



ACTION COMMITTEE for **TRANSIT**

Transit Times

The newsletter of the Action Committee for Transit of Montgomery County, Maryland.

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Next Meetings

- October 8 - Speaker to be announced
 - November 12 - Speaker to be announced
 - December 10 - Speaker to be announced
- Check ACT’s web site and social media for updates.
- Can’t make it in person? Watch the meeting on our live stream on our our Facebook page and/or YouTube channel.

ACT’s monthly meetings are normally held on the second Tuesday of each month at the Silver Spring Civic Building, One Veterans Place. The Silver Spring Civic Building is an eight-minute walk north from the Silver Spring Metro Station. Meetings begin at 7:30pm.

Many bus routes can take you to and from the meeting. Ride-On #15 and #19 stop at the corner of Wayne Ave. & Fenton St.; Metrobus routes Z6 and Z8 and Ride-On routes #9 and #12 stop along Colesville Road; Ride-On #16, #17, and #20 and the F4 Metrobus pass by on Fenton St. If coming by car, plentiful parking is available at the Ellsworth Avenue garage.

Why ACT Endorsed Angela Alsobrooks for the Senate

By Sizhe Xie

Angela Alsobrooks’ candidacy for United States Senate was endorsed unanimously at our September 10 membership meeting. The choice was based on the records of the two competing candidates, Prince George’s County Executive Alsobrooks and former governor Larry Hogan.

The endorsement had been recommended by our Board, whose members made a detailed presentation of the two candidates’ records at the meeting. Key points that motivated our endorsement are:

Angela Alsobrooks:

- Supports the Purple Line, the Baltimore Red Line light rail, and light rail from Branch Avenue to Waldorf in Southern Maryland.
- Oversaw a massive expansion of housing and job opportunities near Metro stations and future Purple Line stations in Prince George’s County.
- Promises to fight for more federal transit funding for Maryland.

Larry Hogan:

- Botched the construction of the Purple Line, causing years of delay and hundreds of millions of dollars of cost overruns
- Halted work on the Baltimore Red Line and Southern Maryland Light Rail. He turned away \$900 million in federal aid that had been promised to Maryland.
- Stalled long-sought expansion of MARC train service on the Brunswick Line through Silver Spring, Kensington, Rockville, Gaithersburg, and Germantown.
- Tried to widen I-270 and the Beltway by adding toll lanes that wouldn’t relieve traffic congestion but would let a private company pocket tolls of up to \$50 per trip. Put Republican political operatives in charge of awarding the multi-billion-dollar contract.

President's Letter

Fellow transit supporters,

ACT has had a productive summer and we look forward to an engaging fall season.



I first must thank Lev Boonin, our first-ever, fulltime ACT Organizer, for his service to ACT these past two years. Lev left ACT employment at the end of August to pursue a career in urban planning, a field in which he recently earned a master's degree from Georgetown University. Lev's regular tabling and outreach efforts at Metro stations and transit centers helped ACT grow its membership and reach transit riders in ways which our organization was not previously capable. When he was not out at the stations talking to transit riders, he was assisting the Board and myself behind the scenes with social media and communications, and most visibly, running out tech at our monthly membership meetings. He will be missed—but he remains an ACT member and we hope to see him at meetings in the future.

This fall is election season and ACT has taken an action unique in our organization's history regarding the U.S. Senate race to fill Ben Cardin's soon vacant seat. At our September membership meeting, the general membership of ACT voted to endorse Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks for Senate. County Executive Alsobrooks is facing former Governor Larry Hogan in a race that is expected to be much closer than typical races for the U.S. Senate in Maryland, given Hogan's status as a recent two-term governor who enjoyed decent popularity despite his political affiliation.

The ACT Board recommended that the general membership vote to endorse Alsobrooks over Hogan due to Alsobrooks strong record of supporting both transit and transit-oriented development in Prince George's County during her time as county executive. Also-brooks' administration has especially promoted transit-oriented development (TOD) around the New Carrollton and Largo Metro stations, and the results of those policies are already taking shape in a positive way, with former parking lots becoming housing, offices, and healthcare facilities. Additionally, her administration has pressured the State Highway Administration to make state roads in the county safer for pedestrians, the most notable example being Route 1 in College

Park, where improvements are underway on that busy corridor around the university.

In contrast, former Governor Hogan cut transit service during his two terms, canceling the planning of the Baltimore Red Line outright, raising MARC fares while failing to improve service, and reducing MTA bus service both statewide and in Baltimore City. The former governor delayed approval of the Purple Line by a crucial year despite the project being ready for construction when he took office. His administration subsequently mismanaged the project, resulting in the unraveling of one of the biggest public-private partnerships in the country and years of added delays. While neglecting transit, he and his administration pushed for a massive highway expansion on the Beltway and I-270, and diverted construction dollars within the state's transportation program to other highway projects throughout the state.

In comparing the records of these two elected officials, the membership found the choice clear. In the coming weeks until the election, ACT volunteers will assist the Alsobrooks campaign in distributing campaign materials at Metro stations and transit hubs. No ACT funds, however; will be spent to aid the campaign or to compensate these volunteers, in keeping with our group's 501(c)4 status. Our support will be in the deeds of our volunteers rather than the funds entrusted to us by our members.

I hope you have a pleasant fall despite this hectic election season, and I look forward to seeing you at one of our upcoming membership meetings (or on the Metro!).

In service,

SEAN

Sean Emerson

Why MDOT Needs to Rethink Cutting Funding for Transit & Transit Projects When Dealing with Budget Shortfalls

By Jake M. Goodman

(Please note this is an opinion piece.)

Budget cuts to transit are never good, especially for those who have disabilities that make it impossible for them to drive a private personal vehicle, like myself. You might be wondering what exactly does budget

cuts have to do with individuals with disabilities who rely on transit. It is common knowledge that budget cuts equate to service cuts. Lack of frequent service leads to a lack of frequent ridership, which could lead to entire routes being cut. Budget cuts reduce bus and rail ridership, leading to increased pollution from car emissions. In recent years MDOT has made millions in budget cuts multiple times. While the most recent budget cuts have been applied to highway maintenance and highway construction as well as public transit, earlier rounds of cuts under the Hogan administration took money out of transit and put it into highways, and this shift in spending priorities has not been fully reversed. Often there is a situation where highways and roads get funded way more than any form of public transportation such as busses or rail. This situation is not unique to Maryland as it is common in many other parts of the United States as well.

For those of you who are reading this, this may seem like common knowledge and something that we all know. But the thing that is often left out when talking about budget cuts and service cuts as it pertains to public transportation is the impact it has on people living in poverty, individuals with disabilities, and other people who rely on busses and trains as a means of getting around for daily life tasks. Not everybody can afford the overinflated prices of rideshare rides from Uber or Lyft. Until society starts to realize that the livelihoods of many people are upended as a result of transit service cuts, we will never fully understand the severity of the impact budget cuts have on riders. A place you can get to 15 minutes by car should never be an hour by bus. If transportation planners and local and state government officials took the livelihood of people who solely rely on public transportation into account when making budget cuts and service cuts more often, then maybe there would be consideration for possibly making budget cuts elsewhere in state and local government in agencies that are intensely overfunded that aren't as essential.

If we took a portion of the budget from other agencies (such as the prison systems, police, military) toward funding public transport infrastructure and public transport services, maybe the budget cuts for transit agencies won't be as severe. If we took a portion of the money that we spent on highway maintenance, freeway lengthening, road construction, then maybe more people would ride the rails if we reallocated that funding towards improving systems like MARC.

Again, all of this is common knowledge that we often think about and are things that we all want as transit advocates. Ever the issue is that we don't see it as an essential part of the equation because most of us are able to access a private car or afford rideshares. As soon as we start to see the perspectives of those who would not be able to function without a certain bus route, we realize how essential it is to not make any severe budget cuts to transit networks. Even in the direst of times we could still find means of funding a transit network.

The Predicament of Intercity Bus Terminals

By Quon Y. Kwan

Humanity has been called “an infrastructure species,” i.e., a species defined by what it builds. One of the infrastructures which humanity has built is now in a highly decadent state—this is the intercity bus terminal. The abandonment of traditional brick-and-mortar intercity bus terminals in the centers of major cities has now captured nationwide attention on National Public Radio and *The Wall Street Journal*. In addition, on a recent journey by intercity buses between Los Angeles and Las Vegas in 2023, the author personally witnessed the state of some intercity bus terminals. Basically, the history of the curbside intercity bus operation is the history of the decline of intercity bus terminals. The historic turning point in intercity bus operation was the shift in loading and unloading of passengers from fixed, brick-and-mortar bus terminals to the curbside, as pioneered by the Chinatown bus, which operated between the Chinatowns of major East Coast cities. Chinatown bus ridership grew astonishingly in spite of the steep drop in intercity bus ridership from 140 million in 1960 to 40 million in 1990. Coincidentally, 1990 was when Greyhound, the largest intercity bus carrier in the U.S., filed for bankruptcy; Greyhound ridership sank further over the next 16 years.

The second revolution was the adoption of on-line ticketing eliminating ticket windows and ticketing personnel, further obviating the need for fixed, brick-and-mortar bus terminals. Curbside operation was adopted by corporate giants in the industry, who repudiated the fixed, brick-and-mortar bus terminals due partly to their stigma but primarily due to economics. The first corporate giant which adopted curbside operation was Megabus in 2006; it also introduced on-line ticketing,

which eliminated ticket windows and ticketing personnel. Finally, when the largest conventional intercity bus carrier, Greyhound, was sold; it was evicted from its iconic bus terminals in city centers and succumb partly to curbside operation.

For the most part, the disadvantages of curbside operation can be summarized by the lack of amenities: (i) no sheltered, indoor waiting area, (ii) no restroom, (iii) no announcements, (iv) no baggage service (v) no customer service agents, and (vi) no concessions. The first two of these features will be elaborated upon in more detail.

The absence of sheltered, indoor, seated waiting areas is not an acceptable option when passengers have long layovers between connecting intercity motorcoaches and the weather is inclement. Sheltered indoor waiting areas are not just a comfort but necessity. winter temperature averages below 42° F, and in places like Chicago, which gets 38 inches of snowfall per year. Seniors and persons with disabilities especially need the most protection from the elements. The lack of restrooms has been another ignored necessity. Restrooms are not an amenity, but a necessity for several reasons. Using the restroom on a bus is very awkward due to the pitch (up-and-down motion) being highest at the back of the bus where the restroom is situated. Again, passengers who have long layovers between intercity motorcoach connections (over two hours) need restrooms. Seniors and persons with disabilities (including incontinence). When the Greyhound depot on Filbert St. in Philadelphia was replaced by curbside operation on Market St, it was described as a “humanitarian disaster and municipal disgrace.” Thus, the curbside bus zone was moved temporarily to the ground level of a parking garage slated for eventual redevelopment.

When FlixBus acquired Greyhound in 2021, FlixBus purchased only the rolling stock and operations—not the real estate. FirstGroup, the parent company which held Greyhound, sold 33 Greyhound bus terminals to Twenty Lake Holdings in 2022. Twenty Lake Holdings is an arm of the hedge fund Alden Global Capital, renowned for acquiring newspapers and ruthlessly gutting journalists to cut costs. Subsequently, Twenty Lake Holdings hired Coldwell Banker Richard Ellis, the world’s largest commercial real estate and investment firm, to sell the Greyhound bus terminals all of which were sitting on prime real estate.

The options available when Greyhound was evicted from its bus terminals in city centers were (i) elimination of service, (ii) re-location to curbside locations, (iii) re-location to a train station, intermodal or multi-modal center or an intracity transit bus center, (iv) re-location to a mall, (v) re-location to gas station or truck stop, and (vi) re-location to a modular office structure. Each of these six re-location options need examples and more explanation. None of these options serve riders well. Elimination of service was the most drastic and least tenable but still happened in Jackson, MS (temporarily) and Little Rock, AR (permanently).

The second option of some Greyhound service succumbing to curbside operation has already been discussed.

The third option of re-location is to a train station, intermodal or multi-modal center or intracity transit bus terminal seems highly appealing due to intermodal access. In one highly unusual case, Greyhound’s Miami bus terminal was moved to Miami International Airport’s Multimodal Center with direct access to Tri-Rail commuter rail, AMTRAK, Miami-Dade Transit (Metrorail and bus), and airplanes. However, re-locating intercity bus terminals to intracity bus terminals is highly problematic due to inadequate shelters and insufficient capacity. A typical transit bus shelter covers maybe 5-6 people but in no way can cover a crowd of 20-50 people waiting for an intercity bus. Again, sheltered, indoor seated waiting areas for passengers with long layovers and seniors and persons with disabilities are still needed. Intracity bus terminals lack sufficient capacity in places such as Los Angeles Union Station’s Patsouras Bus Plaza and Knoxville Area Transit’s bus hub. The greatest concern is the capacity of these re-locations; they must be capable of handling the sheer magnitude and complexity of intercity bus arrivals and departures to serve as intercity bus hubs

The fourth option is re-location to a mall. BoltBus was one of the first curbside carriers to use a mall as a curbside stop, namely, the Cherry Hill Mall in Cherry Hill, NJ. The Barstow, CA Greyhound bus terminal was originally at the Barstow Train Depot at 211 E. Main Street, which is now a mini-mall. The FlixBus curbside bus stop for the Las Vegas strip was fixed outside the Forever 21 store at the Fashion Show Mall, 3200 South Las Vegas Blvd. The re-location of Louisville’s downtown Greyhound depot to a strip-mall a mile away at 1211 W Broadway in 2023 was tolerable

except that it was not as easily accessible as downtown. Unfortunately, malls may not be open at the time when curbside intercity buses stop there, and they are not designed to accommodate crowds waiting for buses. Mall owners are known to distance away from the mall the spots where curbside buses may stop in order to keep away people they consider undesirable.

The fifth option of re-location is to a gasoline station or truck stop. The downtown Columbus Greyhound terminal had become a political football before its closure in early 2022, when, due to pressure to redevelop the site, Greyhound and Barons Bus moved to a Central Ohio Transit Authority intracity transit center. When the transit center ran out of capacity (a general problem noted before), the intercity buses had to move again to a revamped former gas station outside of the western edge of downtown Columbus, OH.

The Chattanooga Greyhound Station closed in autumn 2023, and the stop was relocated to a gas station in Wildwood, GA, 10 miles from the city center. Re-location of bus terminals to gas stations and truck stops are objectionable because they have no sheltered, indoor waiting areas and no places to sit and have limited restrooms.

The sixth option is relocation to a modular office structure. For example, the downtown Cincinnati Greyhound station was relocated 13 miles away to the suburb of Arlington Heights and housed in a modular office structure, described as a trailer situated in a parking lot. The modular structure has limited seating inside and two restrooms.

One might ask if the U.S. Congress has offered billions of dollars in financial aid to airlines and AMTRAK, why has it over-looked intercity bus service. The reason, for the most part, is due to the lack of political power of low-income riders who use intercity bus service. Nonetheless, there are a few bright spots in Federal, state and local support for intercity bus terminals when they are incorporated as part of a train station or airport.

The Federal Railroad Administration is funding the Washington, DC Union Station expansion project to transform the existing Station into a world-class multi-modal transit hub. The \$10.7 billion project will bring bus bay capacity for intercity buses up to 39 and make another 15 bus bays available for peak-tourist season. Greyhound, Flixbus, Megabus, Washington Deluxe,

Peter Pan, BestBus, and Virginia Breeze load and unload here. The Chinatown buses (Eastern Shuttle) still maintain curbside operation loading and unloading in Chinatown, Washington, DC.

Georgia Department of Transportation funded \$11.0 million to construct a new intercity bus terminal at the Garnett Station of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority in downtown Atlanta. It opened in May 2023. The new intercity bus terminal houses Greyhound, FlixBus, and Southeast Stages, It boasts natural light from its large windows, a food stand with a grill, spacious restrooms, and a digital departure board. It is furnished with airport-style seating with power outlets, USB chargers, and armrests with cupholders. The Garnett transit station has direct rapid transit service to Atlanta Hartsfield International Airport.

With \$18.3 million in Federal and \$2.8 million in state money, and \$5.01 million in city money, Carbondale, IL transformed its AMTRAK station into the Southern Illinois Multimodal Station to house bus bays for Greyhound, Jackson County Mass Transit, RIDES Mass Transit, Shawnee Mass Transit and South Central Mass Transit. It is targeted to open fall 2024. Michigan Department of Transportation's (MDOT) Intercity Terminal Development Program constructs and rehabilitates intercity passenger terminals throughout the state. The state's Intercity Terminal funds are used to ensure the passenger terminals remain attractive, passenger-friendly, and safe. As part of the plan for a new \$57 million AMTRAK train station for Detroit, MDOT announced it would make the station intermodal to include intercity buses. Greyhound would move its current terminal, owned by MDOT, three miles away to the Detroit New Center Intermodal Facility. No opening date has been established yet.

Intercity bus terminals, especially hubs, are crucial, inseparable links in the surface transportation network. Abandonment and re-location of intercity bus terminals adversely affect low-income, transit-dependent people. The adequacy of every re-location must be thoughtfully evaluated. All things considered, adequate re-location of intercity bus terminals must be supported by government at all levels, Federal, state, and local, because they are a crucial part of the nation's surface transportation infrastructure. Most important, we have to stop treating intercity bus passengers as the "steerage" of the travel industry.

Transit Times

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We encourage you to renew your membership or join ACT, if you haven't already. Membership dues help us push for better and safer transit, sidewalks, bike facilities, and safer roads. You can join/renew at a level that's comfortable for you:

- \$ 10 – Rider**
- \$ 25 – Activist**
- \$ 50 – Conductor**
- \$100 and above – Engineer**

Mail a check with your contact info to ACT at: Action Committee for Transit, PO Box 7074, Silver Spring, MD 20907. Or you can easily make a one-time or monthly dues payment online at actfortransit.nationbuilder.com/join.

Thank you so much for supporting transit activism! Also check us out online for event updates and the latest news:

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