



ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 23, Number 3, July 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.

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

Aug 11: Speaker TBD

Sept 8: Speaker TBD

Oct 13: Brian Murphy, Bombardier Transportation; "Light Rail Systems in North America"

Feature Articles

- ACT Position on White Flint - Rockville Pike & MARC (p. 4)
 - ACT Testifies to Congress (p. 5)
 - The Emergent Curbside Intercity Bus Industry: Chinatown and Beyond (p. 6)
 - Council of Governments Transportation Planning Board Votes Unanimously to Advance the Purple Line (p. 8)
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- ### **Hoyer Seeks \$1.2 Billion for Purple Line**
- Posting on Representative Hoyer's Web Site
- Representative Steny Hoyer (D-MD) of Prince George's County announced that he will be introducing legislation to seek \$1.2 billion in New Start Authorization funds for the design, engineering, and construction of the Purple Line by the Maryland Department of Transportation.
- The Purple Line, a proposed 16-mile light rail or bus rapid transit line in the State of Maryland suburban area of Washington, D.C., extending from Bethesda in Montgomery County to New Carrollton in Prince George's County, is currently in the project planning stage, with the Federally required combined Alternatives Analysis and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS) having undergone public hearings in the Fall of 2008.
- Hoyer Seeks \$1.2 Billion for Purple Line (p. 1)
 - Nearly All County Transit Cuts Averted (p. 2)
 - ACT Testimony on Corridor Cities Transitway and I-270 Widening (p. 4)

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.

(cont. from p. 1)

Maryland Transit Administration is preparing a recommendation for a locally preferred alternative (LPA) and is concurrently developing an application for New Starts funding. With Federal Transit Administration approval and sufficient funding the project could be ready for construction in 2012.

Nearly All County Transit Cuts Averted

Craig Simpson

Transit riders scored a big victory when the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and Montgomery County Ride-On canceled most bus service cuts. Both transit providers had proposed drastic cuts in bus service in order to balance budgets.

Action Committee for Transit joined with transit advocates, environmentalists, and labor unions forming a coalition, "Transit First," to oppose bus service cutbacks throughout the region. The coalition was formed early in the year when WMATA and the other local jurisdictions faced severe budget problems that threatened to severely cut bus and rail service. Transit First determined to oppose all transit cuts and to seek additional funds from jurisdictions to close budget gaps at WMATA and Ride-On.

The WMATA board first proposed administrative cutbacks without eliminating any service. There would have been some loss of service quality, such as cars cleaned less often, but there still remained a \$29 million budget deficit. After initial activism by Transit First, Fairfax County agreed to cover all its share of the deficit and Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Arlington added more funding.

The remaining \$13.6 million deficit (almost \$10 million of which was in Maryland) was to be offset by cuts in Metrobus service chosen by each jurisdiction. Most of the proposed cuts were on vital, regional routes. Transit First pointed out the inequity: more transit-dependent, lower-income and people of color were affected by bus cuts while not even a single mezzanine closure on a Sunday night was proposed on the rail.

The public hearings were set quickly, but Transit First was able to mobilize for the mid-April hearings by passing out flyers at major transit stops across Montgomery and Prince George's Counties and the District of Columbia and by generating e-mails and postcards against the cuts.

Consequently, over 400 riders, transit advocates and union members attended and 159 people spoke at six public hearings; 2,679 people submitted comments. The vast majority cited the inequitable nature of cutting bus service as the main reason for opposing the cuts. Elected officials, including a number of Prince George's County Council-members opposed the proposed cuts at the public hearings. U.S. Rep. Donna Edwards (MD-4) spoke passionately against cutbacks. The Chairs of the Montgomery Senate and House delegations sent letters to Maryland Governor O'Malley opposing the service cuts. The Montgomery County Council did the same. The press began reporting the existence of a WMATA "rainy day" fund that was "full" and that additional surpluses generated this year would be returned to the jurisdictions.

A House Government Oversight subcommittee held a hearing on WMATA at which ACT President Ben Ross spoke on behalf of Transit First [see summary p. 5]. At the Congressional hearing, U.S. Rep. Chris Van Hollen (MD-8) spoke pointedly against the cutbacks and read a letter from U.S. Reps. Hoyer (MD-5) and Edwards.

The WMATA board voted the day after the Congressional hearing to utilize the "rainy day" fund to close the gap. Maryland put in a little more money since the fund did not cover their entire deficit. Of the \$13.6 million in cuts proposed, less than \$2 million were to be carried out along with levying express fares on several routes. WMATA cancelled Metrobus service only on the C-7/C-9 routes (four trips in each direction), mid-day Z-2 (Silver Spring-Colesville) line, and rush-hour L7 (Wheaton-Friendship Heights).

Montgomery County Ride-On proposed discontinuing service on 12 routes, eliminating segments on two routes, and reducing hours on 14 routes. The proposed cuts totaled about \$1.2 million per year.

ACT president Ben Ross identified parking fees as a funding source that could restore the cutbacks and Transit First adopted that proposal to avoid service reductions in Montgomery County. At a public meeting

February 11 on the proposed Ride-On cutbacks and in later budget meetings, hundreds of concerned riders, community organizers, and union members turned out to oppose the cutbacks. Miriam Schoenbaum and Ben Ross spoke on behalf of ACT and Transit First, respectively, at that hearing and a later hearing

After the February meeting, County Executive Isaiah Leggett agreed to restore funding for Ride-On routes 7 and 37. The County Council then turned its attention toward finding funds to avert all the proposed reductions.

The County Council ultimately imposed higher parking fees in Bethesda to generate enough money to avoid further Ride-On cuts. All proposed Ride-On cuts were restored and one route already eliminated in April will be restored in September. With higher parking rates in Bethesda, the tax that subsidizes parking was reduced, and the countywide mass transit tax was very slightly increased (\$4 per year for a typical homeowner). There will be no net increase in real estate tax revenues, keeping the county under the recently enacted tax cap.

Member organizations of Transit First include Action Committee for Transit, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, Audubon Naturalist Society, CASA de Maryland, Clean Water Action, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Crofton First, MCGEO — UFCW Local 1994, Prince George's Advocates for Community-based Transit, Progressive Maryland, and Save Maryland Area Rail Transit.



ACT Testimony on Corridor Cities Transitway and I-270 Widening

[Presented by Miriam Schoenbaum, testifying on behalf of Action Committee for Transit, on June 16, 2009 at the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) public hearings in Gaithersburg, MD].

Action Committee for Transit believes that the purpose of transportation planning should be to get people from here to there, not cars. As a result, for the Corridor Cities Transitway, we strongly support the extension of rail transit north of Shady Grove. We hope that MDOT will immediately begin building a light rail line from the Shady Grove Metro station through the King Farm and proposed Crown Farm town centers to Kentlands Boulevard, on the Kentlands side of Great Seneca Highway – without a detour into the Johns Hopkins University’s proposed “Science City” development. For transit north of the Kentlands, MDOT should immediately begin a study of a fast, direct rail connection from Shady Grove to Metropolitan Grove, the Germantown, Clarksburg and Urbana town centers, and downtown Frederick. We need a transportation system that gets people out of their cars by connecting population centers and transporting riders to their destinations by rail, quickly and directly. We do not need a slow, indirect transit system that goes places few would take transit to get to and won’t make a dent in the traffic on 270.

For the highway expansion, we oppose the express toll lanes, which will cost taxpayers even more than just plain highway widening, while benefiting, at best, only the taxpayers rich enough to use them. And we strongly support the no-build alternative. MDOT’s traffic projections notwithstanding, the relationship between increased highway capacity and increased vehicle travel is well-established. Bigger highways get rid of traffic jams for a few years. But then there are more cars on the highway than before, more traffic jams – and plans for an even bigger highway. Remember the last time lanes were added to 270. Twenty-odd years ago, 270 was so bad that Maryland spent hundreds of millions on highway widening. Did this solve the problem? It did not, as we well know. According to the Washington Post,

fewer than ten years later, 270 was again a rolling parking lot, and traffic in some places already exceeded MDOT’s projections for a decade or more into the future. Our choice is clear. Either we widen 270 again, knock down hundreds of houses, pave thousands of acres, burn millions of gallons of gas, spend billions of dollars borrowed from our children, and warm up the planet, and then come back here in ten years to comment on another MDOT solution to traffic in the 270 corridor. Or we acknowledge now that widening 270 will never solve the traffic problem, and we work instead on effective mass transit north of Shady Grove.

ACT Position on White Flint - Rockville Pike & MARC

Letter of May 4, 2009 from
ACT President Ben Ross to Chairman Royce
Hanson, Montgomery County Planning Board

As strong supporters of the redevelopment of the White Flint area as a vibrant transit-oriented urban center, the Action Committee for Transit wishes to express its views about two issues before the Planning Board on the Master Plan: design of Rockville Pike and the new MARC station.

Rockville Pike - *We share the view of citizens and business groups that Glatting Jackson’s design for Rockville Pike is superior to the recommendation of the Planning Board staff. The White Flint area would benefit immensely from a pedestrian-friendly “great street” in the heart of the new urban district. We must exercise creativity and move away from the suburban street designs of the past.*

Despite successes in Bethesda and Silver Spring, the pedestrian ambiance of these downtowns remains limited by the arterial-style highways. As Bethesda developed, the focus of activity has moved away from Wisconsin Avenue (envisioned by the Master Plan as the spine of the downtown) to the more pedestrian-friendly Woodmont Avenue. The east side of Wisconsin,

despite relatively intense office and residential development, is cut off and has never developed the all-day activity that occurs on the west side. One can already see that Colesville Road, Georgia Avenue, and East-West Highway divide residential from retail areas and hamper connecting the newer parts and the older areas of downtown. We need to learn from such experiences to create a better and more humane White Flint.

MARC station - *We support the Planning Board's goal of a 24-hour transit-oriented community at White Flint. Under the right circumstances, a new MARC station would contribute to this goal. However, the current one-way rush-hour service on the Brunswick Line cannot support intense transit-oriented development. MTA plans for frequent, all-day, two-way service on this line by 2035, but funding is uncertain.*

The Red Line Metro station at White Flint provides enough transit now to support development of a walkable, transit-oriented community. We therefore support moving ahead with the White Flint Master Plan. This Plan should set aside space for a future MARC station but not include that station in its transportation planning. The White Flint MARC station should wait until it is served all-day, two-way on the Brunswick Line. Since MTA plans for more limited-stop and express trains by that point, there is no reason why MARC could not then maintain service at Garrett Park as well.

At the National Building Museum

July 21, 6:30-8pm, **The Purple Line: A Rail Solution?** Free. Registration required.

Hear a panel of experts, including MTA's Mike Madden, discuss the Purple Line's potential to relieve congestion, spur economic development, and connect people to jobs in the rapidly growing Maryland suburbs. Robert Thomson, the Post's Dr. Gridlock, moderates.

More info contact NBM at www.nbm.org or 202-272-2448; 401 F Street NW, Washington, DC; Red Line Metro, Judiciary Square

ACT Testifies to Congress

Ben Ross

[Reprinted are highlights of the testimony of ACT President Ben Ross on April 29, 2009 before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and District of Columbia. Although the testimony starts off opposing cuts in Metrobus and other local transit services, it touches on fixing the root causes of these cuts.]

. . . Something is wrong here with our overall policy-making mechanism. The threat of global warming and the need to protect national security by lessening our dependence on foreign oil require a shift from driving to transit. Yet transit service is shrinking while we continue to build new facilities for automobile travel.

The American love affair with the automobile is over. Nation-wide, people are riding transit more and driving less. A year ago, this trend was attributed to high gas prices – but no more. Even though gas prices today are much lower than a year ago, transit ridership is still up and vehicle miles traveled are down.

. . . In Washington, Metrorail ridership started rising in 1998 after a decade of little change. Since then it has grown at breakneck speed. Average weekday ridership rose from 528,000 in May 1998 to 752,000 in May 2008 – an increase of 42% in just 10 years – far exceeding population growth. Despite a worsening economy and falling gas prices, ridership is still significantly higher than a year earlier.

. . . No one today would call driving on the Beltway a pleasure. Driving is not a prestige activity and voters don't like to be taxed for it any more than anything else. Gasoline taxes have not increased since 1993 although Maryland has had four modest increases in transportation revenues.

. . . With the public no longer happy to pay for roads, revenues from automobile user fees have dropped. Gasoline usage is falling as a result of improved fuel economy and slower growth in car travel. . . Drivers are relieved of much of the burden of paying for highways – making the

general public, including transit riders, pay instead. When this subsidy is taken into account, the user fees paid by drivers are dropping much more steeply than generally recognized.

As a consequence of voters' growing resistance to gas tax increases, the tax per gallon has stayed fixed as the gasoline prices went up – causing the indirect subsidy to increase rapidly as a fraction of gas tax revenues.

. . . For one thing, federal aid to Metro is no higher, as a percentage, than in the Maryland budget.¹ Yet Metro plays a unique role in supporting the federal government's presence in the nation's capital. Clearly, federal support is incommensurate with this role. Funding at the recently authorized \$150 million/year level is badly needed.

. . . Second, only 19.8% of Maryland's automobile transportation program is funded by user fees. This is far less than the 32% that users pay Metro through fares and parking fees. Automobile taxes do not subsidize transit. On the contrary, transit riders are subsidizing highway programs.

. . . Transportation budgets are being severely stressed. . . The cause of this stress can be traced back to the lessened popularity of automobile travel. The shift in public preferences can be seen both in travel choices and in voters' resistance to new automobile user fees, but it has not been reflected on the expenditure side of transportation budgets. Major highway construction projects are in full swing on both sides of the Potomac. This combination – continued road-building alongside shrinkage of the user fee revenues that formerly paid for the roads – has put transportation budgets in a vise.

¹Metro receives 16.6% of its budget from federal aid, which is less than the 18.3% received by the Maryland highway program. Some federal aid to the jurisdictions that passes through to Metro is included in . . . general tax revenues; moving these pass-throughs into the federal aid category would slightly increase the share of federal aid in Metro's budget.

. . . We see funding shortfalls in Maryland despite strong commitment to transit and to fiscal responsibility under Gov. Martin O'Malley and his Secretary of Transportation John Porcari, who is U.S. DOT Deputy Secretary nominee. Elsewhere in the Washington area, neither D.C. nor Virginia has increased gas taxes since 1993. Other transit systems in the country are suffering cutbacks even more severe than Metro.

Failure to adjust transportation budgets to the new reality is . . . the true cause of Metro's fiscal troubles and the reason commuters are threatened with service cuts. The public has spoken for a shift from autos to transit – indeed, it has spoken twice, with its feet and with its votes. But the political system has been slow to listen. Money continues to pour into highways of marginal value while transit is starved.

From the 88th Annual Transportation Research Board (TRB) Meeting, January 11-15, 2009 in Washington, DC, there is a paper that will fascinate ACT readers: ***The Emergent Curbside Intercity Bus Industry: Chinatown and Beyond.*** This paper is summarized in the next article.

The Emergent Curbside Intercity Bus Industry: Chinatown and Beyond

Abstracted from TRB Paper 09-1043 by
Quon Kwan

Nicholas Klein, Rutgers University, authored the first study ever made of the emerging curbside intercity bus industry, commonly known as “Chinatown buses”.

In the past 10 years, curbside intercity buses have quickly grown to become an important transportation provider on the Northeast Corridor with over 2500 low-fare bus trips per week. Such buses are known as “Chinatown buses” because they began in 1998 when Chinese immigrants in New York City chartered a local jitney van to go to

Boston to visit their children in college. This service became a regularly scheduled service between the Chinatowns in the two cities. In 1999, a similar service began daily trips between Philadelphia and New York.

Had it not been for September 11, 2001 (9/11), the “Chinatown buses” would have remained a niche market. However, the 70% decline in the charter bus industry after 9/11 combined with fear of airplane travel and inconvenience of airport security prompted charter bus companies to use their idle buses for regularly scheduled “curbside” intercity bus service. The term “curbside” denotes the fact that these intercity buses stage at curbside – not at conventional bus terminals.

New competition among curbside intercity bus operators in Chinatown quickly led to fare reduction, increased ridership, and route expansion. As college students, often non-Asian, discovered the “Chinatown buses,” ridership rose to where in 2003, 1/3 of riders on the weekdays were non-Chinese growing to ½ on weekends.

Despite competition, new companies continue to enter the crowded market for intercity travel. In 2006, Megabus (a Scottish firm) began 16 routes from Chicago followed by 5 routes from Los Angeles; in 2008, Megabus began 6 routes from New York City. In 2008, Greyhound and Peter Pan (traditional carriers) jointly funded BoltBus, a new low-cost curbside intercity bus in the Northeast Corridor.

In comparing curbside intercity buses with competitors (e.g., Greyhound and Amtrak), curbside intercity buses offer more scheduled and frequent departures and much cheaper fares. [Traditional intercity bus carriers try to match the cheaper fares of the curbside carriers through internet ticket sales.] Although curbside buses are slower than Amtrak, they are faster than traditional intercity buses. On New York (NY)-Boston, NY-Washington, and NY-Philadelphia routes, curbside intercity buses capture 63%, 61%, and 44%, respectively, of all train and bus trips.

The curbside intercity bus industry is dependent primarily on reducing labor costs and utilizing taxpayer-subsidized city street curbs for

staging. Labor typically accounts for 60 – 75% of the operating costs. Labor costs are reduced through internet ticketing, avoiding the need for ticket sellers. Also, baggage handlers are not used or minimized. This industry pays its drivers about half of what a traditional intercity carrier pays.

By not using a regular bus terminal for staging, a curbside intercity bus firm saves considerable expense. Use of the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City costs \$40/departure plus annual fees of \$13,000-\$19,000/gate depending on location. A carrier with 200 weekly departures must pay \$416,000/ year. On the other hand, the same carrier would have to average \$1,140/day in parking and moving traffic violations to total \$416,000.

Entrepreneurs run curbside intercity buses by taking advantage of a deregulated industry. They make decisions without consulting local transportation planners and show little responsibility to the public or neighborhoods where they stage. This unplanned service caught many cities off-guard as to how to handle the multitude of buses that use the curbside.

Regulators have only recently begun to address the negative externalities of curbside intercity buses. The DC Department of Transportation (DDOT) proposed requiring such buses to stage in a single, common area at L’Enfant Plaza, instead of any old curbside. However, DDOT withdrew the proposed requirement after public outcry. Boston intensified ticketing until it was too costly not to use a bus terminal; now they use South Station.

The U.S. Department of Justice has sued one curbside intercity bus firm for noncompliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Massachusetts State Attorney General successfully sued a bus firm for refusing to accommodate a blind person accompanied by a guide dog. To address public safety concerns, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration [for whom your editor works and which regulates the intercity bus industry] created a “strike force” and increased inspections. (You may check the safety status of any intercity bus company: <http://www.ai.fmcsa.dot.gov/Passenger/home.asp>).

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8

Transit Times, vol. 23, no. 3, July 2009

Council of Governments Transportation Planning Board Votes Unanimously to Advance the Purple Line

Purple Line Now!

The Purple Line took another step forward on June 17 when the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) approved the light rail Purple Line for air quality conformity testing. This is an important move to prepare the project for incorporation in the Constrained Long Range Transportation Plan (CLRP). The vote of support for environmentally-friendly mass transit unites the voices of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties to present the strongest case for light rail to Governor O'Malley and our state's congressional delegation.

THANK YOU!

ACT Volunteers have been busy leafleting, writing our decision makers, stuffing envelopes and more.

You are the best!

Editorial Remarks

Your Transit Times editor is Quon Kwan. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is **September 11**. Send your materials to Quon at: qykwang@gmail.com or call him at: (h) 301-460-7454.

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