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Monday, July 22, 2013



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Metro fires back at county about Silver Spring Transit Center fixes

County could be 'on its own' if fixes are not deemed appropriate, agency says

By Kara Rose Staff Writer

If Montgomery continues on its current course in repairing the beleaguered Silver Spring Transit Center, the county will be responsible for future maintenance, a Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority official said in a letter Friday.

The county, meanwhile, believes it shaped its current plans for the project to respond to concerns WMATA expressed after initial plans for the repairs were drafted.

Under county direction, workers are trying to repair individual "pour strips" — sections of concrete — that showed a series of cracks. The cracks were the result of a lack of reinforcement in the concrete, according to a contractor's report delivered to the county in March, which further delayed the center's opening.

Originally, the county was planning to completely remove and replace the pour strip sections that lacked reinforcement at the facility, county spokesman Patrick L. Lacefield said.

But WMATA raised concerns that the work could produce "further unanticipated stress to the structure," Lacefield said. The agency asked a working group engineering the repairs go back and look further at the issues, he said. The working group includes representatives from WMATA, county and contractors.

Lacefield said the working group agreed WMATA was correct. Instead of completely removing the concrete, workers could remove portions of the concrete, add rebar and then repour concrete.

In the Friday letter, however, WMATA appears to have back-tracked.

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"Under such a scenario, the County must commit to fixing future structural issues and perform requisite maintenance as it relates to structural concerns upon commencement of operation of the facility," wrote A. Robert Troup, WMATA's deputy general manager.

WMATA spokesman Philip Stewart would not comment directly on the letter, but said in an email Monday that the agency "remains committed to the

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project but is deeply concerned that the cause of the cracking has yet to be identified" at the center.

The Montgomery County Council has scheduled a briefing Tuesday afternoon to discuss the progress of the repairs. WMATA said Monday afternoon that representatives would be present at the briefing, though they would not specify who would attend.

Now that the county has pushed forward with the alternative, the agency has "flipped," saying the concrete sections should be removed entirely, Lacefield said.

"We reconsidered it in the first place because of them," Lacefield said. "Now they are saying it all needs to come out."

The county awarded the contracts to build the \$120 million transit center, at Colesville Road and Wayne Avenue. According to the county's contract with WMATA, the agency would then operate the facility. The center was slated to open in 2011. It is still unclear when the center will be open for business.

When permits were requested for the work on July 1, the county and the agency agreed that comments would be sent within five days, Lacefield said.

WMATA said it would need the full 15 days stipulated in its agreement with the county to review the plan, Lacefield said. After 15 days, there was no word from the agency, he added.

On July 16, the county wrote WMATA saying it was moving forward with its plans for repairs.

Troup's July 19 letter said the problem lies with the county "neglecting to copy WMATA's General Counsel" on letters from June 29 and July 16.

"WMATA remains committed to providing the best transit facilities and service to the region. Arbitrarily truncating a comprehensive assessment of transit center remediation to provide facilities in support of this commitment does not service the region," the July 19 letter from WMATA read, which noted that acting quickly on the project may compromise the structure in the future.

Lacefield said the county is sticking to its contract with WMATA and anticipates the agency will do the same.

"At this point, we're prepared to move forward with what they originally said they wanted," Lacefield said. "We are agreeing with what they initially wanted: Repair without ripping out all of the concrete."

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