

Action Committee for Transit

www.actfortransit.org

P.O. Box 7074, Silver Spring, MD 20907

November 28, 2008

Ms. Diane Ratcliff
MTA Office of Planning
6 St. Paul St., 9th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202

Subject: Purple Line DEIS: Selection of alternatives for analysis

Dear Ms. Ratcliff:

The Action Committee for Transit writes in support of the MTA's selection of alternatives in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Purple Line.¹ MTA has succeeded admirably in identifying a full range of alternatives for analysis; the objections that have been made to the MTA's choice are wrong in substance and disingenuous.

The criticism comes from the Town of Chevy Chase and two of its spokespeople, Mier Wolf and Pam Browning. They contend that MTA erred by failing to analyze an alternative put forward by the Town — medium-investment bus rapid transit running next to the Capital Crescent Trail east of Jones Mill Road and on Jones Bridge Road to the west. Yet this routing was denounced, at the time the alternatives were selected, as “monstrous” by the very people who now promote it.

In early 2003 — when the MTA was selecting the options that it would study in detail in the DEIS — Del. John Hurson proposed that Jones Bridge Road could be used for bus rapid transit. The county's Planning Commission evaluated the Jones Bridge Road routing, assuming that the BRT line would continue east of Jones Mill Road next to the trail as the Town, its consultant Sam Schwartz, and Mr. Wolf now advocate. Mr. Wolf, then the Town's Mayor, wrote in the Town's April 2003 newsletter [[Attachment A](#)] that:

Pam Browning, Ed Finn, and I from the Town continue to work hard to prevent the placing of a bus or train route down the Capital Crescent Trail between Bethesda and Silver Spring.

Mr. Wolf did endorse study of Jones Bridge Road, but only if the buses went on existing streets from Jones Mill Road to Silver Spring and completely avoided the trail.²

The Greater Bethesda Chevy Chase Coalition, in which the Town is a leading member and whose current president is Mr. Wolf,³ testified in September 2003 [[Attachment B](#)] that “We

¹We plan to submit additional comments later about the substance of the analysis.

²MTA considered such an alignment, using East-West Highway and Jones Mill Road, in its initial screening and dropped it from further analysis for good and sufficient reasons.

³In an earlier town newsletter [[Attachment D](#)], Mayor Wolf made clear that the GBCCC spoke for the Town: “The Town independently and through the Greater Bethesda Chevy Chase Coalition has strongly

are opposed to building any kind of transit system on the Capital Crescent Trail.” A few months later, the GBCCC issued a newsletter [Attachment C] that was even more explicit. It denounced what is now the Sam Schwartz alignment as a “destructive proposal” and a “monstrous intrusion... into the neighborhoods.” The newsletter made its opposition to the route the Town and Mr. Wolf now endorse absolutely clear. It printed a message from Del. Hurson responding to Purple Line supporters who “alleged that I suggested and supported running ‘buses on the Georgetown Branch.’” “This statement is absolutely false,” Del. Hurson averred, adding that

I will continue to oppose any options that would use any portion of the Georgetown Branch for these buses, and have told the Secretary of Transportation that I will vigorously oppose any options that would involve using portions of the trail right-of-way east of Jones Bridge Road for the mass transit project.

When Mr. Wolf now tries to explain away this stunning reversal of position, he implicitly concedes that the earlier position was taken in bad faith. An e-mail from Webb Smedley to members of the Planning Board's advisory committee on the Purple Line pointed out the inconsistency between the past and present positions. Mr. Wolf responded [Attachment E] that

...the advent of BRAC has changed the dialogue for the Purple Line alignment. Whereas we couldn't justify the placement of transit next to the trail before BRAC, we see that the service to Medical Center might require that configuration for a portion of the trail east of Jones Mill Road.

The trail-plus-Jones Bridge Road BRT alignment that the Town of Chevy Chase now favors and the alignment it proposed in 2003 are identical between Jones Mill Road and Bethesda Metro. The newly favored route has no more advantage for BRAC-related travel than for travel to any other destination in the medical area or Bethesda. If the alignment originally proposed by the Town does not provide adequate service with BRAC, it did not provide adequate service without BRAC. The conclusion is inescapable: the Town proposed a Jones Bridge Road route that it knew was impractical. It was nothing but a delaying tactic.

We have already waited twenty years for light rail between Bethesda and Silver Spring. The Town of Chevy Chase, which has worked for twenty years to block this project, now asks us to wait longer — so that the state can analyze something that its representatives denounced just a few years ago as a monstrosity. We urge the MTA not to be distracted by their obstructionism. Analysis of additional alternatives is not needed. The state should move ahead to select a locally preferred alternative — which we believe should combine the best features of the medium and high LRT options — and build it as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Ben Ross
President

cc: County Executive Leggett
County Council
Planning Board

opposed the building of this project.”