



ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 21, Number 2, April 2007

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 10: Pamela Lindstrom, Urban Planning Leader of Sierra Club, Montgomery County - "Linking Transportation and Urban Development"
Rescheduled from February 13.

May 8: Speaker TBD - Possible Update from State Legislator

June 12: Speaker TBD

Feature Articles

- ... ACT Welcomes New President and New Board Member (p. 1)
- ... ACT Member's Thoughts on the Delay of the Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transitway (p. 2)
- ... ACT Testimony On The Proposed Development "Time-Out" (p. 3)
- ... Scoping Comments on BRAC EIS (p. 3)

Continued on page 2.



Photo: Neil Greene

Incoming ACT President, Hans Riemer presents former President, Ben Ross, with a Certificate of Appreciation from the Montgomery County Council for his 11 years of service as President of ACT

ACT Welcomes New President and New Board Member

Cindy Snow

Action Committee for Transit has a new President. Hans Riemer was elected President of ACT at the January membership meeting. Due to a shortened meeting in January so members could attend Governor O'Malley's Town Hall meeting and cancellation of the February meeting because of foul weather, it was not until March that Hans presided over his first membership meeting.

Also at the January membership meeting, Miriam Schoenbaum of Boyds was elected to the ACT Board of Directors. Welcome to both of you and thank you for taking on these important positions.

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.

Continued from page 1.

- ... Update on MARC Legislation (p. 5)
- ... Analysis of the Proposed Metrorail "Core Area Congestion Charge" (p. 5)
- ... ACT Treasurer's Report for 2006 (p. 7)

"STOP THE PAIN, BUILD THE TRAIN"

Quote from State Senator Gwendolyn T. Britt, Prince George's County, during the Purple Line Rally in Annapolis, January 31.

ACT Member's Thoughts on the Delay of the Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transitway

Harry Sanders

Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) secretary, John Porcari, made the decision that he had to make in announcing a nearly year long delay for the Purple Line (PL) and Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) projects. There are two major reasons for the delay.

First, the Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transitway studies were already behind schedule, partially due to the lack of resources that Robert Flanagan (previous MDOT secretary) and the ex-Governor Ehrlich administration gave them.

Second, the Washington Council of Governments model has some problems when it comes to projecting transit corridor ridership and the inputs needed for the Federal Transit Administration New Rail Starts process. The concern is that the model is under predicting ridership at Shady Grove Metro, so that they can't properly calibrate the model. They are having some of the same problems that occurred in the Dulles Rail study. The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) needs to use ridership projections from the improved model, otherwise it could jeopardize federal funding for the projects.

Additional resources are bringing brought in to "fix" the problem with the model. ACT does need to stay on top of this, but John Porcari did state that this would be a priority for his new MTA administrator, Paul Wiedefeld.

Check out the ACT website

www.actfortransit.org

to see more photos from the March membership meeting that included guest speaker Representative Albert Wynn, District 4, as well as visiting Council members Floreen & Leventhal.

ACT Testimony On The Proposed Development "Time-Out"

Ben Ross

The Action Committee for Transit (ACT) has argued consistently that the real issue that the county faces is where to put new development and whether it is designed for people or automobiles. Arguing about whether development is too fast or too slow will not lead to a solution. Thus, in general, we neither favor nor oppose the idea of a temporary "Time-Out" while new development rules are proposed.

We do, however, strongly endorse the provision of the proposed legislation that distinguishes development near Metro stations from automobile-dependent projects elsewhere, rather than arbitrarily imposing a uniform policy everywhere. The legislation recognizes that it is not development per se, but the suburban sprawl pattern of development, that has caused our current transportation mess. Exemption of Metro station policy areas from the proposed Time Out expresses a fundamental policy choice for Smart Growth that is supported by transit advocates and, we believe, the great majority of the County's residents.

The same choice must be made later this year when the Council writes permanent new rules for development. While the fundamental goal of our wedges and corridors plan is Smart Growth, our system of land-use regulation often works against that goal. Sprawl-promoting rules remain in effect, such as these:

The quantitative measures of transportation access used in the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance measure automobile access, but not transit or pedestrian access.

The zoning code requires developers to build more parking than car owners are willing to pay for, forcing transit users to subsidize drivers via rents and retail prices.

The zoning code gives effectively free land for parking lots rather than setting aggregate ceilings for Floor Area Ratio and

impervious area and leaving the developer to make an economic allocation between floor space devoted to people and floor space devoted to cars.

Single-use buildings are treated as the norm that is built "of right," rather than allowing multi-use buildings "of right" and requiring special approval for single-use commercial structures such as strip malls and stand-alone office towers.

Streetscape-destroying setbacks of commercial and multifamily residential buildings from sidewalks are, when not required, rewarded as so-called amenities.

We look forward to working with the Planning Board and the Council as you address these fundamental issues in the coming months.

[Ben Ross, Vice President, presented this testimony on January 16, 2007].

Scoping Comments on BRAC EIS

Ben Ross

ACT submitted scoping comments in response to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which calls for the relocation of Walter Reed Army Medical Center to the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC). These comments were subsequently endorsed by the Bethesda Chamber of Commerce. The proposed expansion of the National Naval Medical Center would pose severe impacts on a community that is already suffering from the negative environmental effects of suburban sprawl and overuse of the automobile.

It is essential that the EIS evaluate alternative means to (a) minimize further negative impacts on the already severely stressed local transportation system and on surrounding communities and (b) mitigate those impacts that are unavoidable by relieving some

of the existing stresses on the area's transportation system and built environment. Bulletized below are the comments made in the January 4, 2007 letter:

... Cluster new construction at the southwest corner of the site, close to the Metro Red Line and the urban environment of downtown Bethesda.

... Provide no additional parking, or only a small amount of new parking. National Capital Planning Commission's parking guidelines should be followed.

... Increase the amount of on-base housing.

... Encourage pedestrian movement along Rockville Pike and Jones Bridge Road by moving sidewalks 4 to 8 feet back from the road and reconfiguring the roads in an urban boulevard style with narrower traffic lanes and landscaped islands.

... Open a new entrance to the Medical Center Metro station at the northeast corner of Rockville Pike and Jones Bridge Road.

... Move the security fence back from the two roads and erect (possibly via public-private partnerships) multi-story mixed use buildings outside the fence with the Navy Exchange and other retail uses on a street-facing ground floor and housing for base employees on the upper floors. [Housing for patients' relatives might also be provided, similar to the Childrens' Inn at National Institutes of Health (NIH)]

... Build Dupont Circle-style underpasses for Rockville Pike at its intersection with Jones Bridge Road and, if feasible, at Center Drive or Cedar Lane.

Transit-new urbanist alternatives that include such elements offer numerous advantages for the base and for the surrounding community should be considered as follows:

... Greatly reduced traffic generation by the base, plus additional traffic mitigation by

making the Medical Center Metro station more accessible to residences in East Bethesda and along Battery Lane.

... Compatibility with surrounding land uses through design that is consistent with downtown Bethesda. Wisconsin Ave./Rockville Pike would form a harmonious whole extending from Bradley Boulevard to beyond Center Drive. The highly incompatible strip mall-style Navy Exchange should be replaced with a more pedestrian-oriented mixed-use structure that matches its environment.

... Improved connectivity within NNMC and between NNMC and NIH by making pedestrian travel more comfortable, safer, and faster.

... Congestion-free travel to the Walter Reed Annex, the University of Maryland, and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) College Park facility by entering Metro at Medical Center and connecting to the future Purple Line at Bethesda.

... Preservation of trees and no incursion into wetlands.

... Better integration of NNMC into the surrounding environment.

... Improved security by placing sturdy multistory buildings between public roads and the security perimeter.

... Less vulnerability of NNMC operations to future disruptions in petroleum supply.

... Access to affordable housing for employees, and reduced base impact on the extremely limited stock of affordable housing in nearby communities.

... Reduction of vehicle noise and visual impacts on base employees by traffic calming on Wisconsin Ave. and Jones Bridge Road and by locating new buildings as distant as possible from the Beltway.

... Employee access to restaurants and stores in downtown Bethesda.

In sum, the transit-new urbanist approach offers the opportunity to create a high-quality built environment at the National Naval Medical Center that is worthy of NNMC's importance to the Armed Forces and to the nation.

Update on MARC Legislation

Miriam Schoenbaum

Legislation affecting MARC service passed the State Senate by 46-1 on March 8 and came before the House Environmental Matters committee on March 13. This legislation, SB 438/HB 770, would have three major effects:

1. Defining "level of service" required by the law. Last year, when the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) proposed the closure of four MARC train stations, they held that "level of service" applied only to the train line as a whole, not to number of stations or number of trips. Logically, then, under the current law, MTA could eliminate all stops between Brunswick or Baltimore and Washington, D.C., and still comply with the "level of service" requirement. The legislation would fix this problem.

2. Specifying the requirements for holding a public hearing. Again, last year, MTA stated that they had complied with the public notification requirement by publishing a notice in the Maryland Register, and that furthermore the law did not require them to hold any public hearing at all, because closing a train station is like moving a bus stop. At the two public hearings MTA nonetheless held, the standing-room-only crowds showed that the public disagreed. Passage of the legislation would ensure that MTA hears the opinions of taxpayers, citizens, and customers before making major changes.

3. Updating the law to include the recent expansion of MARC service. The level of service requirement dates to 1981 and does

not include MARC's added service to Frederick and Perryville. Passage of the legislation would include Frederick and Perryville in the level of service MARC is required to maintain.

Co-sponsors include Sen. Rob Garagiola and Dels. William Bronrott, Kathleen Dumais, Brian Feldman, Tom Hucker, Anne Kaiser, Susan Lee, Roger Manno, Karen Montgomery, and Craig Rice.

Analysis of the Proposed Metrorail "Core Area Congestion Charge"

Quon Kwan

On December 14, 2006, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) announced proposed fare hikes – the first such fare changes since 2004. For the most part, these fare changes are hikes. The proposed fare changes include charging more for trips paid for with cash than with a SmarTrip card, making bus-to-bus transfers available only with SmarTrip, balancing the costs of rail-to-bus (currently discounted) and bus-to-rail transfers (currently not discounted), and imposing a "core area congestion charge" during peak periods.

Of the proposed fare changes, the most controversial is the "core area congestion charge" for Metrorail trips passing through the downtown core of the Metrorail system. Although this would minimize the impact of a fare increase on reverse commuters, the "core area congestion charge" would add up to a 35-cent fare for riding Metrorail into the downtown core during peak periods.

The levy of a "core area congestion charge" seems to mark a precedent for not only WMATA but for the transit industry. The only analogous "core area congestion charge" that has occurred is that for roadways. Singapore introduced the first such charge in 1975 using a simple daily charge. In 1998, Singapore shifted to a fully automated electronic charging system.

In 2003, London began to levy a “core area congestion charge.” Stockholm implemented a similar “core area congestion charge” on a trial basis in 2006 from January through July. The purpose of such a charge is to encourage either a shift in mode of travel, such as from single occupant vehicle to transit, or to shift travel to the core area from peak periods, i.e., periods of congestion to off-peak periods, i.e., periods of non-congestion.

However, no such analogy can be found for transit anywhere. Is WMATA justified in imposing a “core area congestion charge”? Let’s look at some facts.

If the purpose of increasing Metrorail fares by imposing an additional “core area congestion charge” is to encourage a shift in ridership from peak periods to off-peak periods, then the justification is flawed for two reasons. First, imposing the “core area congestion charge” on transit riders could make the costs of driving comparable to, if not less than, the costs of riding transit and shift commuters from riding transit to driving cars. This modal shift is undesirable because it only serves to aggravate roadway congestion. Not solely is this undesirable, but also this is truly ironic because transit is supposed to relieve roadway congestion by providing a viable alternative.

Second, Mayworm, Lago, and McEnroe conducted a study, commissioned by the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (now Federal Transit Administration) in 1980 that shows most riders in peak periods are commuting to work and have extremely limited flexibility, that is, have no discretion, in work starting times and are thus, unlikely to shift to commuting in off-peak periods. In fact, an American Public Transportation Association study in 1991 shows that peak ridership is roughly half as sensitive to fare changes as off-peak ridership is to fare changes. The explanation is off-peak trips are likely to be discretionary and can be shifted much more easily.

If the purpose of the “core area congestion charge” is to recover the extra

expenses for providing service during peak periods that are over and beyond the normal expenses for providing service during off-peak periods, then would the charge be justifiable? It is true that the expenses for providing service during peak periods are greater by a factor of two to three than for providing service during off-peak periods because of the inefficiencies necessitated by unbalanced passenger loads and resulting uneven wear and tear on the rolling stock, labor costs for deadhead trips and split shifts, and unused capacity in the counter-flow direction.

Nonetheless, while it may make economic sense to charge more for peak period service because the costs of providing service are greater during peak periods, take notice that WMATA is already levying a peak period fare and hiking the peak period fare. Now as if the peak fare and hike in peak fare were not enough, WMATA has to add a “core area congestion charge.”

What is unusual is both the peak fare and “core area congestion fee” seem to defy the general trend of fares in the transit industry across the country. Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 94: “Fare Policies, Structures, and Technologies: Update” examined the trend in fare structure across the country. The report found that the percentage of transit agencies using any type of differentiated fare (differentiation based on time of day, length of trip, zones of travel, or type of service) has declined since 1994. Most transit agencies have continued to display a preference for the simplicity of flat fares. So it would appear that WMATA’s proposed “core area congestion charge” (let alone WMATA’s peak period fare) is bucking the trend.

Let’s face it. If fares need to be raised, then just raise the fares across the board. There is absolutely no need to complicate matters by disguising a fare hike or even a portion of a fare hike as a “core area congestion charge.” Flawed is the justification of a “core area congestion charge” for transit.

A Man Behind the Scenes

Cindy Snow

ACT is fortunate to have many wonderful volunteers. One of the little known volunteers is Tom Stecher, ACT's Tax Adviser and Accountant. Tom joined ACT in 1994 and took on this position when ACT incorporated in 2000. He regularly attends the monthly meetings and works with ACT Treasurer, John Carroll, to ensure that we are fully compliant with the requirements of a corporation. This includes completing State and Federal forms, calculating appropriate amounts due, and filing quarterly and annual returns on time. In reference to Tom, John states, "If he were to quit I don't know what I'd do." Thank you Tom for taking on this cumbersome task and for your dedication to ACT.

ACTivist in the News and in ACTION

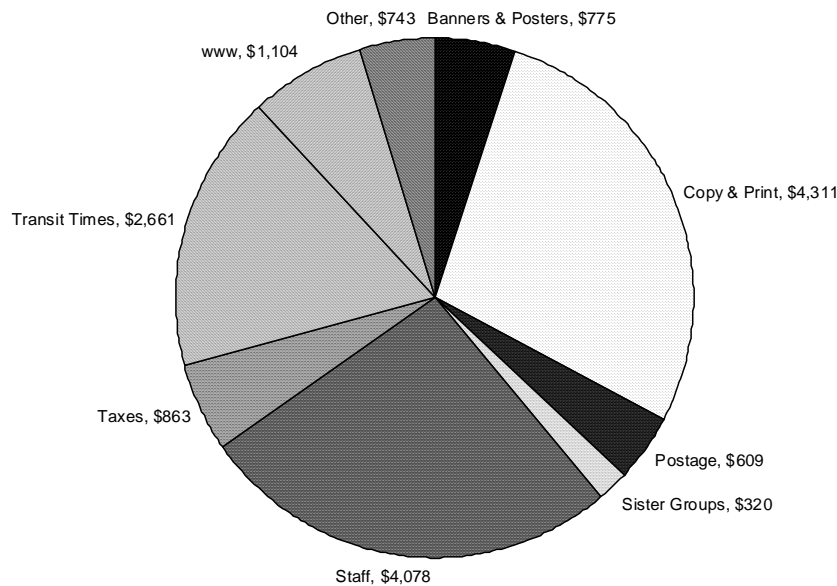
Cindy Snow

Congratulations to ACT volunteer Tracey Johnstone of Chevy Chase, who was pictured in the *Baltimore Sun* article, "Seeing green, red in the Purple Line," by reporter Andrew A. Green, published January 31, 2007. The article was about the Purple Line Rally held in Annapolis on Jan. 30. Thank you to all the volunteers who came out on a blustery day to make the Rally a success and show their support for the Purple Line.

Two ACT members, Jon Gubits and Ruth Fort, had Letters to the Editor published recently in the Gazette. Keep up the good work.



ACT Expenses in 2006



ACT Treasurer's Report for 2006

John Carroll, Treasurer

ACT started 2006 with \$7,793 carried forward from the previous year. Our 2006 income came from dues (\$11,290) donations (\$2,639) State and Federal tax refunds (\$1,679) a reimbursement from the ACT-VIC campaign for staff hours (\$1776), and bank account interest (\$11) for a total income of \$17,395. Expenses were \$15,464. We ended 2006 with \$9,724 in our account at Branch Bank & Trust. The chart shows the distribution of expenses.

Ride On Transit Advisory Group Seeking Volunteers

Are You a Fan of Public Transit? Ride On is looking for 12 volunteers to serve for two years on its Transit Advisory Group. If you are a committed Ride On user, a resident of Montgomery County and interested in serving, send your letter, e-mail or fax by close of business on Friday, May 4, 2007. Please include the following information in your letter of interest: Name, home, address, city, state and zip code; day and evening telephone numbers; how long you have used Ride On; how often you use Ride On; what contributions you can provide to the Transit Advisory Group, and background information about yourself. Please send information to: Carolyn Jones, Division of Transit Services, Transit Advisory Group, 101 Monroe Street, 5th Floor, Rockville, Maryland 20850; e-mail carolyn.jones@montgomerycountymd.gov Any questions call Carolyn Jones at 240-777-5800.

Editorial Remarks

Your Transit Times editor is Quon Kwan. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is June 12. Send your materials to Quon at: siufung@erols.com or call him at: (h) 301-460-7454.

ACT Officers/Staff for 2007:

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