



MTA STAKEHOLDER WORK GROUP



MTA Stakeholder Work Group Meeting #2

Outlining the Transit Needs and Expectations of the Transit Users in the Region

On Monday, August 3, 2015, the Secretary's Office (TSO) and the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) from the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) held the second 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 second meeting was intended to focus on outlining the transit needs and expectations of transit users in the Baltimore Region. Jim Ports, Deputy Secretary of Transportation for Operations chaired the meeting with over 100 people 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 2015 Joint Chairmen's Report on the budget. Attendees included bus, paratransit and rail transit users as well as elected officials and representatives from State agencies, local jurisdictions, and other transit interests from communities in the Region, as highlighted below.

- The Secretary's Office (TSO) of the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)
- The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) of the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)
- Anne Arundel County Office of Planning & Zoning
- Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local #1300
- Representative for Baltimore City Councilmember Eric Costello's
- Baltimore City Department of Transportation
- Baltimore City Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods
- Representative for Baltimore County Executive Kamenetz
- Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC)
- Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC)
- Baltimore Sun
- BWI Business Partnership
- Carroll County Government
- Central Maryland Transportation Alliance (CMTA)
- Citizen Advisory Committees (CACs) for MTA and for MARC Riders
- Citizens Planning and Housing Association – Baltimore (CPHA)

MTA Stakeholder Work Group Meeting #2

Page Two

- Community Representatives from Rosemont Neighborhood Improvement Association, Canton Community Association, Fells Point Community Association, Sandtown Winchester Neighborhood, Riverside Neighborhood Transportation, Charles Street Development
- Crossroads Transportation
- Fort Meade Alliance
- Frederick County Transit
- Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC)
- Howard County Government
- Johns Hopkins University
- Maryland General Assembly Representatives, including:
 - Delegate Pam Beidle
 - Speaker Busch's Office
 - Senator Bill Ferguson
 - Delegate Stephen Lafferty
 - Delegate Clarence Lam
 - Delegate Brooke Lierman
 - Delegate Corey McGray
- Parsons Brinckerhoff
- Transit Choices
- Transportation Association of Maryland
- Under Armour
- University of Maryland at Baltimore (UMB)
- University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) Transit
- Waterfront Partnership
- 1000 Friends of Maryland

Deputy Secretary Ports opened the meeting, highlighting the importance of providing safe, efficient and reliable transit services in the Baltimore Region and across Maryland with world-class customer service. He summarized that the MTA Stakeholder Work Group is 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 this Stakeholder Work Group meeting is to conduct outreach and seek input on the transit service needs of transit users in the region in order to identify opportunities to improve services. We want to ensure that the concerns and recommendations of the MTA stakeholders are heard, understood and implemented where feasible and appropriate.

MTA Stakeholder Work Group Meeting #2

Page Three

The MTA Stakeholder Group will meet several times in advance of an October 1, 2015 goal of producing a proposed Transit Performance Improvement Plan, including the following:

- August 10th Meeting with Elected Officials on the Baltimore Transit Alternatives
- September 10th Meeting with the MTA Stakeholder Work Group
- September 22nd Tour of MTA Facilities with Elected Officials

Deputy Secretary Ports noted the recent Baltimore Red Line announcement by Governor Hogan and reiterated the Department's commitment to find transit solutions for Baltimore. He then introduced Sam Minnitte, Vice President of Planning, Environment & Traffic in the Northeast US for Parsons Brinckerhoff, facilitator for these Stakeholder Work Group Meetings and Paul Comfort, Administrator of the MTA.

Administrator Comfort highlighted his work experience and background, including a rich history in paratransit and local and national transit service agencies, a law degree and work in local government in Charles County and Queen Anne's County. He has been spending his time at MTA reviewing all of the modes of transit, meeting with internal staff, union representatives as well as meeting with customers/user groups to learn and to determine improvements. He is developing the MTA team to address his four key goals: reliability, safety, efficiency and a world class customer service. Some improvements have included a new paratransit team, tracking on-time performance daily (versus monthly previously), tracking fare evasion at 2.5 percent, which is better than the national average, and providing a digital dashboard for all managers, to name a few.

MTA is analyzing the Baltimore Bus Network Improvement Network Project (BNIP) to determine if the data can be used to identify how to make regional bus improvements and better connections to target the jobs and land use, which will include bus stops, signal prioritization, bus only lanes, enhanced police, decreased passenger times and enhanced transfers. Transit is more than transportation; it is economic development by connecting people with jobs and opportunities. He is going to take the input from these meetings and use that information to make recommendations and improvements. Paul then gave a presentation on the Baltimore Regional Transit System, 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: local bus, Metro Subway, Light Rail, MARC commuter train, Commuter Bus, and Mobility.

The notes from the MTA Stakeholder Work Group Meeting are broken down into issues and questions. There were a number of questions that were raised during the meeting, but to maximize our time and ensure all attendees could speak freely, the questions were written down and not verbally answered. There is a Question and Answer (Q&A) Addendum that will list the questions that were raised and provide answers.

Key Themes Identified by Transit Users:

Transit Reliability

- Use better tracking systems to improve real-time user information.
- About 15% of attendees were transit dependent; while a significant number of the those in attendance expressed an interest in wanting to take transit if available and convenient (around two-thirds).
- Ensure that MTA can accommodate existing riders before taking on more riders.
- There were reports that buses pass by wheelchairs as drivers do not want to deal with loading wheelchairs.
- Transit is critical in Baltimore to get to jobs, is important to the environment, and is essential for the medical needs of those who are transit dependent. 35% of Baltimore City residents do not own a car.
- The region needs a better way of locating stops and station, especially for those with disabilities. Such improvements should include using more Braille signage and considerations for how to accommodate passengers suffering from dementia/Alzheimer's.

Bus Complaints

- Buses are too crowded. It was mentioned that many of the issues regarding reliability and ridership could be addressed by adding more transit vehicles
- Bus drivers need to pay better attention to passengers (fights, patrons standing, sick passengers, etc.)
- Some of the bus operators need to be more accommodating to riders and need a better understanding of the bus network so they can answer questions about connections, as well as how to handle difficult situations.
- Bus operators should be friendly, pleasant, courteous, and helpful

- There were reports that bus drivers may not pick up patrons or help, especially if they are mobility riders or the riders have impairments.¹
- Bus drivers need to have a better knowledge of the system as a whole and announce stops. They need to be aware that not all passengers know where they are going, so they might not be knowledgeable enough to push the button by looking out the window at street signs/landmarks.

Transit Efficiency

- Consider better connections for paratransit so that Howard County residents do not have to go through Anne Arundel County to get to Baltimore County for appointments which take 1.5 hours each way.
- Consider better connections for the Baltimore Transit Systems beyond Baltimore City.
- Consider better scheduled routes so that transit riders do not need to plan for a 1.5-hour ride time.
- Consider more efficient bus routes. A 40-minute bus ride from Canton to downtown Baltimore is too long.
- Cutting long bus routes adds time for the user to wait for bus connections and make transfers. "Frequency is freedom."
- Make the buses more user friendly, especially for people with disabilities (i.e., visually impaired).

Transit Funding

- Provide adequate funding to improve transit.
- Need more resources to get MTA vehicles operating efficiently.
- Need a better farebox collection (ratio) formula. Farebox is just a measure if the fare that is enough to cover costs. We need measures of service delivery and quality.
- Remove consideration of farebox recovery, as it is arbitrary (as well as the State mandated percentage 35%) as no such farebox recovery is used for roads or bridges.
- Consider eliminating fares that are on necessary routes to minimize the cost to recover the fare collection costs.
- Need more economic development opportunities around transit stations.

¹ It should be noted that Deputy Secretary Ports did respond to this concern. While he wanted to allow the transit users to speak freely and uninterrupted, he was very concerned about reports that drivers of transit vehicles were refusing to pick up people with disabilities or with physical limitation. He said he wanted to know personally if and when these incidents occur as they are completely unacceptable.

- Consider advertisement opportunities inside the buses to improve farebox recovery.
- Consider a dedicated revenue stream for transit.

Transit Improvements

- Consider bus only lanes.
- Consider regional transit solutions besides 54 passenger buses.
- Need an integrated transit system in the Region with regional connectivity.
- Focus on potential transit choice riders to convert single occupant drivers to bus riders, as parking is a real issue in downtown Baltimore.
- Improve and expand the transit system in the Region, including transfers, transfer times and connections.
- MARC is successful; consider improving and adding MARC services. Consider increased MARC weekend mid-day service between 11 am and 2 pm and earlier service on Sunday mornings for those attending church.
- Need service expansion to Frederick, Wilmington, Alexandria and Annapolis, as well as Fort Meade and Arundel Mills.
- Re-imagine the Baltimore transit system using Houston, which took two years to make transformative improvements as an example.

Incentivize Transit

- Consider free suburban parking lots with vouchers from employers to save money on parking in the City and providing shuttle bus services to employment.
- Development shouldn't be approved unless parking issues and transit connections are addressed. Consider restricted parking or bus lanes in the City of Baltimore.
- Employers need to provide employee shuttles (especially from Bayview and along Boston Street) and use park and ride lots. Consider using the park and ride lots identified in the Baltimore Red Line project.
- Take away the incentive for driving.
- Get cars off historic streets.
- Use the Charm Card to variably price high-use routes and distances.
- Incentivize some routes and opportunities.
- Discourage employers from providing free parking. Tax the employers who provide free parking.
- Provide free Wi-Fi on buses.
- Note that people are selling day passes to make money and "cheat" MTA.

Market Transit & Educate the Public

- Need to educate people on the Charm Card. MTA needs better advertising and public awareness.
- Need to make incremental transit improvements and changes and keep people apprised.
- Need to give people enough notice of transit bus stop and route changes.
- Need to market and educate the public on transit routes and opportunities.
- Provide performance metric dashboard information publicly.
- Woodlawn is a good example of an employment area (4,000 employees) that could take advantage of transit use, but employees do not know how to take advantage of the transit options.

Questions and Answers for the MTA Administrator:

1. What does on time performance mean?
2. Are any organizational changes planned?
3. With students leaving Baltimore, UMBC suggests MTA meet with the new Chancellor to streamline operations.
4. What is the expectation for the GPS/user information to improve?
5. What is the standard for frequent service?
6. What is the goal of the percentage of the population riding the system?
7. How does MDOT/MTA plan to deal with conflicting goals?

It is clear in the discussion that there are a lot of interests for transit improvements in the region, as well as plenty of good ideas and opportunities. Paul Comfort concluded the meeting by highlighting some critical transit improvements he and his staff at MTA are working on, including looking at:

- modal connection improvements
- aligning bus improvements with the existing land uses
- transfer time improvements
- suburb to suburb improvements (without going to through the City)
- smaller buses
- BUS USA procurement for GPS/electronic improvements to data collection
- user application improvements (through an APTA grant)
- bus stop amenities
- adopt a stop program

MTA Stakeholder Work Group Meeting #2

Page Eight

- robust real time application improvements
- public private partnerships (i.e., Uber, Zip Car, Lyft, etc.)
- Quick bus improvements

The next meeting of the MTA Stakeholder Work Group is Thursday, September 10th at 5 pm. This meeting will allow MDOT and MTA to continue listening to transit users with a focus on workforce issues in west Baltimore City. There will be an additional evening scheduled focusing on the same issues for east Baltimore. The September 10th meeting will be held at the State Center Complex Auditorium located at 300 West Preston Street, Baltimore, MD 21201.