TPB Regional Public Transportation Subcommittee

Virtual Meeting Summary: March 28, 2023

Attendees*, total: 32*

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| Nick Ruiz, VRE (Chair)  Renan Snowden, DDOT  Joe Sierputowski, DDOT  Jeremy Strauss, DDOT  Ann McGrane, NVTC  Ronnetta Zack-Williams, NVTC  Xavier Harmony, NVTC  Genoveva Cutrell, NVTC  Paul Mounier, ART  Roman Steichen, TransIT  Jeff Barnett, VanGO  Mary Dennis | Melissa Kim, WMATA  Anikwenze Ogbue, WMATA  Efon Epanty, Pr. George’s Co.  Will Truong, MATOC  Halie Mitchell, VDOT  Alex Freedman, City of Takoma Park  Perrin Palistrant, OmniRide  Sibtay Haider, MTA  Jennifer Mouchantaf, MTA  Stephen Miller, MTA  Mike Mucha, DRPT | Fred Lippert, MDOT  Andrew Diehl, Anne Arundel  Brenden Watts, WSTC  Erin Morrow, TPB  James Li, TPB  Nicole McCall, TPB  Charlene Howard, TPB  Tim Canan, TPB  Andrew Meese, TPB  Eric Randall, TPB  Pierre Gaunaurd, TPB |

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Introductions

Nick Ruiz, Chair

* Nick Ruiz opened the meeting by asking that new attendees introduce themselves, as well as posing the question what is everyone’s most memorable experience taking transit to a recreation event.

1. WMATA: regional partnerships for bus priority expansion

Anikwenze Ogbue, WMATA

* Anikwenze Ogbue, PE (WMATA) presented on demonstration bus lane projects WMATA is coordinating with Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties in Maryland. He explained how demonstration projects are faster and easier to implement and develop within 6 months to 2 years, as well as get buy-in for. The goal of these projects is to move transit buses more quickly, as well as build greater inter-jurisdictional cooperation. The projects discussed included:
* Silver Hill Road (Prince George’s County) which includes the Suitland metro stop as a terminus, and repurposes curbside lanes as bus lanes.
* Georgia Avenue (Montgomery County) from approximately 16th street down to Wayne Avenue through downtown Silver Spring
* These corridors were already studied and identified in local transportation plans, helping make implementation and benefit generation occur faster.
* Wanted to make sure that these projects are in densely populated areas with a metro station nearby and multiple destinations in the vicinity.
* Developing tactical bus lanes, over generally shorter distances, is a faster process than design and implementation of more complex bus lane projects, which is demonstrated in the outcomes of various local projects. These demonstration projects are also more flexible and can be adjusted after the fact more easily.
* A key performance indicator is bus reliability for riders (increased bus speeds for slowest buses and increased median speeds generally).
* WMATA applied for a RAISE grant on February 23 to fund new bus priority lane projects and related road upgrades. WMATA and MDOT split the cost sharing element of the grant application ($2.5mil each).
* The goal is to begin implementation in Fall 2023 and evaluate performance in early 2024. Once the winter begins, it becomes too cold to apply the paint properly, so the timing is particularly important.

*Discussion*

* Pierre Gaunaurd, TPB, asked if there were any performance benefits noticed in existing short distance tactical bus lanes. A. Ogbue described how WMATA has done some preliminary analysis of general traffic conditions, but ultimately will compare conditions for buses within bus lane segment before and after as the basis for evaluation. Specifically, it will look at overall route metrics for reliability, as well as just the tactical segment alone.
* N. Ruiz asked what type of public feedback they had done on bus lane projects. A. Ogbue mentioned that WMATA had engaged with businesses to address their concerns and needs, especially along Georgia Avenue where these issues are more prominent compared to Silver Hill Road where these issues aren’t as prevalent due to existing conditions. Those stakeholders emphasized the importance of enforcement and street parking and access for their businesses. The ultimate decision was to run the bus lanes only during peak hours and leave the lanes available for parking during off-peak hours. There has not been the same level of feedback from the Silver Hill Road project.

1. OMNIRIDE: ZERO Emissions fleet study, Omniride connect microtransit, and operations update

Perrin Palistrant, OmniRide

Perrin Palistrant, PRTC presented an update about OmniRide operations including MicroTransit (OmniRide Connect) and its zero emission fleet transition.

* OmniRide bus route 62 in Manassas Park was replaced by the OmniRide Connect microtransit service. This works because the area served is mostly residential, difficult to navigate with larger vehicles, and microtransit is more flexible in the way stops and service can be changed to serve the best fit. The program is slowly but surely doing well. Some vans also have bicycle racks and they can be specifically requested.
* A second microtransit zone will soon begin in the southeastern part of the county serving the Dumfries area and the town of Quantico. A fixed route used to run into the civilian town at the back end of the U.S. Marine base, but increased security in the area made it more complicated to continue. Delivery logistics also have issues now operating within Quantico. This new microtransit zone will help address the need for food access. The new zone is meant to supplement fixed routes and not replace or supplant them.
* A partnership with Yellow Cab is also being examined to determine what is the best arrangement for working with the cab operators on microtransit (for example whether Yellow Cab would just staff the program or fully operate it).
* No fares currently for microtransit.
* Kimley-Horn was contracted by OmniRide to do its Zero Emission Fleet Transition Plan. The study resulted in several recommendations that work together to form a long-term strategic plan. Recommendation 1 is to electrify paratransit and staff vehicles, which are smaller scale and easier to incorporate into existing facilities. OmniRide’s Western Facility will first store any EVs and have the corresponding charging infrastructure installed since the Woodbridge facility would be more costly to retrofit and is used more for larger vehicles. It will be electrified later.
* Recommendation 2 is to conduct a battery electric bus pilot with 6-8 buses on local and express routes. Recommendation 3 is to decide on a final zero emission fuel type and commit on a procurement plan for the rest of the agency’s vehicles, including commuter buses. This includes potentially working with Washington Gas on their interest to develop a hydrogen hub.
* Other OmniRide bus initiatives include expanding local and commuter bus routes in the eastern part of the county and to points south in Stafford and Spotsylvania in 2024. Also renumbering commuter and other bus routes to identify their beginning zone more easily:
* Local buses = begin with a 2
* Express buses = begin with a 3
* East of I-95 = begin with a 5
* I-66 routes = begin with a 6
* West of I-95 = begin with a 9

*Discussion*

* N. Ruiz asked whether the eastern service area restructure is a complete system restructure, including new routing, or is it something more of a modest revision. P. Palistrant explained that there will be both major and minor changes, such as possibly a combination of new routes, splitting of routes into two loops, and/or expansion of transit into new areas.

4. MARC: brunswick line study and Operations Update

Sibtay Haider, MTA

* Jennifer Mouchantaf (Jacobs) and Sibtay Haider (MDOT/MTA) presented about MARC’s Brunswick Line Study, including that the study is currently in the public comment phase until April 20th.
* Requests for expansion of MARC service along the Brunswick Line and into Western Maryland come from the MD Legislature.
* J. Mouchantaf gave an overview of Brunswick Line’s current operations and how it is designed to connect with residents living northwest of the immediate D.C. area with jobs in and close around Washington, D.C. Changes to service would require greater capacity and collaboration with CSX. Currently, Brunswick line ridership is about 35% of what it was pre-pandemic. 18 trains serve the line daily along 19 stations. There is also a higher senior population along this line than in the overall population. The counties it serves in Maryland and West Virginia are experiencing greater population growth than the rest of the state.
* 250 constraints to service expansion and new construction were identified, 16 of which were found to be significant. These include historic sites, natural barriers, flooding, right of way issues, and more.
* S. Haider discussed different operating scenarios being studied for the Brunswick Line, Western Maryland alternative routes (one of which has already been disregarded – between Weverton and Hagerstown), and the community engagement process for the Line’s planning study. The different alternatives mentioned are meant to be implemented in an incremental way to make them more practical, but are presented here at a high level without any engineering review.
* Next steps are to define the short, medium, and long-term priorities using public feedback and other stakeholder engagement.
* Potential service enhancements have been identified, including more weekend service.
* MTA is specifically looking for public feedback on the different service scenarios, ways to improve demand, and service into Western Maryland.

*Discussion*

* J. Mouchantaf mentioned that more network-wide, comprehensive planning for the MARC system would begin in Spring 2023.
* S. Haider and J. Mouchantaf noted that inter-agency coordination is ongoing and is happy to work with VRE on any related issue to cross-honoring, service coordination, etc.
* N. Ruiz asked whether significant changes were observed on the Brunswick line between the origin and destinations of travel or if they’re the same as pre-pandemic. S. Haider explained that weekend service is coming back faster than weekday, but traffic volume is consistent with the more popular regions and destinations are.
* N. Ruiz mentioned that he has seen a faster recovery in ridership in the outer stations of the VRE systems, potentially because of less mobility options, as well as traffic congestion.
* P. Gaunaurd asked about what is being discussed regarding reverse flow service and weekend service. S. Haider explained how this is an issue that’s come up and received popular support, but MARC is currently focused on the direction of travel versus particular start points in service. J. Mouchantaf added that Frederick specifically is a city that has received greater interest in terms of weekend service as a destination point.

1. High-Capacity Transit (HCT) map development

Charlene Howard and Tim Canan, TPB Staff

* Tim Canan and Charlene Howard (TPB) discussed the TPB’s High Capacity Transit Map development process. Specifically, their focus was on the TPB’s definition of bus rapid transit (BRT) and how that impacted potential projects for inclusion in the map.
* BRT projects in the HCT footprint are being updated to reflect new projects and to remove or update projects that have changed, including for the map and the model.
* They requested that RPTS members submit for inclusion in the map any projects that they were not shown during the presentation, which is available for download in the meeting’s webpage.

*Discussion*

* Xavier Harmony mentioned that NVTC is working on the Envision Route 7 BRT project and that said project is missing from the BRT project list shared in the presentation even though it’ll be completed by 2045. C. Howard mentioned that she’s seen a map that has this project included, but the team needs to see what projects are included in the long range plan to ensure that it is included in the associated map.
* N. Ruiz asked about how future commuter and inter-city rail service will get integrated into the HCT map since commuter rail is typically included, but expected service upgrades across Virginia will mean that in certain areas, trains will be operating more like Metro rather than a traditional commuter rail line. T. Canan acknowledges that it would be a conspicuous absence to not address increased service along Amtrak where it serves as a commuter option and that this will need to be looked at further, especially in a regional product like this HCT map and model. C. Howard mentioned that associated stations may just be coded as multi-modal since Amtrak is listed in the model as a “mode.”
* P. Gaunaurd asked whether the Duke Street BRT project qualifies as BRT for the map, since it wasn’t on the presentation list, as well as asked whether the extension of the long-range plan to 2050 impacts any of the work or need of the GIS team? C. Howard that the date extension will impact the map and model, but there are already projects in the system that have implementation dates beyond 2045. She stated that the idea behind the HCT map initially was for someone to be able to see the connections they could make beyond just Metrorail and future long-term projects on the same map may not be as relevant to that user.

1. other business/ADJOURN

Nick Ruiz, Regional Public Transportation Subcommittee Chair, VRE

* N. Ruiz reminded the group about the upcoming RPTS field trip to VRE’s Broad Run rail yard in May and that emails with more detail will be forthcoming.
* N. Ruiz ended the meeting with a reminder that April’s meeting is on Tuesday April 25th. Meeting was adjourned around 2:01pm.

All meeting materials are available for download from the subcommittee’s website:

<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2023/3/28/tpb-regional-public-transportation-subcommittee/>