



Montgomery County Group

Action Committee for Transit Coalition for Smarter Growth

August 10, 2009

SHA Administrator Neil Pedersen
MDOT Director, Office of Planning and Capital Programming Don Halligan
WMATA Principal Director representing Montgomery County Peter Benjamin
WMATA Board Alternate Director Representing Montgomery County Gordon Linton
Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett
Montgomery County Department of Transportation Director Art Holmes
Special Assistant to the Director Montgomery County DOT Gary Erenrich

Dear Sir/Madam,

We commend the Q2 Metrobus Veirs Mill Line Study. The plan has many elements that will improve bus service and alleviate the area's transportation woes, support Smart Growth, get people out of cars, and help the environment. Improved bus service will save money on operations and improve mobility.

We are currently in a vicious circle, in which congestion is slowing bus service, discouraging riders and therefore increasing car use, leading to more congestion. Improved bus service will help create a virtuous circle, encouraging more users and decreasing congestion.

There is one element of the new plan that we think deserves speedier implementation on a wider basis. This is bus priority through special lanes, signal priority and queue jumping. Indeed, a 2003 MWCOG plan recommended bus priority lanes, particularly on Veirs Mill, Georgia Avenue, and University Boulevard. The Montgomery County planning board also put a Veirs Mill BRT on the development agenda in 2003. Unfortunately no portion of these plans has yet been implemented.

We strongly urge you to commence bus priority as soon as possible for all buses on Veirs Mill, both Ride On and WMATA. We believe that you can make immediate adjustments to pavement markings, signal timing, and other elements to create queue jumper lanes and give signal priority. These minor changes would have a major impact in a very short time.

One change that could be implemented immediately would be to move back the stop line on Church Street where it meets 355 at the Rockville Metro, so that exiting buses aren't blocked. This is just one example of where a street design that favors cars is delaying large numbers of bus

passengers and costing the county money. Other suggestions in the Q2 bus Metrobus Veirs Mill Line Study, including signal retiming outside Rockville station and using service lanes on Veirs Mill as bus only lanes, could be implemented now.

A vehicle holding 40 passengers deserves privileges over vehicles holding only one or two. If drivers see buses passing them they are more likely to switch their transportation mode. Besides alleviating congestion, buses alleviate the need to build ever-greater numbers of parking lots using up precious land. In addition, bus priority measures will ease the slow-down and bus bunching that hinders service today.

Undoubtedly the next budget year will come with enormous financial pressure to cut bus routes that people depend on for jobs, groceries, and other vital services. Improving bus service with cost-effective changes is a far better alternative. A recent MWCOG study shows that, with full implementation of priority plans, four buses in an hour can do the work of six today. According to WMATA's Bus Priority Corridor Plan (May 2008), an average 30% increase in bus speed on the projected network would save \$50 million in capital costs and \$40 to \$50 million in annual operating costs.

Special lanes, signal priority and queue jumping should be implemented as soon as possible. Bus priority on Veirs Mill would make an excellent pilot project leading to even more savings elsewhere. In a crisis era, bus priority service is an efficient method of helping passengers, improving local air quality, alleviating global warming, decreasing congestion, and saving money.

Sincerely,

David Hauck
Chair, Montgomery County Sierra Club Group

Ben Ross
President, Action Committee for Transit

Cheryl Cort
Policy Director, Coalition for Smarter Growth