

April 17, 2008

Mr. John D. Porcari
Secretary
Maryland Department of Transportation
7201 Corporate Center Drive
P.O. Box 548
Hanover, MD 21076

RE: Jones Bridge Road BRT Alignment for the Purple Line

Dear Mr. Porcari:

The Town of Chevy Chase requests that MTA immediately amend its ongoing Purple Line Alternatives Analysis so that the Jones Bridge Road alternative is modified. Alternative 3 (Low Investment BRT) should include improved routing and traffic signal priority treatments that will make it into a true BRT, with reduced running times likely to maximize ridership. Only by doing this will there be a JBR and a low-investment BRT alternative that permits valid and fair comparison with other alternatives currently being studied. The State needs to be fully informed of all feasible alternatives prior to its selection of a preferred alternative. The changes proposed here will also expedite the approval and funding process for the ultimately-selected alternative by having made that process rigorous enough to withstand review.

The Town of Chevy Chase has retained an independent transportation consultant to review the process, findings, and impacts of the Purple Line Alternatives Analysis currently being performed by MTA. That analysis of five Purple Line options using the Capital Crescent Trail and one using Jones Bridge Road, is to form the basis of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) (now scheduled for release in August, 2008), selection of a Preferred Alternative for the Purple Line by the State of Maryland, and finally, determination by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as to whether the Preferred Alternative is eligible for federal funding.

With several transit projects across the State of Maryland in competition for federal funding, it is important that, if the Purple Line is to be a serious contender, it be competitive with regard to cost and ridership projections. Therefore, the alternatives studied in the DEIS and, subsequently, evaluated by the State, should seek to maximize ridership while minimizing cost.

The Town is concerned that the Jones Bridge Road alternative – the only one to provide direct service to BRAC (NNMC), NIH, and the approved high-density residential development in the north Woodmont area – is not being studied in a manner that will allow for its full and fair comparison with the other alternatives.

Through a review of residential and employment data along both the Jones Bridge Road and Capital Crescent Trail alignments, the Town and its consultants conclude that the Jones Bridge Road alignment is likely to draw more riders, given similar travel times (achieved by studying a more equitable BRT alternative as described below). Design of the current Purple Line alternatives and the subsequent rejection of a medium- or high- investment BRT along Jones Bridge Road (options with travel times comparable to BRT and LRT alternatives proposed to run along the Capital Crescent Trail) began before the proposal to relocate the existing Walter Reed Facility at the site of the current NNMC and expand existing NNMC facilities. Neither the Medical Center area nor the area near the northern part of Woodmont Avenue is directly served by the proposed Capital Crescent Trail alternatives. The MTA has suggested that for service to these areas, Purple Line riders may transfer to the Red Line at the Bethesda terminus and travel one stop north to the Medical Center Station. The MTA does not account for the additional time required to access the Red Line platform and wait for the Red Line, nor for the inconvenience of such a maneuver. The MTA also fails to account for the additional fare that people making this transfer may be required to pay. The Jones Bridge Road alignment, on the other hand, directly serves the Medical Center *and* downtown Bethesda, so that no transfer to the Red Line is necessary for reaching either of these locations. Further, as the Jones Bridge Road alignment passes through the Woodmont urban corridor, an additional station near the northern section of Woodmont Avenue could serve an additional, as yet, untapped segment of potential riders.

The Jones Bridge Road alternative is listed as a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) alternative, yet it lacks nearly every quality typical of BRT. A true BRT implementation typically includes dedicated lanes which decrease the travel time of BRT vehicles by avoiding traffic congestion. Additionally, BRT vehicles nearly always receive priority at traffic signals to allow them to pass quickly through intersections. Where these treatments do not exist, BRT vehicles are likely to travel at or near the speeds of general traffic and may be viewed as mere buses.

The Jones Bridge Road alternative proposes that BRT vehicles run in mixed traffic along much of the route, without the assistance of traffic signal priority. It is the only alternative that curiously does not have an exclusive ROW through Silver Spring. Only the BRT alternatives which utilize the Capital Crescent Trail alignment receive dedicated runningway, along *all parts* of the 16-mile route, making for an inequitable comparison among the various BRT alternatives.

The Town and its consultants estimate that the total cost of providing a true BRT on Jones Bridge Road which uses Jones Bridge Road and serves both BRAC and the north Woodmont community, still falls substantially below the total cost for providing BRT or LRT along the Capital Crescent Trail. Cost is a key ingredient in the FTA funding formula and a lower-cost alternative has a greater chance of receiving federal funding.

Further, the shorter travel times resulting from increased speeds along a true BRT line will create an incentive to shift a sizeable portion of travelers away from their automobiles and onto the Purple Line. Thus, the potential impact on traffic of providing a dedicated lane to BRT along Jones Bridge Road will be minimal, and potentially even positive. This is due to the decrease in demand for car travel; paired with the sustainability-driven “road diet” movement which has proven that by reducing capacity along a roadway, fewer people will drive and those who do will

find other routes. This conclusion is of particular importance because, without the Purple Line, traffic along Jones Bridge Road is expected to worsen upon completion of the BRAC action.

The Town of Chevy Chase believes that a true BRT alternative using Jones Bridge Road has potential to serve more riders at a lower cost than any alternative that uses the Capital Crescent Trail. However, such a scenario is only possible if it is included in the Alternatives Analysis of the DEIS. The Town, therefore, requests that the MTA be required to study a true BRT alternative along Jones Bridge Road. We believe that such an alternative has the highest likelihood of receiving federal funding, will have the least impact on county and state budgets, and may ultimately result in the Purple Line's implementation. Without such an analysis it is our conclusion that the DEIS would be deficient and open to challenge.

Sincerely,

Linna Barnes
Mayor

Attachment: Executive Summary

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| cc: Governor Martin O'Malley | County Executive Isiah Leggett |
| Lt. Governor Anthony G. Brown | Councilmember Mike Knapp |
| Senator Barbara Mikulski | Councilmember Roger Berliner |
| Senator Ben Cardin | Councilmember Marc Elrich |
| Representative Chris Van Hollen | Councilmember Nancy Floreen |
| State Senator Richard Madaleno | Councilmember Valerie Ervin |
| State Senator Brian Frosh | Councilmember George Leventhal |
| Delegate Alfred Carr | Councilmember Duchy Trachtenberg |
| Delegate Jeffrey Waldstreicher | Councilmember Phil Andrews |
| Delegate Ana Sol Gutierrez | Mike Madden, Maryland Transit |
| Delegate William Bronrott | Administration |
| Delegate Susan C. Lee | Tom Autrey, Montgomery County |
| Delegate C. William Frick | Department of Parks and Planning |