

TRANSIT FIRST!

Coalition members (list in formation): Action Committee for Transit, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, Audubon Naturalist Society, Clean Water Action, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Greater Greater Washington, MCGEO — UFCW Local 1994, Prince George's Advocates for Community-based Transit, Progressive Maryland, Save Maryland Area Rail Transit

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 2, 2009

TRANSIT FIRST! CALLS ON MARYLAND TO AVOID DEEP CUTS IN METRO SERVICE

The Transit First! Coalition, composed of transit rider, environmental, and labor organizations, today called on Governor Martin O'Malley to provide the funds needed to avoid drastic service cuts in suburban Maryland. The group urged the governor to match the additional Metro funding commitment made by D.C. and local Virginia jurisdictions. Transit First! also pointed to the importance of restoring cuts in Montgomery County's Ride-On bus service, which have the side effect of adding \$1 million to the Metro deficit.

"Maryland needs to pay its fair share and match the efforts of its neighbors to avoid deep cuts to transit service in our region," said Ben Ross, coalition chair and president of Action Committee for Transit.

At the March 26, 2009 Metro board meeting, Virginia and D.C. members committed to sufficient funds to close much of the gap in the regional agency's transit budget and avoid most rail and bus service cuts. While Maryland offered a contribution increase as well, it is not enough to prevent severe cuts in bus service in Prince George's and Montgomery counties. As a result, riders in Maryland could face much more dramatic cuts to bus service than neighboring jurisdictions.

Transit First! urged Metro to complement an added contribution from Maryland with cost savings through region-wide improvements in traffic operations. Bus speeds would be increased by giving transit vehicles priority on intersections and roads, as described in the attached plan. Because these improvements cannot be implemented fast enough for the current budget, Transit First! recommended borrowing funds provided to Metro's capital budget by President Obama's stimulus program and returning the funds saved by the priority improvements to the capital budget in subsequent years.

"By moving buses faster, Metro can simultaneously save money, improve service for bus passengers, and attract new riders and fares," said Cheryl Cort, Policy Director for the Coalition for Smarter Growth.

Members of Transit First! are the Action Committee for Transit, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, Audubon Naturalist Society, Clean Water Action, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Greater Greater Washington, MCGEO—UFCW Local 1994, Prince George's

Advocates for Community-based Transit, Progressive Maryland, Save Maryland Area Rail Transit. The coalition is chaired by Action Committee for Transit president Ben Ross; vice-chairs are David Alpert, editor of the Greater Greater Washington blog, and Jason Rylander, Arlington environmental lawyer and transit activist.

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Plan for Cost Savings and Repayment of Stimulus Funds

In the FY10 budget, the WMATA Board of Directors would establish a target for annual savings in bus operating costs, to be achieved by prioritizing the rapid movement of buses on existing roads. These savings would be returned from the operating to the capital budget beginning in FY11. By moving buses faster, this plan would simultaneously save money, improve service for bus passengers, and attract new riders.

As an element of the FY10 budget, the WMATA Board of Directors would assign a contribution of bus operations cost savings to each of the jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction would be responsible for identifying specific actions and locations within its boundaries that add up to its assigned share of the cost savings. Implementation of the necessary traffic engineering would begin in January 2010 and conclude by April 2010. Savings would be calculated from reductions in running times on July 2010 bus schedules.

Examples of bus priorities that could be implemented without capital investment (other than restriping, signage, etc.) are the following:

- Adjust traffic signal cycles to minimize bus delays
- Let buses drive on highway shoulders to bypass congestion
- Let buses use right-turn lanes as queue-jumper lanes
- Restrict curb lanes to buses and turning vehicles only (diamond lanes)
- Improve enforcement of existing bus lanes