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Transit center on track

Mar. 15, 2000

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Construction on \$40 million project to begin in July

After nearly a decade of public hearings, design changes and funding problems, the \$40 million Silver Spring Transit Center is almost a reality.

County officials have targeted July 4 weekend to begin construction on the massive center, an essential component in Silver Spring's ongoing half-billion-dollar urban renewal.

The center, to be located at the corner of Wayne Avenue and Colesville Road, is slated for completion in 2003, said Project Manager Kassa Seyoum.

"I'm confident that we can have things ready and done on time," Seyoum said. "Right now, we're on target."

The three-floor station will house a handful of shops and eateries, as well as become a nexus for buses, taxis, carpools, biker/hiker trails, Metrorail, commuter rail and a shuttle to the University of Maryland at College Park.

The center also will include state-of-the-art information kiosks, electronic displays and real-time schedules.

In July, workers will begin constructing new platforms for commuter rail passengers at the existing Silver Spring Metro station. Currently, riders on commuter trains arrive at a terminal in South Silver Spring.

Construction on the rest of the site will begin sometime next year, Seyoum said.

For years, residents and lawmakers have clamored for an expanded transit station in the downtown area.

The current Silver Spring bus and Metro station is the busiest transit facility in Maryland, state officials said.

More than 57,000 people use the terminal daily, according to recent state figures.

However, since the idea for an expanded station was first introduced by state officials years ago, its design has undergone frequent changes.

Instead of renovating the existing station, officials at the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission decided to transform the property into a local centerpiece, complete with stores and acres of public space.

The plan expanded further in 1998 when media firm Discovery Communications announced it was building its new \$150 million headquarters directly across the street.

"It's a much better design now than when it started," said Dale Tibbitts, chairman of a local transportation board involved in planning the station.



Image

entrances and the mezzanine platform, according to architectural drawings from Park and Planning.

The path runs underneath a colossal crescent-shaped silver canopy.

In addition, a pedestrian bridge running above Wayne Avenue to Discovery will be built.

"We want [the station] to be a positive transit experience," said Francine Meyer, a local citizens board member who gave residential feedback on the design. "We're very pleased with the way it looks now."

As for expansion, the center will leave ample space for any additional bus and Metrorail routes, including future light-rail service from Silver Spring to Bethesda, Tibbitts said.

Meanwhile, project officials are currently in the process of choosing an architect to build the station, as well as whittling down which retail businesses will be housed in the station.

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