

ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 23, Number 2, April 2009

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 14: Cancelled – Instead, please attend:
Hearing on Metro Bus Service Cuts
6:30pm; 10914 Georgia Ave, Wheaton
First Baptist Church

May 12: Speaker TBD

June 9: Speaker TBD

July 14: Nat Bottigheimer, Assistant General Manager, Metro; "Metro's Planning for Expanded Core Capacity Needs After 2025"

- News From Purple Line Now! (p. 4)
- ACT Testimony in Favor of HB 492 (p. 4)
- 30th Anniversary of New Carrollton Station (p. 5)
- Take the Purple Line / Finish the Trail Walk (p. 6)
- Treasurer's Report For 2008 (p. 7)

ACT Joins "Transit First" Coalition - Opposes Service Cuts

On Feb 5, Action Committee for Transit President, Ben Ross, and Vice-President, Jim Clarke, met with representatives from Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, MCGEO - UFCW Local 1994, Save Maryland Area Rail Transit (SMART), Sierra Club, Coalition for Smarter Growth, and transit activists from Virginia to form a new coalition against service cuts to transit. The press release announcing this coalition is below.

ACT Press Release of February 11, 2009

"Transit First," a new coalition of transit riders, environmental and union groups, is organizing to oppose cuts in public transportation funding.

As the Metro executive board meets Thursday to discuss budget shortfalls and possible service cuts, community leaders will speak out to underscore the importance of a well-funded public transportation system.

Feature Articles

- ACT Joins "Transit First" Coalition - Opposes Service Cuts (p. 1)
- County Council & Executive Endorse Purple Line (p. 3)
- Budget Proposal Slashes Transit (p. 3)

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.

Speaking Thursday will be James Allen from Prince Georges Action Committee for Transit, Andy Fellows from Clean Water Action, and Ben Ross from the Action Committee for Transit.

With transit ridership setting new records and continuing to rise – and with many commuters looking for alternatives to driving – the transit advocates say it's counterproductive to make any reductions in Metrorail or Metrobus service. The coalition will urge elected officials in local and state government who are responsible for funding transit to take immediate action to avoid service cuts.

Additional groups involved in the Transit First coalition include Clean Water Action, Prince George's Advocates for Community-based Transit, Progressive Maryland, Greater Greater Washington and Audubon Naturalist Society.

Why Transit Service Must Not Be Cut

Ridership - Transit ridership is going up while people are driving less. It makes no sense to cut transit service while continuing to expand the road network.

Environment - Transit use protects the environment in many ways. It fights global warming, prevents air pollution that causes asthma and other diseases, and forestalls the sprawl development that is destroying our Chesapeake Bay fisheries and natural habitats on the land.

Fairness - Since 1992, Metro fares have been raised four times while the gas tax has remained constant. Transit riders have done our part to keep transportation budgets even with inflation and should not be punished because others have not done the same.

Social Justice - Transit helps families save on transportation costs and have more disposable income. It brings workers to new jobs. For many, transit is a lifeline -- a third of our population is unable to drive or cannot afford a car.

Economic recovery - Transit will stimulate economic recovery. Builders can go to work now supplying unmet demand to live and work in convenient, walkable places around transit stations.

National security - To end our country's dependence on foreign oil, automobile travel must be reduced.

Traffic congestion - Loss of transit service will put more cars on already crowded highways.

County Council & Executive Endorse Purple Line

Quon Kwan

In a joint letter dated February 2, 2009 to Maryland Secretary of Transportation, John Porcari, from Montgomery County Council President Phil Andrews and County Executive Ike Leggett, the County ***recommends for the locally preferred alternative that (1) light rail be selected as the mode, and (2) medium-investment light rail using the master planned George-town Branch right-of-way be selected for the Purple Line.***

Nevertheless, the letter did request the following modifications:

- Use the high-investment light rail design for the Capital Crescent Trail via the tunnel under Wisconsin Ave.
- Curtail tail tracks so that they extend no more than 100 feet beyond west portal of Apex Building in Bethesda
- Expand width of Capital Crescent Trail to 12-16 feet and widen buffer between the trail and tracks
- Evaluate single tracking along portions of Capital Crescent Trail
- Evaluate the tunnel option between Silver Spring and Wayne/Mansfield
- Delete Dale Ave. stop for now but design for the possibility of a future stop if the surface option is chosen

The letter also requested additional studies during the preliminary engineering phase.

We appreciate the notes of thanks and support from our members and friends, like the following that was recently sent to ACT:

This isn't much for all you and your ACT group have done for the Jones Bridge Road residents. THANK YOU. We think purple rail is best and will start cooperation with our neighbors to see that the trail is treated gently and greenly. It has been a pleasure to work with you, Ben Ross and ACT.

Budget Proposal Slashes Transit

Thank you to those ACT supporters who have already sent comments in response to the emailed Action Alert below. It is not too late to send in your comments, if you have not yet done so.

ACT Action Alert from March 17, 2009

Severe reductions in Ride-On bus service are included in the county budget announced yesterday. The budget sent to the County Council includes a 4.7% reduction in transit funding, which will require elimination of many well-used bus routes. These cutbacks will impose severe hardships on many transit commuters who depend on buses to get to work. For details of the cuts, see the link at the bottom of this message.

While shrinking transit, the budget expands subsidized parking. By subsidizing parking, we encourage commuters to drive alone and create traffic congestion and air pollution.

ACT and its allies in the Transit First! coalition are calling on the county to make transit the priority. Eight million dollars of parking fines that are now used to subsidize money-losing parking garages should be redirected to preserve Ride-On service. For details and links to more information, see Transit First's press release:

www.actfortransit.org/archives/press/2009Mar16RelRideOnCuts.pdf

Your help is needed. Please write now to the County Council and tell them that preserving transit service is more important than subsidizing parking. Send an email to the Council (be sure to include your home address) at: county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov or send a letter to the Council at: 100 Maryland Ave, Rockville, MD 20850

(A public hearing on Ride-On cutbacks was held on Tuesday, March 24.)

News From Purple Line Now!

Harry Sanders, Purple Line Now! & ACT

A light rail Purple Line has now received the support of Montgomery County's Council, Planning Board, and County Executive Ike Leggett, along with the Prince George's County Council and County Executive Jack Johnson. These declarations of support mean the recommendation to Governor Martin O'Malley is unanimous.

The joint signed letter from the Montgomery County Executive and County Council is a giant step for the project. It recognizes the grass roots support that we were able to demonstrate through the action and the contributions and assistance that you and others gave to ACT and Purple Line Now in 2008. You deserve our many thanks!

Currently, we are asking local organizations to write the Governor in support of light rail for the Purple Line as the preferred option. If you are active in such a group, please ask for an organizational letter head note to Governor O'Malley. Letters from individuals are also welcome.

ACT Testimony in Favor of HB 492

Submitted February 17, 2009 to bill sponsor
Delegate Al Carr, District 18

Action Committee for Transit, Montgomery County's advocate for policies and practice that promote the use of mass transit, supports the establishment of a state commission on MARC governance and funding. The commission would be a good opportunity to examine the needs of MARC from a regional perspective. For example, West Virginia's only financial contribution to MARC is maintenance of its three stations. When MTA proposed in November 2008 that the last Brunswick Line train in the evening would stop in Brunswick instead of continuing

to Martinsburg, West Virginia officials protested. MTA reportedly implied that they were considering cutting all West Virginia service, and West Virginia officials agreed to a fare increase for only West Virginia riders. Now many West Virginia residents are driving to the Brunswick station -- where fares did not increase -- to catch the train; this means, of course, that West Virginia MARC service is even less cost-effective than before and even more likely to be cut. A similar issue is the \$4.3 million MTA recently paid to expand the parking lot at the Point of Rocks MARC station, given the apparently considerable proportion of Point of Rocks riders who are Virginia residents. Though these examples relate to the Brunswick Line, there certainly will be similar problems with the Penn Line in the future, if MARC is ever able to carry out its planned expansion of service to Wilmington and Alexandria.

Not only does MARC, as a long-haul commuter rail system, face interstate issues most other MTA transit systems do not, but MARC also must operate at the convenience and pleasure of CSX and Amtrak, for both of whom current MARC service, let alone expansion, is at best a nuisance.

And finally, in Maryland, MARC gets lost as only one of many transit systems MTA is responsible for, while in the DC metropolitan area, MARC gets lost because it carries so many fewer riders than Metro.

Therefore, ACT believes that it makes sense to have a commission to examine the needs of MARC by itself.

Take the Opportunity to Make Your Voice Heard

Montgomery County planners invite residents to participate on what they think should be part of the next Growth Policy. A Growth Policy survey posted online at www.GrowingSmarterMontgomery.org provides an opportunity for residents to voice their opinion.

30th Anniversary of New Carrollton Station

Tom Fuchs

November 20, 2008 marked the 30th anniversary of the New Carrollton Metrorail station. In the beginning, there was a station called Lanham, and the station was merely a wooden shelter on the west side of the tracks. (This was the station where I began to watch trains around 1968 - 1969. I remember the foundation of a building – perhaps a station – east of the tracks and an asphalt platform west of the tracks).

Later, when Conrail took over in 1976, a corrugated iron shelter replaced the wooden shelter. Both shelters had walls on three sides and were open on the side facing the tracks. Conrail added a short asphalt platform on the east side of the tracks. The local service, run by Penn Central, had the fewest trains of the three commuter lines at the time. Only 2 trains went into Washington in the morning, and only 2 trains went to Baltimore in the afternoon. The trains used MP-54 "Owl Cars."

The station's presence gave rise to Lanham Station Road, which crossed the tracks at grade. The tracks take a sharp curve under the Capital Beltway. At this grade crossing occurred several accidents because of pedestrian traffic between the garden style apartments east of the tracks and the Lanham Shopping Center west of the tracks.

The Capital Beltway station, which came next, just inside the Beltway, had several problems. First, it was too complicated to drive there. Second, the station had too small a waiting room with only about 10 seats and no rest rooms (initially). Third, the station was not accessible in accord with the Americans with Disabilities Act. However, the Capital Beltway Station was multi-modal. Capital Beltway was served initially by both the Baltimore & Annapolis (B & A) Bus Company and DC Transit (before Metrobus). The B & A went out of business, and DC Transit eliminated service to the Capital Beltway station. The space that was used as a bus ticket office became rest rooms.

Initially, Metroliners only served the station. When conventional trains came through, Metroliners bypassed the station. High-speed Metroliners averaged 90 mph between Washington and New York and collected premium fares. When the Japanese introduced their bullet trains in the mid-1960's, President Johnson decided that the U.S. should have high speed trains, too. With Metroliners rushed into service without testing, short circuits occurred in the snow because of electrical components underneath the cars. The electric components were relocated into a "blister" on top of the train cars.

In spite of its limitations, the Capital Beltway station was a success. Even the Budd-built Metroliners enjoyed success in an odd sort of way. The trains spent the last part of their lives providing Keystone service between Philadelphia and Harrisburg. The design of the exterior car body appeared in Amfleet cars and SPV2000's.

Finally, the New Carrollton Metrorail station opened up November 20, 1978, ½ mile south of the Beltway. The result was three stations stood in three locations served by three different operators. Besides the New Carrollton Metrorail station, there was Lanham Station, ½ mile north of the Beltway for Penn Central local trains and Capital Beltway Station, just south of the Beltway, for Amtrak trains.

When Conrail abandoned passenger service in 1982, Maryland Department of Transportation had to figure out a replacement. Amtrak's charter prevented operating commuter service (i.e., no service shorter than 300 miles). The interim solution was a subsidiary company called "Amdot." When Amdot took over commuter rail service, (1) the number of trains increased from two to five, and (2) the Lanham station was abandoned with commuter trains stopping at the Capital Beltway station.

Eventually, Amtrak trains moved into the New Carrollton station in October 1983. The commuter trains, now known as the MARC Penn Line, moved into New Carrollton with them. The situation changed from isolation and confusion into a single multi-modal station. Greyhound has a ticket office on the east side of New Carrollton now.

Take the Purple Line / Finish the Trail Walk

Cindy Snow

It was an overcast and cool Saturday morning: March 14 to be exact. The air was heavy with moisture. Eight of us gathered at the north entrance to the Silver Spring Metro station. Our mission: to hike the 4 miles from Silver Spring to Bethesda along the proposed Purple Line/Capital Crescent Trail route.

What a great learning experience it was. Our guides, ACT members Wayne Phyllaier (Finish the Trail blog, <http://www.finishthetrail.com>) and Webb Smedley (Purple Line Now!), were extremely knowledgeable about the plans and wonderful guides. They helped me to see how it was possible to run the rail and the trail parallel to the CXS line. Where it didn't look like there was room their vision and knowledge showed it was possible.

Our first sense of a "trail" was in the Woodside community where residents have already started blazing a trail along the right-of-way. It isn't until the Georgetown Branch spur, where the project breaks away from the CXS line, that the rail and trail come together.



Ian Edlind and our guide Wayne Phyllaier

Webb Smedley



Climbing the mountain of mulch.
Tina Slater and Cindy Snow

We encountered our first sign of encroachment in this section as we climbed over a mountain of leaf mulch smack dab in the right-of-way and blocking our route. After we crossed Stewart Ave. the trail became paved. For about 50ft, that is, then we were back on dirt. The view over Rock Creek was quite nice. Standing on the bridge our guides pointed out where a trail would be put in, as part of the project, to connect the Rock Creek Trail with the Capital Crescent Trail.



Checking out the trail map. Lft to rt: Linda Mathews,
Jonathan Bernstein, Tina Slater, Webb Smedley,
Wayne Phyllaier, and Ian Edlind

John Carroll

From this point on to Bethesda there were streamers of purple tape tied to trees, fences, shrubs, and brush, leftover from a demonstration by Save the Trail to express how they feel the Purple Line would destroy the trail. From where we just came, which was void of purple streamers, the improvements the Purple Line project would bring to the trail were sorely needed.

As we continued on, we came to the Jones Bridge Rd. crossing, where the rail and trail will pass under the road in a tunnel. Further down was the Connecticut Ave. crossing, where they will pass over the road on a bridge which will also be home to one of the stations. We chose to walk up to the crosswalk and cross with the light, while another trail user made the dangerous choice to jay walk (jog) directly across the road.



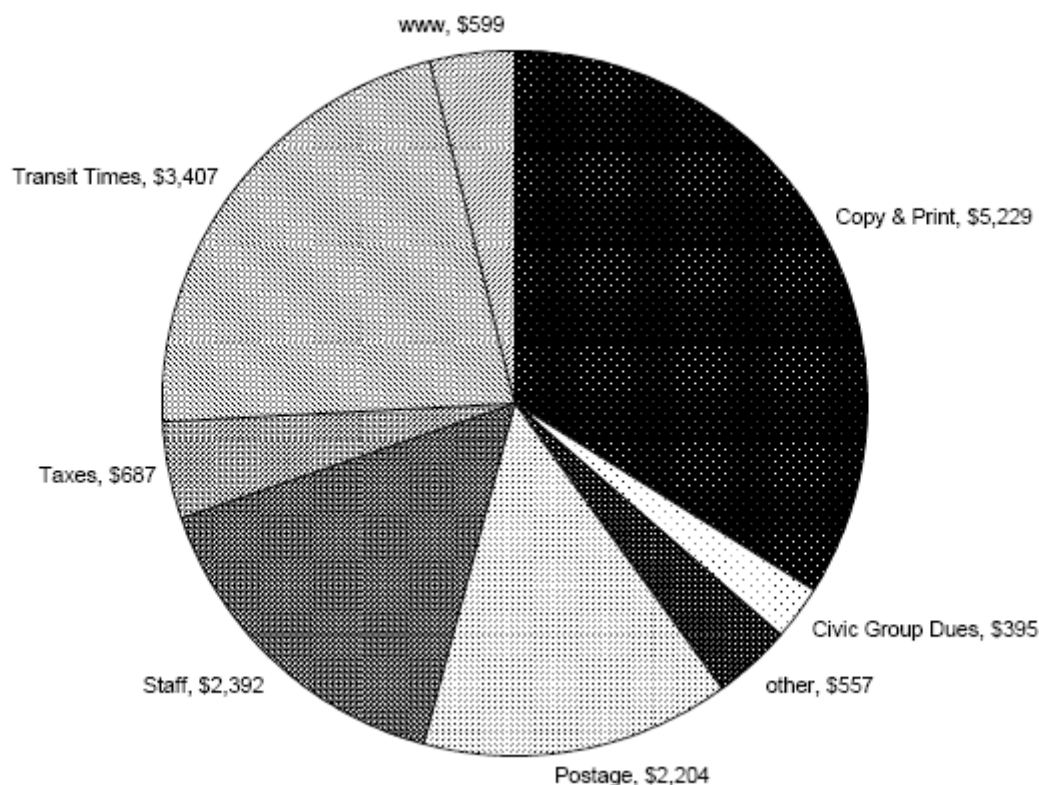
Ian Edlind

When we reached the Columbia Country Club, the trail was artificially narrowed with a tall black chain link fence. This is where we were treated to an eye opening demonstration as to the amount of encroachment by the country club. Take a 100ft right-of-way and narrow it to 15ft, 20ft max. The narrowest part of the project was still to come as the right-of-way narrowed to 90ft and then to its minimum of 66ft. Even then, the project is very doable. The only bottleneck is at the Air Rights Building in Bethesda where the trail will be taken on a bridge over the rail to get through the tunnel. Not really a bad plan at all.

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Treasurer's Report For 2008 - John Carroll, ACT Treasurer

ACT started 2008 with \$9,133 carried forward from the previous year. Our 2008 income came from dues/ \$9,850, donations/\$2,533, and interest/ \$4; for a total income of \$12,387. Expenses were \$15,471. We ended 2008 with \$6,049 in our account at EagleBank. The chart shows the distribution of expenses.



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Out on the other side of the Air Rights Building the air seemed to be colder. This was the end of the trip. The group discussed who was going back to Silver Spring. Two people stayed to check out Bethesda, two stopped to get something to eat and the remaining four of us hopped on the J4 Metrobus back to Silver Spring where, walking to my car tired from the trip, I felt the first drops of rain. It was a great day.

[Thank you to photographers Ian Edlind (Trail Voice, Founder and Editor, www.trailvoice.com), John Carroll, and Webb Smedley.]



Ian Edlind

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: qykwan@gmail.com or call him at: (h) 301-460-7454.

ACT Officers/Staff for 2009:

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Webb Smedely: Purple Line Now!
Miriam Schoenbaum: SMART (MARC riders)

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