



ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 28, Number 3, July 2014

ACT's monthly meetings are held at the Silver Spring Civic Building, One Veterans Place 20910, in the Ellsworth Room at 7:30 PM, the second Tuesday of each month.

The Silver Spring Civic Building is located at the corner of Fenton St & Ellsworth Dr. It is an eight minute walk north from the Silver Spring Metro Station. The nearest bus routes are: Ride-On routes #9, #12, #15, #16, #17, #19 and #20; and, Metrobus routes Z6 and Z8.

Parking is available at the Town Square Garage just across Ellsworth Dr from the Civic Building; it is free after 6:00pm.

For meeting updates check our website listed on pg 2.

Aug 12: Speaker TBD

Sept 9: Topic: "Vision Zero" (see pg 2), Speaker TBD

Oct 14: Speaker TBD

Feature Articles

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ROD Issued for the Purple Line – What Does That Mean?

Quon Kwan

The last issue of Transit Times announced breaking news that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) issued a Record of Decision (ROD) for the Purple Line on March 19. However, because there was not enough time to explain what the issuance of a ROD meant, the ROD will be explained here.

Every project funded with Federal government funds is subject to a review of its impact on the environment in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Such impacts are analyzed and summarized in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

First, by issuing the ROD, the FTA has determined that the requirements of the NEPA have been satisfied for the Purple Line project. The FTA is the lead federal agency for the Purple Line project, while the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) is the project sponsor for the Purple Line. The ROD applies to the Preferred Alternative (which is light rail as opposed to either a no-build or a busway) described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) issued by the MTA on September 6, 2013 for the Purple Line.

Continued on pg 2



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)]
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[the two digits after your category of membership code indicates year paid]

You can join/renew online at our website, or 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

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You may also give your membership dues to Treasurer John Fay 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.

Vision Zero

- “No loss of life is acceptable”

“Vision Zero” is a plan for road safety developed in Sweden, based on the premise: *“The road system needs to keep us moving. But it must also be designed to protect us at every turn.”* In the United States “Vision Zero” programs have been implemented in Minnesota, Utah and Washington state with noticeable results. This year San Francisco, New York City and Montana have announced plans for “Vision Zero” initiatives. *“Throughout the world, the “Vision Zero” mindset, which accepts no traffic fatality as inevitable, is saving lives.”*

Second, by issuing the ROD, FTA has accepted the FEIS and closed a thorough and extensive process to identify and then avoid, minimize or mitigate possible impacts to communities, historic buildings and natural resources such as parks, wetlands, streams and trees. The ROD summarizes the purpose and needs of the project, the alternatives (either a no-build or a busway) considered, the comments received during the review period and responses to those comments, the factors that support the selection of the preferred alternative, and the commitments to be carried into further engineering and construction of the project.

Third, by issuing the ROD, FTA has indicated its desire to approve a Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) for the Purple Line. (Actual approval was insinuated by including the Purple Line in its *Annual Report to Congress On Funding Recommendations for FY2015 on the Capital Investment Grant (CIG) Program* (see below) and actual approval does not materialize until the FTA signs the FFGA for the Purple Line.") The FFGA will: define the cost and schedule for the transit project, commit to a maximum level of federal funding and specify the conditions under which MTA will manage the project. Thus, the MTA can move into the next phase of the project, which includes selecting a private partnership to finalize design, build, finance, operate and maintain (DBFOM) the project. MTA is now working with four private-sector teams, who will submit proposals to compete for the DBFOM award. In late 2014 or early 2015, MTA will select a preferred private-sector team and recommend the final agreement to the Board of Public Works for its review and approval. Construction for the Purple Line is slated to begin in 2015, with the line operational in late 2020.

In its *Annual Report to Congress On Funding Recommendations for FY2015 on the Capital Investment Grant (CIG) Program*, the FTA recommended the Purple Line as one of eight “New Start” projects for Federal funding at \$900 million, which comprises 38% of the total project costs of \$2.371 billion. Note that FTA already funded \$3 million for preliminary engineering for the Purple Line so this means that the FTA will not provide more than \$897 million in the future. In the President’s FY2015 Budget, \$100 million has been included for the Purple Line.

In the *Annual Report*, the FTA also lists ratings for five of the eight “New Start” projects (see table below). Note that the Baltimore Red Line is one of the “New Start” projects, making Maryland the only state with more than one “New Start” project. The three projects in the table below with “n/a” are exempt by law from being rated.

Project	Local Financial Commitment Summary Rating	Project Justification Rating	Overall Rating
Baltimore (MD) Red Line	Medium-High	Medium-High	Medium-High
Denver (CO) Southeast Extension	n/a	n/a	n/a
Durham (NC) Orange Light Rail	n/a	n/a	n/a
Fort Worth (TX) TEX Rail	Medium-High	Medium	Medium-High
Minneapolis (MN) Southwest Light Rail	Medium	Medium	Medium
Purple Line (MD)	Medium-High	Medium-High	Medium-High
San Diego (CA) Mid-Coast Corridor	Medium-High	Medium	Medium-High
Seattle (WA) Lynwood Link Extension	n/a	n/a	n/a

The Purple Line is a 16-mile light rail line that runs east-west inside the Capital Beltway between Bethesda in Montgomery County and New Carrollton in Prince George's County with 21 stations and with direct connections to Metrorail's Orange Line, Green Line and two legs of the Red Line, and the Maryland Area Rail Commuter (MARC) Brunswick, Camden and Penn Lines. Of the total project cost of \$2.371 billion, the private sector is expected to invest between \$500 and \$900 million. A combination of federal, state and local monies will fund the balance of the project. Estimated ridership by 2040 is expected to be more than 74,000.

In Memoriam – James W. Allen, Jr.

Ben Ross

James W. Allen, a great friend of ACT and of transit riders throughout the Washington area, died at the age of 71 on June 14.

Jimmy went to work for D.C. Transit as a bus driver in 1968 and rose to be president of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, which represents the majority of Metro employees, from 1998 to 2001. It was under his leadership that the union forged ties with ACT and other transit advocacy groups that have endured to this day. He greatly expanded Local 689's political outreach as well, forging ties that have benefited riders as well as union members.

A devoted church member, Jimmy saw leadership in his union as a calling. It was an opportunity to work for the betterment of the entire community while ensuring Metro's workers are fairly treated and enjoy a middle-class standard of living. Improving the transit network to serve riders more effectively helps those who work there to grow and prosper.

The end of his term in union office did not stop Jimmy's contributions to the community. Among many other activities, he worked closely with ACT founder Harry Sanders to establish the Prince George's Activists for Community-Based Transit. He was co-chair of that organization until his death. He continued his involvement in Prince George's County politics as well, and for the last two years was a member of the county Board of Elections.

Latest Report on Silver Spring Transit Center

Quon Kwan

Transit Times last featured an article on the Silver Spring Transit Center (SSTC) exactly one year ago. It reported on findings and recommendations of an independent consulting firm hired to evaluate major problems with the SSTC. The SSTC is a 259,000 ft², post-tensioned, cast-in-place, open-air, three level concrete structure; it is designed to handle over 57,000 riders to/from local, commuter, and intercity buses; Metrorail; commuter rail; and the future Purple Line. The SSTC was started in 2008, its cost rose from \$93.3 million to \$120 million. Although not yet finished, cracking and spalling of the concrete has already been spotted.

On April 21, the County Executive released another report on the SSTC. This report is of an Independent Advisory Committee comprised of four distinguished members who served without pay, have no conflict of interest with the matters at hand, and have engineering expertise. The Committee concluded that approximately another \$11 million is required to be spent on fixing the problems it has identified and that the fixes would require at least another eight to ten months of time (assuming multiple work shifts). Even after construction is completed and accepted, long-term maintenance and biannual inspections will be required.

The \$11 million is required to fix two major problems: (i) the need to strengthen elements of the structure to withstand combined shear and torsion stresses and (ii) the need to protect post-tensioning elements and reinforcements that are unacceptably close to the surface. If not fixed, the as-built structure could fail suddenly when subjected to dynamic loads from bus movement. As many as 240 buses could be moving per hour in the structure. The recommended particular fixes are as follows: (i) reinforcing certain interior beams and girders in the structure and (ii) applying a two-inch, latex-modified concrete overlay on the upper two levels. This latter fix would also address the cracking and spalling already spotted in the concrete.

The Committee essentially confirms the core findings and recommendations made last year by the independent consulting firm hired by the County. The Committee warned that the fixes ought to be performed now – even if opening of the SSTC is delayed. Performing any fixes after opening would be extremely disruptive to 57,000 transit riders. Of course, accelerating the fixes by running multiple work shifts would increase the cost of the fixes.

In addition to the major problems above, the Committee pointed out four problems not previously addressed. First, the original Engineer of Record (i.e., Parsons Brinckerhoff) may refuse to prepare the required design documents for the major fixes described above. Second, the handicap ramps do not comply with the Americans with Disability Act requirements and will have to be replaced. Third is that a large number of concrete tree boxes leak or trap water beneath them and need to be resolved. Fourth, a large amount of equipment that has been installed for a year or more may need to be re-qualified.

According to a report from Montgomery County's Office of the Inspector General, released May 20th, 14 of the 22 project management methods were either weak or ineffective. The report also noted that problems with the SSTC were identified as early as 2010, but the people involved in the project did not act to solve the problem when they were first identified. The report makes a range of suggestions to the County's Department of General Services to avoid similar problems in future projects.

UPDATE: The County, in cooperation with WMATA and Parsons Brinckerhoff, has agreed to a plan for the remediation recommended to make the Silver Spring Transit Center safe and durable. The go-ahead has been given to start the work, with Parsons Brinckerhoff agreeing to KCE Structural Engineers, the County's independent consulting firm, serving as Specialty Structural Engineer-of-Record. The County hopes to complete the facility by year's end, at which time the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority will do a final inspection before agreeing to take it over.

A Visit to the New York Transit Museum

Quon Kwan

On January 16, I visited the New York Transit Museum at Boerum Pl. and Schermerhorn St. in Brooklyn Heights. Entering the museum is like entering the subway because the museum is housed in the decommissioned Court St. subway station that was opened in 1936 as the west end of the IND (Independent) subway "HH" line. Plans to extend this line to 2nd Ave, failed because of low ridership and the availability of nearby stations so the station was closed in 1946. This station site was used to film "The Taking of Pelham 1-2-3" (1974 original and 2009 remake) and "The French Connection" (1971). On July 4, 1976, the site was re-opened as the "New York Transit Exhibit" commemorating the history of New York's buses and subways as part of the U.S. Bicentennial. The exhibit was so popular that it never closed and became the New York Transit Museum in 1984, now owned/operated by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

The museum consists of two floors, a classroom (mostly for children), a shop, archives, and offices. The lower floor contains vintage subway and elevated railcars sitting on the original subway tracks as well as a working signal tower. The upper, main floor houses several fascinating, professionally-curated exhibits:

- "Steel, Stone, and Backbone: Building New York's Subways 1900-1925." The exhibit is about the workers who built the subways before the city government took it on. Albeit hard, back-breaking work, it resulted in an achievement hailed as a world-class engineering marvel, which we now take for granted. For the adults are didactics describing the dangers of deep rock mining and underwater tunneling as well as the social, political, and economic aspects of the effort (e.g., ethnic patronage systems, Tammany Hall, labor strikes, kickbacks, and racial discrimination). For the children are hands-on activities so that they can feel how heavy is a wheelbarrow full of rocks or see what a test boring of layers of rock and sand looks like.
- "ElectriCity: Powering New York's Rails." This exhibit is about the entire process of generating, transmitting, converting, and consuming electricity to move 8 million passengers/day. When opened in 1904, New York's first subway was the largest user of electricity in the U.S., all generated by the 59th St. powerhouse, the world's largest at the time. For the children are hands-on activities on mechanical, wind, and solar power generation; insulators and conductors; and how trains get their electricity from "shoes" running on the "third rail."
- "On the Streets: New York's Trolleys and Buses." This exhibit displays a timeline and associated photographs of important events in the history of moving passengers on surface streets, from horse-drawn streetcars in 1810 to hybrid-electric buses in 1998. In 2000, the timeline ends with the Metrocard (magnetic swipe farecard) made intermodal. When Metrocard was introduced in 1998, it did not allow free transfers between bus and subway until two years later, *pushing bus ridership from 140 million to 696 million*. Here also is the highlight of the museum's collections: 50 detailed models of trolleys and work cars created by Dr. George Rahilly, a trolley enthusiast. For children is a simulated streetscape complete with traffic lights, walk-don't-walk signals, fire hydrants, and other street "furniture" as well as a 12-seat bus and a refurbished 1960s bus cab (both in which kids can play the driver). Here also is the explanatory mural, "Day in the Life of a Bus."
- "Clearing the Air." This highly interactive exhibit first tells the woeful tale of dirty diesel engines. [It does not tell you that the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) in 1995 sued New York City Transit to allow NRDC ads on the buses saying how dirty diesel buses were – emitting soot and nitrogen oxides.] Using natural gas and hybrid-electric buses has helped clear the air, but the exhibit also makes clear that these alternative buses cost much more money. (The exhibit does not tell you that the hybrid-electric buses nearing the end of their service life are now being replaced

with new “clean” diesel buses.) The hands-on activity (all ages) shows how filters remove soot from diesel exhaust.

- “Anatomy of a Powerhouse: Electrifying the El.” A photographic story of the 74th St. powerhouse.
- “Subway Fare Collection.” This exhibit shows how the process of collecting fares has become increasingly efficient. It starts with humans using wooden choppers on paper tickets. It proceeds to mechanical turnstiles taking tokens: 4-arm (horizontal), 3-arm (vertical), and high wheel (cage-like) devices. It ends with the current automated fare collection (AFC) turnstile activated by a Metrocard swipe.

The New York Transit Museum is open 10 AM to 4 PM on Tuesday – Friday and 11 AM to 5 PM on Saturdays – Sundays and closed on Mondays and major holidays. Admission is charged.

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DRAW TRANSIT



Photos above taken by Kathy Jentz and Dan Reed at the ACT booth during the June 21 Fenton Street Market in Silver Spring. Theme for the day - Draw Transit.

How About Taxi Vouchers Instead of Nearly-Empty Buses?

Quon Kwan

There is no question that taxis are considered a form of public transportation. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) officially considers shared-ride taxis to be operators of public transportation and has allowed exclusive-ride taxis to be eligible for New Freedom program grants.

The New Freedom program was introduced in 2001 as a nationwide effort to remove barriers to community living for people with disabilities and long-term illnesses. Lack of adequate transportation has been recognized as a primary barrier to working for disabled people. The 2000 Census showed that only 60% of people with disabilities are employed. The New Freedom program sought to reduce barriers to transportation services and expand the transportation options beyond the requirement of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Providing the disabled with vouchers for riding taxis, when taxis can be used, has been a vital part of the New Freedom program.

In the latest surface transportation authorization law, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), the New Freedom program was consolidated with a separate program (which provided enhanced mobility for senior citizens and the disabled who were outside the New Freedom program) into a new program, called the “Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program,” administered by the FTA.

Aside from taxi vouchers for seniors and individuals with disabilities, taxi vouchers have worked well for a broader population in the U.S. – in particular, for the “Guaranteed Ride Home” programs. [Guaranteed Ride Home programs are neither subsidized nor administered by the FTA.] Guaranteed Ride Home programs ensure that commuters who do not drive alone to work have a ride in case of a mid-day illness, mid-day emergency, or having to work late. There are times when public transportation may not be available. Commuter rail and exurban flow-direction bus service may not run during non-peak hours.

Furthermore, an employee who car pools to work can get home without waiting for the carpool driver by taking advantage of the taxi voucher offered by a Guaranteed Ride Home program. [In the Washington, DC region, the Guaranteed Ride Home program is administered by Commuter Connections of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.] In a 2007 FTA survey of 55 agencies that offer Guaranteed Ride Home programs, some 60% relied on taxi vouchers, 27% relied on taxis and rental cars, 9% relied on taxis and agency vehicles, and 4% relied solely on agency vehicles. In other words, a total of 96% relied on taxis or a combination of taxis and special cars.

When service reductions are proposed in bus service because of budget cuts, a common argument put forth at public hearings by citizen proponents of cuts is that service reductions would stem the waste of taxpayer's money for running empty or nearly-empty buses on the streets.

Taxi voucher programs, also known as user-side subsidy programs have been tried or used in a limited number of locations in the U.S. since the 1970s. They are particularly useful for certain markets such as fill-in service when the regular transit system is not operating or for limited markets. They begin to fail when demand, even though smaller than that to justify scheduled transit service, is larger than can be accommodated by a taxi program. In those cases scheduled route-deviation services can be effective. Taxi vouchers have been in use in Europe for many years. For example, in Hannover, Germany, the bus routes are served by taxis during certain off-peak hours. Riders pay the same amount as they would for a bus ride. The taxis are dispatched only at specific times and only when riders make a reservation.

Without doing the mathematics, there should be no doubt that the cost of operating a taxi is much less than that of operating a standard 40-foot transit bus. However, what would be a good rider threshold for running taxis instead of standard 40-foot buses? The number suggested is seven (7) riders. While seven riders cannot sit in a conventional taxicab sedan, seven riders can sit in a shared-ride minivan operated by taxicab companies. The second reason why seven is a good rider threshold is given by a Transit

Cooperative Research Program report published in 2010, "Current Practices in Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Savings in Transit". The report (p. 11) states, "a transit bus must carry around seven riders at a time to be more efficient than the alternative of single-occupant vehicles." Compared to all other road vehicles, a transit bus with only five riders running in the off-peak hours has the highest GHG emissions per passenger mile traveled.

In conclusion, taxi vouchers seem like an efficient way to provide public transportation without empty 40-foot buses roaming the streets.

Thanks to Volunteers for Distributing ACT Transit Scorecards

A generous thanks goes out to all those volunteers who distributed the ACT Transit Scorecard between June 10th and the primary election. The distribution took place at the Bethesda, Forest Glen, Friendship Heights, Glenmont, Grosvenor, Medical Center, Rockville, Shady Grove, Silver Spring, Takoma, Twinbrook, Wheaton, and White Flint Metrorail Stations and the Maryland Area Rail Commuter train stations at Germantown and Gaithersburg. Scorecards were also distributed at the Fenton Street market and various other locations in the County and DC.

We thank the following volunteers for their help leafleting:

David Anderson, Ralph Bennett, Tsedal Bahta, Kelly Blynn, Carol Blythe, Nick Brand, Jean Buerger, Ross Capon, Jim Clarke, Ronit Dancis, Sean Emerson, Chris Farrell, Donald Farren, Ken Firestone, Neil Greene, Kathy Jentz, Tracey Johnstone, Alan Lauer, Edna Miller, Harvard Morehead, Dan Reed, Ben Ross, Margaret Schoap, Tina Slater, Cindy Snow, Ruthanne Stolzfus, Perry Tsay, and John Wetmore.

We welcome all who can join us to help with distribution for the upcoming general election, no experience necessary.

Transit Times
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Meet Kathy Jentz - Our New Addition to the ACT Staff

ACT hired Kathy Jentz as an additional part time staffer on April 1, 2014 (no joke here) to direct our social media efforts and facilitate project coordination, among other things.

Kathy is a longtime transit user, a car-free resident of Silver Spring, an editor/publisher (*Washington Gardener Magazine*), and a gardener. She has previously served on the ACT board. Please welcome Kathy to our team!



Kathy taking a break from passing out the Transit Scorecard at the Wheaton Metro.

Editorial Remarks

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

ACT Officers/Staff for 2014:

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V. Pres (campaigns): Ronit Dancis
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