



ACTION COMMITTEE for *TRANSIT*

Transit Times

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

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Next Meetings

- April 8: VIRTUAL Affordable, safe, quality housing in Montgomery County, Speaker: Chelsea Andrews, Executive Director Housing Opportunities Commission. Note: this is an ONLINE meeting
- May 13: The Week Without Driving (Sept. 29-Oct. 5), Speaker: Ruth Rosas, America Walks, Program Manager. Note: this is an ONLINE meeting
- June 10: Natali Fani-Gonzalez - County Council-member, Montgomery County, MD, District 6, will speak about public transportation, equity and housing in Montgomery County.

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.

ACT Contact Details

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Editorial Remarks

Your *Transit Times* editor is Quon Kwan. He welcomes your submissions. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is **May 1**. Send your materials to Quon at: qykwan@gmail.com.

We Need YOU!

Join us in working for more and better transit. Whether you want to help us leaflet at Metro and MARC stations, work for pedestrian and bicycle safety or testify at public hearings, or volunteer in some other way—we would love to work with you. Contact ACT Staff at admin@actfortransit.org. In the Subject Line, please put, “I want to help ACT.”

President's Letter

Hello all.....

Let's start with the good news, Spring is here in full form and nature is taking note. The past three months has been a whirlwind with all that is coming out of Washington these days. For those of you who have been deeply affected my heart goes out to you and your families. ACT is still here advocating for what is needed to protect your safety and ability to travel throughout the DC metropolitan area.



There are several policy issues that are upon us in the coming months. One of the biggest that is looming is the Maryland State budget and what will be cut or have reduced funding moving forward. ACT will be there to participate and raise our voices to lessen the impact to transit because regardless of what may be happening people still need the ability to get around.

ACT was in "Action" on many fronts these past three months of 2025. Through the work of many on our board and volunteers our message was heard by elected officials through campaigns and testimony from Rockville to Annapolis. Our "More Trains, No Cuts" campaign demanded that the legislature raise revenues needed to fund Metro and add midday trains on MARC Brunswick Line which was led by ACT volunteers and our MARC chair.

ACT also provided testimony on the More Housing NOW bill to the County Council. We need more "missing-middle" homes to be built near transit, because the only way the new county master plan can be realized is if there is housing for those to both use transit but also provide a foundational argument about transit's expansion. A new ACT member testified for ACT in favor of updating the master plan for downtown Bethesda which would allow for continued growth of downtown Bethesda and identifies additional public facilities to be supported by development fees.

We know that there is a lot going on these days. I am inspired by all the hard work of ACT's board, officers, and members and know that we can create change. To do so we need members like you reading this letter, to renew your membership and send your dues in by check, or online. It is through active membership that we will achieve ACT's mission and goals, and I hope that you all will sign on again to join us!

I thank you all for your continued support and prepare yourselves for a great year!

Happy Spring!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S.T. Whitehurst". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Shanika T. Whitehurst

Automated Guideway Transit Systems

By Quon Y. Kwan

In response to a request, this article was composed to summarize the features of automated guideway transit systems, which consist of personal rapid transit as well as people movers. This article will also compare automated guideway transit to conventional transit systems. However, automated guideway systems that operate solely as shuttles or in amusement parks and airports will not be covered here.

Let's consider personal rapid transit (PRT) first. PRT was conceived in the 1960s during the Great Society era. The Urban Mass Transportation Administration, forerunner to the Federal Transit Administration, included PRT as a key component in its Advanced Ground Transportation Program.

The vehicles are car-like, electric-powered, and automated. They carry a limited number of passengers and run on automated guideways. Thus, each party greater than the capacity of a PRT vehicle traveling to the same destination would have to break and take separate PRT vehicles. The guideways are light concrete or steel beams on columns generally elevated to enable grade separation from surface streets. Grade separation enables PRT to avoid traffic congestion and to travel faster than on surface streets. The other advantage is avoidance of parking. Sidings on the guideway allow PRT vehicles to by-pass stations allowing for point-to-point, non-stop service. The passenger punches buttons to code in the desired destination. PRT was developed as a "Buck Rogers" concept to capture the advantages of personal services of a private car travel with the high efficiency of rapid transit. PRT vehicles operate in on-demand service.

Only one PRT system is in operation today: the Morgantown, WV PRT, launched in 1975. It was originally designed to connect the three campuses of the University of West Virginia with the central business district. The Morgantown PRT has five off-line stations, and 73 vehicles (each vehicle has a capacity of 20 passengers). The PRT runs on an 8.7-mile route along a heavily traveled corridor. It carries about 15,000 passengers per day. The steam-heated track has proven expensive requiring a annual \$ 5 million operation and maintenance budget. During periods of low usage, all PRT vehicles make a full circuit stopping at every station in both directions.

Then, there are people movers (also called "automated people movers"). Although people mover vehicles are similar to PRT vehicles in capacity (i.e., being car-like, electric,

and automated, running on elevated guideways), people movers operate differently. In contrast to PRT, people movers run on fixed schedules instead of being on-demand. People mover vehicles follow a single route and stop at all stations sequentially instead of being non-stop, as PRT is. People mover systems are single track with no by-pass capability unlike PRT.

The Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1966, provided funds specifically for people mover systems through the “Project Downtown” demonstration program. “Project Downtown” became known as the “Downtown People Mover Program” in the 1970s. This program moved away from the earlier focus on development of PRT systems. Initially, four cities were selected to implement people mover systems: Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles, and St. Paul. Later in 1977, the program added three cities, namely, Detroit, Miami and Jacksonville. Of all cities, only the latter three added cities built and are still now operating people movers.

The Detroit People Mover opened in 1987, constructed at a cost of \$200 million. It runs in a fixed 2.9-mile, clockwise loop, stopping at all 13 stations. If a passenger wants to travel to a station preceding the station that the person boarded, the passenger must ride all the way around the loop. It serves primarily as a downtown circulator, connecting major destinations like Renaissance Center, Greektown, Cobo Center (now Huntington Place), and various parking facilities. Annual ridership is 2 million (2019). Detroit struggles with attracting more riders.

The Miami MetroMover opened in 1986 and later expanded in 1994. It was constructed at a cost of \$153 million for its initial segment in 1986. The 1994 extensions were built at a cost of \$220 million. The system consists of three loops. (i) The inner loop circulates through Miami’s downtown core. (ii) The Brickell loop serves the financial district south of the Miami River. (iii) The Omni Loop extends north to serve the Omni and Arts & Entertainment District. All three loops connect with Miami’s Metrorail at Government Station and serve as a distributor and collector subsystem for the heavy rail system. All the loops operate from 5 AM to midnight, seven days a week. The MetroMover system consists of 21 stations and 4.4 miles of elevated guideway. Each MetroMover vehicle has a passenger capacity of 100 (16 seated and 84 standing). It is a fare-free system. Trains arrive every 1.5 to 3.0 minutes during peak hours. The MetroMover has been successful in supporting downtown Miami’s development and provides important “last mile” connections from Metrorail to key destinations. Annual ridership is approximately 9-10 million passengers (2019), though this can vary significantly based on down-

town events and tourism patterns. The Miami MetroMover is the U.S.’s most successful people mover.

The Jacksonville people mover is better known as the Jacksonville Skyway. It opened in 1989 at a cost of \$23 million for an initial length of 0.7 mile. It was expanded north to serve Florida State College downtown campus in 1996. It was extended south to cross the St. John’s River in 1998 and extended west to the Convention Center in 2000. The total length of the Jacksonville Skyway is 2.5 miles with 8 stations and two routes: the Northbank line (between downtown and the convention center) and the Southbank line (between downtown and the south side of St. John’s River). It is a fare-free system. Annual average ridership is 750,000 (2019). Jacksonville Skyway struggles with attracting more ridership.

Compared to conventional transit systems, including buses as well as rail, both personal rapid transit and people movers lack the capacity to move masses of people at one time. To illustrate, let us turn to the renowned Vukan R. Vuchic, Emeritus Professor of Transportation Systems Engineering and of City and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania. In his publication “Personal Rapid Transit: An Unrealistic System,” he supposes a PRT system with a station near a large office building. At lunch time, 80 persons come from the building to travel to different points on the PRT network. To serve them, the PRT system has to be capable of providing some 50 vehicles in a few minutes. That can be done only if a very large number of vehicles cruise empty--an expensive operation. The same people could be more cost-effectively and efficiently served by conventional transit bus or rail.

Let us also look at why the four cities (Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles, and St. Paul) dropped their people mover plans in the 1970s: Cleveland’s people mover plan fell apart due to local political opposition and financing concerns. City officials were skeptical about the system’s costs versus benefits given Cleveland’s declining population and tax base in the late 1970s.

Houston’s people mover faced both technical and financial challenges. The city was experiencing rapid growth and development, which complicated route planning. Local officials also became concerned about whether ridership would justify the costs.

In Los Angeles, the people mover was strongly opposed by downtown business owners who were concerned about construction disruption and the visual impact of the elevated guideway. They also questioned how well the people mover would integrate with the Metro Rail system under development.

St. Paul's people mover failed largely due to cost escalation and local funding issues. The city struggled to secure the required local matching funds for the federal grant, and concerns arose about ongoing operational subsidies.

A common thread across all the cities rejecting people movers was that as planning progressed, cost estimates increased while projected ridership numbers decreased, making the systems less economically viable.

Additionally, the long planning and approval process had an adverse consequence: by the time a decision had to be made on whether to adopt a people mover, the transportation needs and priorities had shifted from when they first applied for the program.

In conclusion, automated guideway transit systems have hardly ever passed cost-benefit analyses except in ad hoc applications such as shuttles, amusement parks and airport operations and the unique "last mile" connection, such as Miami.

Montgomery County is Falling Short of Transit Equity: Is Ride-On Turning Into a Potemkin Village Bus System?

By Ben Ross

Ride-On ridership has been in decline for about 15 years. Some of this is due to the relocation of the lower-income population of the county to areas less transit-serviceable (from Silver Spring & Langley Park to Montgomery Village, east Gaithersburg, and Germantown). But a far more important cause, I believe, is the ongoing deterioration of Ride-On service.

The priority for Ride-On in recent years has been PR for people who never ride the bus. Serving riders comes second. It's a Potemkin village approach to transit.

Examples of this trend are many:

- Ride-On used to run buses at least every half hour, or not at all. This policy, essential to attract riders who have choices, has ended. The change conceals reductions in service from non-riders by ostensibly preserving bus routes, while the routes lose riders and enter into a death spiral.
- BRT and local buses stop at different places. Most bus riders want to take whichever bus comes first, but this makes it impossible. The extra wait for the next bus far exceeds the time saved by the BRT bus, especially outside rush hour when most bus rides occur.

- The high costs of battery-electric buses are paid for in part by providing inadequate bus service. Switching a bus to electricity doesn't help the climate if some of its riders switch to cars.

- The county, unlike Prince George's and other neighboring jurisdictions, did not join in WMATA's Better Bus program to jointly develop an optimal Ride-On/Metrobus route network. Instead, it did its own study, aimed at the distant future and based on demographic assumptions inconsistent with the recently adopted Thrive 2050 Master Plan. As a result, when Metrobus routes change this summer, the ad hoc and underfunded realignment of Ride-On routes will leave gaps in the frequent bus network.

- Bus livery is painted over the window, obstructing riders' view.

- Bus stop flags are painted on only one side, so potential riders can't find the stop.

- Bus stops are far from intersections, so riders lose time crossing the street.

- Money is diverted out of the mass transit tax which is part of the county's real estate tax. The transit tax yields \$211 million per year. With \$42 million in state aid for Ride-On and other revenues such as bus advertising, total transit revenues are \$261 million. Yet transit expenditures are only \$211 million.

Infrequent bus service literally kills people. Multiple pedestrians in recent years in Montgomery County have been killed by drivers under circumstances that strongly suggested that the pedestrian was trying to catch a bus. You are much less likely to risk your life trying to catch this bus, if you know the next bus is coming soon.

The county's proposed budget for FY 2026 maintains these misguided priorities. Riders need to speak up to demand change.

Call to Action On Transportation Funding Issues

By Jake Goodman

Since the new administration in the White House was sworn in, we have been through the wringer in terms of with Federal policy changes. These changes will affect transportation funding on a Federal, state, and local level immensely.

Even prior to the new administration, Maryland has been dealing with a budget deficit in terms of state funding for

public transit. But much funding is still earmarked already for highway expansion and road bridge building. The immense priority this country gives to funding for highways far exceeds that for railroads and public transit systems.

Our strong emphasis on car dependency has made life 10-times harder for those who cannot drive due to disability or other factors. In this country, too often we associate car ownership with freedom. But for those who cannot drive due to disability, such as myself, it actually makes getting around more restrictive if you cannot afford rideshare services and the public transportation services in your area run very infrequently. Cutting funding for public transportation makes life more restrictive for those who rely on it. Our public transportation network needs to catch up with our road and highway network.

An executive order was published by the new administration directing the Federal Department of Transportation to deny funding to any so-called “woke” transportation projects. This could be very loosely defined as any project that is not a highway expansion.

Now is not the time to cower to the backwards demands of the new administration. Consider this your call to action to safeguard and protect funding for accessible and sustainable public transportation.

Many public transportation projects have been promised in Maryland in recent years – mid-day MARC Service on the Brunswick and Camden Lines, Red Line light rail in Baltimore, full completion of the Purple Line, Southern Maryland light rail, and the list goes on and on.

Time and time again, innovative and sustainable public transportation projects are proposed, construction is started, yet they are either canceled or delayed. Funding for these projects often get reallocated to highway widening or other road related infrastructure. Action is needed to ensure a consistent stream of public transportation funding during this turbulent time.

Months of ACTivity

Compiled by Ben Ross

ACT was busy on many fronts in the first three months of 2025. Our message was heard by elected officials in Rockville and in Annapolis.

Our “More Trains, No Cuts” campaign demanded that the legislature raise revenues needed to fully fund Metro and add mid-day trains on MARC Brunswick Line. ACT volunteers, led by our MARC chair Anindita Mullick, distributed

more than 9000 flyers at Metro stations. In response to the flyers, more than 400 transit riders sent emails to their Maryland legislators.

ACT vice president Mike Larkin presented ACT’s testimony on the More Housing NOW bill to the County Council. Other ACT members testified as individuals or on behalf of other organizations. ACT supports this bill, which would allow more “missing-middle” homes to be built near transit, but believes it is only a first step toward implementing the new county general plan. Our testimony asked the Council to expand the bill to legalize duplexes, triplexes, and apartments everywhere within one mile of Red Line and Purple Line stations. ACT also urged the County Council to consult with homebuilders, including Enterprise Community Partners and Habitat for Humanity, to ensure housing actually gets built instead of facing more hurdles than homes that are being torn down and then built as larger houses.

New ACT member Alex Campbell testified for ACT in favor of updating the master plan for downtown Bethesda. The update continues the growth of downtown Bethesda and identifies additional public facilities to be supported by development fees.

Mike Larkin testified on the county capital budget as well. He urged the county to expand BRT but to focus on frequent bus arrivals rather than on differentiating BRT from other buses. New BRT service should share stops and payment methods with local bus routes, so that riders are not forced to choose between buses before they know which one is coming first. He also called for expansion of Bike-share and for traffic calming on the corridors where More Housing NOW will concentrate new homes.

Our bus chair Jake Goodman testified at the hearing on Ride-On bus route changes that will accompany WMATA’s implementation of its Better Bus Network in July. He joined with Larkin in calling for an emphasis on frequent buses with extended hours of service.

ACT also testified in favor of several bills in the state legislature for safer streets and for transit-oriented development:

- HB 348 expands speed camera enforcement.
- HB 963 makes it easier to lower speed limits.
- HB 915 enables state to collect fines from out-of-state speeders.
- HB 330 authorizes counties to impose a land-value tax near train stations

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ACT Officers/Staff Join ACT/Renew for 2025!

President: Shanika Whitehurst (Gaithersburg)
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Ex officio non-voting board members:

- Ralph Bennett (Silver Spring), Purple Line Now chair
- Ben Ross (Bethesda), Maryland Transit Opportunities Coalition chair
- Sebastian Smoot (Burtonsville), East County
- Quon Kwan (Rockville), Editor, *Transit Times*

Bus/BRT Committee Co-Chairs: Jake Goodman and Sizhe Xie

Housing and Land Use Committee Chair: Michael Larkin

Staff: Kathy Jentz, Administrator,
admin@actfortransit.org

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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