ACTION COMMITTEE for TRANSIT

Transit Times

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

Inside This Issue

Next Meetings

• July 8 - NOTE: This is an Online Meeting - The Week Without Driving (Sept. 29-Oct. 5), Speaker: Ruth Rosas, America Walks, Program Manager

• August 12 - Free Fares While Maintaining Quality Transit Service, Speaker: Joshua Baker, General Manager/CEO, DASH in Alexandria

• September 9 - TBD

• Sunday, October 5, 2025 at 3:00 PM - ACT Fundraiser Gala, Crescent at Chevy Chase in Chevy Chase, MD

Check ACT's web site and social media for updates.

Can't make it in person? Watch the meeting recording on our YouTube channel afterward.

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

Action Committee for Transit, Inc.
P.O. Box 7074, Silver Spring, MD 20907
admin@actfortransit.org

Editorial Remarks

Your *Transit Times* editor is Quon Kwan. He welcomes your submissions. Cutoff date for receiving materials for the next publication is **August 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…The hot days of summer are finally upon us here in the area after the spring lulled us into a false sense of extended coolness. The Action Committee for Transit is still here advocating for transit options throughout the summer that are needed to protect you and your family's safety and ability to travel throughout the DC metropolitan area.

There are several policy issues that we are working on while the pavements are heating up. Please understand that your ACT dues and donations help to ensure that we will continue to be there to participate and raise our voices among both local and state lawmakers. During these past six months ACT has been advocating on your behalf providing testimony and through the work of many on our board, vice presidents, and volunteers we helped to turn the tide on the removal of the Midcounty Highway (M-83) project. In April, the Montgomery County Planning Board Commissioners voted 5 - 0 to remove the proposed M83 Highway's 5-mile segment (from Ridge Rd/Rt 27 in Germantown to Montgomery Village Ave) from all master plans. ACT will provide public testimony to the county council about the removal of the M83 from all Master Plans. ACT also continues to advocate for the council to pass the Zoning Text Amendment 25-02 of the More Housing N.O.W. proposal. This proposal takes a first step toward legalizing affordable housing for middle-income workers like teachers, first responders, and transit employees.

ACT's biggest victory to date has been advocating for the Purple Line which we know has created detours and dust but that just means we are that much closer to the realization of such a major transit project. Let's not forget all the merchants and businesses that are directly impacted across the county, particularly in Silver Spring by the construction. Let's support those businesses because they are the true lifeblood of the city and remember our neighbors and friends in the immediate area who are impacted as well. They are truly the reason for this construction season! We are almost there!

ACT will be hosting our biennial gala on Sunday, October 5, 2025 from 3-5pm at the Crescent at Chevy Chase, tickets are on sale through our website. I hope to see you there!

Thank you all for your continued support and stay cool this summer because it is already a hot one!

S.T. Whitehurst

2025 Report Card for America's Infrastructure – Transit

By Quon Y. Kwan

Every four years for the past two decades, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) issues an assessment of the infrastructure in the U.S., known as the "The Report Card for America's Infrastructure." Infrastructure includes eighteen categories of various systems that support society from aviation to waste water. The last Report Card was issued in 2021.

Infrastructure is essential to America's quality of life. Moreover, America's infrastructure is the foundation on which the national economy and global competitiveness are predicated. For nearly as long as ASCE has issued these report cards, the grades have been unflattering. In this article, we focus on transit in the 2025 Report Card.

Grades on the Report Card range from "A" (best) to "F" (worst) with no "E." ASCE assigned a grade of "D" to America's transit infrastructure. "D" means the infrastructure is in "fair to poor condition and mostly below standard with many elements approaching the end of their service life. A large portion exhibits significant deterioration. Condition and capacity are of serious concern with strong risk of failure."

In its assessment of an infrastructure system, ASCE takes into account the following eight criteria: capacity, condition, funding, future need, operation & maintenance, public safety, resilience and innovation. Individual grades and weights for each criterion are not reported.

The grading is conducted by the ASCE Committee on America's Infrastructure, which is comprised of 52 dedicated civil engineers and infrastructure professionals from across the country with decades of expertise. They volunteer their time to prepare the Report Card.

ASCE noted specifically in the 2025 Report Card the condition, better known as the State of Good Repair for transit across the nation: the percentage of revenue vehicles in State of Good Repair was 77.6%, the percentage of equipment (service vehicles) in State of Good Repair was 60.5%, the percentage of facilities in State of Good Repair was 92.5% and the percentage of transit track miles in State of Good Repair was 96.9%.

To give a specific state example, the New York State Department of Transportation's "Group Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan[1] for Federal Transit Administration

(FTA) Grantees," 2023 shows 35% of New York's revenue vehicles and 39% of its equipment are at or past their useful life while the average age of facilities was nearly 40 years old.

ASCE noted in its 2025 Report Card for transit that significant gaps remain in order to bring 100% of transit assets into a state of good repair. Uncertainty of future funding and cost increases make closing these gaps a major challenge.

The passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in 2021 poured $108 billion to support America's transit infrastructure between 2022 and 2026. Another $14 billion in additional funds were provided by the FY 2021 Appropriations Act to FTA for distribution to transit agencies. Moreover, $31 billion more was provided to FTA through the 2021 American Rescue Plan. The expenditure of both the $14 billion and the $31 billion prioritized operating and payroll expenses to avoid layoffs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, all of the above funding was just a temporary stop-gap measure and is insufficient over the long run. First of all, there is a need for enhancing transit service in less-populated areas, which have experienced a greater increase in ridership since COVID-19 than large metropolitan areas.

Second, ASCE estimates that the nation's transit programs will require $20.3 billion annually to achieve a State of Good Repair by 2038. Using 2014-2018 spending levels, the State of Good Repair is expected to increase slightly from $101.4 billion in 2018 to $106.2 billion in 2038. ASCE estimates that the total infrastructure needs for transit are $618 billion. If the current funding levels continue from 2024 to 2033, the expected funding would total $466 billion resulting in a shortfall of $618 billion - $466 billion = $152 billion. The cause of the shortfall can be summed in one phrase: years of accumulated deferred maintenance.

ASCE pointed out in its 2025 Report Card for transit that operating expenses are about two-thirds of all transit costs. Nationwide large budget gaps are expected beyond 2025. Funding challenges make it difficult to keep transit routes and trips consistent. ASCE was also astute to point out that workforce needs greatly affect transit operations. ASCE observed in 2023 that 37.9% of transit workers are 55 and older, which is considerably higher than the percentage of all transportation sectors who are 55 and older (24.3%). Also, compared to all other industry sectors, there is a higher rate for candidates to reject offers of employment in the transit industry causing a significant workforce hiring and recruitment problem.

With respect to the criterion of public safety, transit is one of the safest modes of transportation. In 2023 there were 327-transit related fatalities compared to 40,990 estimated highway fatalities. The 327 transit-related fatalities can be broken to 210 rail-related and 117 non-rail related. In 2023, injuries totaled 21,244 with 73% or 15,508 being non-rail incidents.

With respect to the criterion of resilience, ASCE noted that rail and bus lines are frequently interrupted by extreme weather events. To cite one example, over half the subway stations in the New York City Transit System have flooded in recent years. Nevertheless, on the other hand, ASCE remarked that transit is especially useful for evacuation of and relief for vulnerable populations, such as those without access to private vehicles or have special needs. It pointed out that Houston prepared for Hurricane Harvey in 2017 by using 150 transit buses to transport residents affected by the storm.

With respect to the criterion of innovation, ASCE made three observations about transit innovation. First, transit agencies are increasingly purchasing zero-emission buses. The number of full-size zero-emission buses is over 6,100 as of September 2023. Second, rural areas are addressing transit needs with new approaches: on-demand public transit (also known as microtransit). Third, fare collection systems are undergoing a transition from closed to open-loop systems for electronic fare payment, from contact to contactless fare payment and cross-honoring of fare payment among transit agencies.

In conclusion, ASCE assigned a grade of "C" to America's overall infrastructure so this means transit ("D") did worse than America's overall infrastructure. The only other infrastructure in America that was graded as poorly as transit ("D") was stormwater. In comparison, the 2021 Report Card for transit assigned transit a grade as "D-" so the 2025 grade for transit is a slight improvement from 2021 (from "D-" to "D").

Notes:

[1] FTA requires transit agencies receiving federal subsidies to develop and update TAM plans every four years. Key components of TAM plans include inventory of capital assets, condition assessment, investment prioritization and implementation strategy.

ACT Members' M-83 Testimonies

The Action Committee for Transit is an advocacy group dedicated to better communities through improved public transit in Montgomery County, Maryland. ACT believes that the goal of transportation is to move people, not cars. That is why ACT supports the permanent removal of Mid-County Highway Extended (M83) from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways, as well as all other aspects of current and future Montgomery County plans, programs, and project development. Here are three recent testimonies by ACT leaders on this issue.

Michael Larkin:

(*Note that Michael Larkin spoke on behalf of ACT.*)
The update to the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways is an opportunity to continue moving forward with our county's efforts to build a transportation network with public transit, walking, and biking as the best ways to reach the destinations people want to go to. The update should remove the Mid-County Highway Extended (M-83) from the plan but retain the bike plan along the right-of-way. Removal of the M-83 and keeping the option open for alternative transportation is a clear statement that sustainable transportation will be prioritized.

Montgomery County has repeatedly committed itself to evironmentally sustainable transportation. The Climate Action Plan states we have to reduce the use of cars and increase the use of active transportation options and transit to decrease greenhouse gas emissions. The Thrive 2050 general plan explains reducing vehicle miles traveled is imperative for achieving the county's climate goals. The continuing existence of the M-83 in the master plan is an obvious contradiction. Furthermore, the building of a new highway will not deliver relief from traffic but will increase congestion when more people choose to drive because a better option is lacking. Safer bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and frequent transit such as MD-355 Bus Rapid Transit can provide much-needed transportation improvements the upcounty requires without the environmental impacts of building the M-83.

The time has come to put an end to the idea that the M-83 is part of our county's future. It is clearly not, and the various other plans already passed by the Planning Board and the County Council logically point to the choice of removing this highway from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ben Ross:

There have been repeated references to a traffic modeling study of this project. We are told that the traffic model shows that M-83 will reduce traffic congestion in the upcounty.

This is not correct. The modeling was done with the MWCOG travel demand model. Traffic models of this type cannot tell you whether new highways will reduce traffic congestion. They assume the answer to that question, and the assumption in the MWCOG model is wrong.

How much congestion relief will come from a new highway depends on how much added car traffic will emerge as a consequence of building the highway. The assumption buried in the MWCOG model is that such traffic will be negligible. In congested cities and suburbs, experience shows the opposite: new and widened highways fill up with added traffic. A new USDOT report documents this, based on many years of research.

I believe this flaw is inherent, and MWCOG-type models are incapable of predicting whether there will be congestion relief. Let me step back and explain this.

It is obvious that the car trips people take depend on where they live and where the things they want to go to are (demographics, for short) and also on the location and travel speed of the road network connecting those places. What isn't obvious is the relative importance of those two factors.

The current models calculate the trips from the demographics (current and predicted for the future). The modelers refer to the dependence of trips on the road network as "suppressed demand" and "induced demand."[1]

These modelers can't calculate how much of this there would be, because they can't measure what people would do if there were no traffic congestion. They can only measure what people do in the real world. That's the only data they can calibrate their models against. They have to assume how much suppressed and induced demand is waiting in the wings.

The USDOT report says that the best practice for modelers is to assume that the number of vehicle-miles driven (VMT) in the area of a highway project will increase by the same percentage as the number of lane-miles of highway increases. But this is inconsistent with the basic structure of an MWCOG-type model, in which VMT is an output rather than an input.

If you accept the USDOT-recommended assumption, you can easily estimate how much congestion relief M-83, or any new highway, will deliver. None. Traffic will likely get better in some places and worse in others, but the overall level of congestion will not change.

You can make that forecast without any computer model. You can say as well that traffic will probably get better on roads parallel to the new highway and worse on roads that feed into it. If, however, you want to know how much better and worse, you do need a computer model.

Unfortunately, MWCOG-type models can't even do that. Not even if you somehow add in the induced and suppressed demand. They have another limitation: they are designed to calculate traffic between "Traffic Analysis Zones" and do not produce accurate prodictions of traffic on individual road segments (what they refer to as "fine-grained outputs").

The authors of the MWCOG model acknowledge this themselves. They emphasize on page 21 of the User's Guide for Version 2.3.75 that "the model has not been validated to these fine grained levels, so it is not recommended that one use these fine-grained outputs from the travel model."

The bottom line is very simple. New highways don't reduce congestion. You don't need a computer model to tell you that, and no MWCOG-type computer model can tell you otherwise.

Notes:

[1] As an example of suppressed demand, imagine that you live in Germantown and expect dinner guests Wednesday evening. At 4:00 in the afternoon, with all the cooking done, you think to yourself "Why don't I run up to Viniferous in Frederick and buy a good bottle of wine for tonight?" If there were no traffic congestion, you might do it; in the real world, you never would.

Miriam Schoenbaum:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at the public hearing on Thursday, November 14, in favor of removing M-83 from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways.

1. Great Seneca Highway does not demonstrate the benefits of M-83. It demonstrates the harms of M-83.
• A court ruling in 1989 allowed the county to build Great Seneca Highway through Seneca Creek State Park (see the article: "Ruling paves way for highway through Seneca Park," by Steven C. Fehr, Washington Post, April 12, 1989).
o Edgar Gonzales was involved in the project.
o The 1989 article cited the claim that "When finished, the highway should accommodate up to 40,000 vehicles a day, taking many of them off of I-270 and Rtes. 28 and 355."
o In reality, Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) on this section of Great Seneca has never been higher than 23,000.
o In reality, Great Seneca Highway did not fix congestion on I-270, MD 28, or MD 355.
• On this section of Great Seneca Highway, drivers get in each other's way (i.e., there is traffic congestion) for 10-15 hours a week, at most.
• The environmental damage from Great Seneca Highway is 24/7/365.
• The operating and maintenance costs of Great Seneca Highway are 24/7/365.
• During the 90% of the time when drivers can drive on Great Seneca Highway unimpeded by other drivers, the road induces high-speed, dangerous driving. Deaths include (but are not limited to):
o Northwest High School student Alicia Allen, 15, who was walking to school when
she was killed by a driver in January 2002.
o Three deaths in 2012 (at High Gables Drive, Lakelands Drive, and Longdraft Road).

2. The people who put M-83 on the master plan of highways in the 1960s did not demonstrate wisdom. They demonstrated hubris and folly.
• The 1960s were the peak of the highway-building era, which ended with the highway revolts of the 1960s and 1970s.
• The 1967 Master Plan of Highways (MPOH) also includes:
o an Outer Beltway (F-9)
o an Outer Outer Beltway (F-11)
o a new north-south freeway west of I-270 (F-12)
o a new north-south freeway east of Georgia Avenue (F-4, "Northern Parkway")
o circumferential arterial highways around Germantown (A-80) and Olney (A-46)
• In Boyds, according to the 1967 MPOH:
o White Ground Road was supposed to be a major highway (M-57) with a grade-separated interchange with the F-12 freeway.
o West Old Baltimore Road was supposed to be an arterial highway (A-7).
o Hoyles Mill Road was supposed to be an arterial highway (A-254).
o All three roads are now Exceptional Rustic Roads.
• In Germantown, the 1967 MPOH includes plans for most the big, high-speed roads that now encourage driving; discourage people from walking, bicycling, or using transit; and prevent successful transit-oriented development:
o Germantown Road (M-27)
o Father Hurley Boulevard (M-6)
o Middlebrook Road (M-85)
o Crystal Rock Drive (M-84)

Transit Times
Action Committee for Transit
P.O. Box 7074
Silver Spring, MD 20907

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

PRSRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SILVER SPRING, MD
PERMIT # 1931

ACT Officers/Staff

President: Shanika Whitehurst (Gaithersburg)
Vice President: Michael Larkin (Silver Spring)
Vice President: Paul Goldman (Silver Spring)
Vice President: Miriam Schoenbaum (Boyds)
Treasurer: Chris Farrell (Silver Spring)
Secretary: Elendil Heinrich (Wheaton)
Board Member: Sean Robertson (Kensington)
Board Member: Derick Nabors (Silver Spring)

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

Join ACT/Renew for 2025!

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:

www.actfortransit.org
@actfortransit.bsky.social on Bluesky
www.facebook.com/actfortransit
www.instagram.com/actfortransit/
www.youtube.com/@ACTforTransit