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## Transit center to be built in two phases

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Staff Writer

Federal, state and local officials gathered beside the railroad tracks leading to the Silver Spring Metro Station Monday to celebrate the planned Silver Spring Transit Center project in conjunction with national Try Transit Week.

The \$57.2 million transit center is expected to unfold in two phases, said Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan.

In the first phase of the project, the Maryland Mass Transit Administration will relocate MARC commuter rail service to the county-owned site next to the Silver Spring Metro and construct a pedestrian bridge over the railroad tracks, Duncan said.

In the second phase, the county Department of Public Works and Transportation will build a transit center facility with bus bays serving county Ride On buses, Metro buses and inter-city buses and about 10,000 square feet of retail space.

The entire project is scheduled to be complete in 2003.

Among those joining Duncan at the kickoff celebration were Maryland Department of Transportation Secretary John D. Porcari, U.S. Sens. Paul Sarbanes and Barbara Mikulski, County Council President Michael Subin, state Sen. Ida Ruben and Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority General Manager Richard White.

Several members of the County Council and two state delegates also were present.

Porcari said he envisions the new transit center as the "Union Station of Maryland."

When it is completed, someone living in Frederick will be able to take a MARC train to Silver Spring and then get to virtually anything in the D.C. area by changing over to Metro with a common fare card, he said.

The goal of the new transit center is to link people to jobs, medical care and leisure activities in Silver Spring, Sarbanes said.

"I remember taking the Metro to Silver Spring and then walking to the MARC station down the street in pre-Duncan days to see what the average commuter went through," Sarbanes said. "Barbara and I have worked hard with the county and the state to get federal funding for Phase I of the project. And now we have gotten another \$15 million for Phase II. We have been waiting for this day for a long time."

The center is also another piece of the redevelopment of downtown Silver Spring.

"The redevelopment is going forward at a tremendous pace," Sarbanes said. "It is going so fast that County Executive Duncan has to carry around an electric saw to open businesses." Sarbanes was referring to the saw Duncan used to cut a "wooden" ribbon signaling the opening of Strosniders Hardware last month.

"We are creating a totally new Silver Spring," Duncan said. "Outside of Baltimore's Inner Harbor, we will have the biggest urban center in the state. Therefore, people need to understand that using transit is easier and more convenient than driving. Transit is a big part of the solution to traffic congestion."

Image

we knew we had to get behind a massive redevelopment if businesses, like the Taste Diner, were to survive," Mikulski said. "If you look behind us, you will see the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration. ... NOAA was the first anchor in the redevelopment. Since then, the federal government has also given Silver Spring community development block grant, community policing and day care funds.

As Silver Spring introduces newcomers, such as Discovery Communications and the American Film Institute, transportation is the most important issue facing us, she said.

*For more information on transit options, call Ride On at 240-777-7433 or visit the Web site at <http://www.rideonbus.com>.*

"A lack of transportation could derail everything Montgomery County is doing," Mikulski said.

Try Transit Week includes a number of special offers including special one-way fares, regional passes and Ride On giveaways.

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