

## **ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT**

# Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland  
Volume 24, Number 2, April 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.

**April 13: Speaker: Craig Simpson, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689 – "Service Cuts and How to Prevent Them"**

**May 11: Speaker: Jim Hamre, Director of Bus Planning, WMATA – "Bus Priority Improvements on Veirs Mill Rd. and New Hampshire Ave."**

**June 8: Speaker: Marc Elrich, Montgomery County Council – discussing his proposed Bus Rapid Transit Solution for Montgomery County**

- ACT Members Dig Out Bus Stops After Big Snowstorms (p. 5)
- ACT Comments on Purpose and Needs for Medical Center Access Study (p. 6)

### **Harry Sanders, 1946 - 2010**

Ben Ross, ACT President

It is now nearly a quarter-century since the impending cessation of freight service on the Georgetown Branch railroad assembled a half-dozen rail fans in Harry Sanders' living room. How, they asked, can we turn that right of way into a route of passenger travel?

It wasn't a new idea. Back in the 1940s, D.C. planners considered the possibility of building a mass transit line from Georgetown to Bethesda. When today's Metro system was laid out in the early 1970s, the Georgetown Branch between Bethesda and Silver Spring got another look. The Montgomery County Planning Board gave the concept detailed study, and the 1974 Bethesda master plan specified that new buildings above the rail tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue had to leave room for a future station connecting to the Red Line.

Were it not for Harry, those old plans would today sit unremembered on dusty shelves, alongside so many other long-forgotten transit schemes. Never seeking anything for himself, Harry persevered through

### **Feature Articles**

- Harry Sanders, 1946 - 2010 (p. 1)
- ACT Saves Ride-On from Cutbacks (p. 3)
- Treasurer's Report for 2009 (p. 3)
- ACT's Vision Map for Transit (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)]

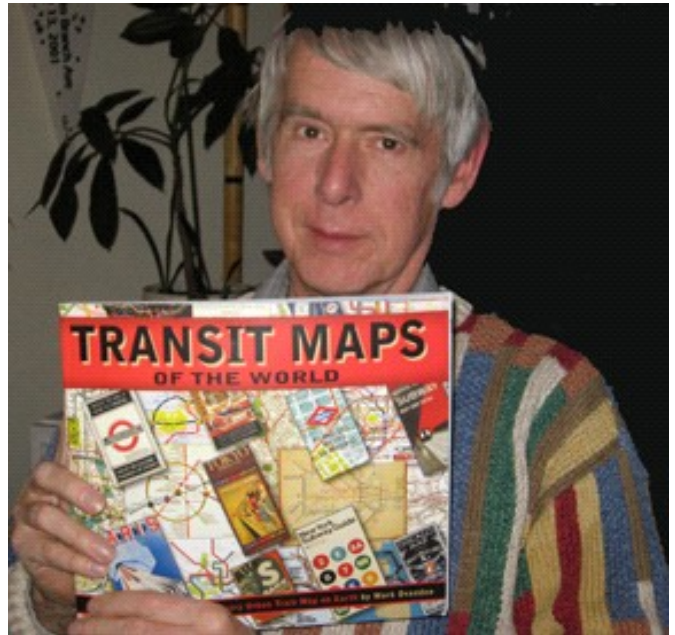
[the two digits after your category of membership code indicates year paid]

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](http://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.



During the first hopeful years, Harry, Nick Brand, and a few other ACT volunteers worked tirelessly to explain light rail to any audience that would listen. This effort culminated in the endorsement of the Georgetown Branch project by Montgomery County and a promise of state funding from Governor Schaefer. But the money evaporated when the state went into fiscal crisis, and the 1990 election left light rail supporters with only thin wavering support from within the county government. An effort to restart the project with federal funding stalled when local backing was undercut even more by the results of the 1994 election.

good years and bad. A greater vision was always in sight – the words he loved to quote were from Daniel Burnham: *“Make no little plans.”* Connecting Bethesda and Silver Spring was the necessary first step toward reshaping sterile suburbs into communities arranged for people rather than automobiles. Today the Action Committee for Transit, started in his living room, has grown from those six to nearly a thousand dues-paying members pursuing a county-wide agenda. The few enthusiasts' idea of a single-track trolley from Bethesda to Silver Spring has become a widely supported light rail line extending to New Carrollton.

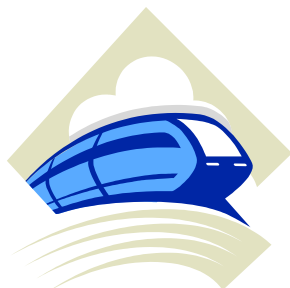
The light rail line was given up for dead by observers and practicing politicians, and most people would have abandoned the quest. But not Harry. He stuck to his dream of light rail between Bethesda and Silver Spring as the first step toward a new concept of how we connect our communities. Countless meetings about light rail along U.S. 29 led to little – then in 1996 a study of widening the Beltway opened up new possibilities. Harry was among the first to grasp the opportunity. After continual prodding from Harry and others, that study evolved into what is now the Purple Line.

Harry was first as well in sensing, in the dark days after the 1994 election, the need to give organizational form to the diverse but loose alliance that had previously backed east-west light rail. He initiated the Campaign for Better Mobility and devoted long hours to building that coalition into today's Purple Line Now. At his death, he was the president of that group, a title he never sought. He worked as well behind the scenes to create Prince George's Advocates for Community-Based Transit .

From the beginning, Harry understood that transit is about much more than moving people. It makes a statement about what kind of community we are – a community based on cooperation for the common good. The way Harry carried out his advocacy embodied that vision every bit as much as the goals he aimed for. Contending against objections to the light rail line that he considered often disingenuous and on occasion mendacious, he sought always to educate, never to inflame. He would out-argue his adversaries, he would out-organize them, but he would not out-maneuver them.

He did not live to see his vision come to fruition. With the goal he had pursued through many reversals and detours at last in clear sight, Harry Sanders concluded his journey like Moses looking across from the mountaintop. It was a life from which we can all learn lessons of honesty, perseverance, modesty, and – most of all – simple human decency.

A memorial service will be held Saturday, April 17, 11AM at St. Luke Lutheran Church, Colesville Rd and Dale Dr, Silver Spring MD, followed by a reception. Donations may be made to Purple Line NOW!, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, or League of Women Voters of Montgomery County Citizen Education Fund.



## ACT Saves Ride-On from Cutbacks

Cindy Snow

The Montgomery County Council voted February 9, 2010 to reject all the proposed cuts in Ride-On bus service. Continued service will be paid for with a ten-cent bus fare increase, a \$5 increase in parking fines, and by spending less on Montgomery County's cable television channel.

This great victory is due to the work of so many ACT members and other bus riders. Three hundred angry riders came to the public hearing. Hundreds and hundreds more wrote to the County Council. Special thanks to all of the ACT volunteers who passed out leaflets at bus stops. Without all your work, this would never have happened.

Unfortunately, we are not done with this issue. You once again need to send an email in support of preserving Ride-On service to [county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov). Cuts in Ride-On are on the table again as part of next year's county budget proposal to be discussed in April. Metro service is also in danger. But our great volunteers are out there once again leafletting at Metro and bus stops. Let's keep working together to preserve our transit service.

## Treasurer's Report for 2009

John Carroll, ACT Treasurer

ACT started 2009 with \$6,049 carried forward from the previous year.

Our 2009 income came from dues \$8,720, donations \$2,725, and other income \$87, for a total income of \$11,532.

Expenses were \$12,896 comprising of Civic Groups \$75, Payroll \$3,051, Postage \$2,077, Printing \$2,998, Supplies \$81, Taxes \$457, Transit Times \$3,483, www \$589, and other \$85.

We ended 2009 with \$4,685 in our account at EagleBank.

### ACT's Vision Map for Transit

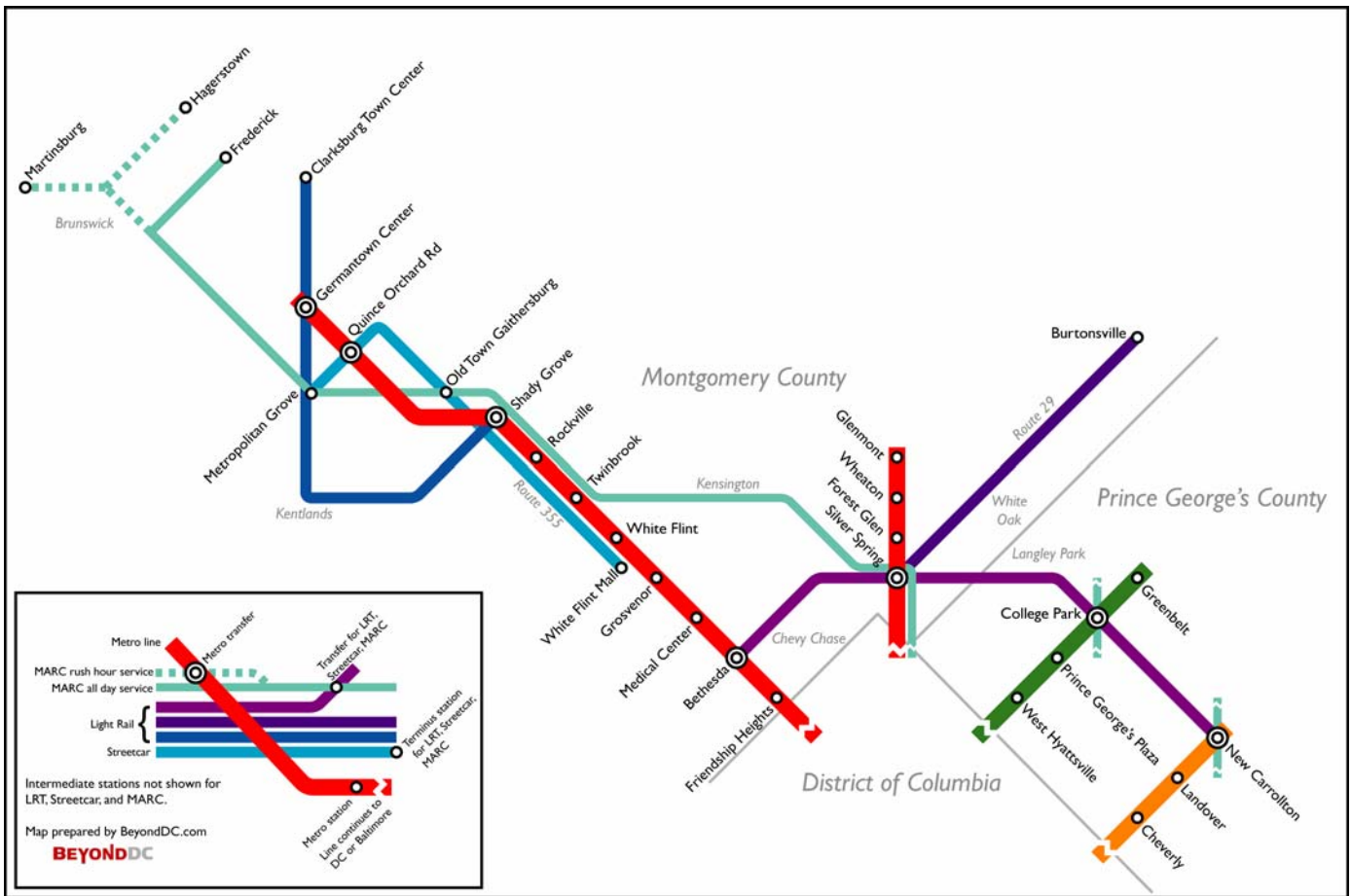
From [www.actfortransit.org](http://www.actfortransit.org)

ACT has mapped a vision of a Montgomery County where it is easier to travel and more pleasant to live -- a county built for people and not for automobiles. Years of experience have shown, and studies prove, that building highways leads to more traffic and more congestion. Affordable, convenient transit gives us a way to get past the traffic jams and fosters a better quality of life in our neighborhoods.

It is time to change priorities:

- Connect our communities with a network of rail lines.
- Redesign our streets to make it easier and safer to walk and to ride a bike
- Create livable neighborhoods, the kind in which we want to live.

The Purple Line from Bethesda to New Carrollton is the key to creating a livable, transit-oriented future for our county, but it is only a first step. A Red Line extension to Germantown, the Corridor Cities Transitway from Shady Grove to Clarksburg, all-day MARC service, light rail on U.S. 29, and streetcars on Route 355 are all part of our vision.



### Building Museum Program – “Parking is Not Free”

On May 27, 2010 from 6:30 to 8pm, the National Building Museum (NBM) in Washington, DC is hosting a talk titled "Parking is Not Free." The speaker is Donald Shoup, Professor of Urban Planning at UCLA & author of "The High Cost of Free Parking." The talk is in the context of this metro area. Price is \$12 for NBM members, free for students and \$20 for non-members. Prepaid registration required. For more information go to [www.nbm.org](http://www.nbm.org).

## ACT Members Dig Out Bus Stops After Big Snowstorms

Hans Riemer

During the week of February 12 – 16, the metropolitan Washington, DC area was inundated by two historical snowstorms. The first storm dumped more than 2 feet of snow that shut down aboveground Metrorail and all bus service for almost three days. Barely was the snow from the first snowstorm cleared, a second snowstorm dumped another 8 – 10 inches that again shut down aboveground Metrorail and all bus service for another two and a half days. As transit riders know, while the streets were plowed, snow from the plowed streets was left piled up on the curb blocking the sidewalks and bus stops.

On Saturday, February 13, Dennis Jaffe sent an e-mail to inspire ACT members to use neighborhood listservs and Facebook to spread the word about organizing a shovel brigade to make access to bus stops safe for riders. On Sunday, February 14, ACT members showed up for a shovel brigade. A Gazette reporter, thinking the story might prompt others to act, followed three ACT members. Many bystanders thanked the ACT volunteers and some even joined in to lend a hand.

Thanks to Tracey Johnstone; Don, Tina, and Jessie Slater; Richard Hoyer; and Kathy Jentz. Apologies to those ACT volunteers whose names were omitted.

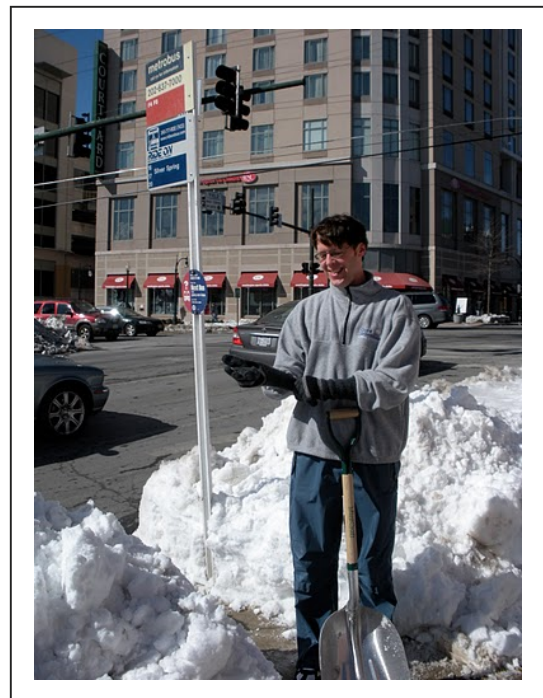
### The ACT Website Gets a Facelift

The ACT website has been revised and revamped. And it looks good. A huge thank you goes to ACT member and webmaster Jeri Roth, who dedicated her time to updating and improving the site.

If you haven't seen the website lately, be sure to check it out at [www.actfortransit.org](http://www.actfortransit.org). It's a good way to find out what ACT is working on. And a new feature, archives of the ACT newsletter, Transit Times, has been added.



Kathy Jentz and Tina Slater pondering snow "removal" for bus stop on Fenton near Bonifant (Silver Spring)



Hans Riemer after digging out a path to bus stop at Fenton and Wayne (Silver Spring)

## **ACT Comments on Purpose and Needs for Medical Center Access Study**

Quon Kwan

On February 3, 2010, ACT submitted comments on the Purpose and Needs Statement in response to the solicitation for comments during the scoping phase of the environmental study by Montgomery County government for a proposed underpass at Medical Center Metrorail Station.

The Action Committee for Transit believes that the draft Purpose and Needs Statement has several fatal flaws. MCDOT has already decided that it wants to build an underpass for motor vehicles, which would be the first phase of a much larger project. The draft statement disguises this as a project to benefit pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders. Moving ahead on the current track would be a clear violation of NEPA. We recommend a Purpose and Needs Statement that directs this project solely to improving pedestrian and bicycle access to transit. This will allow the project to move forward expeditiously by focusing the analysis on the alternatives already identified by Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) "Medical Center Station Access Improvement Study."

ACT made four salient points in the letter to Montgomery County:

1. The draft statement "tilts the playing field" in order to obtain a predetermined outcome (namely, construction of a roadway).
2. Segmentation of roadway alternatives is impermissible
3. Improved emergency evacuation of the Medical Center Metro station should be among the project objectives.
4. Procedures for public participation have not been followed

What was first announced as a plan to improve access from National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) to the Medical Center Metro station has been turned into a road project. In the beginning, WMATA, with Montgomery County's blessing, conducted its study, aimed at improving access from NNMC to the Medical Center Metro station. The study developed alternatives purely for pedestrians so that they would no longer have to cross Rockville Pike; no roads were proposed.

Meanwhile, Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) was secretly promoting an entirely different plan by Clark Construction. MCDOT officials have kept this plan secret, claiming "confidential business information." After the Navy rejected Clark's plan, MCDOT came back with a scaled-back version to state and Navy officials at a July 8, 2009, meeting. According to a project timeline given to ACT by MCDOT, the project that MCDOT now seeks is a variant of what Clark proposed at this meeting. MCDOT proceeded to seek federal grant funding for this project.

In a July 15, 2009, presentation to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Transportation Planning Board (TPB), MCDOT described the project as a "pedestrian tunnel." The TPB instructed MCDOT orally at this meeting to reword the grant application to leave open all options in the WMATA study, including the new elevator entrance.

On August 3, MCDOT publicly announced that the purpose of the project was to build "a new east-side entrance to the Metro station" using one of the alternatives in the WMATA study. In contrast, MCDOT's grant application as actually submitted stated that all options in the WMATA study were unacceptable. MCDOT changed the project description to "multimodal underpass." This foreclosed the possibility of building elevators with Federal grant funds.

MCDOT then initiated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for this project. On Jan. 6, 2010, MCDOT Director Arthur Holmes wrote to the TPB to request approval of a

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“MD 355 Multimodal Crossing Project Study.” Mr. Holmes explained, “The study funds will provide for environmental studies to satisfy Federal requirements for the design and construction of an underpass....” The project description that MCDOT submitted to the County Council similarly described the project as “the MD355 underpass.”

A public meeting was held on January 19 to “present the Purpose and Needs Summary and solicit input from the community” for this study. However, MCDOT did not bring the draft text of the Purpose and Needs that it summarized at the meeting. MCDOT told attendees that all options are open, and MCDOT has not yet decided whether the project will be an underpass or something else.

The draft Purpose and Needs Statement was issued on Jan. 26, seven days *after* the meeting that was ostensibly called to get public reaction to it. The project title has now been changed to “MD 355/Rockville Pike Crossing Project.” However, this is just optics; the text of the statement still predetermines the outcome as a roadway. The purpose is stated as improving movement “between the west and east sides of MD 355.” Since the Metro station is directly *underneath* MD 355, this statement excludes options that improve access to Metrorail.

Despite the secrecy that has enveloped this project, enough information has emerged to make it clear that MCDOT's rhetoric about pedestrian and bicycle access is nothing more than a smokescreen for a road-building project.

The second salient point concerned the issue of segmentation by MCDOT. Under a Freedom of Information Act request from the Navy, ACT obtained a letter describing the July 8, 2009, meeting at which this project was initiated. The subject of that letter, from the Navy to Clark Construction subsidiary called Edgemoor Real Estate Services, is “355 & 270 / 495 Roadway Designs.” If the roadway, the so-called “multimodal” pedestrian /bicycle underpass, is part of a larger road project to provide direct access to I-270/ 495, then the County is sternly warned that it violates the National Environmental

Policy Act with respect to segmentation. If the roadway is part of a larger project, then an environmental assessment must be made of the entire project. The project may not be segmented into smaller projects to circumvent studying the impacts of the overall larger project.

The third salient point concerned MCDOT's failure to consider emergency access. The Medical Center Metro Station lacks adequate escape means in case of fire or terrorism. The WMATA study identified this issue and studied the merits of proposed options. Medical Center Station was built before there was a National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 130 standard on escape. Currently, escape takes three-times longer than the NFPA standard and will get far worse as passenger loads increase from the NNMC expansion. The bank of high-speed elevators and stairwell in the WMATA designs make the station safer for the 2020 passenger loads scenarios than exist today.

The fourth salient point concerned MCDOT's failure to follow the proper public participation procedures. In particular, MCDOT did not comply with the Federal regulation requiring notice to potentially interested community members. The public meeting to discuss the summary was poorly publicized. Aside from a limited distribution of a last-minute email, only members of a handpicked advisory committee (on which ACT fruitlessly requested membership some time ago) were notified. No transcript was made of the public meeting. The Purpose and Needs Statement was summarized at the meeting, but such a Statement was not made available. When the draft Statement was finally made public, only 11 days were allowed for comments. The Clark Construction plans (the basis for MCDOT's decision to rule out the WMATA study alternatives) are not available, as required by Federal regulation. The document used to justify the Purpose and Needs Statement, the “Feasibility Study on Emergency Access Between Partnership Facilities” (which “identified in 2004 a critical need for improved transportation access”) has not been made public. ACT has repeatedly requested this document, without success.

# Transit Times

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## Action Alert: Stop Cuts in Metro & Ride-On Service - It's Not Too Late

Be sure to make your voice heard to preserve Metro Service by going to:  
<http://FairShareForMetro.com>

Be sure to let the County know you don't want them to cut Ride-On service by emailing [county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov) or calling 240-777-7900.

## Receive the Transit Times by Email and ....

- Reduce your paper clutter,
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To receive your Transit Times emailed as a PDF, send your request to [admin@actfortransit.org](mailto:admin@actfortransit.org).

## Editorial Remarks

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

## ACT Officers/Staff for 2010:

President: Ben Ross  
V. Pres.: Jim Clarke  
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V. Pres.: Tina Slater  
Secretary: Tracey Johnstone  
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Non-Voting ex officio board members:

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

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[actfortransit@mail.org](mailto:actfortransit@mail.org)