating.

The financial commitment summary rating is a weighted [weights noted in brackets] rating based on (i) share of matching non-Federal funds provided by the state and local governments [20%], (ii) operating financial plan [30%], (iii) capital finance plan [50%].

The project justification summary rating is a weighted rating based on (i) cost-effectiveness – measured in terms of incremental cost per hour of transit user benefit [50%]; (ii) change in regional pollutant emissions [16.67%]; (iii) change in regional energy consumption [16.67%]; and (iv) EPA's air quality designation [16.67%].

"Highly Recommended" rating is assigned by FTA to a project that has at least

a medium-high for both the financial and project justification summary ratings.

"Recommended" rating is assigned by FTA to a project that has at least a medium rating for both the financial and project justification summary ratings.

"Not recommended" is assigned by FTA to a project not rated at least medium for both the financial and project justification summary ratings.

"Not rated" is assigned by FTA when the project justification information is insufficient, inaccurate, or of questionable value.

An overall rating is used by FTA to recommend to Congress which projects should be funded. Each year, FTA publishes a list of projects that have been rated and a list of projects recommended to Congress for funding.

Following completion of preliminary engineering and fulfillment of Federal environmental requirements, the FTA may approve the project to advance into the final design phase. Final design is the last phase of project development before construction and may include right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, and preparation of final construction plans and cost estimates.

After final design, FTA may approve a project for an FFGA and for the project to proceed to construction with Federal funds. Although a project may receive a "Recommended" or "Highly Recommended" rating, the FTA may not approve a project for FFGA unless all non-Federal, matching funds are committed and available to the project; uncertainties about costs, benefits, and impacts are minimized; and there are no cost, project scope, or local financial commitment issues remaining.

**Check out the Website for
 Our Sister Organization
 Prince George's ACT**

www.PrinceGeorgesACT.org

ACTion Notes

Cindy Snow, ACT Staff

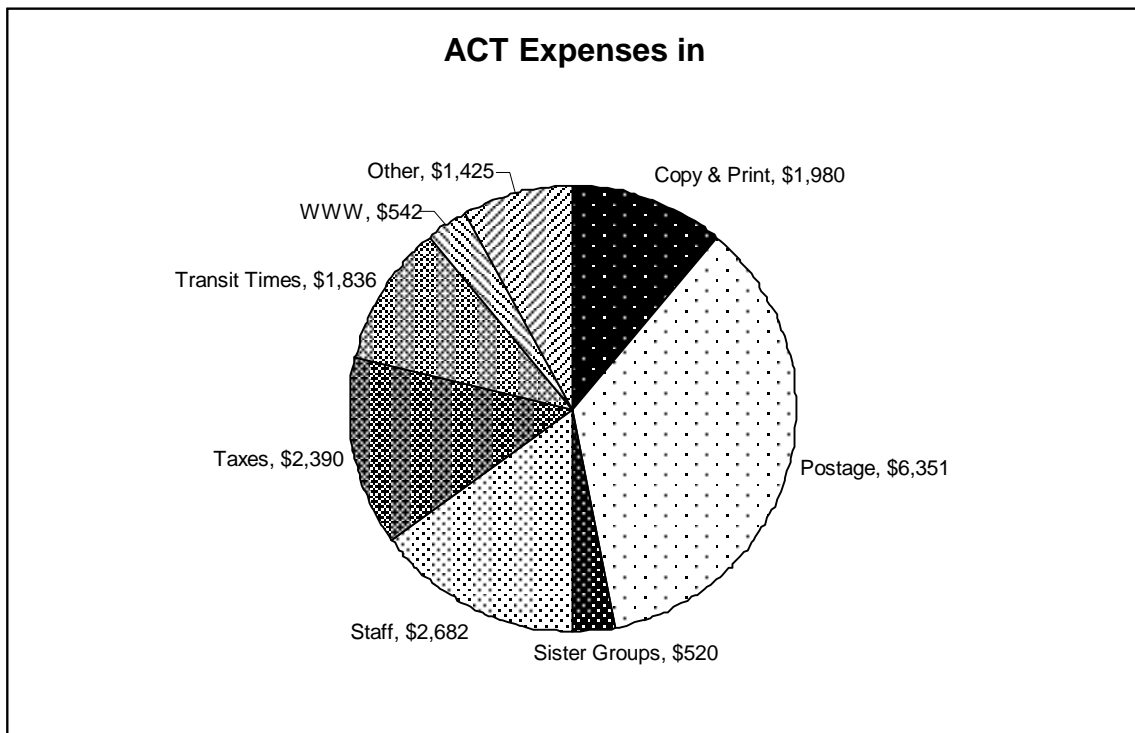
Thank you to our wonderful volunteers who help keep ACT in the forefront by helping with ACT tables, distributing literature at meetings and displaying the ACT signs. They are: Janet Fernandez, John Carroll, Joan King, Jerry Yokoyama and Jean Buerkler. Also our support crew that help with the envelope stuffing. They are: Charles Lietwiler, Judy Ratcliff, Barbara Shaw and Lydia Thorndyke. Other volunteers were waiting in the wings to help when we needed them.

[Continued on p. 8]

ACT Finances in 2005

John Carroll, Treasurer

ACT started 2005 with \$7,940 and ended the year with \$7,793 in our account at Branch Bank & Trust. Our income of \$17,579 came from dues (\$13,706), donations (\$3,860) and interest (\$13). Expenses were \$17,726. We overestimated State and Federal Taxes and are due a refund of \$1689. The chart shows the distribution of expenses in 2005.



[Continued from p. 7]

It has been a very busy season with many Action Alerts being sent. We have had wonderful responses. Thank you to all that have taken the time to send out letters supporting our requests. Your efforts helped delay the closing of the Boyds and Dickerson MARC stations and have also put us on the road to preserving right-of-way for the Purple Line storage yard [see p. 3 for article].

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, the push for angled parking on Norfolk Ave. in Bethesda was defeated in the County Council by a 5-4 vote. The supporters of a pedestrian-friendly Norfolk Ave. were councilmembers Andrews, Leventhal, Perez, and Silverman.

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 Quon at: siufung@erols.com or call him at: (h) 301-460-7454.

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