

THE TRANSIT TIMES

BETHESDA / SILVER SPRING LIGHT RAIL/TRAIL STUDIES REVIVED IN DRAFT STATE CAPITAL BUDGET; SILVER SPRING MARC STATION RELOCATION DELAYED 3 YEARS; WMATA FUNDING CONTINUED

Increased transit emphasis in Montgomery County, but share of total state budget declines

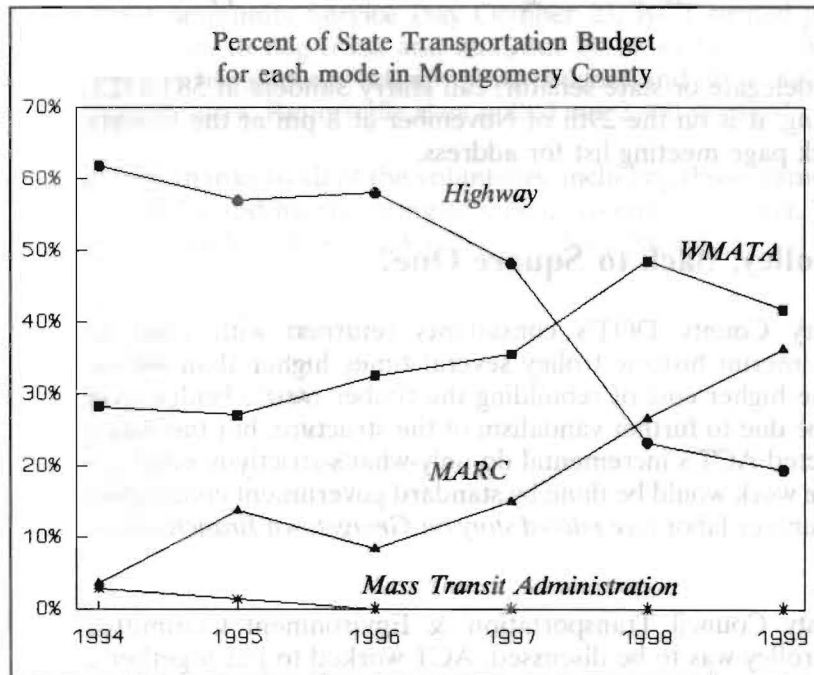
Environmental and engineering studies on the Georgetown Branch are being revived in MD DOT's proposed FY94 to FY99 budget discussed in public with County elected officials late last month. For this fiscal year and next, \$3.3 million would be spent by the Mass Transit Administration on alternatives and design studies by Bechtel, the consultant that was working on the project until the 1991 budget shortfall caused its suspension.

In the same document, MD DOT pushed back the scheduled start of construction on the relocation of the MARC train station from FY94 to FY 97. The rationale is that a better plan is needed to integrate the MARC station in its new location with the Metro station, bus bays, and the Bethesda / Silver Spring light rail/trail. A separate study lasting into FY96 is included for this more comprehensive work. Nearly simultaneously with this announcement, the Federal appropriations bill for the coming year was finalized, with earmarked Federal funding secured by

Senator Mikulski and Representative Al Wynn. This will save the State the direct cost of \$1.1 million, which could be reallocated to other Montgomery County area transit work.

This CTP also reduces the scope of planned parking at Germantown's MARC station from a garage of 800 to 1000 spaces to a surface lot with 300 spaces.

The bulk of State transit allocations to Montgomery County continues to be in the completion of Metrorail, some \$15 to \$20 million annually, accounting for around 60% of the transit capital budget in the next few years. These a-



mounts do not include roughly \$1 billion per year provided directly to the Metrorail system by the Federal Government and which will allow extension to Glenmont, Branch Avenue, and Springfield VA by 1999.

Maryland's share of buying about 150 Metrobuses a year and the construction and refurbishment of bus garages in DC and Prince George's County account for some \$6 million yearly attributable to Montgomery County.

(cont. next page)

State Capital Plan (from page 1)

The biggest increase in investment planned in the next five years is in MARC commuter rail. With extension of service between Point of Rocks and Frederick, purchases of new locomotives and cars usable on the Brunswick line, and improvements of service between Baltimore and DC, the share of investment in transit going to MARC will quadruple, from 10% to 45%. The amount spent in the county on MARC will then be around \$15 million per year.

All in all the good news is that in the County, spending by the State is shifting towards transit, as we have long advocated. Today 60% of the investments are in highways; this drops to 20% in the 1999 time frame. The bad news is that this percentage change happens because highway funding falls by 2/3, without being made up for by transit investment. Consequently, the County's share of state investment drops from 15% of the total in 1996 to 7% in 1999, even though the county makes up a fifth (20%) of the state's population. Clearly, additional transit projects need to be developed and accelerated to bring Montgomery County to a level of parity with the rest of the State in investment.

The County legislative delegation will hold a HEARING on this plan, and it is really important that LETTERS be sent, and if possible, TESTIMONY be given supporting the re-start of the light rail line, and encouraging the Legislative members to support more transit investment in the County.

If you need addresses for your delegate or state senator, call Harry Sanders at 587-1323. If you want to attend the hearing, it is on the 29th of November at 8 pm at the County Council Chambers. See the back page meeting list for address.

The Interim Heritage Trolley, Back to Square One?

After six months, Montgomery County DOT's consultants returned with costs to implement the ACT-proposed interim historic trolley several times higher than we estimated last winter. Some of the higher cost of rebuilding the timber trestle bridge over Rock Creek Park appeared to be due to further vandalism of the structure, but the major causes were that the DOT rejected ACT's incremental do-only-what's-strictly-needed approach, and assumed that all the work would be done by standard government contracting processes without using any volunteer labor (*see related story on Georgetown Branch clean-up, page 5*).

In the week before the County Council Transportation & Environment Committee meeting at which the heritage trolley was to be discussed, ACT worked to put together a less costly plan that would run from Bethesda to Rock Creek Park, without crossing the steel and wood trestle bridge. Alternatively the trolley could first operate to Connecticut Avenue, with a historic building and display of the development of Chevy Chase Lake in the 1900's by the trolley as its centerpiece. The T&E committee, chaired by Isiah Leggett, and served on by Bruce Adams and Derick Berlage, sent the proposal back to the DOT for further evaluation, and consultation with the State and trail groups. We will work actively to be a part of all of these discussions.

Interim Heritage Trolley (cont.)

The big surprise to the supporters of a competing trail-only option that would remove the rails was testimony by lawyers for the Columbia Country Club that the Club would require some form of physical protection or separation of even an interim trail on the rail right of way. Previously, and apparently under earlier management, the Club had been willing to not contest the trail, although not the trolley, without special protection for hikers against the periodic firestorm of approach shots to the adjacent greens. It appears that the Club has designed several options for lowering the trail and the trolley as part of negotiations on settling a lawsuit against the County's plans to build the Bethesda / Silver Spring trolley. Both Chairman Leggett and Council Member Krahnke, who was auditing the hearing, expressed dismay at the seemingly new obstacles that the Club appeared to be placing in the way of starting interim use of the County land. It is useful to remember that the Club was laid out around the pre-existing rail line, with the first and last holes completely on the south side of the tracks and the intervening holes on the north side.

Washington Area Transit and Development News

Montgomery County General Plan

This fall the Montgomery County Council has been working on their version of a revised county-wide General Plan. Their refinement consists of seven goals and associated objectives and strategies, which together provide a vision of the future for Montgomery County and a frame of reference to make the vision become a reality. The goals were for the following areas--Land Use, Housing, Economic Activity, Transportation, Environment, Community Identity and Design, and Regionalism.

The Transportation section of the Plan endorses the use of transit, HOV lanes, and bikes over single-occupant vehicles as a way of providing additional transportation capacity. The General Plan refinement also endorses land use decisions that encourage transit while discouraging suburban sprawl, generally going in the direction that ACT had testified on last summer. However, it doesn't go as far as having the general plan set numerical limits on growth, so that area master plans and the annual growth policies will still be extremely important.

Montgomery County Annual Growth Policy Encouraging Metro Station Area Growth

The proposal of Council Member Bruce Adams to create special areas around four Metro stations where developers could develop more quickly provided they paid a development tax is making progress. Ben Ross provided detailed testimony for ACT at recent discussions on implementation of the Transportation Management Organization. The four stations designated for FY 94 are Grosvenor, White Flint, Twinbrook, and Wheaton. The development would still be restricted by the existing zoning and master plans, but it could take place more quickly. One other very positive feature is that developers would not be required to build as much suburban-sprawl-style road improvements as in the past, since the presence of Metro would do much to change the mix of commuting.

Washington Area Transit and Development News (cont.)

COG Partnership

In 1992 the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) initiated a year-long effort, "Partnership for Regional Excellence," to develop strategies and an implementation plan that will foster a better Washington metropolitan region. The 200-member partnership was made up of roughly equal shares of government officials, business representatives, and members of civic and environmental groups. The membership came to a consensus in a series of meetings beginning in June 1992 assisted by neutral facilitators and recorders.

The Partnership recommended regional agreements on land use, transportation, and the environment. These agreements would lead to preparation of a new, cooperative regional plan that would ultimately integrate land use and transportation planning. As an immediate-action recommendation, the Partnership urged reconstituting COG's Metropolitan Development Policy Committee to include more representation from federal government, business, civic and environmental groups. This COG committee would review local plans, encourage preparation of composite maps of existing and planned uses, and prepare a regional development policy with guidelines and standards to guide development of local master plans, among other purposes.

Testimony, Letters, on Buses, NIH, Bethesda CBD Master Plan

Tom Fuchs testified in early September at the Prince George's County hearings on changes in the bus lines to go into effect with the opening of the Green Line to Green Belt and got them to make several changes to their initial plans. These included higher frequency on the local F-4 connecting Prince George's Plaza and Silver Spring where the distances between Metro Stations can be a long walk, and several improvements in service between the College Park Metrorail Station and the University of Maryland campus.

Ben Ross has been quite active in fighting the proposed \$80 million parking garage to serve new development at NIH, pointing out that considerable public transit exists there now, such as the Red Line station at its doorstep and various high-frequency bus lines. The \$80 million, he suggests, should go instead towards extending the Bethesda / Silver Spring light rail line to NIH. In related action, Neil Greene has been working with his neighborhood to the north of NIH to oppose the auto capacity increases proposed to service NIH. Rather than remove the median on Old Georgetown Road, increase transit service, and improve internal transit circulation, he says.

Ross Capon and Nick Brand prepared letters and testimony urging Congressional extension of the Federal employee transit pass program. At the same time funds to pay for the program should be raised by eliminating the free and subsidized parking at government office buildings.

Nominations Committee

It is that time of year again. ACT has formed a nominations committee to find candidates for ACT offices of President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer. In addition to any candidates nominated by this committee, any ACT member may nominate a candidate including self-nomination. If you would like to serve on the committee or have a nominee in mind, please call Harry Sanders (587-1323) or Neil Greene (897-5738). Your comments and participation are strongly encouraged.

Georgetown Branch Summer and Fall Cleanup Keeps Tracks Clear

Over three summer weekends, volunteers were busy clearing the overgrowth and fallen trees blocking both walkers and rail vehicles east of Rock Creek Park. Bob Thompson, who has been clearing other less overgrown portions of the right-of-way on a regular basis, brought his weed whackers; Bob Bishop brought his chain saw for the several large blow-downs; Gene Tucker brought his railcar mounted track mower; numerous people brought their muscles to pull the railcar, and vowed to find a mule next time; everyone hacked at ailanthus, wild brambles, and kudzu, pulled up poison ivy and wild grape, and shoveled dirt off of the ties and out of the drainage ditches.

On Community Service Day October 23, ACT turned out again, with Bob Thompson's hand car, to bag trash and haul out 20 or so bags. Thanks to persistent requests, the County brought out refrigerators, couches and other assorted heavy junk dumped in the right-of-way. Reportedly they pulled out 2,800 pounds!

Many thanks to all of the volunteers, including those named above, and John Carroll, Dick McArdle and his strapping son, Neil Greene, John Seri, Tom Fuchs, Harry, Barbara, and Greg Sanders, Francis Walters, and Nick Brand.

UPCOMING EVENTS & MEETINGS

Tues. Nov. 9 - ACT membership meeting

The November 9 meeting will be at 7:45 PM at the Silver Spring Center, 8818 Georgia Avenue catty-corner from the Montgomery County Planning Board building. Our speaker will be Jeff Blum, new ACT member from Pennsylvania, who was a leader there in successful pro-transit and Citizen Action efforts.

Sat. Nov. 13th - Citizens Conference on Transportation and Land Use

This conference is sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and co-sponsored by ACT, among others. It is entitled "*Transportation -- The Common Ground; Citizens Uniting for Livable Communities*". We hope that participants will get a better understanding of how transportation and land use are linked, and how to improve community plans in our area.

The conference starts at 8:45 AM at Catholic University. You should make reservations ahead of time since space will be limited. Contact Richard McArdle (588-3294) for more info.

Sat. Nov. 20 - Last 1993 Cleanup of the Georgetown Branch

We will meet at Connecticut Ave. and Georgetown Branch Railroad near the T.W. Perry lumber and hardware store. Following the cleanup effort we are hoping to offer rides on a rail-car on the Georgetown Branch. Contact Harry Sanders for info on exact time: 587-1323.

Tues. Nov. 23 -- Sierra Club Maryland Chapter, General Meeting

The feature bout of this meeting will be rival presentations by ACT and by the anti-trolley-trail NIMBY group headed by Tony Czajkowski. The presentations start at 7:30 pm at the Red Brick Court House in Rockville (near the Government buildings). If you happen to be a member of the Sierra Club, by all means come and lend your support. For more information call Jim Clarke, Conservation Chair, at 380-8994.

Mon. Nov. 29 - Montgomery County Legislative Delegation Public Hearing on State Transportation Plan

Beginning at 8 PM, County delegates and senators will hear public testimony on the draft capital spending plan at the County Council Office Bldg, 100 Maryland Ave., Rockville.

ACT will be testifying, and any members who are interested should also come and speak or at least contact your delegates to ensure that the 3 million dollars stays in the state budget.

Tues. January 12 - ACT membership meeting

7:45 PM at Silver Spring Center, 8818 Georgia Ave. Speaker to be announced.

Action Committee for Transit
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The Action Committee for Transit is a Montgomery County based citizen's group supported entirely by the contributions of our individual members, most of us regular transit users. For more information about meetings, activities, or joining ACT, write us at P.O. Box 7074, Silver Spring, MD 20907, or call Harry Sanders at (301) 587-1323.