



ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland
Volume 25, Number 4, October/November 2011

ACT's monthly meetings are held at 7:30 PM, the second Tuesday of each month, at the DHHS Silver Spring Center, 8818 Georgia Ave 20910, in the Woodside Conference Room.

The Silver Spring Center is located on the northwest corner of Georgia Ave and Spring St, just south of Ballard St and east of 1st Ave. Enter the parking lot from Ballard St next to the big Woodside Methodist Church. Enter the building on the Georgia Ave side.

It 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.

For meeting updates check our website listed on pg 2.

**December 13: Speaker: Carolyn Biggins, Chief,
Montgomery County Division of Transit
Services -**

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ACT's 25th Anniversary Celebration – Amazing Night!

Tina Slater

On October 11 ACT accomplished a huge milestone celebrating its 25th Anniversary! We brought together our members and supporters to pause and review the past, and renew our commitment to press the Purple Line and other non-auto-oriented travel modes forward. Not to mention just having a good time.

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

www.twitter.com/actfortransit

You may also give your membership dues to Treasurer Ted Van Houten 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.

ACT is an awesome group of committed and informed people. It was great to have so many members and friends join us for the evening. We had around 80 guests. Several attendees commented that the celebration felt like a "reunion".

And I'd like to extend a huge thank you to our volunteers that helped that evening. Your efforts made the evening polished and professional. Another huge thank you goes to Kristen Mosbaek, who designed the invitations, as well as, Nancy and David Weiman, who graciously opened their home to us for the event.

And of course our generous sponsors: Barbara Sanders, Greg Sanders & Kate Malloy, Ben Ross, Tina & Don Slater, Duchy Trachtenberg, White Flint Partnership, Jeff Blum, Nick & Carole Brand, Jim Clarke, Ike Leggett, Montgomery County Executive, Joseph Napolitano, Stephan Schwartzman, Lew & Susan Winarsky, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, Chevy Chase Land Company, David Alpert, Roger Berliner, Montgomery County Council, Brian & Barbara Ditzler, Phil & Leslie Downey, Donna Edwards, U.S. House of Representatives, Phil Fraulino, Neil Greene, Ana Sol Gutierrez, Delegate Dist 18, Sheila Hixson, Delegate Dist 20, Richard Hoye, Marc & Rebecca Korman, George Leventhal, Montgomery County Council, Elizabeth & Frank Malone, Jamie Raskin, State Senator Dist 20, Hans Riemer, Montgomery County Council, EYA, Kap Kapastin & Quantum Companies, StonebridgeCarras, Vance Ayres of WBCTC, Robert Edlavitch, Tom Hucker, Delegate Dist 20

The entire ACT Board of Directors sends its sincere appreciation and thanks to all our supporters.

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*"It was a wonderful event last evening, and we heard nothing but praise for the wonderful house, decor, food and program. You all outdid yourselves!"*

*Many thanks for putting together such a wonderful evening, and the Sanders family appreciates and enjoys taking the tributes that belong to Harry."*

Fondly, Barbara Sanders



## ACT Hails Purple Line Approval

ACT Press Release of October 7, 2011

The Action Committee for Transit hailed today's announcement that the Federal Transit Administration has approved the Purple Line for preliminary engineering. ACT was founded 25 years ago to advocate light rail between Bethesda and Silver Spring, which will finally come to fruition as part of the Purple Line.

"We are excited with the news that the Purple Line has cleared this key hurdle," said ACT president Tina Slater. "I am thrilled beyond belief. In my mind's eye, I can already look down the street from my front porch and see the train go by."

**"This is the culmination of a 25 year grass roots struggle,"** added Ben Ross, who was ACT president for 15 years. **"Hundreds of people who have helped as volunteers share in the credit for today's great news."**

## So What Does This Approval Mean for the Purple Line?

Cindy Snow

According to excerpts from a press release by Governor Martin O'Malley on Oct 7, 2011, *"Federal Transit Administration (FTA) ... approval for the Purple Line to move forward and enter the Preliminary Engineering (PE) phase ... means that work on the project now moves to preparation of more detailed plans, schedules and cost estimates, as well as completion of environmental studies.*

*The FTA review of the Purple Line proposal focused on the project's high daily ridership and many significant benefits as well as the State's financial commitment and technical capacity to build and operate the project. By granting permission to begin preliminary engineering, the Purple Line becomes one of a small number of projects nationwide that are eligible for federal funding.*

*"This approval is a critical step in making the Purple Line a reality and improving the transit*

*system that is integral to the quality of life and economic well-being of the entire region," said 5th District Congressman Steny H. Hoyer.*

*Congressman Chris Van Hollen of Maryland's 8th District added, 'I am pleased that we've cleared an important hurdle in the effort to bring new transportation options and economic development to our region.'*

*'The FTA approval is a pivotal step towards redefining the scope of public transportation throughout our communities,' said Congresswoman Edwards. '... Today, we are in a stronger position to secure additional federal funding, and I look forward to working with Governor O'Malley and the rest of the delegation to further develop the Purple Line and begin construction on my top transportation priority.'*

*The MTA will continue to work to address concerns raised by communities throughout the Preliminary Engineering process. Public outreach and agency coordination will continue to be an integral part of the development of the final environmental impact statement, providing opportunities for local residents and stakeholders to contribute to the planning and design of the project. With appropriate approvals and funding, construction could start in 2015 and service on the Purple Line could begin in 2020."*

## ... and What Happens From Here?

Cindy Snow

FTA approval to advance into Preliminary Engineering for the Purple Line is the first in a series of needed approvals to secure construction money through the FTA's New Starts program. When the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Impact Statement are completed, the next step is approval for Final Design. After this is completed the project can then be considered for a federal Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA). This agreement is basically a license for our Congressional delegation to seek the New Starts money for construction. It's a step by step process, but we're on our way.

## **ACT Launches Campaign to Prevent Escalator Disaster at Bethesda Metro Station**

ACT Press Release of September 12, 2011

Overcrowded escalators at the Bethesda Metro station – noted as a symbol of our inability to get things done by Thomas Friedman's book *That Used To Be Us* -- will catastrophically worsen unless the Montgomery County Council acts. ACT launched a campaign to avert the disaster by urging the building of a new entrance to the station, which is already planned, before any existing escalator is shut down for rebuilding. ACT volunteers leafleted at the Bethesda Metro Station on Sept. 13.

There are three long escalators at the Bethesda Metro station. In 2014 Metro plans to rebuild them, one at a time, leaving two working escalators. When, as so often happens, one of the other two escalators breaks down, the one remaining escalator must be stopped so that riders can walk single-file up and down. During rush hour, the number of riders getting off trains is more than can leave the station single file, trapping crowds of riders. Many cannot handle the 212-foot (175-step) climb at all.

There is an easy solution. Design of a new entrance at the south end of the station is nearly finished, and the county has already appropriated money to build it, but construction is not scheduled until 2015 -- a year *after* the looming escalator catastrophe. Not only is construction of the new entrance scheduled to start too late, but design work stands still for the County halted work several months ago by failing to authorize Metro to spend appropriated funds. Before the design of the new entrance can be finalized, Metro's engineers must review the plans of the Maryland Transit Administration.

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Thank you to all those who wrote into the County Council about this issue (the Council received more than 80 comments), and to our dedicated volunteers who helped with the leafleting effort to spread the word.

UPDATE: The Bethesda Metro escalators have recently been having a rash of problems. So much so that at one point in October all three escalators simultaneously broke down, realizing ACT's fears and prompting the Montgomery County Council's Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy & Environment (T&E) Committee to hold a special evening meeting on October 25th to discuss the issue with the community.

It's not too late to make your voice heard and demand construction of the south entrance to the station. Write to:

Valerie Ervin, President
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave, Rockville, MD 20850

Red and Purple Line Backers Say Full Funding Needed

ACT Press Release of October 19, 2011

The Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County and the Red Line Now PAC of Baltimore today called on the legislature to guarantee that new transportation funding will fully fund the non-federal share of the Purple Line and Red Line.

The highway lobby, in recent days, has begun trying to endanger vitally needed mass transit expansion by demanding private funding for public transit.

"We cannot leave these critical projects in the hands of a capricious market," said Robbyn Lewis, chair of Red Line Now PAC.

"If the highway lobby thinks developers should pay for transportation, they should start by sending Kingdon Gould the bill for the Intercountry Connector," added Ben Ross, vice-president of ACT. Kingdon Gould is the developer of Konterra, located near the east end of the ICC.

ACT and Red Line Now PAC are locally based citizen groups that advocate better transit.

Do Roads Pay for Themselves?

Quon Kwan

The U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) in January 2011 published an iconoclastic report, "Do Roads Pay for Themselves: Setting the Record Straight on Transportation Funding," which dispels the myth that roads pay for themselves.

First, road advocates claim that roads pay for themselves through gasoline taxes labeled as "user fees," and that such revenues should be spent only on roads. Unlike true user fees, such as admission fees for state parks and tolls for turnpikes, the amount of money that a driver pays in gasoline taxes bears little relationship to the driver's use of roads. Furthermore, the monies collected from gasoline taxes are allocated by local, state, and Federal governments without consideration to need or benefits those investments would deliver to society.

Since 1947, the amount of money spent on highways, roads, and streets has exceeded the amount raised through gasoline taxes and other so-called user fees by \$600 billion, representing a massive transfer of general government funds to highways. The myth that "highways pay for themselves" is less true today than ever. Currently, highway "user fees" pay only about half the cost of building and maintaining the nation's network of highways, roads, and streets. A 2007 study showed that if gasoline taxes were to cover the total amount of money spent on roads, they would have to be raised 20 to 70 cents per gallon.

The costs of highway construction *per se* are not the same as the costs of driving. The costs of driving often fail to include the costs imposed by highways on non-users, including damage to the environment and public health and encouragement of sprawl development and the consequential costs of sprawl. Economists call such costs that are not included in driving, external costs. A 2009 study by the Victoria Transport Policy Institute estimates that 35% of the costs of driving consists of external costs. Another 2007 study by Resources for the Future estimates that external costs imposed by driving amount to about \$2.10 per gallon. Roads are subsidized.

The "user fee myth" is invoked by road advocates to make investments in alternative forms of transportation, namely public transit, appear more "expensive" than investments in roads. For example, the Reason Institute (a champion for roads) states, "*Since transit is unable to generate significant user revenues the way highways can, it is a far more appropriate candidate than highways for general-fund support.*" Road advocates exploit these canards to ensure continued first dibs on a dedicated revenue source (gasoline taxes). Dedicated funding is after all, immensely valuable as it ensures a steady, reliable stream of funding without requiring repeated lobbying of elected officials.

If one can accept the fairy tale that roads pay for themselves through user fees, one can also accept the fact that every fairy tale has to have a villain. So along the way, as the story goes, politicians began to see the gas tax as a pot of gold that could be used for programs other than roads. The wicked politicians began to "divert" money from the gas tax to their purposes, like public transit, bike paths, and even public schools. As a result, the public that had once been so willing to pay the gas tax as a "user fee" for roads now lost faith in its appropriate use. Therefore, the gas tax has become one of the least-liked forms of taxation. Perhaps, this is why no elected official has the guts to raise the gas tax, and this is why the nation now finds itself without resources needed to fix its aging transportation infrastructure.

There are two other myths perpetrated by road advocates:

(i) casting of Interstate highways as national priorities – worthy of Federal support – while transit and other alternatives are said to be merely local issues. The idea is that the Interstate highway system is at its core about moving people across state lines – a truly Federal function. However, is this true? No. Two out of three vehicle miles traveled on the Interstate highways are in urbanized areas, suggesting Interstate highways serve mostly local mobility needs.

(ii) touting of highways as true transportation investments while transit and other alternatives are depicted as forms of "social policy," "social

engineering,” or “socialism.” The idea is that highway investments are the only legitimate investments, and all others (i.e., public transit, bike paths, and sidewalks) are illegitimate. Is this true? Of course not. It is socialism when government can spend billions of dollars on roads without worrying about whether “user fees” (like gas taxes) will cover the full costs. Moreover, transportation cannot be divorced from social policy; transportation is social policy because how we get from one point to another affects the rest of society in terms of congestion, energy use, land use, and environmental impacts. Public transit, bike paths, and sidewalks are just as legitimate forms of transportation for the choice of mode is up to the traveler – not up to the road advocate.

[See ACT’s website for *Myths and Facts About the Maryland Transportation Budget*. http://www.actfortransit.org/archives/reports_and_other/2011Nov02PosMythsFacts.html]

Aging in Place, Stuck without Options

Quon Kwan

Aging in Place, Stuck without Options is a report published in June 2011 by Transportation for America (T4America), the largest, most diverse coalition working on transportation reform in the U.S. The report starts with the fact that the baby boomer generation is the largest in U.S. history, with more than 77 million people born between 1946 and 1964. During the same time period, the U.S. built the greatest transportation project in history, the Interstate Highway System. The Interstate Highway System enabled people to live far from work by encouraging suburban housing. Thus, whereas previous generations tended to live close to work, baby boomers tend to live far from work requiring frequent, long trips by car.

Only a small percentage of Americans move after retiring; thus, most will “age in place”. For the baby boomer generation, this means the largest generation in history is also the most car-dependent generation in history. With rising life expectancies, the baby boomer generation will also be the oldest ever. Yet, aging experts note that as people age, their driving ability diminishes or disappears. Seniors 65 and older who no longer drive make 15% fewer trips to the doctor, 59% fewer trips to shop or dine, and 65% fewer trips to visit friends and family. Seniors in their early 70s who no longer drive will need alternatives to driving, such as transit or paratransit.

Whether seniors have access to transportation alternatives depends on where they live. Transportation for America commissioned the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) to analyze the adequacy of public transportation service for 241 metropolitan areas with a population of 65,000 or more. Transit access was evaluated as a function of the number of transit lines and stops (i.e., bus routes, rail lines). “Poor” transit access, for a metropolitan area with more than 3 million people, is having fewer than 1.9 transit lines and stops within walking distance (less than ¼ mile for bus and less than ½ mile for rail).



Seeking Nominations for ACT Board of Directors and Members for Nominating Committee

In January 2012, at our monthly membership meeting, we will once again be holding elections for the ACT Board of Directors. Do you know someone that you think would be great for the ACT Board that you would like to nominate? Perhaps you would like to join the Board? If so, let us know.

We are also putting together a Nominating Committee. All help is welcome, so please consider joining the team. To send in your nominations &/or join the Nominating Committee email admin@actfortransit.org or call Cindy Snow, 240-308-1209.

On the average, the present does not bode well for seniors since 79% of Americans 65 and older live in car-dependent suburban and rural areas. Within the metropolitan areas examined in the report, more than 11.5 million Americans 65 and older lived with “poor” transit access in 2000. If most seniors “age in place” (i.e., do not move), then by 2015, 15.5 million Americans 65 and older will be living with “poor” transit access. This means that a substantial majority of that population will be faced with declining mobility options. In particular, the Washington, DC metropolitan area (with more than 3 million people now) will have by 2015, 308,000 or 41% of its seniors living with “poor” transit access.

The report recommends a national response, especially given the fiscal constraints facing local communities, including the following:

- Increased funding for transit, paratransit, and ridesharing
- Continued dedicated funding for transit from the Highway Trust Fund
- Funding for innovative practices, coordination, public-private partner-ships, intelligent transportation systems, and outreach for providing transportation for seniors
- Involvement of seniors in transportation plans affecting them
- Requiring states to “flex” a portion of their highway funds for transit
- Requiring a “complete streets” policy that ensures all streets and intersections are safe for people of all ages and ability

Create a Broader Vision for the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan

ACT member Richard Hoyer is leading an effort to look at a broader vision for the Chevy Chase Lake Sector Plan with ACT Board member Cavin Wilk. ACT members interested in participating on this effort, please contact Richard Hoyer at richardhoyer@mac.com or call Cindy Snow at 240-308-1209.

Early Memories of ACT

Tom Fuchs

I gave up driving in November 1974. While living in Bethesda and working in Rockville, I found it easy to take an express bus out to the Parklawn Building. I also began to testify at Metrobus public hearings at that time. There were significant changes with each new Metrorail opening so there were opportunities to be heard. At one such hearing, I met Harry Sanders, who told me about ACT so I started to attend meetings. Often, only a handful of people attended – Ross Capon, Bruce Gilson, Harry Sanders and myself.

It was common for Harry to testify at hearings on “The Georgetown Branch,” which evolved into the Purple Line. Harry participated in the Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) for the sector plan laying groundwork for the new line. Indeed, most ACT members were interested in the Purple Line and little else while I testified at public hearings about Metrobus, Maryland DOT's Consolidated Transportation Plan (CTP), Montgomery County's Capital Improvement Plan, and Ride-On.

Harry and I became members of the Transitway and HOV Network Master Plan CAC. Here I noticed that Veirs Mill Road was an overlooked link. Veirs Mill Road was later the subject of a federal demonstration project for Bus Rapid Transit, but the idea has since been dropped. The Transitway and HOV Network Master Plan was later dropped because the Plan was opposed by Montgomery County Councilmember Betty Ann Krahnke (who showed much courage battling Lou Gehrig's disease.) The Plan never got beyond the Alternatives Report (January, 1995). While part of this CAC, I got to know John Matthias, who was Planning Coordinator of the Transportation Planning Division.

I later became a member of the Montgomery County Transit Advisory Group. As a result of my participation in this group, Metrobus adopted its “Simple Fare to Anywhere.” Previously, Metrobus fares were a complicated array of zones combined with peak and off-peak fares -- described as “byzantine.” Well, it is simpler now.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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[One more recent] memory involves the Paul Sarbanes Silver Spring Transit Center. There was a public hearing held in the headquarters of the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC), 8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring. Yes, that's the building not too far from the Silver Spring Community Center where ACT meets. ACT members Harry Sanders and I attended. (There were probably others, but I don't remember who.)

The officials handed out a brochure and then opened up the meeting for questions. I looked in the brochure and there was nothing about new temporary bus shelters. I was actually able to ask the question, "*What will you do with the existing bus service while all of this is under construction?*" This concept and question was so unexpected that several MNCPPC officials gasped. This was an important issue that they had not even considered!

In any event, they were able to come up with and implement a plan. I felt good about having gone to the meeting that night.

Editorial Remarks

Your Transit Times editor is Quon Kwan. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is **December 13**. Send your materials to Quon at: gykwan@gmail.com or call him at: (h) 301-460-7454.

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