



# ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

## Montgomery County's Advocates for Better Transportation

## Transit Times

The Newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland  
Volume 25, Number 1, January 2011

ACT's monthly meetings are held at 7:30 PM, the second Tuesday of each month, at the Silver Spring Center, 8818 Georgia Avenue (near the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Spring Street), in the Woodside Conference Room.

The Silver Spring Center is a ten minute walk north of the Silver Spring Metro Station; it is a two-block walk from the nearest Ride-On #5 stop; and, the Metrobus "Q" and "Y" routes pass in front of the Center.

The Center is located on the northwest corner of Georgia Ave and Spring St just south of Ballard St. Enter the building on the Georgia Ave side.

For meeting updates check our website listed on pg 2.

**Jan 11:** Election of ACT Officers – see p. 8 for nominations. Come and vote;  
Speaker: Valerie Ervin, Montgomery County Council President.

**Feb 8:** Speakers: Richard Hoye and Casey Anderson - “Making the county pedestrian- and bike-friendly: How do we move from talk to action?”

**March 8:** Speaker TBD

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### Transit Backers Hit Hidden Plan to Spend \$3.4 Billion on I-270 Widening

ACT Press Release of Nov. 16, 2010

A plan to pour \$3.4 billion of scarce transportation funds into widening I-270 was denounced by transit advocates one day before a scheduled vote by the National Capital Regional Transportation Planning Board (TPB). Transit backers said the money would be better spent on MARC commuter rail. An expansion plan for MARC has seen little progress since it was issued in 2007 and is not funded in the regional Constrained Long-Range Plan, the document that was voted on November 17, 2010.

In its written testimony to the TPB, the Action Committee for Transit slammed the regional body for an "*utter lack of openness*" in decision-making. The proposed allocation of billions of dollars was hidden in the fine print of

### Feature Articles

- Transit Backers Hit Hidden Plan to Spend \$3.4 Billion on I-270 Widening (p. 1)
- ACT Suggestions for Queue Jumpers for J - Metrobuses Approved (p. 2)
- What Happened to the Q2? (p. 3)

## **It's Time to Renew Your ACT Membership**

You can renew your membership or join ACT by remitting membership dues. Your membership dues are based on the category of membership that you choose:

\$10 [rider (code R on mail label)]  
\$25 [activist (code A on mail label)]  
\$50 [conductor (code C on mail label)]

[the two digits after your category of membership code indicates year paid]

Send your check for the chosen category of membership to:

**Action Committee for Transit**  
**P.O. Box 7074**  
**Silver Spring, MD 20907**  
[www.actfortransit.org](http://www.actfortransit.org)  
[www.twitter.com/actfortransit](http://www.twitter.com/actfortransit)

You may also give your membership dues to the Treasurer at the next ACT meeting. The address on your check will be used as the mailing address unless otherwise indicated.

Your dues support ACT Activities and this newsletter.

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bureaucratic documents and never announced to the public. Representatives of ACT and local environmental groups told the TPB that the I-270 project is a waste of money. When I-270 was widened south of Shady Grove, it filled up with new traffic in just a few years and was soon as congested as ever. The new plan adds lanes to the highway between Shady Grove and Frederick.

ACT president Ben Ross added that the Maryland Department of Transportation's clarification of this proposal, in a *Baltimore Sun* interview, raised as many questions as it answered. The state agency explained that the new money allocated to I-270 widening will come from transportation revenues expected between 2020 and 2030, and that tomorrow's vote is needed to let studies continue. But why study now, if construction money won't be available for ten years? And why isn't the MARC expansion plan getting similar study?

ACT is concerned that this vote could undercut the search for new revenues by Maryland's Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation. Will voters, who by a 2-1 margin favor investment in transit over roads, support new taxes for transportation, if their priorities are ignored in spending the money?

## **ACT Suggestions for Queue Jumpers for J - Metrobuses Approved**

Ben Ross

In December 2008, ACT wrote a letter to the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) suggesting improved mobility for buses at three intersections:

1. Northbound left turns from MD 355 to Cedar Lane for Metrobus routes J1, J2, and J3 during the AM peak
2. Use of the right lane as a queue jumper for Metrobus routes J2, J3, and J4 along westbound MD 410 at Jones Mill Road and Beach Drive.
3. Use of the right lane as a queue jumper for Metrobus routes J1, J2, J3, and J4 along westbound MD 410 at 16<sup>th</sup> Street.

Queue jumpers provide priority for buses by allowing buses in an extreme (usually curb) lane to move in advance of other traffic due to "early" green light given only to buses and a "delayed" green light for other traffic. In a

September 15, 2010, letter from SHA District Three Engineer, Brian Young to Montgomery County Department of Transportation Director, Arthur Holmes, queue jumpers for buses are justified and feasible for ACT's suggestions # 2 and 3.

ACT's suggestion #1 was considered by SHA. In order to implement suggestion #1, SHA concluded the need for an exclusive left turn signal during the AM peak, the possibility of cars taking advantage of this bus only signal, and the need for bus detection to differentiate between cars and buses. SHA does not believe that the ridership on the Metrobuses that would turn left from 355 north to Cedar Lane east justifies installation of an exclusive left turn signal during AM peak for Metrobuses.

SHA found ACT's suggestion #2 justified based on high ridership in the westbound direction during the AM peak. Because several treatments are required, namely, the installation of a bus priority traffic signal, removal of the right-turn channelization traffic island at the northwest corner of MD 410 and Jones Mill Road, addition of a receiving lane on the northeast corner of the same intersection to allow buses to safely merge back into traffic when buses move on the same green light as other traffic. SHA plans to include this particular intersection on a list of queue jumper projects to be submitted to the U.S. Department of Transportation for funding under a Transportation Improvement Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grant. [Under the same type of grant, the SHA is also asking funds for queue jumpers along Viers Mill Road for the Q Metrobuses (see article on Q Metrobuses next).]

SHA concurs with ACT's suggestion #3 except during the PM peak. During the PM peak, SHA modeling analysis showed bus queue jumping reduced intersection efficiency by 25%. If bus ridership rises at this intersection during PM peak, SHA would be willing to reconsider allowing bus queue jumping during the PM peak. Before allowing bus queue jumping to occur, approval has to be given by the SHA Office of Traffic and Safety. According to Sean Kennedy of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, who collaborated with SHA, approval is imminent. Once approved, SHA will install a bus priority traffic signal at this intersection.

Another great ACT to celebrate!

## What Happened to the Q2?

Quon Kwan

The original Metrobus Q2 used to run on Georgia Ave., Viers Mill Rd., and Hungerford Dr. between Silver Spring and Shady Grove. It had a weekday average ridership of 10,200 – the most heavily used Metrobus route in Montgomery County. Between 2008 and 2009, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) studied ways to improve the Q2 as part of a larger Priority Corridor Network Initiative involving 24 of the most often used Metrobus routes. Due to heavy traffic along the route, the Q2 has long suffered from lack of on-time performance.

The study began with a 21-question Q2 rider survey in December 2008. Because of the low number of responses (i.e., 274), a second survey was conducted in March 2009 by personally speaking with Q2 riders at high-volume bus stops. In the later survey, 147 responses were received (79% in English, 16% in Spanish, and 5% in other languages). The survey identified problems with bus crowding, schedule frequency, schedule adherence, and bus travel time. Bus bunching was cited as the biggest problem on the Q2. In 2009, WMATA held three public meetings to collect rider feedback on bus improvement options.

The main recommendation, which was implemented on December 27, 2009, is the breakup of the Q2 into two overlapping routes – Q4, Silver Spring - Rockville and the Q6, Shady Grove - Wheaton. Thus, the Rockville -Wheaton (aka "middle") segment along Viers Mill Rd. receives overlapping service with bus service operating at double the frequency of bus service in the two "tail" segments: (i) Shady Grove - Rockville and (ii) Wheaton - Silver Spring. Q6 trips bypassing Montgomery College (on Sundays) are called the Q5.

The "middle" or overlapping segment generates 51% of former Q2 riders. The Shady Grove – Rockville tail segment generates 19% of former Q2 riders, but is also served by Ride-On. The Wheaton - Silver Spring "tail" segment generates 30% of former Q2 riders, but is also served by the Y Metrobus routes. Implementing the main recommendation saves \$1.3 million/year and reduces capital peak bus requirements for Viers Mill Road. The original,

full-length Q2 from Silver Spring to Shady Grove is preserved for early morning and most evening trips in order to maintain *maximum* 30-minute headways. Q2 buses skipping Montgomery College are called the Q1.

The second recommendation is "Metro Extra" Q9 making limited stops during the weekday peak hours between Shady Grove and Wheaton, including one at Montgomery College.

Behind the scenes are other operational improvements, including assignment of street supervisors who focus solely on managing the Q buses. The street supervisors are in direct contact with Q route bus drivers to address problems, such as detours, and to keep buses evenly spaced. Street supervisors have direct contact with authorities to remove illegally parked vehicles. WMATA is planning new approaches for the Q buses into the Shady Grove and Wheaton stations in order to achieve greater timesavings. In addition, WMATA is studying adjustments to traffic light timing, queue jumping, and bus-only lanes to improve Q2 service. The next corridor targeted for improvement is the K6 route, White Oak - Fort Totten (New Hampshire Ave.)

[On December 14, 2010, a TIGER Grant of \$58,838,000 was awarded for the National Capital Region, which includes \$265,000 for queue jumpers along Viers Mill Road and NextBus real-time bus arrival displays as well as \$1,262,000 for queue jumpers, transit signal priority, and NextBus real-time bus arrival displays along University Blvd.]

## Forum on Metro Governance

The League of Women Voters of the National Capital Area will be sponsoring a forum on Metro Governance:

Saturday, February 12, 2011 at 11:00 am

Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library  
901 G St, NW, Washington, DC 20001

The Metro stop for the library is Gallery Place on the Red & Green Lines.

Speakers TBA. For more information call 301-984-9585 or email [LWVMC@erols.com](mailto:LWVMC@erols.com).

## LA Mayor Villaraigosa Sets Example for Champion of Public Transit

Quon Kwan

A visionary, elected official who sets an example for being a champion of public transit is Antonio Villaraigosa, Mayor of the City of Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA, as you may know, is an automobile-dominant culture in which Villaraigosa must work to be a champion of public transit. Currently he is serving his second four-year term as mayor.

The bold, innovative proposal that Villaraigosa made to advance transit in November 2009 is known as the "30/10" Plan – a plan to do 30 years worth of 12 rail and bus rapid transit projects within 10 years in Los Angeles. One of the 12 projects includes the renowned extension of the subway from its current westernmost terminal at Western Ave. and Wilshire Blvd. all the way towards the sea (thus, the project title, "Subway to the Sea").

All 12 projects were approved by 68% of the voters (in the midst of an economic recession) and partially funded by Measure R in 2008, supported by Villaraigosa. Measure R raised sales tax in Los Angeles for public transit by 0.5% for 30 years to provide \$40 billion. Also, all 12 projects are in the unanimously approved 2009 Long Range Transportation Plan. By accelerating the projects so that they are built over 10 (instead of 30) years, the total cost can be reduced to \$14.7 billion (from \$18.3 billion).

The crux of the 30/10 Plan is that Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) would build those 12 projects with Federal loans secured by Measure R funds. [The last major transportation project in Los Angeles secured by Federal loans was the Alameda Corridor, a 22-mile freight railroad trench between the ports and downtown to eliminate grade crossings and as well as to improve mobility and safety.]

When Villaraigosa first announced the 30/10 Plan last fall, it seemed like a pipe dream, but his relentless lobbying won over powerful political allies. Villaraigosa's persuasive arguments for the 30/10 Plan are that the 12 transit projects would reduce annual particulate emissions by at least 500,000 pounds, lower annual gasoline consumption by 10.3 million barrels and, cut automobile trips by 208 million miles/year, and generate 166,000 jobs.

The mayor even got the news media to back him. In fact, the *Los Angeles Times* called the 30/10 Plan the most important initiative ever introduced by Villaraigosa. When the LACMTA Board of Directors unanimously voted to adopt Villaraigosa's 30/10 Plan, Los Angeles County Supervisor Yaroslavsky (an anti-subway official) said, "You can't turn the economy of this nation around unless you turn around the economy of California. The antidote to the recession is the 30/10 plan."

Next in line, Villaraigosa won over Rep. Jane Harman (D-Venice) and Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), who chairs the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, as well as U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. Finally, Villaraigosa's 30/10 Plan caught President Obama's attention, who called the mayor's 30/10 Plan a "template for the nation."

On September 28, 2010, Mayor Villaraigosa testified in Washington, DC before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, calling to create "a national program of innovative financing tools" to help pay for major rail transit projects in Los Angeles and elsewhere; he also advocated bolstering an existing federal loan program, the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act.

On October 16, 2010, the U.S. Department of Transportation announced a \$546 million low-interest loan and a \$20 million grant to spearhead work on one of the 12 projects, the Crenshaw Light Rail Line between LAX and the now being-built Exposition Light Rail Line. The funding will allow this particular project to be completed by 2016, rather than 2018 as expected. Two financing sources made this deal possible: Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loans and the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery II (TIGER II) grant program. The TIFIA funds, representing the \$546 million loan, will be leveraged by the \$20 million TIGER grant.

The Crenshaw Light Rail line project in Los Angeles will cost nearly as much as the Purple Line (\$1.4 billion vs. \$1.6 billion), yet it is half as long (8.5 miles) and will carry far fewer riders (between 15,000 and 21,000, compared to 68,000 for the Purple Line). Once again we see that the Purple Line is extremely competitive for federal funding. The lesson here is that it takes an elected official to serve as a visionary champion to come up with a bold, innovative plan and to lobby relentlessly for funding multi-billion dollar transit projects. If it can be done in car-loving Los Angeles, it can be done here.

## Purple Line Station Named in Honor of Harry Sanders

The 16<sup>th</sup> St. Purple Line station has officially been named the Sanders/Woodside Station in honor of the late Harry Sanders, "Father of the Purple Line."

## New Database Shows Transit Oriented Development Sites

Tina Slater

The National Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Database is a project of the Center for Transit-Oriented Development, a partnership among the Center for Neighborhood Technology, Reconnecting America and Strategic Economics. The Database is intended as a planning tool for citizens, developers, government officials, and academicians and provides economic and demographic information for every existing and proposed fixed-guideway transit station in the U.S., including commuter rail, streetcars, light rail, bus rapid transit and ferries.

The Database includes 3768 existing stations and 843 proposed stations in 47 metropolitan areas, as of December 2009. Spanning Honolulu to Portland, Maine, the database synthesizes 40,000 data fields to create a user-friendly web site that allows people to view maps of various transit regions and choose data reports for stations of interest.

Users can query data by geography or demographics. Data are available at three geographic levels: the transit zone (the 1/2 mile or 1/4 mile buffer around the individual station), the transit shed (the aggregate of transit zones), and lastly, the transit region. The data are derived from nationally available data sets including the 2000 Decennial Census, the Census Transportation Planning Package, and Longitudinal Employment Data. Over the next year, Census 2010 data will also be incorporated. The TOD Database is available at <http://toddata.cnt.org>,

## WMATA Seeks Input for Regional Transit System Plan

WMATA Press Release of November 18, 2010

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) launched a new Web page, [PlanItMetro.com](http://PlanItMetro.com), to share information and gather feedback from riders during development of a long-term Regional Transit System Plan. With continued population and job growth predicted for the Washington Metropolitan area, the Regional Transit System Plan aims to provide a 30-year vision for future growth and options to improve and expand transit service. Early next year, there will be public workshops about the 30-year transit plan. Next summer WMATA aims to have a draft of the Regional Transit System Plan with recommendations for transit projects that will provide the most benefit.

The Regional Transit System Plan will examine existing bus and rail systems, light rail and options for expansion centering around four key issues: core capacity, access, surface transit corridors, and new and emerging markets. Growth trends indicate that portions of the Metrorail system will reach peak capacity before 2040, with downtown core stations most significantly impacted. Examples of solutions sought are making pedestrian and rail connections between lines to bypass bottlenecks, adding new rail lines through the downtown core, improving surface transit, enhancing access to rail stations with improved pedestrian and bicycle paths and better bus feeder service.

**Why is it called Highway Investment, but Transit Subsidy?**

anonymous

## Annual Scoring of Congestion by City Gets It Wrong

Tina Slater

For nearly three decades the Travel Time Index (TTI) has been treated as a benchmark of the state of our traffic congestion. These annual scores are widely reported, including by the US Department of Transportation, and are often used as a reason to spend more on roads. The TTI is one of the single most reported-on transportation statistics in the US.

It is also, according to a new, detailed review, wrong.

<http://blog.smartgrowthamerica.org/2010/09/29/national-traffic-congestion-report-gets-daily-driving-backwards/>

The study, titled “*Driven Apart: How sprawl is lengthening our commutes and why misleading mobility measures are making things worse,*” shows how the Travel Time Index actually gets daily driving backwards: cities with longer daily driving times look better than those with shorter driving times. Why? The Index leaves out something just about any traveler knows to think about: distance. By focusing only on speeds, the TTI neglects what people actually care about: how long does it take me to get there?

## Changing of the Guard

Cindy Snow

The ACT Board of Directors and Officers will be changing in 2011. First, our long time President, Ben Ross, is stepping down. Fortunately he has agreed to stay on the Board. Ben has truly been a driving force behind the progress ACT has made for transit.

It will be sad to see long time Treasurer John Carroll leave the ranks. He has been behind the scenes (as well as in front) making sure ACT runs smoothly, both financially and by keeping track of the membership.

Board member Hans Riemer is moving on to the County Council. We wish him the best and look forward to working with him in his new capacity as councilmember.

Board member Jason Waskey is newly married (Congratulations Jason!) and will also be moving on. Thank you all for helping to make ACT great.

We look forward to working with the outstanding nominees selected to replace them. See the proposed slate for the 2011 ACT Board and Officers on p. 8.

### ACT Joins Twitter!

[www.twitter.com/actfortransit](http://www.twitter.com/actfortransit)

## Outgoing President's Good-Bye Message

Ben Ross

When I yielded to Harry Sanders' pleading and agreed to become president of ACT for a year, I had no idea what was to come. I accepted only on the condition that Harry, who had just begun to organize what is now Purple Line Now, would do most of the work as chair of that group. Now fifteen years have passed, and I have more thoughts than there is room for here.

It's hardly necessary to draw up a full balance sheet of those years. All that really needs to be said is that outside of the few dozen members that ACT then had, the idea of building light rail between Bethesda and Silver Spring had been pretty much given up for dead, and the Purple Line wasn't even a gleam on the horizon.

ACT didn't have numbers then, but we already had a core group of committed activists who were not only dedicated – that's something you can find elsewhere – but extraordinarily practical and easy to work with as well. We were remarkably free of the backbiting and posturing that is so common in organizational life, and

we've managed to stay that way as we've grown. Unquestionably, it's been one of the keys to our success.

Far more people than can be named deserve to be thanked for their work over the years. My predecessors as ACT presidents – Tom Fuchs, Foster Morrison, Nick Brand, Ross Capon, Dick McArdle, and of course Harry Sanders who whatever his title at any time was always the soul of the organization. Hans Riemer filled a one-year interregnum. John Carroll, not just treasurer but also record-keeper and communicator, maintained a list of supporters that has grown to well over 2000 names. Cindy Snow, our staff person for nearly ten years now, has been truly indispensable, making it possible for us to function as a member-powered organization.

And of course all of our volunteers, numbering well over a hundred, who passed out leaflets in the cold at Metro stations, trudged from doorway to doorway delivering over 50,000 neighbor letters on the Purple Line, and sat through the countless meetings that are convened before Montgomery County makes, or avoids making, a decision.

## VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION



Photo by Ronit

Tracey Johnstone, Sabine Beisler and Richard Hoye during our Beltway Banner campaign in Oct.

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## **ACT Volunteers Are Great!**

Cindy Snow

Thank you ACT volunteers for all your help in 2010. It was a busy year. From leafleting to keep transit services from being cut to distributing our Transit Scorecard. There was the holding of banners at Beltway exits and intersections during rush hour to publicize our webpage PurpleLine2010.com and staffing of ACT tables at events, the most recent being the Corridor Cities Transitway hearing on December 15, 2010. Our envelope stuffers are always there when we need them. Remember, all those emails and letters that you, our members, send out in response to ACTion alerts really make a difference. Keep up the good work.

## **Did You Know?**

ACT was mentioned in the July 8, 2010 Dr. Gridlock (*Washington Post*) as one of the grass-root groups in the area “*that consistently seek to improve travelers' conditions.*”

## **Editorial Remarks**

Your Transit Times editor is Quon Kwan. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is **March 11**. Send your materials to Quon at: [gykwan@gmail.com](mailto:gykwan@gmail.com) or call him at: (h) 301-460-7454.

## **ACT Officers Nominated for 2011:**

President: Tina Slater  
V. Pres (program): Ben Ross  
V. Pres (upcounty issues): Miriam Schoenbaum  
V. Pres (policy): Cavan Wilk  
Secretary: Tracey Johnstone  
Treasurer: Ted Van Houten  
Board Member: Zach Canto  
Board Member: Jim Clarke

Non-Voting ex officio board members:

Ralph Bennett: Purple Line Now!  
Richard Hoye: Pedestrian & Bike Safety

**Come to the Jan. 11 meeting ready to vote.  
Nominations from the floor will be accepted.**