

ITEM 11 - Information

June 20, 2012

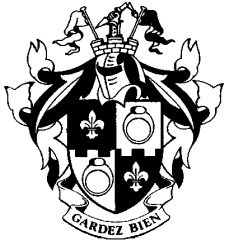
Briefing on the Montgomery County Executive's Task Force Report and Recommendations on Implementing a Rapid Transit System

Staff

Recommendation: Receive briefing on the proposed rapid transit system and potential funding strategies.

Issues: None

Background: In May, a task force appointed by the Montgomery County Executive released its report and recommendations for implementing a 160 mile rapid transit vehicle (RTV) system utilizing sophisticated, surface level bus-type technology.



Montgomery County Council

From the Office of Councilmember Marc Elrich

May 22, 2012

Contact: 240-777-7966

Montgomery Transit Task Force Recommends 160-mile County Rapid Transit System

*Councilmember Marc Elrich Welcomes Plan
Based on His Original Rapid Transit Proposal*

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ROCKVILLE, Md., May 22, 2012—Montgomery County Councilmember Marc Elrich today welcomed the report of the County’s Transit Task Force (TTF) that calls for a “comprehensive transit network” across Montgomery County. The report, which was presented to County Executive Isiah Leggett today, largely reflects a transit plan for which Councilmember Elrich has advocated for more than four years. Councilmember Elrich said the plan the TTF recommends is “the most practical, efficient and cost effective way to develop a world-class transit system to deal with the challenges of mounting congestion and declining mobility.”

The complete text of Councilmember Elrich’s statement on today’s release of the Transit Task Force report:

Today, in a report to the County Executive, the Transit Task Force (TTF) called for a "comprehensive transit network" across our County.

The Rapid Transit proposal being advanced today represents the refinement of my original proposal to construct a 120-mile rapid transit system that I first advanced four years ago. I continue to believe that it is the most practical, efficient and cost effective way to develop a world-class transit system to deal with the challenges of mounting congestion and declining mobility. Unless we address these challenges, economic development projects that are critical to our County's future will be stalled and our residents will experience worsening gridlock as well as more environmental degradation.

This proposal, when implemented, will connect the County's residential communities to its job centers and offers significant service improvements that will make it possible for far more residents to choose transit over continued use of single-occupant autos for the daily commute. And as the report highlights, there are creative and reasonable solutions to the financial and logistical challenges in implementing this system.

I was pleased to serve on the TTF, and I applaud the work of the task force members who were drawn from the civic, business, environmental and transit advocate communities. It is almost unprecedented in our County for leaders from these four groups to find common ground and unite behind a common approach for addressing our County's greatest challenge. That alone speaks volumes about the broad recognition that the solutions we need will require us to think differently.

This report gives us a plan of action that is sustainable and affordable. When a rapid transit system is done well, people will want to leave their cars behind and use public transit. I continue to believe that a countywide rapid transit system is the only reasonable solution for the positive future of our county. I now join the other members of the task force in calling for a Rapid Transit Vehicle (RTV) system, a concept that has evolved from the bus rapid transit (BRT) system I originally envisioned.

I would like to highlight some of the major points from the report that I believe are absolutely critical. First, the system's vehicles must have dedicated right-of-way. Put differently, the vehicles cannot travel in the same clogged lanes of traffic with cars and trucks. The report recommends a system with true station stops with real time electronic passenger information; off-vehicle, Metro-like fare collection; stylish, high-quality and accessible vehicles; and frequent, reliably fast service. It will be like a light rail experience with vehicles on tires instead of steel wheels, but at a quarter of the cost.

Additionally, as the report discusses, we can find creative and reasonable solutions to the financial and logistical challenges in implementing this system. I was pleased to serve on the TTF, and I applaud the work of the people with whom I worked. The members of the task force included an array of business, residential, governmental, and transit advocate representatives who worked diligently to offer reasonable, well-researched alternatives to some of the thorny questions of implementation. I encourage you to read this very detailed report (or at least the executive summary).

I understand that some residents may be wary of how an RTV system will impact their nearby roads and as the report points out, this system cannot be a one-size fits all design. Community specifics will have to be a part of the design of each route.

With the recent announcement by Governor O'Malley that the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) should be a BRT route (rather than light rail), we have the opportunity to use it to showcase a first phase of a world-class system. The report proposes a first phase of more than 80 miles of RTV network to include the CCT. The

CCT together with the other routes can provide the essential connections to move around the County.

Some of the financing scenarios include special taxes or taxing districts that would make this system a reality for less than a dollar per day for households and businesses. For a price that is less than a cup of coffee per day, we could transform our transportation system to one that is sustainable and consistent with the high quality of life of we have come to expect in our County. If we don't do this, then what else can we do to reduce congestion, accommodate growth, encourage economic development and mitigate environmental degradation?

We can choose a future in this County where new businesses choose to locate in our smart-growth centers and where our residents have meaningful transit- and environmentally-friendly options for travel. With an RTV system, we can serve current residents, businesses and visitors. We can also accommodate our share of future growth and development as allowed through the master plan process—in a manner that does not exacerbate the current clogged condition of our roadways.

We need to begin this now. We can have functioning, gold-standard routes in a relatively short time period—that is the beauty of an RTV system.

It may be difficult to imagine a system that would be better than anything we have now in the United States, but this report makes it clear that we understand what is needed and it gives us a clear path for how to get there. Now we must commit to it for the future of a healthy, green Montgomery County.

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