



MTA STAKEHOLDER WORK GROUP



MTA Stakeholder Work Group Meeting #3

West Baltimore Regional Stakeholder Meeting

Focusing on Workforce and Customer Needs and Priorities

On Thursday, September 10, 2015, the Secretary's Office (TSO) and the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) from the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) held the third meeting of several Transit Stakeholder Work Group meetings at the State Center Complex Auditorium at 300 West Preston Street in Baltimore.

The third meeting was intended to hear from residents, employers, and transit users with an emphasis on issues facing transit use and access on the western side of Baltimore. A meeting with an emphasis on the eastern side is scheduled for September 28, 2015. Jim Ports, Deputy Secretary of Transportation for Operations, chaired the meeting. More than 50 people were in attendance, and more than half of the meeting time was spent listening to, recording, and responding to issues and concerns raised by attendees. The information heard will help MDOT 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 MDOT
- Anne Arundel County Office of Planning & Zoning
- Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local #1300
- ArchPlan
- Baltimore Electric Rail Society
- Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC)
- Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC)
- Baltimore Bus Network Improvement Project (BNIP) Stakeholders
- Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office
- BWI Business Partnership
- CH2M Hill
- Central Maryland Regional Transit (CMRT)
- Central Maryland Transportation Alliance (CMTA)
- Citizen Advisory Committees (CACs) for MTA

- Citizens Planning and Housing Association – Baltimore (CPHA)
- Representatives from the Canton Community Association and the Fells Point Community Association
- Fort Meade Alliance
- Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC)
- Hodges Development, LLC
- Maryland General Assembly Representatives, including:
 - Speaker Busch's Office
 - Delegate Clarence Lam
 - Delegate Brooke Lierman
 - Senator Shirley Nathan-Pulliam
- Mount Vernon Business Association
- Parsons Brinckerhoff
- Transportation Association of Maryland (TAM)
- University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) Transit
- 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. This meeting specifically was focused on reaching out to the workforce in the West Baltimore area. MDOT and MTA 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 proposed Transit Performance Improvement Plan, including the following:

- September 23rd Tour of MTA Facilities with Elected Officials
- September 28th Meeting with the MTA Stakeholder Work Group, focused on reaching out to the workforce in the East Baltimore area

Deputy Secretary Ports then went over the ground rules for the meeting, which is intended to be a listening session, and asked participants to be respectful of the ideas and concerns raised by others. He also asked attendees to identify their top five transit improvements using a handout that was

distributed at the meeting. He said that the intent is to work on all of the objectives, but MDOT and MTA want the group's input on priorities for our initial focus. He then introduced Paul Comfort, Administrator of the MTA, who provided an overview of the MTA's services and the three performance metrics it is required by law to track and report on.

Administrator Comfort announced that he had just completed 100 days as Administrator and during that time he has learned a great deal about the organization and what needs to be done to create a safe, efficient, and reliable transit system that offers world-class customer service. He has instituted daily on-time performance reports for all modes and daily absenteeism reports for all modes and is developing a dashboard for all operations managers. He then discussed the three key performance indicators that will be published online, as required by the budget language. For each metric, he described the metric, the metric's goal, improvement plans for the metric, and charts showing change in the metric over time. The three metrics are ridership, on-time performance, and farebox recovery.

The floor was then opened up to the audience for reactions and comments. The comments heard at the MTA Stakeholder Work Group Meeting are summarized by issue.

Key Themes Identified:

Metrics

- Farebox recovery metric doesn't adequately cover MTA's services and should be revised to include all services not just "core" service.
- Farebox recovery method is flawed as it doesn't take into account the fact that peak demand and general demand have different costs and benefits.
- Need to track and be accountable for measures that show how many more people have access to transit service, the level of economic development capacity generated by transit service, and job access.
- Need to figure out a way to measure equity and then address inequity in access. Transit travel time is the number one predictor of poverty.
- Need a metric for the number of stranded or passed-by passengers when buses don't stop because they are too full.

School Transportation

- MTA is the city's school buses. When school closes early, MTA needs to get buses out there so children aren't stranded.
- School transportation provides \$7 million to MTA, which is MTA's biggest contract.

- Need to figure out the best way to handle school children on the buses. There have been complaints about people not wanting to ride because school children are riding the buses. Uncertain if the concern is fear over the children's behavior or whether it is related to overcrowding, having to stand, and not enough buses on the route.
- At this time, drivers are not allowed to enforce truancy; however, Baltimore City Schools has piloted and is looking at expanding use of a card that would only be valid for transit trips during specified non-school hours.

System Restructuring

- Use smaller buses so that they can operate more frequently and in different locations.
- Need to use data to ensure that routes are connecting where people are and where they need to go. The Opportunity Collaborative work is an excellent starting point.
- How willing is the MTA to a complete overhaul of the current bus network to create something more aligned with the grid?
- Need to increase the frequency on key bus routes.
- However, need to be cognizant of the impacts of changes. Can't just remove bus stops based on distance. Need to use land use with a distance guideline.

Fare Collection

- Collecting fares is more costly than people realize. Need to consider the tradeoffs.
- Need to get more people using the Charm Card. This will lower fare collection costs and speed up boarding times. Should consider creating incentives to use the Charm Card such as discounted fares. Also need to increase promotion of the Charm Card.
- Need to make bus drivers aware that WMATA's SmartTrip card is valid on MTA buses.

Funding

- There has been 50 years of a lack of investment in transit. It is great to hear the enthusiasm tonight, but how can we have faith that things will change if there isn't a commitment to make the investment?
- Where is the money? What new funds are provided for in the CTP?
- MDOT and MTA are caught up in "the politics" rather than being able to focus on what needs to be done.

Collaboration

- Lane repurposing and signal priority are needed to improve service quality and that requires coordination with local jurisdictions. However, MDOT/MTA need to “advocate” for these changes and not just “support” them.
- Land use around transit needs to be considered as well and that requires increased coordination between MTA, City/County departments of transportation, and City/County planning departments. There is lots of development capacity at high accessibility locations, but it isn’t being harnessed.
- Need to institutionalize the relationships between MDOT/MTA and the jurisdictions that are responsibility for the roadway network and adjacent land uses.
- Need to leverage the new B&P tunnel to bring improvements to the area, including a new station at Upton and maintaining the community walkway.
- Need to increase collaboration with the Charm City Circulator and transit services provided by private entities.
- Population is aging, which could increase demand for transit service to dialysis; this is one role the locally operated transit services (LOTS) play so we should start to think about opportunities to respond and collaborate.
- Need to think regionally about transit services and collaborate appropriately with the counties. There are people who live in the city who are commuting to jobs outside of the city, particularly to the BWI region.

System Quality

- What will it take to create a system like WMATA?
- Enthusiasm for real-time data and BUS USA project, but wonder about the timeline for implementation and the fact that a 2013 RFP for similar services didn’t result in an award.
- The Red Line would have done a lot for the network; are there more cuts coming that the public is not yet aware of?
- Need to replace the light rail vehicles with something more user-friendly. The steps are steep and the high-block boarding method is cumbersome.
- Need to be aware of unintended consequences of improvements. For example, shortening routes has led to an increase in transfers and wait times.

The next meeting of the MTA Stakeholder Work Group is Monday, September 28 at 5 pm. This meeting will allow MDOT and MTA to continue listening to transit users with a focus on workforce issues in east Baltimore City. The September 28th meeting will be held at Humanim, Inc. at 1701 North Gay Street, Baltimore, MD 21213.