



## MTA STAKEHOLDER WORK GROUP



# MTA Stakeholder Work Group Meeting #1

## Outlining the Transit Needs and Expectations of the Businesses in the Region

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On Wednesday, June 24, 2015, the Secretary's Office (TSO) and the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) from the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) held the first meeting of several Transit Stakeholder Work Group meetings at the Baltimore Metropolitan Council's offices located at 1500 Whetstone Way, Suite 300, Baltimore, Maryland in Conference Room A.

The first meeting was intended to focus on outlining the transit needs and expectations of businesses in the Baltimore Region. With Jim Ports, Deputy Secretary of Transportation for Operations, as the Chairman, the list of businesses and organizations below were in attendance for a worthwhile conversation, which aimed to provide information for MDOT to develop a Transit Performance Improvement Plan by October 1, 2015, as outlined in the FY 2015 Joint Chairmen's Report on the budget.

The following businesses and organizations were in attendance:

- The Secretary's Office (TSO) of the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)
- The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) of the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)
- Alexander & Cleaver
- Anne Arundel County Office of Planning & Zoning
- Association of Maryland Pilots
- Baltimore Port Alliance
- Baltimore City Department of Transportation
- Baltimore City Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods
- Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC)
- Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC)
- BWI Business Partnership
- Carroll County Department of Planning & Government Affairs
- Carroll County Department of Citizen Services
- Central Maryland Transportation Alliance (CMTA)
- Citizens Planning and Housing Association – Baltimore (CPHA)

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- Fort Meade Alliance
- Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC)
- Horseshoe Casino
- Johns Hopkins University
- Maryland General Assembly Representatives
- Simon/Arundel Mills
- Transit Choices
- Transportation Association of Maryland
- Under Armour
- University of Maryland at Baltimore

Deputy Secretary Ports opened the meeting, stressing the importance of providing safe, efficient and reliable transit services in the Baltimore Region and across Maryland with world-class customer service. He noted that we have developed this MTA Stakeholder Work Group in response to legislation introduced during the 2015 session of the General Assembly, as well as FY 2015 Operating Budget Language aimed at improving transit services. The goal of these Stakeholder Work Group meetings is to conduct outreach and seek input on the transit service needs of the business community and transit users in the region in order to identify opportunities to improve transit services. We want to ensure that the concerns and recommendations of the MTA stakeholders are heard, understood and implemented where feasible and appropriate. The MTA Stakeholder Group will meet several times in advance of an October 1, 2015 goal of producing a Transit Performance Improvement Plan.

Deputy Secretary Ports introduced Sam Minnitte, Vice President of Planning, Environment & Traffic in the Northeast US for Parsons Brinckerhoff, who will help facilitate these Stakeholder Work Group Meetings. Jim Knighton, Chief of Staff for MTA, then gave a presentation, which provided an overview of the MTA transit services in the region, including a brief history, overview and ridership of the various modes of transit in the region: bus, Metro Subway, Light Rail, MARC, Commuter Bus and Mobility.

Some questions on the presentation focused on the following:

- Clarification on the mobility numbers (use slide 17).
- Bus ridership is declining due to fall 2013 federal shutdown and severe weather incidents as well as the Charm City circulator, which provides a parallel free service in the City.
- A healthy farebox recovery depends on the size of the system. For its size, Maryland is in the middle of the pack – most are in the 30% range.
- Bus on-time performance is 80% where our goal is 88%.
- Items to focus on to help recalibrate our system performance should focus on:
  - layover times,
  - realistic running times,
  - the number of bus stops,
  - ADA times to board a bus,
  - traffic congestion, etc.
- Buses have GPS; however it follows an automated vehicle locator (AVL) radio system which needs to be upgraded. MTA is working on the update to this system through the Bus USA project, which will use cellular service towers and is much more efficient.

Next, Sam Minnitte asked each person in attendance to share their understanding and issues with transit in the region, outlining transit needs to better serve businesses in the region. The following summary highlights the key focus areas identified by the Stakeholder Work Group.

## **Key Themes:**

### **Flexibility and Efficiency of the Transit System**

- Accommodate and adjust transit to the longer peak commute periods and the peak-hour service that is changing with 24-hour needs (hotels, casinos, hospitals, Amazon)
- Consider flex-time to enable better employee access through transit
- Need to refocus/redesign the transit access in/out of Baltimore City, as travel patterns have changed
- Make transit timely and convenient
- Fewer bus stops means more reliable bus service

- Business partners need to provide funding for transit options
- Need to examine the various other local and private transit/shuttle services to evaluate the duplication of service
- Also, MTA buses transport Baltimore City school children. Making any changes to bus stops or routes could likely impact City schools

### **Ease of Use; Transit Experience**

- Integrate different (public and private) modes of transit for ease of access/transfers (water taxi, LOTS, State transit/MTA)
- Map all public/private transit in the region as one integrated map
- Provide connections to work site locations, providing the last mile of access to jobs
- Need a universal fare card or payment as the fares can be confusing
- Consider the use of smaller vehicles for some of the lesser utilized transit services/routes
- Better message/market bus and public transit – note that the Charm City Circulator does well because of good marketing, reliability and public perceptions
- The Charm City Circulator is simple, easy to use, is frequent and has next bus information
- Consider using short and longer routes, including circulators
- Make the experience “cool” and fun

### **Access to Jobs**

- Connect jobs and people in the Baltimore Region
- Identify gaps in the current transit system
- Connect to Port of Baltimore employers/employees
- Connect to all of the Universities, Hospitals and Larger Employers/Key Activity Centers in the Region, including Fort Meade, Arundel Mills, Sparrows Point, etc.
- Connect Annapolis, as the State Capital, to the Region through transit, including consideration of rail
- Need frequent access to transit for the 24/7 businesses (casinos, hotels, hospitals, etc.)
- Need east/west County transit access without having to go through the City of Baltimore
- Link employment centers outside of Baltimore City with workers within the City
- Use the data from the Opportunity Collaborative on the regional employment centers and the commute shed work

- The Port of Baltimore needs reliability, which is why a lot of employees carpool rather than taking transit
- There is an imbalance in the transit service area between the Beltways, which is where 45% of the employment is located
- Provide access to jobs, schools and commerce

### **Increase Transit Ridership**

- More people will use transit if it is safer and more secure
- Provide a better, quality experience
- Keep transit fare rates affordable
- Make the buses more reliable
- Need positive user experiences to get more people to ride transit
- Attract those with alternatives to use transit, younger people like to take transit
- Consider marketing/branding certain lines/service to promote cool, easily identifying routes, etc.

### **Need Safe and Secure Transit**

- Need more bus shelters and lighting at bus shelters
- Need shuttles for the last mile for business access
- Need more safety on transit and to transit
- Need more police presence

### **Incentivize Transit**

- Find opportunities to direct employees to transit options and other programs to incentivize or take advantage of transit
- Promote bicycle/pedestrian access at transit stations/stops
- Find opportunities for satellite parking to promote shuttle bus service into major growth/cities
- Provide expanded service
- Need transit hubs/transfers
- Need transit funding
- Large employers should help with the last mile of travel or work together with the locally operated transit for the last mile of travel
- Consider options for TOD similar to Owings Mills (especially at light rail stations)

## Redesign Bus Routes

- Use a data-driven approach to defining routes
- Consider adding/deleting bus stops based on use, presence of shelters, etc.
- Ensure that we don't block parts of the City from jobs and opportunities
- Note that public transit cannot get to the door of all businesses
- Redesign the entire system for today/tomorrow rather than adjusting existing routes
- Suggest looking at demographic shifts, needed movement(s), as well as shift changes (especially at the Port of Baltimore employment areas)
- Maximize efficiencies with the number of State and local transit providers
- Assess how to address/link transit to the suburbanization of employment
- Consider how to address traffic congestion in the City that impacts the bus travel times - consider a park and shuttle option into the City
- Consider that the MTA buses provide bus access to schools in the City
- Consider market changes versus standard transit applications

It was discussed that there were many surveys conducted by employers in the region that would be worth consolidating and using, rather than creating or seeking new data. Some surveys include: a Fort Meade survey, an Under Armour employee survey, and a Harbor East transit survey to name a few. Also, the following links were identified as a source of good information:

- Provide link to the Opportunity Collaborative work at: [www.opportunitycollaborative.org/](http://www.opportunitycollaborative.org/) or [www.opportunitycollaborative.org/transportation-plan/](http://www.opportunitycollaborative.org/transportation-plan/)
- Coordinate all of the MTA and external data
- Provide link to the CMTA last mile report (www.cmtalliance.org under "About Reports") or at:  
[www.cmtalliance.org/uploads/file/reports/The%20Last%20Mile%20Executive%20Summary.pdf](http://www.cmtalliance.org/uploads/file/reports/The%20Last%20Mile%20Executive%20Summary.pdf)
- Provide link to the NY Times article on poverty:  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/upshot/transportation-emerges-as-crucial-to-escaping-poverty.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/upshot/transportation-emerges-as-crucial-to-escaping-poverty.html?_r=0)

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It is clear in the discussion that there are a lot of competing interests for transit service in the region and while there is plenty room for improvement, it is not possible to service all employers and residents in a door-to-door fashion. Some folks identified concerns over funding and lack of service at all times needed.

The next meeting of the MTA Stakeholder Work Group is Monday, August 3rd at 2 pm to focus on the needs of transit users. This meeting will be held at the same location, at the Baltimore Metropolitan Council's offices located at 1500 Whetstone Way, Suite 300, Baltimore, Maryland in Conference Room A. Please note that we do ask folks to RSVP if you plan to attend this next meeting so that there will be adequate seating. RSVP to Mr. Philip Dacey, MDOT's Director of Governmental Affairs. He can be reached by e-mail at [pdacey@mdot.state.md.us](mailto:pdacey@mdot.state.md.us) or by phone at 410-865-1090