



Comments on the Purple Line Functional Master Plan  
Testimony before the Montgomery County Planning Board on behalf of Purple Line *Now!*  
Craig Simpson – December 10, 2009

Chairman Hanson and members of the Board:

It is a pleasure to speak to you on behalf of Purple Line *NOW!* in support of this important improvement to our east-west transportation network. We have reviewed the draft Purple Line functional plan and find it consistent with the decisions of both the County Council and Governor Martin O'Malley.

Our organization represents a broad range of diverse interests including major business, labor, environmental, municipal and community organizations and as such reflects the breadth of community support that facilitated our regional Metrorail system which now carries nearly 1 million riders a day.

Now, more than ever, Montgomery County needs the Purple Line. Even during the current economic downturn, traffic on the beltway and east west highway is often at a standstill and our citizens are suffering as a result. Montgomery County residents have made it clear that they want transportation alternatives to driving. We have a great radial rail system. What we need is a quality, light rail line connecting this system. We need it in as soon as possible.

Much time has been lost. We cannot continue stalling and hoping the congestion will miraculously go away. Traffic congestion is spreading like a plague. When highways back up, people shift to main roads and when these become impassible they scour our communities for local short cuts - searching in vain for a way to get across town. Families suffer as commutes lengthen, and neighborhoods suffer many negative impacts of cut-through traffic.

People traveling east-west do not have good transit alternatives. Even if the bus system were improved, the buses are stuck in the same traffic as cars. It would be nice if a tunnel could quickly and affordably be constructed for the 16 miles covered by the Purple Line. Unfortunately it can not. Light rail traveling primarily on its own right of way is a proven alternative that will be of a quality guaranteed to attract riders. Modern light rail lines have proven to be community friendly in cities across the globe. There are now many examples of successful light rail lines operating on grass tracks alongside popular hiker biker trails.

Light Rail has been specified on the County's Master Plan since 1990 when the Georgetown Branch Master Plan was approved. The lengthy process that led to that decision rejected buses on the right-of-way between Bethesda and Silver Spring. The adopted plan also specifically states on page 49:

*"In the event future consideration is given to implementing additional double track sections, the existing right-of-way is generally sufficient with appropriate structural treatment to accommodate the necessary typical 56-foot trolley/trail cross section (see Figure 4), except along the Metropolitan Branch section from Talbot Avenue to Silver Spring."*

The Purple Line comes with a tremendous addition to our hiker-biker trail network which is why Washington Area Bicyclist Association supports the joint use of the Georgetown Branch master plan. PLN supports best practices when dealing with community and environmental issues and we feel grass tracks and the future examination of wireless LRT illustrates the State and County's commitment to addressing community concerns.

We would note that improved access to the Purple Line at Chevy Chase Lake and improved ability to transfer between Metrorail and the Purple Line at Silver Spring are desirable but can be addressed in Preliminary Design.

The Purple Line will be good for Bethesda, good for Silver Spring and especially good for the University Boulevard corridor where people are suffering as a result of the current recession. We urge you to move this plan forward to the County Council as quickly as possible.

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