

Action Committee for Transit, Inc.

www.actfortransit.org

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

For Immediate Release

TRANSPORTATION BILL HELPS PURPLE LINE

The six-year transportation authorization adopted by Congress at the end of July marks a significant step forward for the Purple Line. The bill includes an earmark that authorizes "Alternative Analysis and Preliminary Engineering" for a transit line connecting Bethesda, Silver Spring, and New Carrollton. No specific amount of money is guaranteed, but funding for Purple Line studies is already available from a variety of Federal programs as well as the state Transportation Trust Fund. The earmark is a significant step forward for the project because it represents a recognition of its importance at the Federal level and by our state's entire congressional delegation.

In addition, the managers' report on the bill contains important language about the bike trail that will accompany the Bethesda-Silver Spring portion of the Purple Line. This language undercuts the efforts of Purple Line opponents to divide transit supporters from their natural allies among advocates of pedestrian and bicycle transportation. The exact wording of the report is as follows:

Bi-County Transitway.--It is the intent of the managers that any alignment of the Bi-County Transitway along the Georgetown Branch right of way should be designed and constructed in a manner to ensure a safe and accessible pedestrian-bicycle trail. The Maryland Transit Administration should consider a range of options include placing the rail line underground through cut and cover.

This text is a victory for common sense over obstructionism. It establishes a clear goal for Purple Line planners -- to make the trail "safe and accessible," not to satisfy the esthetic demands dreamed up endlessly by light rail opponents. This implies that:

- * The trail should have an asphalt pavement that is safe to ride on. Some Purple Line opponents call for a gravel surface that will "keep bikers going slow."
- * Of the two potential trail alignments through downtown Bethesda identified in the Master Plan, the street-level route along Bethesda and Willow Avenues is preferable to an inaccessible elevated bike trail that lacks direct access to the lively streets of Bethesda Row and is squeezed beneath the roof of the tunnel under Wisconsin Avenue.