

Written Testimony
Patricia Burda, Councilmember, Town of Chevy Chase
Presented to COG Transportation Planning Board Meeting
May 20, 2009

Good afternoon. I am Patricia Burda, a member of the Town of Chevy Chase's Council. The Town is an incorporated municipality, a community of about 1,000 households at the western terminus of the proposed Purple Line.

The Town has submitted formal written comments to the Maryland Department of Transportation regarding our concern that one of the alternatives presented in the State's Purple Line Draft Environmental Impact Statement – the Jones Bridge Road Bus Rapid Transit (the low cost bus rapid transit alternative)—has not been optimized by the State as Federal Law requires.

We feel strongly about this because we believe that this alternative, if properly designed, it could serve 56,000 riders, cost about \$600 million to build, and save two miles of the Capital Crescent Trail from devastating environmental damage. The light rail alternative being promoted is estimated to serve only 6,000 more riders, but will cost twice as much to build and will, as the State acknowledges, destroy the mature tree canopy along the Trail. Likewise, all studies, including the State's, show that light rail and bus rapid transit are equally clean energy alternatives to vehicular traffic, yet in this instance, the light rail will have a greater negative impact on the environment because of the trees that will have to be destroyed to accommodate the catenary wires.

The World Resources Institute has endorsed BRT for the Purple Line because they too believe it will "cost less, offer similar services, and fight global warming better than light rail" (report announcement attached).

We believe the Jones Bridge Road BRT alternative is of crucial importance because it could potentially:

- serve more jobs in the Bethesda area with a direct one-seat ride – 75,000 versus 35,000 (2030 MCOG projections) because it can make stops at National Naval Medical Center where construction for the BRAC transfer of Walter Reed is already underway; the north Woodmont area of Bethesda which is projected for high density growth, *and* still end in central Bethesda;
- cost taxpayers substantially less than the other alternatives (anywhere from \$600 million to \$1 billion less) making money available for other important transit projects in the region, like the Corridor Cities Transitway;
- help provide direct relief for the projected 16% traffic increase anticipated on Jones Bridge Road due to the BRAC realignment of Walter Reed (overall it is anticipated that there will be *4,000 new trips per day to National Naval Medical Center*);
- prevent the clear-cutting of over 15 acres of mature trees in an important down-county greenspace, the Capital Crescent Trail;

- maintain a wider, safer Trail for all its multiple types of users; and
- save the new “Heart of Bethesda” – Woodmont East Plaza – from negative transit impacts, i.e., BRT vehicles running through the plaza every 6 minutes or tail tracks with disabled transit trains parked in the middle of movie goers.

Bethesda is a major attraction and a good terminus for Purple Line. But Bethesda is not the only attraction or trip generator at the western end of the Purple Line. The area around the Medical Centers has more employees today than the area of downtown Bethesda within walking distance of the CCT station. And employment around the Medical Centers will grow faster between now and 2030 than in downtown Bethesda. We are not talking small numbers. There are 33,000 employees around the Medical Centers today, and about 40,000 projected in 2030. Those thousands of employees will only be served by Purple Line if the JBR alignment is chosen. They will not be served if the CCT alignment is selected. That is because they would have to pay 89% more, have to make difficult and time-consuming transfers, and have to spend more time in transit with a CCT alignment. MTA has consistently framed this as a question of choice: Purple Line can serve either Bethesda or Medical Centers, but not both. That is a false choice. Purple Line can serve both if routed along JBR, and serve them well.

The Town enthusiastically supports our region’s and our nation’s commitment to promoting public transportation. Yet, we also urge fiscal responsibility. To that end, it is time to be creative and pragmatic, and to search for ways to get the biggest bang for the taxpayer’s buck and to do so in a way that doesn’t sacrifice needed greenspace in the process. We need the Purple Line. We also need many other transit solutions in the metropolitan region.

As a former Montgomery County Council member wrote, “the best option for the Purple Line needs to be high mobility, safe, low cost, fuel efficient, clean and green and flexible. The proposed LRT option now chugging down that path-of-least resistance policy rut fails in all these areas compared to viable options.” The Town today urges you to press the State to consider the merits of the JBR BRT alternative and push them to follow the law and optimize the analysis. We think it is premature to undertake an air quality conformity assessment of light rail at this time. Don’t rush through a project that you will regret later. It is time to let 20 year old dreams die and accept today’s realities. There is a better Purple Line.

Thank you.

My name is Aileen Worthington and I am a DC resident who uses the Capital Crescent Trail for cycling. Along with legions of others I started using this trail even before it was officially opened and delighted in each improvement...such as the bridge over River Road and the refurbishment of the trestle in Rock Creek Park. I often ride from the bike trail in Rock Creek Park and connect with the Capital Crescent Trail, heading either east toward Silver Spring or west through Bethesda, sometimes continuing to cross one of the Potomac River bridges and onto the Mt. Vernon Trail.

As communities across the country are celebrating and enhancing their trails, officials in this area are seriously contemplating plucking out an integral piece of our regional trail system. This is baffling and disheartening to me. With the growth in population and density we need more green places of respite, not fewer.

If the Purple Line takes the CCT route, a long section of the trail will be unusable for recreational cyclists, runners and walkers. A few intrepid commuters (I used to be one of those!) might take on the challenge, but can anyone honestly think that a narrow cycling lane, just a few feet away from trains zipping by every three minutes, will remain an attractive recreational resource for families and children? Using this narrow bike lane, which will have to be fenced in on both sides, will be frightening. Who would dream of taking children there?

I have cycled in several European cities which have paths fairly close to "light" rail. This makes sense when the purpose is to add a cycle path through an existing urban area. With the CCT we are starting instead with a treasured, tree-lined recreational trail/ linear park in an extremely narrow corridor and then actively planning to trash that park-like trail when there are other options.

I am a supporter of public transportation who took Metro rail and Metro bus to work for almost 20 years and still use public transportation whenever feasible. But in the case of the Purple Line there are other route options. I think it is extremely shortsighted to send transit along the Capital Crescent Trail. When the trail is gone, it's gone.