

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION





What the West Baltimore MARC Transit-Centered Community Development Strategy Is and Is Not

The West Baltimore MARC Transit-Centered Community Development Strategy is the first in what must be a long-term and continuing relationship between government agencies and residents of West Baltimore in their efforts to rebuild the West Baltimore MARC station area. The Strategy reflects the community's needs and expresses a vision for the future of the area based on community input in 2006 and 2007 and provides recommendations for the stakeholders involved to help achieve desired outcomes. The Strategy also includes phasing recommendations to achieve large-scale and small-scale development over time, and, more importantly, to transition West Baltimore into a healthy, stable neighborhood for existing and future residents.

Research conducted for this study indicates that there is limited market potential for various uses in the local market area as it exists today and both the City and the community need to take immediate action to improve the quality of life for current residents and business owners and to change the current development environment. The West Baltimore MARC Transit-Centered Community Development Strategy recommends that the community create a non-profit community development corporation to assist in the implementation of the strategy and to take advantage of the current and future MARC and Red Line investments. The Phasing section suggests what types of development could be supported over a four-phase, 35-year implementation period, starting with an immediate revitalization phase.

Though the Strategy specifies various actions that the community, the City, the State, and other stakeholders can take to help West Baltimore revitalize, the Strategy is primarily a framework document. Its intent is to **provide guidance to various stakeholders**. In recognition of the ever-changing market conditions, no attempt has been made to provide a specific and detailed build-out scenario for the neighborhood. Nor does the strategy make land use, zoning, or development-intensity recommendations at the parcel or block level. Instead, it summarizes a strategy for transit-centered community development and includes suggested actions, design and development principles, funding strategies, and lists of existing state and local assistance programs. All of these elements can help the community to achieve its desired future. The Strategy is not intended to be the last word on how West Baltimore is redeveloped – rather it is intended to be the first.



HISTORY:

How We Got to Where We are Today

Community History

West Baltimore underwent dramatic changes in the 20th century. In the 1940s and 1950s, at its peak size, the area was a vibrant neighborhood full of rowhouses and community businesses. The years that followed were not as good to the neighborhood, and vacancies and abandoned homes have been common in past the 40 years. Major population losses resulted in part from changes that affected the rest of the City, including increased suburbanization, white flight, loss of urban jobs, racial discrimination in housing, and drugs and crime. In both central West and East Baltimore, there were also civil disturbances in April 1968 as a reaction to the killing of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.

West Baltimore, however, suffered an additional blow in the late 1960s when the City adopted the "3A" Interstate Highway System, which was thereafter approved by the Federal Highway Administration. This system included a new connection to the Central Business District via the Franklin Street corridor, known as I-170. While some construction was started, the project was not completed and became known as the "Highway to Nowhere". Construction resulted in the demolition of 20 blocks and the displacement of almost 1,000 households, ending abruptly at what is now surface parking for the West Baltimore MARC station. The deep rift created by this highway has divided the communities in West Baltimore, causing a lot of pain and leaving a particularly deep scar.



▲ Views of the "Highway to Nowhere" dividing West Baltimore

However, with care and the passage of time, the scar can heal and fade. One important step toward this healing is the West Baltimore MARC Transit-Centered Community Development Strategy and the process that led to its creation. A sign of the community's healing? The community is no longer calling it the "Highway to Nowhere"; it is in the process of becoming the "Highway to Somewhere".

A passenger rail line has gone through West Baltimore since the mid- to late-1800s, although the location of the station serving that area has varied. Today, the West Baltimore MARC station is located at Franklin and Pulaski Streets. The station consists of platforms in both directions for passengers to board from and alight to and two surface parking lots. There is no formal station, and the station area is not an attractive community amenity.

However, MARC service is an important asset to the community. People from inside the community use it, as do people from outside the community. It connects West Baltimore residents to jobs in Baltimore, BWI Airport, Washington, and beyond. The Base Realignment and Closure Act (BRAC) calls for many new jobs in Aberdeen and Fort Meade, and both of these areas are served by the same trains that serve West Baltimore. MARC provides West Baltimore residents with easy access to numerous job centers, and MARC can create opportunities for workers from these job centers to move to West Baltimore and take the train to their jobs.

West Baltimore is also the site of a planned additional transportation asset – the proposed Red Line transit line, which, as an east-west line, would connect West Baltimore to the west to Security Square Mall, the Social Security Administration employment centers, and the Edmondson Village shopping center, and to the east to downtown, Harbor East shopping and employment and the Bayview medical research campus of Johns Hopkins University at the eastern terminus. The proposed Red Line will provide residents with better access to jobs, schools, medical centers, retailers, and other areas of the City. Such a line would be an important step towards integrating the various Baltimore region transit modes and provide West Baltimore residents with fast and easy access to the Baltimore Metro line (Owings Mills employment and shopping, Johns Hopkins Hospital) and the existing Central Light Rail Line (access to the Hunt Valley employment Center and BWI Marshall airport). The proposed Red Line is an opportunity to help reduce congestion, create more walkable communities, and support economic and community development in the Baltimore region. The project could bring major new investment and interest to the area and provide momentum for revitalizing the area.



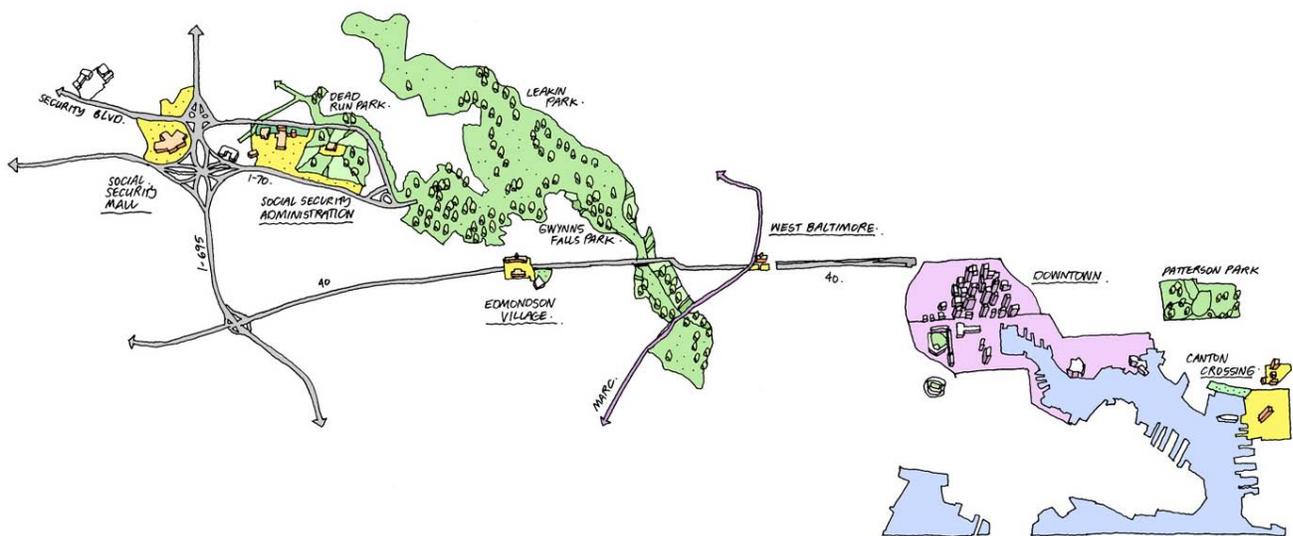
▲ The West Baltimore MARC station-simple platforms lacking community amenities

The transportation modes being studied for the Red Line are Light Rail Transit (LRT), Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and Enhanced Bus Service. There are three major phases of the project that must be completed prior to construction. The Planning/Draft Environmental Impact Statement phase is scheduled to be completed in 2008, the Preliminary Engineering/Final Environmental Impact Statement phase in 2010, and the Final Design/Right of Way acquisition phase in 2012. Construction could be initiated in 2012, but this timeline is contingent upon both federal and state funds being available for the project.

The West Baltimore Coalition has requested that a community benefits agreement be formulated in conjunction with this project. A community benefits agreement would ensure that area benefits, as outlined in this report, would be leveraged through the realization of the Red Line project. Benefits would range from employment opportunities during construction and operation (particularly if a maintenance facility for the line is placed in West Baltimore as indicated in options of the current Red Line plans) to a transformation of the US 40 freeway to streetscape improvements and transit oriented development.

It can be assumed that the Red Line as an additional transit mode will transform West Baltimore into a true multi-modal transit hub which could add significant value to the area and could stimulate the changes envisioned by the Transit Centered Community Development Strategy.

An alignment for the future Red Line has not yet been selected by the MTA, and the Transit Centered Community Development Strategy does not advocate a particular alignment. The Strategy's maps and graphics show all the alignments when possible. It is up to community residents to decide which alignments they prefer and to express their opinions to the MTA through the Red Line process. Chapter 4's "Implementing the Community Development Strategy" section provides residents with additional information to consider as they participate in the MTA's Red Line project.



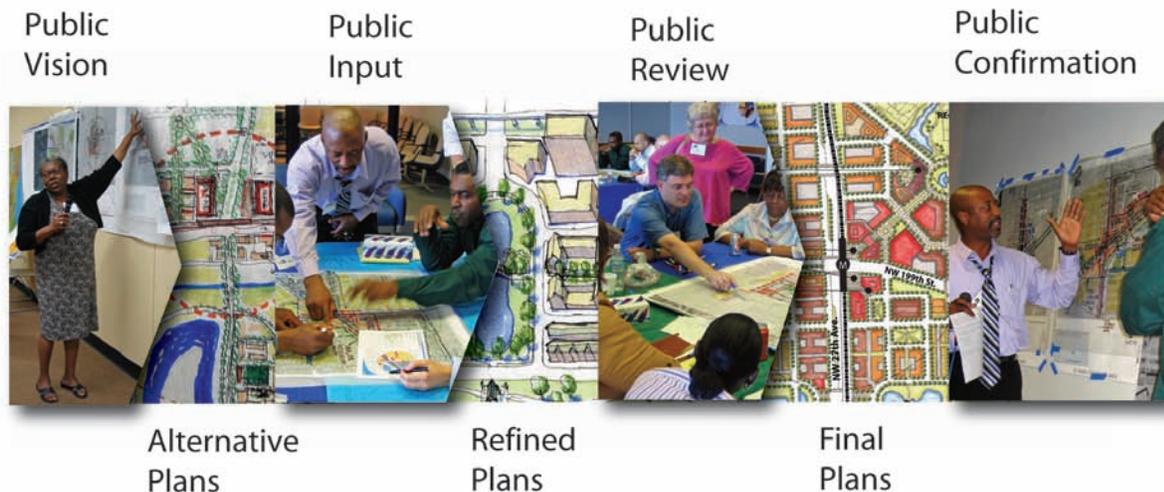
▲ Red Line Schematic Map

Project History

In recognition of the value the MARC service and the proposed Red Line service can play in the revitalization of West Baltimore, the Maryland Department of Transportation hosted a week-long community planning charrette in October 2006. The purpose of the charrette was to create a development strategy for the area around the station and to identify ways the community might leverage the proposed Red Line. Many residents participated and provided valuable information to the process. However, when it came time to present the results, West Baltimore's residents expressed the need for further consideration of the impacts that the Red Line and new development could bring to the area. The October 2006 charrette clearly identified a need for the City and State to step back and work more closely with the citizens of West Baltimore.

Project Milestones

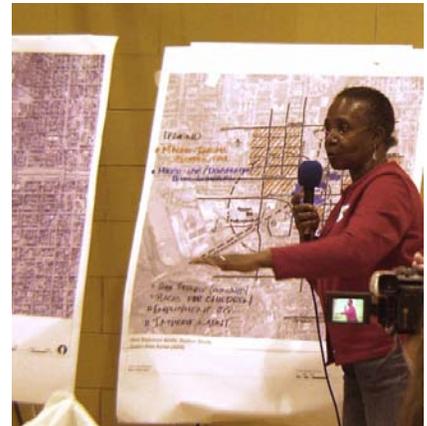
- 2005 Initial 1-day mini-charrette
- 2006 Preparation event prior to workshop (October 3)
- 2006 Workshop 1 (October 14-17)
- 2007 Creation of West Baltimore Coalition (WBC) and three subcommittees
- 2007 WBC Trip to DC to see TOD neighborhoods (April 28)
- 2007 Workshop 2 (Oct 12-13)
- 2007 Workshop follow-up event (November 30)
- 2008 Incorporation of the WBC



▲ Typical Charrette Process Diagram



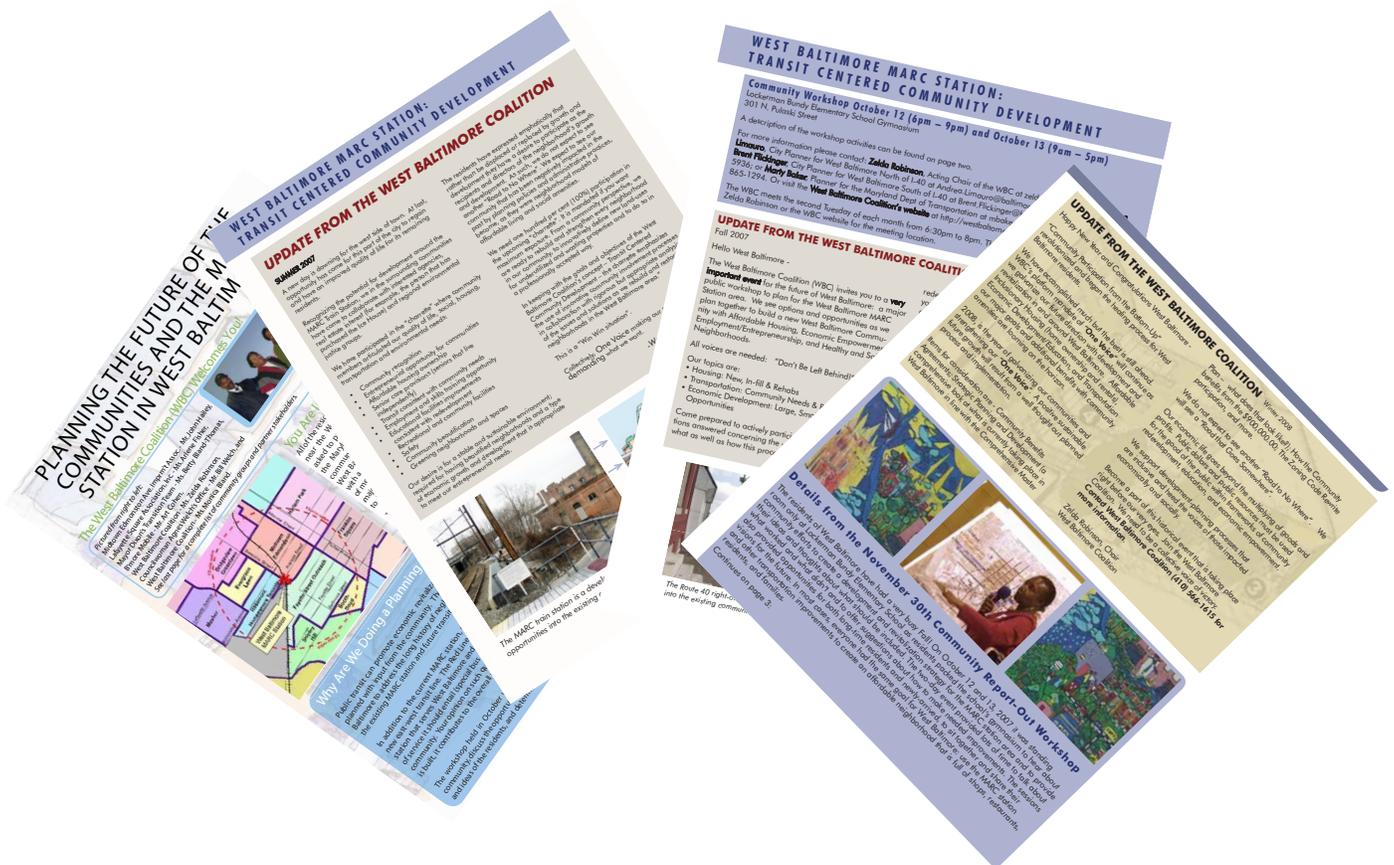
What a difference a year can make! After the 2006 charrette, a group of neighborhood leaders formed the West Baltimore Coalition (WBC), a collaboration of neighborhood groups and other stakeholders interested in seeing change in West Baltimore. This group played a major role in reorganizing the planning process to meet community needs and worked with the City and State to guide the planning process, and ensuring that the effort was grounded in the community and represented community interests. City and State officials helped community members expand their understanding of the benefits of transit, the community revitalization process, and the range of programs and resources that could help them achieve their goals.



▲ WBC Members Participating at Community Workshops

The WBC actively recruited fellow residents to get involved. Community leaders associated with the group held monthly community meetings and formed several subcommittees to provide additional and specific direction on the areas of particular interest to the community. The community decided that the focus should be on three topic areas: housing, economic development, and transportation. In advance of the October 2007 workshops, WBC members accompanied by a City planner visited neighborhood groups within West Baltimore to encourage residents to attend the community meetings and the October workshop. Members also distributed flyers, hung posters, and recorded radio spots to encourage participation. Newsletters that went to every home within a half mile of the MARC station told people about what was going on in the neighborhood and how they could get involved.

Newsletters were sent out to the community





The community's hard work paid off, and the October and November 2007 workshops were a rousing success. On October 12 and 13, it was standing room only at the Lockerman Bundy Elementary School as residents packed the school's gymnasium to hear about community efforts to create a development and revitalization strategy for the MARC station area and to provide their ideas and thoughts about what should be included. The two-day event provided lots of time to talk about what worked and what didn't and to offer suggestions about how to make needed improvements. The sessions also provided opportunities for both long-term and newly-arrived residents to sit together and share their visions for the future. In most cases, everyone had the same goal for West Baltimore: use the MARC station and other transportation improvements to create an affordable neighborhood that is full of residents, shops, restaurants, civic amenities, parks, and other recreational opportunities.

On November 30, 2007 Lockerman Bundy's gymnasium was again filled as residents gathered to see preliminary land use concepts and implementation strategies that came out of the October work sessions. The meeting began with a presentation of overall concepts, and the bulk of the time was spent with people gathered around posters showing the concepts and talking about the concepts with their neighbors. Agency representatives and members of the consultant team were available to answer questions, provide clarification, or take note of any concerns. The response back from the residents was clear, "This process has captured our vision, now let's get moving and start making something happen."

The West Baltimore MARC Transit-Centered Community Development Strategy is the first step toward making "something happen." It reflects the outcome of the intense community engagement over the 2006-2007 time period, including the culminating public workshops of October and November 2007. The Strategy is not a comprehensive list of all efforts that should be pursued in West Baltimore; rather it summarizes concerns and opportunities as expressed by participating community members. It is one of many steps that will be needed to make West Baltimore a better place to Live, Work, Earn, and Play.

PLANNING CONTEXT

In the Baltimore/Washington Metropolitan Region, Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) has become one of the primary strategies for spurring economic revitalization, sparking job creation, and encouraging mixed-use development. Historically, Baltimore has been under-recognized as a target for this type of development activity. However, this attitude is changing as more development is starting to occur around Baltimore's transit stations.

Interest in TOD has grown for several reasons:

- Maryland has invested a great deal of money into creating an extensive transit infrastructure, and it is in the best interest of the State to see its investments maximized;
- TOD can increase the number of people who ride transit, which will allow the system to get a better return on investment;
- Creating places that make it easier to use transit can help relieve road congestion by making it easier for people to leave their cars at home; and
- Putting a variety of land uses around transit stations can stimulate community reinvestment, boost property values, increase access to jobs, develop community culture, and improve quality of life.

The City's *Comprehensive Master Plan 2007-2012* outlines a TOD Strategy for implementing projects around transit stations that meet TOD objectives. The Plan calls for transit station areas to be an important focus for future capital investment. Additionally, the city's *Development Guidebook* contains a checklist for Transit Oriented Development that is intended to guide Baltimore City agencies in reviewing proposed projects near transit stations and in assessing the transit-friendliness of land-use plans, codes, and ordinances.

Several State agencies, led by the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP), together with the City of Baltimore have been working to identify TOD opportunities within the City. MDOT and Baltimore City have identified West Baltimore as an important TOD site because the area is currently served by the MARC commuter train between Washington, D.C., and Aberdeen and because the area will be served by the planned Red Line transit project.



City agencies, in consultation with the Maryland Department of Transportation and area residents, identified West Baltimore as an area that could substantially benefit from TOD. The City recognizes that it is important to honor the West Baltimore neighborhoods' unique economic, housing, and cultural assets and values, while encouraging TOD opportunities at this location. The City also recognizes that it will need to work with residents and neighborhood leaders to achieve local goals as part of the City's promotion of transit use, bicycling, and walking as alternatives to automobile travel. This is why the City has supported community visioning, since it is vital to ensuring that future projects meet the desires of residents, businesses, transit riders, and local governments.

As TOD projects are identified, the City should continue to work with West Baltimore residents and MTA to ensure that they have opportunities to participate in the planning and development process. This support could take the form of detailed timelines, assistance from appropriate City agencies, identification of additional actions required to further the community's objectives, and negotiation and implementation of community benefits agreements between West Baltimore communities and developers. The coordinated approach would entail continued regular (quarterly or semi-annual) meetings with neighborhood organizations such as the WBC to review the City's and the neighborhoods' obligations and successes regarding TOD and revitalization. (More information on community benefits agreements can be found in Appendix F.)

