



ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 24, Number 1, January 2010

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.

Jan 12: Election of ACT Officers – see p. 8 for nominations. Come and vote; Bill Lind, author of the new book "Moving Minds," will speak on the topic of "Conservatives and Public Transit"

Feb 9: Topic - ACT's Strategic Plan

March 9: Speaker TBD

- Hair of the Dog No Cure for Traffic Hangover (p. 4)
- ACTION on Access at Naval Medical Metrorail Station (p. 5)
- Local Transit Oriented Development Lowers Vehicle Trips (p. 6)

County Seems to Oppose All Non-Auto Transportation in Favor of Auto Transportation

Quon Kwan

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) seems to have taken a position against all non-automobile transportation projects and in favor of all automobile transportation projects. For one, it has delayed forward progress on the Bethesda south entrance to the Metro, which is also the access to the Purple Line, for four months. (See article in this newsletter, "Council of Governments Endorses Purple Line & Related News.")

Second, MCDOT is trying to use money designated for pedestrian access to the Medical Center Metro station to build a highway underpass. MCDOT appears to have ganged up with a private construction company to conceal information from the public about the true nature of what they seek to do with Federal funding for the project. (See article in this issue, "ACTION on Access at Naval Medical Metrorail Station.")

Feature Articles

- County Seems to Oppose All Non-Auto Transportation in Favor of Auto Transportation (p. 1)
- Victory and Setback on I-270 Corridor (p. 2)
- Council of Governments Endorses Purple Line and Related News (p. 3)

It's Time To Renew Your ACT Membership

You can renew your membership 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.

Third, it is promoting an unneeded, overpriced underground parking garage in Bethesda (see article in this issue, "Last Chance to Stop \$89 Million Garage Boondoggle") in the face of the county's \$500 million budget gap.

Fourth, more than one year has gone by since ACT sent a letter to the county suggesting bus priority improvements. We identified ten specific intersections where buses could be moved faster with no-cost changes like re-striping and signal re-timing. The result would be faster transit service and budget savings for the county and Metro. Yet we still have not received an answer.

Finally, MCDOT opposes the provisions of the proposed White Flint master plan that would make Rockville Pike a pedestrian-friendly boulevard. It argues that Rockville Pike ought to be designed to carry high-speed traffic into Washington, D.C. while pedestrians and transit riders need to take a back seat.

Victory and Setback on I-270 Corridor

Quon Kwan

ACT scored a victory and a setback on its advocacy efforts (see "ACT's All-Transit Alternative for the I-270 Corridor" in the last ACT Newsletter) when the Montgomery County Council on November 17, 2009 voted to recommend to the Maryland Department of Transportation:

- (1) Light rail as the mode (instead of bus rapid transit) for the Corridor Cities Transitway. (This was a victory for ACT because it is a part of ACT's vision and won extensive support from legislators), and
- (2) Two reversible, High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes for I-270 (instead of four conventional, non-toll lanes) (This was a setback for ACT because our position is to spend all the money on transit and use the I-270 right of way for an extension of the Red Line).

Purple Line Functional Plan

It's not too late to make your voice heard.

The community has until January 22, 2010 to comment on the Purple Line Functional Plan, which is before the Montgomery County Planning Board. Show support for the Purple Line, endorse the use of "best practices," let them know that the Rail and Trail can go together.

E-mail your comments to mcp-chair@mncppc-mc.org or write to Planning Board, 8787 Georgia Ave, Silver Spring, MD 20910. For more information go to www.purplelinenow.com.

The Corridor Cities Transitway is a proposed 14-mile transitway in the I-270 corridor that would extend from the Shady Grove Metro Station to Clarksburg. The recommendation in regard to light rail for the Corridor Cities Transitway was 6-3, with Councilmembers Valerie Ervin, Nancy Floreen, Mike Knapp, George Leventhal, Nancy Navarro and Duchy Trachtenberg in favor of the light rail option. Council President Andrews, Vice President Roger Berliner and Councilmember Marc Elrich preferred the less-expensive option of dedicated Bus Rapid Transit.

The Council by an 8-1 vote recommended an alignment for the Corridor Cities Transitway that would be closer to the Kentlands community and the proposed future communities at Crown Farm and Gaithersburg West. Council President Andrews voted against the recommendation because the Council has yet to take action on the scope of the proposed major expansion of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan and the proposed Life Sciences Center that is part of the plan. Andrews indicated support for the realignment regarding the Kentlands and Crown Farm that are in the City of Gaithersburg and not within the pending Gaithersburg West Master Plan.

Building two reversible lanes rather than four regular lanes would offer some cost savings and reduce environmental and community impacts, but it would still be very expensive. The county has voted to offer car pool users, buses and motorcyclists free use of the toll lanes, but experience with the Intercounty Connector shows that the state -- which is the ultimate decision-maker -- may not go along with that. When the ICC was planned, the public was promised that tolls would be just high enough to make sure that the lanes move at a reasonable speed. Now that the road is becoming reality, the tolls have been set at a much higher level in order to bring in as much money as possible. This means that the toll lanes will take less traffic off other roads than promised -- and thus offer less relief to middle-income commuters who can't afford to pay.

Council of Governments Endorses Purple Line and Related News

Harry Sanders

On October 21, 2009, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) Transportation Planning Board (TPB) voted unanimously to place the Purple Line on the region's Constrained Long-Range Plan (CLRP). No opposition was voiced during the hearing or the citizen comment period. Placement of the project on the CLRP is a critical requirement for Federal funding.

Thanks to James Clarke, Wayne Phyllaier, Ralph Bennett, who in addition to Harry Sanders, testified before the TPB.

Mike Madden and Henry Kay of the Maryland Transit Administration confirmed that there were sufficient funds to continue with the engineering phase without delay.

The Prince George's County Council formally adopted the new Countywide Transportation Master Plan during its November 17 meeting. This new Master Plan includes the Purple Line light rail as a key part of the overall transportation and land use plan for the County. The Prince George's County Council has long been on the record as unanimously supporting Purple Line light rail, but having the Purple Line included in the Master Plan is an essential to qualify for federal funding.

Montgomery County is acting now to bring its Master Plan into conformity for Purple Line funding. A draft "Purple Line Functional Plan" is under review by the Mont. Co. Planning Board and a public hearing was scheduled for December 10, 2009. ACT members, including Craig Simpson and myself, testified at the December 10 public hearing.

Craig Simpson stated that the Purple Line is badly needed and light rail is the best choice. He refuted assertions by plan opponents that

double tracking is a fundamental and unacceptable change from the old master plan, by reminding the Board *"Light Rail has been specified on the County's Master Plan since 1990 when the Georgetown Branch Master Plan was approved. The lengthy process that led to that decision rejected buses on the right-of-way between Bethesda and Silver Spring."*

Harry Sanders testified to endorse "best practices" that are part of world-class transit systems. Best practices occur in several cities in Spain and France, which create tram systems so attractive that they are featured on post cards. Best practices include grass tracks and wireless systems.

Meanwhile, the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) delayed forward progress on the Bethesda south entrance to the Metro, which is also the main access to the Purple Line, for four months. Last summer, MCDOT told the Maryland Transit Administration to stop work on the project while it thought about whether Elm Street, where the sidewalk will be widened to make room for new elevators down to the Red and Purple Lines, should be made a one-way street. MTA was told not to show its plans to WMATA. Only in mid-December did MCDOT allow this project to resume, and MCDOT threatens further obstruction because it still has not decided on Elm Street.

Hair of the Dog No Cure for Traffic Hangover

Ben Ross

(letter to the editor, *Gazette*, Nov. 20, 2009)

Is a hair of the dog the way to cure a drunk? Of course not, and more asphalt is no remedy for the hangover from a 50 year binge of auto-dependent sprawl development.

But more asphalt and more traffic is what we get from Montgomery County's failed Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO). The measure of good transportation, under this law, is how many cars can move through street corners. The more traffic that can get through, the more the corner has "improved." A cloverleaf overpass that blights surrounding neighborhoods is the biggest "improvement" of all.

Day by day, this so-called "growth policy" makes developers add lanes to roads near new buildings. This is medicine that treats only the symptom and aggravates the underlying illness of traffic congestion. Walking to train stations and bus stops becomes difficult and dangerous, so more people drive. Economic incentives push new development into outlying areas where commutes are long and transit is hard to reach. Cars move faster through newly widened streets, and then create more jam-ups a few blocks down the road.

The growth policy doesn't work because it is based on a false diagnosis of the traffic plague. It rests on the premise that a few congested intersections — or, at worst, a few busy "policy areas" — are surrounded by underused roads where rush-hour drivers see open roads. But of course our traffic congestion is not an isolated problem; it is a regional disease. Its cause is too much driving, not a localized lack of road capacity. A law that forces people to drive by distancing new buildings from transit stations and making streets hard to cross creates more traffic and more backups.

Even worse than the traffic jams is the damage the APFO does to our communities. It shapes our environment to fit traffic engineers'

HOLD THE DATE

Join Purple Line NOW! for the Most Exciting Event This Winter!

What: Purple Line NOW! Reception - headlined by Maryland Lt. Governor Anthony Brown and featuring other key business leaders and elected officials.

When: February 10, 2010 at 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
(Remarks begin at 7:15 pm)

Where: Performing Arts Center at Montgomery College, Takoma Park – Silver Spring Campus, 7995 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, MD

Why: To raise funds to help mobilize our support base and provide public outreach and advocacy. We believe the Purple Line is the most important next addition to the Maryland public transit network.

rules of thumb. Pedestrians don't count and the only people who use roads are drivers. By these rules, the Springfield Mixing Bowl is a triumph and urban neighborhoods like Boston's Beacon Hill or Paris's Latin Quarter are "failures."

Montgomery County's growth policy can't build the new rail transit lines that are the only real cure for our transportation disease, but it can at least stop making the illness worse. Starting near Metro stations, roads need to be redesigned to serve all, placing pedestrians and cyclists on an equal footing with drivers. The growth policy amendments now before the County Council fall far short of the fundamental change that is needed, but this modest step forward deserves approval.

ACTion on Access at Naval Medical Metrorail Station

Ben Ross

On September 21, 2009, ACT requested a copy of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grant Application submitted by Montgomery County, Maryland, for "Bethesda Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Multi-Modal Traffic Mitigation and Pedestrian Access Project." This document was submitted with a cover letter from County Executive Isiah Leggett to U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary LaHood, on Sept. 15, 2009.

The county made public a redacted version of this document, claiming that the missing pages are confidential business information of Clark Construction Group, LLC. The proposed project is labeled as promoting pedestrian access to the Bethesda Navy Hospital. However, as best as can be determined from the non-redacted parts of the proposal, it is actually an underground roadway. The project appears to deter pedestrians from crossing the street to/from the Medical Center Metro station, and instead

forces them to walk on an underground sidewalk next to the traffic.

Even though the County states that the project, if funded, will be subject to open bidding, bidding will not be fair and open if Clark Construction has superior knowledge about the project. If withholding the information now will give Clark a competitive advantage later, non-disclosure would violate procurement rules.

The information that is being withheld includes the location and dimensions of the proposed tunnel. Such information must be disclosed in the environmental review process.

Designation of the missing or withheld information as Confidential Business Information (CBI) bypasses planning processes required under U.S. DOT rules. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority did a detailed study of five options for improved pedestrian access at this location, none of which included a vehicle tunnel.

At the last meeting of the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) of Metropolitan Washington Council Of Governments (MWCOG) prior to the grant submission, this project was described to MWCOG members as a pedestrian tunnel. This item was discussed, and MWCOG staff was instructed to keep open the option of new elevators down to the Metro on the Navy Medical side of Wisconsin Ave. However, the grant application as submitted did not include any of the aforementioned options and instead proposed a vehicle tunnel. At the next TPB meeting, after the application deadline, the regional planning body was handed a *fait accompli*, with the essential information it needed to make an informed judgment still withheld.

The Bethesda Base Re-alignment and Closure (BRAC) Implementation Committee, a broad-based advisory committee, devoted numerous meetings to the options studied by Metro. The committee learned of this proposal only after the fact, on the evening of September 15. Even the Navy was not consulted; its representative was quoted in the *Gazette* as saying that the county put the Navy's "*backs against the wall.*"

Local Transit Oriented Development Lowers Vehicle Trips

Ben Ross

The Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) published Report No. 128, "Effects of Transit-Oriented Development on Housing, Parking, and Travel." The authors are G. B. Arrington and the renowned Robert Cervero. This report documents the reduction in vehicle trips associated with transit-oriented developments in four metropolitan areas: Philadelphia, PA, Portland, OR, San Francisco, CA, and Washington, DC. The study found the lowest vehicle trip reductions in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Five Washington, DC local transit-oriented developments were studied:

- Lenox Park at Silver Spring Metrorail Station,
- Avalon at Grosvenor Metrorail Station,
- Meridian at Braddock Road Metrorail Station (Alexandria)
- Quincy Plaza at Virginia Square Metrorail Station (Arlington)
- Apartments Gallery at Virginia Square Metrorail Station (Arlington)

At the Lenox Park Apartments near the Silver Spring Metrorail Station on East-West Highway, vehicle trip generation was one-third of the rates predicted by the model given in the Institute of Transportation Engineers' (ITE) manuals and far below the Montgomery County Planning Board of the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission's (MNCPPC) estimate. The MNCPPC used a peak-hour trip generation rate of 0.30 in downtown Bethesda and Silver Spring. The actual rate at the Lenox was 0.18 in the AM and 0.22 in the PM. Further, Lenox Park is cut off from the rest of downtown Silver Spring by East-West Highway, so the trip generation rate might be lower in other parts of downtown Silver Spring and in Bethesda.

At the Avalon at Grosvenor Metrorail Station, the reduction in vehicle trip generation was much less, only about 20% below ITE-predicted rates. However, there is no place from which one can walk from that building, except for the Metrorail Station and Strathmore Hall (which is accessed only by going through the parking garage).

At the Meridian at the Braddock Road Metrorail Station in Alexandria, the vehicle trip generation was more than 90% (yes – 90%) below the ITE predicted values.

Two transit-oriented developments (namely, Quincy Plaza and Apartments Gallery) were studied at the Virginia Square Metrorail Station in the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor of the Orange Line in Arlington. Apartments Gallery generated vehicle trips 55% below the ITE estimated value, and Quincy Plaza generated vehicle trips about 70% below ITE estimated value.

The research implies that parking ratios for residential transit-oriented developments are likely overstated since they also are based on ITE data. Some of the cumulative impacts of over-parking in transit-oriented developments are illustrated in case studies. The case studies demonstrate that under certain conditions lowering residential parking ratios for transit-oriented developments in quality transit-service areas result in:

- Increasing 20%-33% the potential density of a residential transit-oriented development (depending on the residential building type);
- Saving 5%-36% on residential parking costs, after accounting for increases in the number of units to be parked from increased residential density; and
- Potentially increasing developer profits and/or housing affordability through higher densities, lower capital costs for parking, and reduced traffic impact fees.

Kudos

John Carroll

Transit advocates were visible and vocal again in 2009 calling for safer streets and improved transit across Montgomery County. Here are some of the names we were able to record:

Anne Ambler, Brett & Joseph Badin, Nathan Bahn, Marilyn Balcombe, Michael Ball, George Barsky, Brenda Beattie, Gary & Kay Boughan, Paul Boylin, John Breeskin, Carolyn Bryant, Clyde Buzzard, Evelyn Cameron, Rachel Cohen, Martin Czigler, Coleen DiPaul, Barbara Ditzler, Sharon Dooley, Sally Dorsey, Nathan Dotson, Dino Drudi, Jon Elkind, Valerie Ervin, John Fay, Ruth Fort, Brenda Freeman, Peter Galvin, Ethan Goffman, Karen Goozner, Seth Gordon, Burton Gray, Sean Hall, Richard Harris, Arnold Hauser, Carl Henn, Deborah Holveg, Joe Howard, Paul Howey, Kathie Hulley, Zara Iqbal, Shawn Jacobson, Kathy Jentz, Laurie Kelly, Kiersten King, Beth Kirby, Cheryl Kothrade, Ken Lee, Drew Malizio, Bob Mason, Deborah Miller, Harvard Morehead, Sadef Mortezaei, Johanna Nathanson, Niels Pemberton, Joel Pomerantz, Jon Prater-Lewis, Linda & Jerry Rafats, Jayanthi Ramprakash, Richard Reis, Arthur Rowse, Marcia Rucker, Ana Salazar, Melinda Salzman, Michael Sandner, Basil Scarlis, Terry Seamens, Sandra Seider, Mike Shirven, Craig Simpson, Tina Slater, Ryan Spiegel, Barry Starke, Patty Stephens, Baird Straughan, David Tolman, Rebecca Van Gilder, Lise Van Susteren, Hope Walker, Richard Wanerman, Helena Weingarten, Jon Weintraub, Kenneth Weiss, David West, Emma Williams, Peggy Wise, John Wolff, Laura Wright, Constance Wynn, Sandra Yates.

Thanks to all citizens who spoke out, attended hearings and sent messages. Our county is taking notice of transit, bike & pedestrian needs. Thanks to everyone.

ACT is forming a **Pedestrian & Bike Committee** to be chaired by ACT member Richard Hoye. **We welcome all those who are interested to join the Committee.** To join or for more information, please e-mail admin@actfortransit.org or call Richard at 240-644-4084.

ACT Members In The Spotlight

Cindy Snow

ACT Board member **Tina Slater** has agreed to chair a long-range planning committee for ACT. **Hans Riemer** and **Richard Hoye** are also members on the committee. Thanks for taking this job on, Tina, Hans & Richard.

ACT member and former Secretary, **Rodolfo Perez**, was mentioned in the Dec. 17, 2009 *Washington Post* article "Transportation Department Honors Metro Safety Whistle-blower." The article pointed out that a bridge manager for the Dulles Rail project, Steve T. Mackey of VA, "was honored with a letter of thanks from U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General Calvin Scovel III" for bringing concerns about old foundations to be used for the rail without all of them being fully tested for load bearing. Rodolfo, "an engineer adviser for the inspector general and the lead investigator in the case, also was acknowledged for his work." Thanks Rodolfo for keeping us safe.

During the Governor's announcement of light rail for the Purple Line back in August, ACT member **Jim Clarke** was recognized by State Senator Paul Pinsky. When Senator Pinsky stepped up to the podium he recalled how, many years ago, a fellow named Jim Clarke came to his office and told him about the idea for the Purple Line. That was Senator Pinsky's introduction to the Purple Line, and as he said at the podium, "It was a good idea then, and it's still a good idea now."

A Call To Members (2):

Is your civic group or homeowners association interested in learning about ACT's All-Transit Alternative to I-270 Widening? ACT has formed a **Speakers Bureau** on our I-270 Vision and we want to speak to your organization. **Please provide ACT with the name and contact information for your organization.** We will send them information about ACT's Speakers Bureau and the All-Transit Alternative. E-mail the contact information to admin@actfortransit.org or call Cindy Snow at 240-308-1209.

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Silver Spring, MD 20907

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Meeting Notes

At the November membership meeting, participants passed a motion to support the concept of building a new entrance at the north end of the White Flint Metro Station.

Also at the November membership meeting, speaker Alison Mosle listed four items ACT members could request the County Council to do to help promote the center transitway down Rockville Pike that is part of the White Flint Sector Plan before the Council. Please ask the County Council to:

- Dedicate the center transitway down Rockville Pike.
- Support proposed funding for the transitway.
- Keep the self-proposed tax within the White Flint Sector Plan area.
- Redo Rockville Pike in the 1st phase, not the 3rd phase

For more information on the White Flint Sector Plan go to www.friendsofwhiteflint.org.

Contact the Council at county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov or write to Montgomery County Council, 100 Maryland Ave, Rockville, MD 20850.

Editorial Remarks

Your Transit Times editor is Quon Kwan. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is **March 9**. Send your materials to Quon at: qykwan@gmail.com or call him at: (h) 301-460-7454.

ACT Officers Nominated for 2010:

President: Ben Ross
V. Pres.: Jim Clarke
V. Pres.: Hans Riemer
V. Pres.: Tina Slater
Secretary: Tracey Johnstone
Treasurer: John Carroll
Board Member: Cavan Wilk
Board Member: Jason Waskey

Non-Voting ex officio board members:

Richard Hoyer: Pedestrian & Bike Safety
Harry Sanders: Purple Line Now!
Webb Smedley: Purple Line Now!
Miriam Schoenbaum: SMART (MARC riders)

**Come to the Jan. 12 meeting ready to vote.
Nominations from the floor will be accepted.**