

Transportation Update – What’s Moving in Montgomery County’s Transportation?

Montgomery County’s growth in population has also prompted growth in its transportation systems. The transportation committee updated you spring of 2016 as to how the county was progressing environmentally with transportation initiatives. Let’s take a look now at what transportation is currently available in the county and what the plans are for the near future.

Federal Government – a) A new administration brings new Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao. The Secretary influences new projects and funds for infrastructure maintenance.

b) Maryland has applied for 3 federal transportation grants, none in our county: 1) Expansion of Howard St. tunnel in Baltimore. 2) improvements to I-95 for port traffic. 3) Widening I-81.

c) President Trump’s proposed budget includes: 1) Elimination of all federal funding for Amtrak’s national network trains, which provides the only Amtrak service to 23 states, and the only nearby Amtrak service for 144.6 million Americans. 2) Cuts of \$499 million from the TIGER grant program, a program that invests in passenger rail and transit projects of national significance (Proposed Route 29 BRT system has a \$10 million grant) 3) Elimination of additional funding for the Federal Transit Administration’s “New Starts” Capital Investment Program, which is crucial to launching new transit, commuter rail, and light-rail projects (Purple Line is one project).

Maryland – Some 2017 legislation affects local transportation. Two WMATA bills passed dealing with safety (see [WMATA Rail](#)). Montgomery County had two bills that would specifically affect speed in urban areas and residential areas that failed. The HAWK signal (push button for pedestrians) bill also failed. Transportation projects scoring bill (SB338/HB578) compromise passed where officials have a moratorium of 2 years to enact the 2016 law and a commission will study the scoring of other jurisdictions. The legislature approved the [Farebox Recovery bill](#) so transit doesn’t have as strict of requirements for how much revenue it must collect.

Transportation Planning Board (TPB) – is part of Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) and is a federally mandated and funded transportation policy group made up of representatives from local government and governmental transportation authorities. The TPB prepares plans and programs that the federal government must approve for federal-aid transportation funds to flow to the Washington region. [Members of the TPB](#) include representatives of local governments; state transportation agencies; the Maryland and Virginia General Assemblies; the [Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority](#); and non-voting members from the [Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority](#) and federal agencies. The TPB has an extensive public involvement process, and provides a 30-day [public comment](#) period before taking action on plans and programs.

The TPB’s [planning area](#) covers the District of Columbia and surrounding jurisdictions in Virginia and Maryland. In Maryland these include Frederick County , Montgomery County , and Prince George's County, plus the cities of Bowie, College Park , Gaithersburg , Greenbelt , Rockville and Takoma Park .

ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS ARE INVITED TO DUPLICATE THIS FACT SHEET WITH ATTRIBUTION GIVEN TO LWVMC. BEFORE REPRODUCING, PLEASE CONTACT THE LEAGUE OFFICE AT 301-984-9585 OR LWVMC@EROLS.COM FOR CORRECTIONS OR UPDATED INFORMATION, OR CHECK OUR WEBSITE, LWVMOCOMD.ORG, FOR THE MOST UP-TO-DATE VERSION.

The TPB's work includes many transportation modes, [highways](#), [transit](#), [walking](#), and [bicycling](#). The TPB addresses some of the region's most significant challenges like roadway and transit congestion, efficient [freight](#) movement, [safety](#), public health, and [equity](#). It supports planning at the region's three major [airports](#). And it aims to encourage integrated decision-making across disciplines, especially [land use](#) and the [environment](#).

State of the Commute survey: the TPB's extensive triennial survey of commuting behavior will be presented September 2017 to the TPB and focus on the latest trends in average commute times and distances, commute satisfaction, factors influencing mode choice, and more.

The Transportation Planning Hub <http://www.transportationplanninghub.org> , provides public access to various parts of the region plan, high profile projects, plus documents and other resources.

WMATA Rail – In recent years, Metro has faced three main challenges:

Service - Safety, reliability and customer service have been impacted by an aging infrastructure that hasn't been properly maintained. Metro General Manager Paul J. Wiedefeld has implemented SafeTrack which, as described on the WMATA website, "will complete approximately three years' worth of work in approximately one year. The plan significantly expands maintenance time on weeknights, weekends and midday hours and includes 16 "Safety Surges" - long duration track outages for major projects in key parts of the system."

Governance – The governing document, the Metro Compact, was negotiated in the 1960's. Other than the addition of Loudoun County as a participant, it hasn't been modified since then and has never been opened for re-negotiation. The Compact would be incredibly difficult to modify as VA, MD and DC would all need to agree on any changes. Various parties are interested in renegotiating the Compact to eliminate elected officials from the governing board and replace them with professionals who have expertise in fields related to running a major transportation system. Others are adamant about altering the Compact to eliminate binding arbitration between the union and management to allow for more negotiated wage agreements. Those in favor of the move say it would dramatically reduce labor costs. Others are concerned that without binding arbitration, a non-strike clause would likely be eliminated leaving the system vulnerable to shut-downs.

Financial – Metro is in serious financial trouble both in the short and long term. To deal with the immediate budget shortfall, the Metro Board has voted to reduce frequency of trains and buses and raise fares. There is general agreement that the long-term capital and operational needs of Metro require a dedicated funding source. However, no strong consensus about what that source should be has emerged. A Washington Post [poll](#) showed that 51% of Marylanders support an increase in the sales tax in the DC region to fund Metro.

Several efforts are in the works to come up with answers to the above challenges. The region's The Council of Governments Board has hired Barbara Donnellan as a consultant to collaborate with the Chief Administration Officers from the District and the jurisdictions in MD and VA where METRO operates to do an analysis of METRO funding needs (both capital and operational) and possible revenue sources. In addition, they are calculating the economic benefits of METRO and the cost of reduced service. Democratic members of Congress have asked the federal General Accountability Office to conduct a similar review. It was recently announced that Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe has asked former U.S. transportation secretary Ray LaHood to head an independent panel to study the system's governance and long-term financial needs. This move

was applauded by local leaders. <https://www.wmata.com/service/rail/> ,
<https://planitmetro.com/>

In the fall of 2016, the Board of the League of Women Voters of the National Capital Area voted to actively engage in the pursuit of a dedicated funding source for Metro. They and LWVMC have joined the Fund It/Fix it Coalition that is being organized by the Coalition for Smarter Growth. League members will be informed of opportunities for further information and advocacy as this movement progresses.

Purple Line – This 16-mile light rail project is a top transportation project for the Maryland elected officials of both parties, connecting Bethesda to New Carrollton, intersecting four suburban Maryland Metrorail lines, three MARC commuter and two Amtrak rail lines, as well as numerous business, educational and entertainment centers. The Maryland Transportation Administration is the lead on the project, and working under a Public-Private Partnership (“P3 Agreement”). (See <http://www.purplelinemd.com> for background on the project and the P3 Agreement)

In August 2016, the project was scheduled for signing a \$900 million federal Full Funding Grant Agreement, to be followed soon after by construction ground-breaking. Four days before the signing, a U.S. District Judge ruled Richard Leon vacated the 2014 Record of Decision and ordered the Federal Transit Administration to perform a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) in a case brought by Friends of the Capital Crescent Trail in 2014. Metrorail’s safety and ridership issues were the primary source of concern. There have been numerous challenges and supplemental filings, with the FTA’s new analysis supporting its decision not to perform an SEIS, because of the continued strength of the project.

The Attorney General of Maryland filed a motion March 31 for an expeditious ruling on the case by April 28. The Attorney General’s motion cites the long delay is causing the outcome of the case to be “determined by default” not on its merits. The lack of “just speedy and inexpensive resolution of disputes” is now jeopardizing the project. Federal funds under the New Starts projects may be withdrawn under the President’s proposed budget. Additional federal transportation loans to the private partnership may be jeopardized without an imminent ruling and financial signing. The private partnership is also subject to termination if there is a delay of over a year (August 2017).

Additional sources of coverage of the project include: <http://www.bethesdamagazine.com>;
http://www.actfortransit.org/purple_line.html; and <http://www.purplelinenow.com/>

BRT – Bus Rapid Transit – Learn details at these county websites: <http://getonboardbrt.com/>
<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/brt/>

What is BRT? A large often articulated bus of about 90 passengers (similar to light rail) that:

- 1) drives in its own running way; which may be striped as a separate lane, signaled, be in mixed traffic, or use an exclusive lane. Many intersections use signal prioritization, so a stop light will automatically turn green with the approaching vehicle, or it gets a head start for a green light.
- 2) has set stations with off-board fare collection with raised platforms for level boarding.
- 3) has a frequent set service plan that often connects to other modes of transportation.

Accessibility? Pedestrian and bike routes will be planned as well as the modification of Ride On routes. No additional parking will be provided. Level boarding at each station platform.

Costs? Montgomery County has received a \$10 million federal Tiger grant to get things started with the balance provided by borrowing, development and commercial fees, and taxes.

Routes? Ten BRT lines (102 miles) were approved in the 2013 Transit Corridors Master Plan plus the Corridor Cities Transitway. **Three** corridors will be built first by the county.

1. Route 29 (Colesville Road) <http://getonboardbrt.com/us-29-virtual-open-house/> will connect downtown Silver Spring NOAA, Discovery to White Oak, the Federal Drug Administration, and Burtonsville commercially where there are currently 61,000 jobs. By 2040, 80,000 jobs are expected. Howard County is studying continuing this corridor to Columbia and near Ft. Meade, with minimal impact to adjoining properties.

Frequency will be 7.5 minutes during peak times and 15 minutes off-peak, operating from 5AM to midnight, 7 days a week. Signal priority is expected at 15 intersections. Running way will have 40% bus-on-shoulder in dedicated lanes and 11 stations.

Time Frame: 2017-mid 2018 is project design. Mid 2018-late 2019 is construction. Operational early 2020. Projected ridership is 13,000/day in 2020 and 20,000/day in 2040.

Costs: \$80 million - \$140 million depending on miles of dedicated lanes.

2. Maryland Route 586 (Veirs Mill Road) will connect Wheaton Metro area to Aspen Hill, to Rockville Metro, to Montgomery College in Rockville.

Four final alternatives are being considered with final decisions to be made in 2017. 1) No build 2) Transportation System Management using current buses with enhanced service 3) BRT in curb lanes, 5b) BRT in median running way where possible.

Twelve stations are proposed: Wheaton Metro, University Blvd, Newport Mill Road, Connecticut Avenue, Randolph Road, Parkland Drive, Aspen Hill Road, Twinbrook Parkway (near Metro), Broadwood Drive, MD 28 (First Street), Rockville Metro Station, Montgomery College.

3. Maryland 355 (Wisconsin Ave / Rockville Pike) will connect Bethesda Metro Station through Rockville Metro, through Shady Grove Metro, Lake Forest Blvd, Middlebrook Road (Holy Cross Hospital), Germantown Road, Little Seneca Parkway, to Clarksburg.

The route has been divided into two sections because of its length and diverse conditions. There are currently two alternatives in the northern section from Middlebrook Road to Clarksburg. Studies are ongoing before a final route will be chosen.

Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) – is a 15 mile BRT system from the COMSAT facility just south of Clarksburg, Maryland to the Shady Grove Metro Station. <http://www.cctmaryland.com/> The project has two phases. Phase I is nine miles from the Metropolitan Grove MARC station to Shady Grove. This section's design is actively underway, is currently proceeding with engineering and environmental analysis, and is funded for preliminary design, final design, and right-of-way acquisition. Phase II is six miles long and would be a future extension from Metropolitan Grove to the COMSAT facility.

Currently, CCT is stalled as there is no additional funding to transfer the CCT from paper to breaking ground. This is a Maryland state project that depends on federal funds as well.

MARC Train Service – is a commuter rail system whose service areas include Harford County, Maryland; Baltimore City; Washington D.C.; Brunswick, Maryland; Frederick, Maryland and Martinsburg, West Virginia. MARC Train Service operates Monday through Friday with limited weekend service on the Penn Line only.

Brunswick Line travels through Montgomery County with stations at Silver Spring, Kensington, Garrett Park, Rockville, Washington Grove, Gaithersburg, Metropolitan Grove, Germantown, Boyds, Barnesville, and Dickerson. Service is Monday – Friday rush hours only. https://mta.maryland.gov/sites/default/files/Brunswick_Mar132017.pdf There are current plans to improve many of the Brunswick stations to encourage ridership.

MTA Commuter Bus Service

Route 201 – SERVING GAITHERSBURG PARK & RIDE to BWI MARSHALL AIRPORT AND MARC / AMTRAK RAIL STATION – Full Fare \$5, Seniors \$4

Weekday All Day Service - 4am to 12:20am, Weekend/Holiday All Day Service - 4am to 12:08am
Gaithersburg Park & Ride, NIST, Shady Grove Metro Station, Georgia Ave. Park & Ride, Burtonsville Park & Ride, Dorsey MARC Station, Arundel Mills Mall, BWI Airport (Southwest Airlines), BWI Airport (International Terminal), BWI Airport MARC / Amtrak Rail Station

<http://www.mdtrip.org/files/schedules/201MTACB.pdf>

Route 202 – Gaithersburg to Department of Defense (DOD)/Fort Meade

Route 203 – Columbia to Bethesda

Route 305 – Columbia to Silver Spring/Washington DC

Route 325 – Columbia to Silver Spring/Washington DC

Ride On Bus – RIDE ON bus system has 335 County buses. The system provides almost 30 million trips per year. Routes are evaluated frequently so changes can be made. A new bus route from Clarksburg to Germantown helps relieve parking problems at the Germantown MARC station. A brand-new [Rockville Pike express bus](#) will have 12 stops between the Medical Center Metrorail Station in Bethesda and the Lakeforest Transit Center in Gaithersburg.

All route schedules can be found here.... <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Transit/routesandschedules/rideonroutes.html>

Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Ride Free on Ride On and Metro buses in Montgomery County, Monday - Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. or half fare at all other times. The Kids Ride Free program provides free rides on County Ride On buses and certain Metrobus routes within Montgomery County to kids ages 18 and under (older if still in high school) who are Montgomery County residents. The free rides are available weekdays between 2 and 8 p.m.

A new electronic service is [Ride On Real Time](#) so one knows exactly when a bus will be coming by checking a phone or computer.

MetroBus – Metrobus in Montgomery County provides 22 million transit trips per year and Metrorail provides 40 million trips per year. See <https://www.wmata.com/service/bus/> for more information. Regular Fares are \$1.75 using a SmarTrip® card or cash, 85¢ using Senior SmarTrip® card or cash. Fares are expected to rise soon.

School Bus Depots – Currently there are 5 sites. Shady Grove site needs to be replaced as the land has been sold and will soon be redeveloped. Public protests led to dropping of two potential relocation sites: Carver Educational Services Center on Hungerford Drive or an empty lot on Westmore Drive. While a February 2017 news article from Montgomery Community Media mentioned the possibility of early spring community meetings to discuss other possible sites, these have not yet been scheduled (as of mid-

April). Sites need to accommodate 450 buses along with parking for the drivers' vehicles as well as space for 10 repair bases and fueling stations.

Proposed Roadway M-83

In 2004, the Midcounty Highway (M-83) Facility Planning Study (FPS) reinitiated the evaluation of the master plan alignment from Montgomery Village Avenue to MD 27. Due to the potential magnitude of environmental impacts associated with the project, and the likelihood that the project would need federal permits, the Midcounty Highway (M-83) Facility Planning Study expanded to include the development of various alternatives to the Master Plan, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The county invested additional resources for the evaluation of alternatives & changed the project name to Midcounty Corridor Study to reflect the expanded analysis.

Alternatives determined by the report are:

- 0) NO BUILD, assumes that the M-83 would not be constructed along any alignment, none of the localized intersection improvements associated would be implemented and none of the BRT alternatives from the SHA/MTA Study would be built, but with some road improvements.
- 1) Some road improvements & BRT on MD 355 by year 2040 BRT without M-83. Includes all planned roadway improvements from NO BUILD scenario along existing transportation system using localized intersection improvements confined to the existing right of way. Also, improvements along 6.6 miles of existing roads including MD 27, 355 & 124 (Montgomery Village Avenue) and existing Midcounty Highway.
- 2) New road M-83 by year 2040, plus a BRT, plus the M-83 reversible two-lane option. There are a few locations where two-way traffic must be maintained at all times to provide access to/from "landlocked communities".
- 3) New Road M-83 by year 2040 no BRT. It consists of building a 4-lane divided roadway from MD 27 to Montgomery Village Avenue along the M-83 alignment. It does not include building BRT along MD 355.

Why is M-83 controversial? Montgomery County has been working to employ smart growth principles including providing transit alternatives throughout the County. All alternatives do not meet these goals and with potentially severe environmental impacts.

Drivers – Want some information about how to request road restriping or new lane markings, information about what to do if you're involved in a collision, report missing or damaged street or traffic signs, get information about recent traffic delays in the County & in Maryland, etc. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT/info-drivers.html> or call 311

Parking – By limiting parking, the county achieves greater multi-modal use and wards off "Parkageddon": gridlock, pollution and sprawl. County planners, as they conduct biennial supply/pricing studies, are conscious of parking guru Donald Shoupe's estimate that the average vehicle is parked 95 percent of the time. And as The Economist (April 6, 2017) noted, "The biggest cost of parking minimums may be the economic activity they prevent."

On-street parking is transitioning to solar-operated "smart" meters (1,100 are installed in Silver Spring, 820 in Bethesda) that accept credit cards, coins, or the use of the parking app by phone. Single-space parking meters in county garages are being converted to multi-space pay stations. An innovation that has met resistance on civil-liberties grounds because of record-

keeping issues is the electronic license-plate reader.

In garages, electronically-monitored parking-space availability systems are becoming common. Electronic boards register how many spaces are available on each garage level and are operational in Garages 31 & 57 in Bethesda and Garages 60 & 61 in Silver Spring. Twelve county parking garages are topped by solar panels.

Twenty-four EV charging stations are administered by the parking authority. Each spot has a 4-hour limit at a charging station. Private lots and garages also have EV charging stations. Some stations are part of a “trip mitigation” agreement with developers.

Zip Car is currently the only car-share service company with a MCDOT contract. (Metro has a different car-share vendor and Rockville has still another.) The company reserves 55 public spaces for sharing in Silver Spring, Bethesda, Wheaton, North Bethesda and Chevy Chase.

Division of Parking Management (DPM) has 342 ADA Accessible spaces and 116 ADA Van Accessible space in the Parking Lot Districts; including 4 Parking Lot Districts, 20 parking garages, 21 parking lots and over 21,500 total parking spaces. Private lots also have ADA spaces. DPM introduced an online residential parking permit program in 2016, replacing paper permits. This has prompted some controversies about convenience and appropriateness.

More information: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dot-parking/index.html>

Pedestrians – In 2016, over 475 pedestrians in Montgomery County were involved in collisions with motor vehicles, and eight people died from their injuries. Close to a million pedestrian and bicycle trips are predicted by 2040. The growth in pedestrian and bicycle travel is the largest of any transportation mode. Significant growth in pedestrian travel throughout Montgomery County coupled with increases in pedestrian-related crashes make it a critical transportation issue for county residents and transportation professionals.

County transportation planners identified geographic areas where enhancement of pedestrian and bicycle traffic and safety are priorities. They based this on data analysis showing high numbers of pedestrian and bicyclist-related incidents or collisions. Five areas were identified – Silver Spring, Grosvenor, Glenmont, Wheaton and Viers Mill/Randolph.

All new capital projects in the County are required to include sidewalks. Individuals, elected officials and neighborhood associations can request sidewalk construction on existing streets. An extensive process involving a public hearing and consultation with property owners and neighbors is required for adding sidewalks to existing streets. The Bus Stop Improvement Program provides \$11 million to make 5,400 bus stops in the County accessible in compliance with the Americans for Disabilities Act. To date, sidewalk extensions and connections have been added to 3000 bus stops to provide ADA accessible pathways to and from stops.

Vision Zero is an international initiative to eliminate traffic deaths and serious injuries at the local, state and national levels. The County Council unanimously supported developing a Vision Zero action plan February 2, 2016. The draft 2-Year Vision Zero Action Plan was reviewed by the safety advisory committee on March 2nd.

SafeRoutesToSchool is a national program designed to address the public health problem of childhood obesity by encouraging and supporting walking and biking to schools. Less than 15% of children walk or bike to school and the rate of children overweight has increased from 5 to 20%. Fifty Montgomery County schools participated in the 2016 International Walk to School Day to raise awareness about the need for SRTS and carry out successful safe walks to school.

Bicycles – Bicycle Master Plan On July 1, 2015, the Planning Department began its comprehensive update to the 1978 Master Plan of Bikeways. Find out more about its ongoing revision at <http://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/functional-planning/bicycle-master-plan/>

MoCo Bike Stress Map <http://www.mcatlas.org/bikestress/> rates all county and state roadways on how easy or difficult they are to bike.

Bicycle Heat Map shows area of greatest demand for biking, including all Metro and MARC stations. <http://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/transportation/bicycle-planning/bicycle-demand-map/>

66 BikeShare Stations in 5 geographic areas feed Metrorail (Bethesda/Friendship Heights for west leg of Red Line; SS/TkPk for east leg of Red Line; Chevy Chase Lake to connect to Beth & SS; Rockville/Shady Grove/Life Sc Center for Rockville & Shady Grove Red Line; Wheaton for Wheaton business district & Wheaton Red Line. Free bikeshares are available for those who meet income requirements. www.capitalbikeshare.com

Bicycle Pedestrian Priority Areas or “Bippas” - 5 Bippas are being considered for evaluation and construction: Silver Spring, Grosvenor, Glenmont, Wheaton, and Viers Mill/Randolph. These provide safer areas for peds and cyclists, as well as improve connectivity to the surrounding area and walkability within community. <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dot-dte/projects/BicycleandPedestrianPriorityAreas/index.html>

Bike to Work Day (BTWD) happens each May. More than 17,500 cyclists pedaled to work in metropolitan Washington during the 2016 event.

Besides congestion, why are we concerned about transportation options?

Transportation is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, even more than power plants. Hazardous nitrogen oxide emissions cause respiratory and cardiovascular problems, immune system damage, as well as neurological, reproductive, developmental and other health problems.

Car crashes are the leading cause of death for Americans between ages 1 and 39 and ranks among the top five killers for those 65 and under. Highway construction and expansion intrudes on open space, farmlands, and our environment.

Transit attracts employers and helps retain employees. Average commute time is the single greatest indicator of a person’s odds of escaping poverty. Transit enables low and moderate income families to live without a car and often to escape poverty.

Questions for discussion:

What are positive changes in transportation you’ve seen in the county?

Have you/your family taken advantage of some of the county’s paths and trails for transportation as well as recreation?

What concerns do you especially have about the county’s transportation?

Do you think the county is spending their transportation funds appropriately?

This Fact Sheet was prepared by members of the Transportation Committee of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, MD: Linda & Dave Anderson, Bee Ditzler, Kathy Krause, Edna Miller, Barbara Sanders, Tina Slater and Nancy Soreng.