



Town Council

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TESTIMONY OF MAYOR KATHY STROM, TOWN OF CHEVY CHASE

November 18, 2008

Good evening. I am Kathy Strom, a member of the Town Council and Mayor of The Town of Chevy Chase. The Town is an incorporated municipality, a community of about 1,000 households. We appreciate the opportunity to present our comments on the Purple Line AA/DEIS to the Maryland State Transit Authority. We will be submitting a formal written response prior to the close of the comment period which ends January 14, and tonight will highlight a few of the issues of concern to us.

We believe that the AA/DEIS does not adequately or fairly consider the Purple Line alternative of using Bus Rapid Transit on Jones Bridge Road, an alternative that could provide a potentially tremendous and cost-effective benefits to the region. In particular, the Jones Bridge BRT alternative would facilitate east-west transit in the southern part of Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties at a cost of at least half a billion dollars less than the other Purple Line alternatives and would address the transportation and traffic problems posed by the relocation of the Walter Reed facility to the Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, all while protecting an important and vital green space -- the Capital Crescent Trail so important in this urban part of the County.

For these critical reasons, the Town of Chevy Chase renews its request to MTA to modify the study of the Jones Bridge Road Bus Rapid Transit alignment (the low cost Bus Rapid Transit alternative, build alternative 6 under consideration) so that the public can assess in a fair and equitable way the potential benefits of this alternative. The Town's consultants continue to find technical deficiencies, omissions and inexplicable assumptions in the AA/DEIS analysis of the BRT option, despite numerous discussions of these failings with the State. Thus, the State's own actions demonstrate a bias in its analysis of this alternative. The alternative presented to the public ignores improved routing and traffic signal priority treatments that the State assumes for all other alternatives, as well as dedicated lanes which would make this alignment into a true BRT, with reduced running times likely to maximize ridership. While this alternative may potentially provide a win-win for the region, we will never know unless the public has been given the option of an informed comparison. While the State has engaged in dialogue with the Town, we are disappointed to find the public is still not given the complete picture in the DEIS and in this regard MTA has done Maryland taxpayers, our local community, and the process a disservice.

The Jones Bridge Road Bus Rapid Transit alternative is of crucial importance because it could potentially:

- serve more jobs in the Bethesda area with a direct one-seat ride – 75,000 versus 35,000 (2030 MCOG projections) because it can make stops at National Naval Medical Center, north Woodmont (projected for high density growth), *and* central Bethesda;
- cost taxpayers substantially less than the other alternatives (anywhere from \$600 million to \$1 billion less) making money available for other important transit projects in the region, like the Corridor Cities Transitway;
- help provide direct relief for the projected 16% traffic increase anticipated on Jones Bridge Road due to the BRAC realignment of Walter Reed to National Naval Medical Center;
- prevent the clear-cutting of over 15 acres of mature trees in an important down-county greenspace, the Capital Crescent Trail;
- maintain a wider, safer Trail for all its multiple types of users; and
- save the new “Heart of Bethesda” – Woodmont East Plaza – from negative transit impacts, i.e, buses running through the plaza every 6 minutes or tail tracks with disabled transit trains parked in front of Bethesda Landmark Theater.

The Town has asked that the Jones Bridge Road alternative be studied in its best-possible and fully developed form – as are the other five – so that a fair and healthy debate of the issues can occur. Our consultant’s best professional analysis reveals that the Jones Bridge Road Bus Rapid Transit alternative could serve 56,000 people (the DEIS shows 40,000) and make the connection from Silver Spring to downtown Bethesda in 17 minutes (the DEIS shows 33 minutes) and that could be accomplished in a manner that will still allow it to be the lowest cost alternative. This alternative will still allow for the completion of the Capital Crescent Trail into Silver Spring; it will be as clean [and energy efficient?] as light rail; and it will readily permit expansion of service as the line grows in popularity.

We know that some seek to avoid the issues we have raised by dismissing the Town’s concerns as selfish NIMBYism. We take issue with that – the Town has repeatedly been an active and supportive member of the larger Montgomery County community. We applaud and actively participate in our region’s commitment to the environment; we support the efforts of our County Executive and Council to be fiscally responsible; and we support our nation’s commitment to promoting public transportation. To that end, it is time to be creative and pragmatic, and to search for ways to get the biggest bang for the taxpayer’s buck and to do so in a way that doesn’t sacrifice needed greenspace in the process. There is a better Purple Line. We urge the State to consider the Jones Bridge Road BRT alternative in a fairer and more accurate manner, so that the public can properly assess the value and benefits of this potentially win-win transit alternative for the region.