



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Thursday, October 25, 2012

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Purple Line will spark neighborhood renaissance, officials say

Light rail alliance group urges importance of public-private partnerships to jump-start development

By Staff Writer

Riverdale Road has not changed much since Prince George's County Councilwoman Andrea Harrison (D-Dist. 5) of Springdale attended Riverdale's William Wirt Middle School — then a junior high school, she said. But Harrison's eyes widened when she saw sketches of roadside restaurants and retail stores that could come with a nearby Purple Line stop.

"To see the proposed rendering of what Riverdale Road could look like is just phenomenal," Harrison said.

Harrison joined other government officials and business owners Oct. 25 in Greenbelt to review concept designs for new retail and housing along future stations and stress that public-private partnerships are essential to pay for the proposed 16-mile light rail link between Bethesda and New Carrollton and the economic growth around it. The Purple Rail Alliance, a nonprofit of 60 residents and businesses that support the light rail plan, hosted the meeting.

The state has spent \$120 million so far in planning and promoting the light-rail link and currently there are no partnerships in place, said Lt. Gov. Anthony Brown (D) at the meeting. Construction of the entire 16-mile rail is estimated to cost \$1.93 billion, said Henry Kay, the Maryland Transit Administration executive director for transit development and delivery. The Purple Line is currently in a preliminary engineering design phase, funded with \$50 million from the state's \$9 billion transportation trust fund, Kay said.

Kay said the MTA will look to finalize what money it can get from the federal government for funding in 2014, and construction could begin as early as 2015. Kay added he hopes construction costs would be split evenly between the state and federal government.

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The Purple Line would have 21 stops, with 10 in Prince George's County. Prince George's County Executive Rushern L. Baker III (D) said having station stops in Riverdale Park and Beacon Heights will help revitalize the East Riverdale neighborhood, one of six the county government has targeted in the Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative, a program to add more crime and code

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enforcement in high crime and blighted areas.

Baker added that a county asset to the Purple Line

is access to available office site space in locations such as Greenbelt and New Carrollton.

"We lose the ability to be the satellite office because it's hard to get from Montgomery County to Prince George's without some circuitous route," said Baker, explaining that the distance and the traffic would be a deterrent.

University of Maryland, College Park, President Wallace D. Loh reiterated his support at the meeting for the Purple Line rail to come through campus, noting that it could lead to a growth of new retail and apartments for faculty and staff and less need for additional parking garages. Loh said less than 10 percent of the college's faculty and staff live in College Park.

"The Purple Line is going to help that enormously, especially the newer generation," Loh said of getting staff to move closer to campus. "They're not as committed to driving cars everywhere."

The Purple Line is expected to carry 60,000 riders daily, according to Scott Peterson, a spokesman for Baker's office.

Kay said he did not know if construction would begin with a Prince George's station or if multiple stations would be built at the same time. Kay said there are a variety of ways the project could be financed, and he suggested developers finance specific stations, and the state would have to pay back the developer after the rail line is financed.

"There has to be a big public contribution no matter what," Kay said. "At the end of the day, we have to pay for it."

nmcgill@gazette.net

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