

Connecting Howard County



Prepared by the

HOWARD COUNTY

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION BOARD

A report to the County Council and County Executive on the performance of the Howard County public transportation system and on specific improvements required of the system to meet the increasing demand for public transportation options in and around Howard County as required by Resolution No. 23-2014, adopted March 5, 2014.

Connecting Howard County

A report to the County Council and County Executive on the performance of the Howard County public transportation system and on specific improvements required of the system to meet the increasing demand for public transportation options in and around Howard County.

In Response to County Council Resolution No. 23-2014

Prepared by the

HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION BOARD

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November 16, 2014

County Council of Howard County
3430 Courthouse Drive
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Dear Honorable Council Members,

In response to Howard County Council Resolution 23-2014 (*attachment*), and on behalf of the Howard County Public Transportation Board (PTB), attached is our report on the performance of the Howard County public transportation system and specific recommendations that we believe are required to meet the increasing demand for public transportation options for Howard County.

This report is a product of numerous meetings we have had with individuals and groups from throughout the County, discussions among all our Board members, and input from the Office of Transportation. We focused on improvements that need to be made short-, medium- and long-term and less on the existing performance of the system while not ignoring this requirement.

We and the business community of Howard County believe the creation and staffing of the Office of Transportation and the establishment of the Regional Transportation Agency of Central Maryland [RTA] represents immediate and significant improvements to our transportation operations and the services provided. At the same time, as you will see in our report, there are public transportation improvements required to the existing system along with expansion needs that would vastly improve connectivity and opportunities for Howard County residents to choose options other than the personal automobile for work, shop, education and play. The PTB considers public transportation options to include motorized public transit, pedestrians and bicycle facilities. Every transportation trip begins by foot.

Our County is changing. We are witnessing increased congestion while, at the same time, watching a nation change in driving habits. As more of the baby-boomers become seniors looking for solutions to independent living, with transportation being a critical element to that solution, we are also finding that today's youth, the "Millennials", are shifting away from driving to transit, walking and biking. This shift is more than just temporary; this is a life style change.

In short, to be competitive as well as compassionate, cities and counties are realizing that public transportation needs to be a major component of the infrastructure benefits provided. Public transportation can no longer be the afterthought that it has been historically. You will find in our report that making real and measurable progress depends on enacting changes to existing laws.

Howard County, from a location and financial standpoint, is best positioned to respond to the growing needs and interest in public transportation. It is a fact that our focus on schools, parks,

libraries, etc., drives the selection of Howard County as being one of the best areas in this country to live, year after year after year. To maintain that position, we must find other ways than the personal automobile to provide transportation to work, schools, parks, libraries, shopping, etc.

We believe this report is a start in understanding the improvements and changes that need to be made to meet our public transportation challenges today and tomorrow. All transportation options need to be efficient and effective – and frequent.

At the core is one simple concept: we have to move past providing public transit that only meets the needs of individuals who have limited choices. Transportation needs to be focused first on getting citizens to employment, school, and services on a regional basis, not just within Howard County.

We need to develop a public transportation system that includes improvements as simple as crosswalks to as involved as bus rapid transit as long as it is a viable and attractive alternative to the private car. We need to develop and sustain a public transportation system in the County that encourages its use and is marketed and promoted as “the way to get around”.

For that we will need both conceptual and funding support as well as changes to existing laws and regulations by the County Council and executed by County Administration. We believe your request for this report is an indication that this support currently exists.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide this report and look forward to meeting with you, individually or collectively, to discuss our recommendations and implementation.

Cordially,



Public Transportation Board

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Attachments: Executive Summary, Report to Council, Transportation Priorities Recommendations, Funding Options for Public Transportation Services



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Executive Summary

Background

Pursuant to Howard County Resolution 23-2014, the Howard County Public Transportation Board (PTB) has been tasked to *“study several factors and file a report to the council and the county executive regarding current service standards, route efficiencies and the ability to meet existing demand; options to increase or expand public transportation to meet short-term and long-term demand; funding sources for infrastructure and capital projects to increase peak and off peak frequency during the next five years; and other aspects of service”*.

Transportation is the base of a growing, sustainable economy and way of life. It is a vital piece of infrastructure along with power and water. Howard County seeks to continue growing in an intelligent, sustainable fashion by drawing new jobs and residents – which it must well serve with improved connectivity and transportation. Key to that growth is the need for Howard County to be attractive in what it offers. Across the nation, today’s planning and design show that people want to work and live in places that have strong, convenient mobility options that do not require a car for every trip.

It is also important to note that, in the course of compiling this report, it became clear that the Howard County, and in fact the entire region, does not suffer from a lack of studies. There are volumes of papers and analyses of transportation options. What is lacking is execution. It is important for the County to determine the improvements that it will make, assure they are grounded in sound reasoning and data, but then *to move forward and make change with new services and initiatives that will make the difference*.

In short, transportation, specifically public transportation, needs to become more than just another line in the County’s budget. Transportation must be the basis for decisions such as where and how the County grows, “fills in”, and above all our future quality of life depends on this vital piece of infrastructure. This requires the development and commitment to a mobility plan that lays out goals, specific actions of how to carry them out, and determination of how each will be financed. This is a way to hold our elected officials accountable to accelerate a comprehensive program of mobility options for pedestrians, bicyclists, and improvements/enhancements in public transportation options. These elements are necessary for travel within Howard County and connecting Howard to the major activity centers in the Baltimore-Washington corridor. Howard County remains at the heart of that corridor, and the heart is where all of the arteries and connections come together.

Process

PTB representatives coordinated with Howard County’s Office of Transportation, seeking input and/or meeting with the organizations/groups to discuss short- and long-term transportation needs/strategies among which were:



- Association for Community Services
- Columbia Association
- Howard County Public School System
- Howard Community College
- Howard County Chamber of Commerce
- Howard County Commission on Disability Issues
- Howard County Department of Citizen Services
- Howard County Economic Development Authority
- Transportation Advocates of Howard County

Additionally, PTB representatives have participated and continue to participate in the Howard County Aging Master Plan Advisory Committee in which transportation is recognized as a primary challenge for the County's aging population. Input from the League of Women Voters is via their handbook since this is an extremely busy year for this organization.

Discussions and review have focused on three time periods: short-term (one to two years); medium-term (three to five years); and long-term (five and more years).

Findings

In general, findings are as follows:

1. **We are becoming more urban and more dense.** Howard County continues to evolve from its rural beginnings to a regional jurisdiction with emerging urban densities, philosophies and ways of life. The two economic engines (Baltimore and Washington, DC) continue to influence life throughout central Maryland, especially as it pertains to transportation. As downtown Columbia continues to develop, as higher-density mixed use centers such as Glenwood and Gateway Overlook emerge, as Columbia's village centers modernize, as the average age of the County resident increases, as the price of oil and the need for sustainability increases, and as the County settles into an ever changing environment of life-styles and economic opportunity, connectivity needs to be a primary focus of the County Administration and the County Council. Existing County transportation activities such as *Bike Howard* and *Walk Howard* need to be supported, both philosophically and financially, and implemented sooner rather than continuing studies.
2. **We need to identify funding and expand public transportation options now.** While applauded for the existing levels of public transportation provided by the County, the focus of most discussions involved improvements that are needed immediately. These improvements included, but are not limited to: more direct and frequent transit service, more and connected sidewalks, more bus shelters, and more crosswalks (which include pedestrian activated signalized crossings), routes that transport people from home to work and/or school. Discussed, were new services such as routes between Columbia and Fort Meade/NSA and increased levels of transit services to and from Columbia, Baltimore and



Washington, DC. Beyond any review of new, additional services, it is equally important to recognize that funding and commitment is essential to obtaining these specific improvements and services.

3. **We need to firmly link land use and transportation decisions.** Although expressed in a variety of ways, a constant theme emerging from all the meetings was the need to create legislation to update and strengthen transportation requirements in the *Sub-Division/Land Development Regulations* and *Design Manual, Roads & Bridges* to establish the “Complete Streets” policy for the County. Such regulations and policies will ensure that county planners, engineers, and developers will have to plan/design roads and projects that equally consider and support bicyclists, public transportation and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.
4. **We need to establish a sensible set of policies and standards to guide the expansion of our public transportation network and all of its components.** A need for the development of public transit service standards for existing and new bus service that include, but are not limited to, levels of service/frequency, routing, establishment and location of bus stops, etc. Most of the fixed-route transit services operating in Howard County were established 30 years or more ago. Due to population growth and changes in traffic patterns some are not as efficient nor effective as they could or should be. Because Howard County’s public transit operates without set service standards, making modifications to existing routes becomes a singularly political activity. Establishing levels of service standards could make this an administrative rather than political process. This is no less true when increases to transit are proposed or new routes are planned and designed.

The issues surrounding transportation have, for many years, been a major concern across the region. In virtually every meeting with individuals and/or organizations, people rate transportation as the number one issue that needs to be addressed. At the same time transportation activities statewide, especially public transit services, continue to be minimized – they are not commensurate with the public imperative!

Howard County has two rapidly growing groups, among others, that must be addressed, seniors and the foreign born. The senior population growth is clear in projections and evident in the great increase in the development of senior housing options. As the County develops strategies to help meet the needs of this growing market segment, public transportation is a vital part of this planning. At the same time, it is important to include in transportation planning the 20% of our residents [65,000] who are foreign born. Planning for the foreign born must include their high usage of public transit, 50%, and cultural sensitivity to their needs. The County must ensure that good, frequent, reliable transportation is accessible to these groups. Reliable, efficient and effective modes of transit services will allow seniors to remain independent, active and connected as they continue to enjoy the County as a passenger rather than as a driver. At the same time, this will support the foreign born who already utilize public transportation.



“It is simply not possible to build our way out of congestion...” said a former Maryland Secretary of Transportation. Continuing along this path will only magnify the negative impacts on the environment, health, attractiveness and overall quality of life in Howard County and the state. While transportation activities need to be balanced, a shift from the “car first” mentality is required. New developments, new roads, maintenance, and operation of existing facilities must include improvements that *move people instead of cars*.

Transportation issues facing the county must be addressed proactively and aggressively with an up-to-date, progressive and locally based approach that focuses on high-quality connections and transportation improvements to create truly effective connectivity. Such an approach will keep Howard County economically vibrant while, at the same time, building a healthy community.

“Moving people instead of cars” is a slogan that needs to be embraced as a commitment, a motivator, a planning goal and the framework for funding and action.

Conclusion

The adoption of legislation, service standards, and other formal actions must be coupled with a change in mindset by Howard County leaders and County staff that will lead to rapid implementation.

Proposing and building sidewalks, paths, pedestrian activated crosswalks, bike lanes, and other facilities that improve conditions and safety for pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders, will continue to be difficult to implement until the impact on car traffic is not the primary consideration used by county leaders and staff to approve a project. There must be the acceptance that a change in mindset is necessary and must be enacted into law as a required element of total transportation infrastructure.

The cost for new road construction needs to be balanced with the ongoing operating cost of public transportation where dedicated lanes and services such as express buses, and the incorporation of bus rapid transit [BRT] can increase the capacity of our existing highway investment. It is far less expensive to offer improved high-capacity bus service than it is to build new lanes.

Building parking facilities to enable residents to access commuter services must be balanced with the benefits of reduced traffic and pollution. Multi-modal transportation must be adopted that does not place the car at the top, but lower in ranking of importance.

Multi-modal means must be built to access commuter and local transit services, including car parking, bicycle parking and improved pedestrian access and shelters.

Transportation will increasingly drive our future quality of life and so must be the basis for decisions such as where and how the County grows and “fills in”.



It is important to understand that this burden for improvement is not to be solely on the shoulders of the Howard County government. The County has many potential partners including its neighboring counties, the Maryland Department of Transportation, developers, the business community, and numerous other organizations – public, private, and non-profit – with resources to create a transportation whole that is far greater than the sum of its parts. It is not all about money. It is also about coordination, communication, and to some extent, more logical effective deployment of the resources already at play. Moreover, the need to communicate and market to Howard County residents and employees is also critical. Today, underutilized transportation services exist, simply because there is no effort or minimal effort to market them to the public.

Marketing and public relations must be developed and continually employed to ensure a positive, proactive image of transportation is created and maintained.

Howard County is in the position, both philosophically and financially, to take a leadership role in addressing transportation on a local and regional basis. Through support provided to and by the Council, County Administration, the Public Transportation Board, and the Office of Transportation, the pieces are in place to move forward in this leadership role.

As Howard County moves forward, let's make sure public transportation keeps in step with the movement!



Public Transportation Board Report to Howard County Council

1. Purpose

Howard County Council Resolution 23-2014 requires the Howard County Transportation Board to do the following:

“...study several factors and file a report to the council and the county executive regarding current service standards, route efficiencies and the ability to meet existing demand; options to increase or expand public transportation to meet short-term and long-term demand; funding sources for infrastructure and capital projects to increase peak and off peak frequency during the next five years; and other aspects of service.”

The resolution goes on to note the nearly 1 million passengers that took advantage of the Howard County public transportation system last year. It also notes the various new circumstances including the growth and development of a denser downtown Columbia and the redevelopment of the Wilde Lake Village Center.” It also quotes the General Plan which called for the County to “enhance the accessibility and quality of existing and future transit services.”

The Board is pleased to submit our report. It is based on the following:

- Review of the numerous documents that have already been compiled looking at all aspects of non-highway mobility in Howard County
- Discussions with key constituency groups regarding their views of current obstacles and needed improvements
- Discussions among us at our Board meetings and retreats including our own perspectives as well as the perspective based on various presentations that have been made before the Board during the past year

2. Setting the Stage

Howard County presents an embarrassment of riches. It has one of the nation’s best school systems. It has a range of housing from affordable to very high end. It has the start of some urban density and reserved open space that will remain for generations. It has a good highway system and is able to attract both residents and employers. It has a growing night life and array of cultural activities. At the same time, Howard County is caught between its rural roots and parts of the county which remain rural and escalating suburban development with emerging urban densities.

With respect to transportation, Howard County has all of the basic elements with some strength and some weaknesses.



- **Sidewalks.** Sidewalks are good in some parts of Columbia, Ellicott City, Maple Lawn, and selected other places. However, even in these locations, they are often inconsistent – sidewalks on one side of an intersection with no corresponding sidewalk on the other, missing segments, narrow, etc. In other places, they are missing entirely.
- **Bicycle Trails.** The bicycle trail network is good and growing. However, questions need to be asked as to whether it is truly in the right place to encourage people to make short trips by bike instead of car. Is it currently possible to commute to work in Howard County by bicycle safely and efficiently? More needs to be done to ensure bicycling is a good transportation option both off-road on trails and on-road with bicycle lanes as well.
- **Public Transit.** Public transit options are hit and miss. Public transit within the County remains a service largely serving people who have no alternative, making it all the more important. This is less true for public transit connecting to locations outside of Howard County. Reasonably good rush hour connections to Washington and Baltimore exist but there are few options outside of the traditional peak periods and to other activity centers in the region at any time. There are many public transit components in and around Howard County, but there is currently little coordination and certainly no consistent marketing. It is hoped that the launch of the RTA will be much need coordination and that with it will come good, consistent marketing.

As our recommendations are being reviewed, they need to be considered in a context of important circumstances and trends that are emerging. Some of the major ones are:

- **One megalopolis.** Baltimore and Washington are rapidly integrating into one region. Increasingly people work in one and live in another or in-between. Howard County is the epicenter.
- **New denser forms of development.** New forms of development, usually moving towards clustered nodes of higher density are appearing. Downtown Columbia, Maple Lawn, and North Laurel are examples. These places are more pedestrian oriented – and for the first time – may even offer the option of living without an automobile or no more than one.
- **Aging population.** People are living longer and healthier. They will need new, additional options for their life styles which will be more active than the previous generations; but they will require more mobility options.

It is also important to note the unique needs of the varying and growing constituent groups that are part of Howard County. These include:

- Immigrants with limited language skills
- Senior citizens
- Students
- People with disabilities



Make no mistake about it. Improved transportation options makes things better for everyone. Nevertheless, specific consideration also needs to be given to groups with unique needs whose participation in all aspects of Howard County life will benefit everyone.

Moreover, it is important to recognize the place that good transportation occupies in attracting economic development to Howard County and strengthening the tax base. Many economic studies note that transportation is a major factor in the decisions people make as to where to live, where to work, and where to locate their companies. Transportation investment in Howard County will always be a win-win situation and the purpose of this report is to lay out a map.

Finally, it is important to lay out the Howard County Public Transportation Board's view of what this report is and what this report is not. It is a set of guidelines to making the entire non-automobile transportation network attract more people through increasing the options, expanding services, providing connections, and communicating what is available. It is not a detailed planning report which gets into the details of specific bus routes and schedules.

It is also important to express our perspective that non-automobile modes like transit, bicycles, and walking need to be attractive, encouraged, and marketed. We start with the notion that public transportation is a good thing for everyone. What we need in Howard County is not just more mobility options for people who have no access to an automobile. Certainly, it is important that this segment of the population is well-served. But, it is also important to find ways to move people – regardless of where in the county they work, live, or travel to – by modes other than the single-occupancy automobile. That is good for all of us.

That is the premise for this report.

3. Existing Data Base

We reviewed many of the existing reports as background.

4. Initiatives

a. Land Use Planning

The relationship between transportation and land use has been integral since the earliest streetcar suburbs grew out of central cities and the Interstate highway system created miles and miles of suburbs and exurbs around every major cities, often robbing downtowns of their residents, their jobs, and their lives.

We know better today.

Transportation and land use offer a chicken-or-egg opportunity. Which leads which? Much of our recent history is about transportation trying to chase development. And it



rarely captures it. We are not proposing to extend bus lines into fields of daisies and hope development will come. But we are proposing that we avoid putting development like senior housing and major office centers in fields of daisies without any hope of ever getting bus transportation at the door.

This needs to happen through the land use process. Howard County has a sophisticated land use planning and development approval process. It is weak in that comments from the Office of Transportation often come in too late to be meaningful.

As a result, we propose these actions:

- Seek comment on all land use proposals and development permits from the Office of Transportation at the earliest possible point. Comment should include but not be limited to:
 - The need presented by the proposal for non-automobile transportation options including
 - Physical improvements required including sidewalks, bus stops, shelters, etc.
- Create a ***Transportation Impact Statement*** for each development proposal that not only projects the impact on the road and highway network but on the existing bus system and paratransit system. The Statement should include the estimation of costs for these improvements.
- Based on the above, require all new development proposals to include a connectivity plan, identifying required connections to the existing street and sidewalk network with new sidewalks, bicycle amenities, transit provisions, and crosswalks.
- Require developer financial contributions to non-highway transportation improvements including bus stops, bus stop pads, shelters, signage, and additional buses.
- If at all possible, require commercial development to be oriented towards the street so that transit service is more efficient and pedestrian mobility is enhanced. This is particularly important for development that is proposed along existing or planned transit routes.

b. Pedestrian

Howard County is rapidly creating a pedestrian friendly environment. Some of the more urban settings in Columbia and downtown Ellicott City have good sidewalk connections and, increasingly, sidewalks can be found along some of the higher-capacity traffic routes like Routes 1 and 40. Additionally, the County's extensive network of trails and paths further enhance foot traffic to share the way with bicyclists.



Placing priority on pedestrian movement makes sense for many reasons. With good sidewalks and connections, we can reduce short automobile trips. People can walk to their destination or, in some areas, leave their car in one location to visit multiple places. Additionally, all transit users are pedestrians in some form. They need to get to bus stops from their origins and to their destinations. And those who use the private automobile must walk from their parking to their destination.

Sidewalks enhance safety. Where sidewalks do not exist, pedestrians often must walk along the shoulders of roads or even in the moving lanes. Along with sidewalks, street and highway crossing zones are important, as well. Safe, protected spaces for walkers to cross the street, tied into traffic signals where they exist, make walking safer and attractive.

Health remains another factor. Howard County has been a leader in various health initiatives for its citizens. Current urban planning theories suggest that pedestrian movement be given priority over motorized travel. The purpose is to offer incentives to people to reduce sedentary lifestyles by making walking safe, fun, and a direct way to get somewhere. The result is to encourage people to set out on foot and leave the car behind. This has particular applicability in the redesign of Columbia's downtown where parking will be less plentiful and development is aimed at a more human scale of mobility. Further, vast amounts of land devoted to vehicle parking are wasteful and interferes with more productive forms of community and economic development.

There have been various sidewalk assessments in Howard County. All of this argues for a continued emphasis on adding sidewalks and walking zones, not only in the more urban areas such as downtown Columbia and Ellicott City but in the Route 1 and Route 40 corridors, as well as selectively where development clusters of residential, office, and retail development is occurring. Attention should be paid to locations where sidewalk segments are missing and can connect existing routes as well as to safe crossing zones, traffic signals with cycles that allow pedestrians to cross, and curb cuts – especially when one exists on one side of the street and not on the other.

Efforts must be made to create a comprehensive sidewalk network in Columbia that allows people to walk as much as possible as part of their daily lives.

As a result, we propose these actions:

- Establish a hierarchy of criteria to govern decisions on proposing and constructing sidewalks and sidewalk segments.
- Update the *Pedestrian Master Plan* and design manuals using the above criteria. Update the existing sidewalk survey with particular attention to missing segments and crossing zones and stronger overall requirements for sidewalks and widths.
- Enforce laws requiring vehicles to yield to pedestrians and enforce with patrol cars and key locations during high-traffic times.



- Develop an action plan to execute the sidewalk survey to assure that a component of proposed sidewalk connections is constructed each year in priority order.
- Add benchmarks to the *Pedestrian Master Plan* to track progress.
- Develop and carry out program of pathfinder signs throughout the County, resulting in attractive signs pointing the way to key destinations including distance to get there. Include local area street maps at key sidewalk locations, as well.
- Adopt a “Complete Streets” policy and amend county development regulations to implement this policy.
- Along with snow clearance along roads, County and CA services should pay attention to sidewalk, pathway, and crossing zones to assure they are also free of snow and ice. Similarly, the County should enforce laws requiring property owners to clear sidewalks within 24 hours after a storm.
- Expand and build direct, safe, and convenient sidewalk connections between major activity centers in Howard County such as between Howard County General Hospital and Howard County Community College and between Ellicott City and County office buildings and courthouses.

c. Bicycle

The Howard County *Bicycle Master Plan* has as its vision, “Howard County, Maryland, seeks to be a bicycle-friendly County where residents and visitors, schoolchildren and seniors, men and women feel comfortable and safe bicycling on our roads and trails as a means of daily transportation and healthy recreation.”

This current plan calls for short/medium/long range plans going out 10-20-30 years. The County should aim a lot higher. The plan should be for up to 5-10-15 years - half the time line in the current plan. When if not now? There should be some short-term, highly visible projects and at least some of these should improve cycling in these high impact areas:

- Columbia Town Center area and its connectivity to adjacent areas - this in addition to and synergistic with the Howard Hughes required multi-use pathway
- Ellicott City’s dense core
- Close to the seat of County Government, where unfortunately, many of the improvements are in the 20-30 year time line – the County should be leading, not be the tail end.

Colored bike lanes bring many advantages. Documentation suggests that bicyclists and motorists have a positive impression of colored bike lanes, and research shows they improve safety. These lanes can easily be done with any road changes and are not “long range” in implementation. They are highly visible and will bring applause from County residents as well as transportation advocates.



In some locations, cycling conditions are degrading. Increasing traffic volumes due to development on rural narrow two-lane roads without shoulders in the western part of the County are making them less compatible with their rural character and less useful for bicyclists and pedestrians. When development changes the rural, scenic, cultural and historic character of the road, the road should be widened. If the character of the area is changing from scenic farmland to residential development, then the road character must change, too, to support it. Even the limited improvements that have been completed for cyclists have not improved conditions.

While many collector roads and neighborhood streets have good cycling conditions due to low traffic volumes and low speeds, the presence of traffic calming is often not compatible with cycling; narrowing of the road can make simultaneous use by automobile and bicyclists impossible. Roads have been repaved and rebuilt while lanes, striping and other improvements for cyclists are not evident.

The issue of storage and parking for bicycling raises other issues. Howard County should re-evaluate parking requirements where a developer provides upgraded bicycle/pedestrian facilities both on- and off-site that will reduce road trips. They should also get similar "credit" for less road congestion. The County should consider upgrading bicycle parking at MARC stations, park-and ride lots, and transit centers as well as hubs, including bike lids (i.e. individual, on-demand, covered racks). At the Mall, where express buses go to DC and Baltimore, Mall owners may financially support bike parking if it will reduce car parking. Bike storage remains dramatically less expensive than automobile storage.

To ensure the most efficient development of a bicycle-friendly Howard County, policies affecting bicycling in the Zoning Ordinance, the Subdivision and Land Development Regulations, and the Howard County Design Manual should be reviewed and modified as necessary. We have a specific recommendation to include regulatory provisions that require offsite road improvements related to traffic impacts such as shoulders or bike lanes for up to 0.1-0.2 of a mile in each direction from the development property boundary on entrance frontage. Areas that undergo major development by multiple public and private entities should have their own bicycle/pedestrian plan and/or design guidelines so they are fully accessible.

The common "Share the Road" sign with a bicycle graphic is vague. Bikes have no choice. In cases where a bike lane on the road is not possible, it is possible, as is done in some European cities, to separately identify the bike and pedestrian portions of the sidewalk.

d. Intra-Howard County Transit

Howard County has demonstrated a strong commitment to public transit within the County and the network has come a very long way over the past few years. Bus routes have been expanded and frequencies are starting to be increased. At the same time, signage has improved, shelters have been placed in strategic locations, and electronic



information is more readily available. More recently, the establishment of an Office of Transportation and its separation from Planning & Zoning Department has helped to drive these advancements. The creation of the Regional Transit Agency, although in its infancy, will build upon and strengthen these enhancements; its next step is to become an “authority” which offers many advantages especially in funding flow.

But, in public transportation, giving people an inch may mean they will want to take a mile. As the network grows, people can make use of new and expanded services and will, inevitably, rightfully, and hopefully want more. Public transit today in Howard County, despite its vast improvement over the last decade, still needs to go much further to keep up with the demands of our citizens. In general, routes need to be assessed to assure they respond to today’s travel patterns and frequencies need to be increased to be more convenient. At the same time, there is much to do in getting out information to people and publicizing the service to residents, employees, and visitors. If residents do not even know what services exist today, it is the same as not having those services at all.

The County transit network needs to be viewed in a holistic sense. Today, there are fixed-route bus options; and there are paratransit options (generally restricted to a specific segment of the population. But there are also taxis and shuttles (often run privately by employers or hotels). The challenge is to create a comprehensive network that results in a sum that is bigger than the sum of the parts. In the end, it should not matter to the passenger what mode they take, as long as it arrives when it says it does and gets them to their destinations in the most efficient manner. This may take a little envelope-pushing and a trip outside the box, ***but where else can there be transportation innovation if not in Howard County?***

Fixed-route buses can be freed from traveling unproductive miles to pick up a small number of people. If fixed-route buses can remain on trunk routes and major thoroughfares, on-demand vans and even taxis can be used to feed people to those routes, with transfers made conveniently. GPS technology with sharp dispatch and communications solutions can make all of this possible.

The other challenge for public transportation in Howard County should be to serve people who may have options. The predominant rider profile today is an individual who does not have access to an automobile or who is unable to use one because of a disability. This remains a critical need for Howard County because our quality of life and economic development depends on people who can get to jobs, health care, services, and education to take advantage of all that society offers as well as take part in a full range of social activity. This is how people at lower levels of income will enhance their economic position, how senior citizens and people with disabilities will live full lives, and how immigrants can integrate and prosper in American society. Public transportation must serve these individuals well.

At the same time, Howard County’s transit network must become a viable mobility option for people who do have cars. The system must grow and become convenient



enough so that people will leave their cars at home and take the bus to the important places they go every day. Howard County will never be New

York or Washington, but it can be a model for other suburban and rural areas to see how public transportation can play a meaningful role, reducing congestion, reducing fuel consumption, cleaning up our environment, supporting economic development, and making this an even better place to live and do business.

As a result, we propose these actions:

- Accelerate the erection of bus shelters, benches, and safe waiting areas in the right locations
- Require sidewalk connections to every bus stop where possible
- Equip shelters and major bus stops with signage indicating where buses go, timetables, how to ride information, and maps
- Continue the existing effort to review the entire Howard County bus network to make routes for efficient, productive, and convenient, trading new service for routes and diversions that no longer make sense
- Establish an action plan for route and frequency changes, in a priority order, with a commitment to programming, funding, and executing one component each year
- Current buses running from northern Montgomery County, along the ICC, and through Howard County to BWI should establish two to three stops in Howard County. This needs to be carefully planned where sufficient parking exists but there is a great need to make better use of these bus lines which have significant wasted capacity.
- Improve connections to regional services with timed transfers and improved information. This should include connections to nearby MARC stations, MTA commuter bus lines, and bus services in adjoining counties.
- Evaluate the need and feasibility for express services between East and West Columbia, major County centers including Ellicott City, Laurel, Maple Lawn, and Columbia, and to BWI.
- Review allowing flag stops along segments of routes where it is safe and will not interfere with schedules. Strict parameters should accompany any introduction of flag stop service.
- Review and make changes in the current fare collection system. Pay particular attention to more electronic means for payment (cell phone, etc.), locations to buy fare media, integration with regional fare systems including MTA and WMATA smart cards, and MARC tickets.
- Inventory all forms of shared ride services in Howard County. This should include not only existing bus and paratransit services but also taxi operations, shuttle companies, privately provided shuttles from hotels, employers, and residential communities as well as van services offered by Howard County Community College, health care facilities, and any county-run transportation. The purpose is then to look for efficiencies and ways to provide feeder service to existing trunk bus lines (local and commuter) as well as find opportunities for



coordination that will service more people efficiently. For instance, what if taxis were contracted to provide shared-ride service in areas that cannot support bus transportation.

e. Regional Transit

Howard County sits in the bull's-eye of two of America's largest cities in a region that is rapidly becoming one metropolitan area. Studies show that Howard County residents who work outside of the County are nearly evenly split between travel to the Washington area and the Baltimore area. Similarly, there are significant levels of travel from Howard County east to Annapolis and Anne Arundel County as well as

west/north into Carroll County. The military base realignment initiative has relocated thousands of jobs to Ft. Meade, adding trips to our roads from as far away as Virginia. As the region continues to become one, people need to travel, not only for jobs, but for health care, education, recreation, shopping, and for various other services to adjoining counties as well as into DC and Baltimore.

Today, there are various components to a regional public transit network. MARC trains running between Baltimore and DC just skirt Howard County with a second line not far away. Commuter buses connect Columbia and other portions of Howard County with downtown Washington and Baltimore. Buses running from Gaithersburg and northern Montgomery County go to BWI, traveling through Howard County regularly but do not stop.

In other words the building blocks of convenient regional transportation system exist. The problem is there is little or no coordination among these elements compounded by little easily accessible information or marketing that these services are even present.

As a result, we propose these actions:

- Expand the existing commuter bus network to add trips between rush hours, later evening, and weekend service. At minimum, service from major activity centers to Baltimore and Washington should be available on an hourly basis seven days a week between 6 am and midnight.
- Under the aegis of the RTA, planning should be initiated between Howard County and adjoining counties (Anne Arundel, Prince Georges', Montgomery, Carroll) to phase in inter-county bus routes over the next five years.
- Fast, express of limited stop bus service should be available between Howard County and major destinations within the region including:
 - BWI
 - Train stations at BWI, Odenton, and Savage,
 - Washington Metro stations at Silver Spring and Greenbelt
 - Annapolis
 - Bethesda



- Rockville/Shady Grove
 - Ft. Meade
 - MTA light rail station
- Planning must begin to create a bus rapid transit [BRT] line along Rt. 29 starting in Ellicott City and connecting with the system planned by Montgomery County to Silver Spring. In coordination with Montgomery County, a funding plan and timetable for bringing segments into service should be established.
- Initiate planning for a rail connection into Howard County from the MARC Camden Line and/or the Baltimore light rail system.
- Similar to what is noted above, coordinate fare payment and fare structures with the use of Washington Metro and/or Baltimore MTA smart card instruments.

f. Marketing and Communication

While the term “marketing” is often associated with the promotion of products and services provided by the private sector, there is a great need to dramatically increase the level of available information and market the Howard County’s public transit options. Today, most residents, other than those who must use the transit system are not aware that there are options to make trips without a car – whether within Howard County and/or regionally. Marketing and communications can rely on traditional venues such as print advertising and posters in strategic locations as well as the dizzying array of electronic modes with the capability of getting individualized travel information to virtually anyone who has a mobile phone or a computer.

As a result, we propose these actions:

- Develop and print a “non-highway” map for Howard County and the region showing all bike paths, bike lanes, major pedestrian connections, and all transit lines
- Develop promotions encouraging people to “try transit” for free or at reduced rates for temporary periods
- Place electronic signs at all park-and-ride lots with bus service, indicating the times the next bus leaves the lot and where it goes.
- Create a mobile phone app able to give electronic trip planning information for travel without a car within Howard County and the region.



Transportation Priorities Recommendations

SHORT TERM – Present to Two years (with many ongoing)

Planning

- Create process to require Office of Transportation review and approval of all plans relating to land development, use and/or subdivisions including re-development to assure sufficient mobility options
- Continue to secure grants for bicycle and pedestrian projects
- Explore opportunities for grants from government and other sources to supplement existing transportation programs
- Establish priority for all projects in the Pedestrian Master Plan and Bicycle Master Plan and create annual element for construction
- Finalize site, design downtown Columbia Transportation Center/Multimodal Center
- Identify appropriate locations for pedestrian-activated crosswalk signals
- Program annual execution of the segments; establish and implement “Service Standards” which include but are not restricted to:
 - ✓ Demand
 - ✓ Density, development clusters
 - ✓ Walking standards to bus stops (distance, pedestrian safety, etc.)
 - ✓ Bus stop and shelter locations including -ADA compliant bus stops, shelters at high activity stops
 - ✓ Location of senior activities and housing vis-à-vis public transit
 - ✓ Requirements for bicycle racks/lockers
 - ✓ School, hospital, library, and other institutional access
- Finalize BRT [Bus Rapid Transit] feasibility review
- Complete revisions and enact into law *Subdivision/Land Development Regulations*
- Revise and enact into law Howard County *Design Manual, Roads & Bridges, Vol. III*
- Establish regulations for “Complete Streets” which will result from the legal changes to *Subdivision/Land Development Regulations* and *Design Manual, Roads & Bridges, Vol. III*



Bicycle and Pedestrian

- Construct annual elements in priority order of Pedestrian Master Plan and Bicycle Master Plan within increased and realistic budget allowances
- Execute pedestrian-activated crosswalk signals at priority locations
- Include bike lockers and/or racks at all Park & Ride locations and at accessible, major, busy bus stops, as well as at major parking lots and garages
- All roadway maintenance, restriping, and snow clearing should improve conditions for walking and cycling to equal that provided for automobiles

Expanded Existing and New Transit Service

- Based on service standards and demand developed above, review existing service and opportunities for more frequent, additional, expanded, and new service to include:
 - ✓ Existing East and West Columbia, Columbia Gateway, Ellicott City, Savage, Route 1, South Laurel service
 - ✓ Existing connections to Anne Arundel County, Laurel
 - ✓ Existing and planned major employment centers
 - ✓ Create Howard County stops for Gaithersburg-ICC-BWI bus service which runs through County but does not stop
 - ✓ Downtown Columbia shuttle to include Mall, Hospital, and HCC at :10 [ten minute] frequency
 - ✓ Additional weekend and later evening service
 - ✓ New service for Applied Physics Lab, Maple Lawn, Ft. Meade, MARC Savage, MARC Odenton
 - ✓ Mid-day, evening and weekend commuter bus service to Silver Spring Metro and Baltimore using RTA buses supplementing MTA service
 - ✓ Additional regional service to include Annapolis
 - ✓ Expand service throughout/across Howard County and region via RTA, express buses
 - ✓ Implement express RTA service [Baltimore/Washington/Ft. Meade/Annapolis]
- Construct downtown Columbia Transportation/Multimodal Center

Information and Marketing

- Increase fare media sites
- Institute aggressive marketing to continually inform residents and employees about existing and planned transportation options with County and MTA financial support



- Create course module for public schools creating awareness and instructing students in how to use public transportation as life preparation. The module should have components for all grade levels.

MEDIUM TERM – Two to Four Years (with many on-going)

- Establish Village-to-Village shuttles with CA/in conjunction with CA
- Establish appropriate service to connect to planned County centralized service center
- Convert to automated next-generation fare collection for transportation
- Study the establishment and construction of transportation centers in Gateway, Maple Lawn, Odenton, Clarksville, Savage
- Implement regional express lanes and dedicated bus lanes to ensure commuters use transit buses that do not sit in the same traffic that they would if they were driving
- Institute Bus Rapid Transit Service on Route 29 integrated with Montgomery County BRT service, ensuring that the BRT is faster than a car by providing specific BRT lanes

LONG TERM – Five+ Years

- Connect Columbia and Howard County to Baltimore via “light rail” and Washington Metrorail
- Extend MARC service into Columbia using CSX line spur into Gateway



Easy Possibilities – Quick & Visible Opportunities

While this report includes justification and recommendations for increasing the focus on public transportation activities throughout Howard County, the Howard County Public Transportation Board understands that funding for many of these activities will require support from both the County Council and the County Executive. In addition, funding for these activities needs to be available. While we believe that there is a strong rationale for increasing public transportation funding, we recognize that there are always competing departments with similar beliefs.

Recognizing the above, the Howard County Public Transportation Board encourages the County to focus on quick and visible projects that can easily be done while efforts to meet the more costly recommendations are made.

While not suggesting that such opportunities are limited, an excellent example involves road paving. Over the last few years, the County has invested time and funding to support *Bike Howard*, the plan to increase bicycling opportunities throughout the County. Currently, the County is developing similar plans for pedestrians, *Walk Howard*. While in its infancy, this project will complement the *Bike Howard* effort and both, together, will focus on improving connectivity and support the first mile and last mile of many trips.

When the County is paving for repair or improvement, bicycle and pedestrian lanes should be mandated. This is the perfect example of a quick and visible opportunity that will show citizens the commitment of the County Council to inter-modal transportation. The incremental cost of adding a bicycle and pedestrian lane, if nothing more than a symbol on the pavement, is minimal. For example, it may be as quick and simple as the striping on the road is located 12 feet apart instead of 14 feet apart.

This is only one example, but a very effective and appropriate example. There are others. Each has the same potential – to improve public transportation options at minimal expense to the County. To implement all that is needed is expectation from the Executive Branch and the County Council.



Funding Options for Public Transportation Services

Overview

As demand for public transportation increases throughout the country, identifying ways to fund additional services becomes a priority. With the continued financial stress on most (if not all) states, identifying local options for funding public transportation is becoming more prevalent. This plays out in Howard County and across Central Maryland. The support for additional transportation services to respond to traffic congestion, pollution, and quality of life is widespread and strong. And while Maryland is in a much better financial position than most other states in the country, due to its proximity to Washington, DC, funding for public transportation has been level for nearly a decade. Notwithstanding the financial boom experienced by the state through a fuel-tax legislation passed in FY14 for transportation, state funding to support Howard County's transit operation remains consistent with previous years funding.

Funding the recommendations that are included in this Public Transportation Board [PTB] report will either fall directly on Howard County or, through a regional approach, on the various jurisdictions in Central Maryland. There are other options for increasing revenues and funding for public transportation that are discussed below.

Revenue/Funding Options

The following is a summary of options for increasing revenues and funding for public transportation.

- **Fare Increases**

In most urban transit systems, adult fares average \$2 to \$3 per trip or \$50 to \$80 for a monthly pass, with discounted fares for youths, seniors and people with disabilities. It is possible to increase all fares or change price structures, for example, to include higher fares for longer distance trips or for special services such as express commuter buses or light rail.

Transit dependent users and peak period travelers tend to be less price-sensitive than discretionary travelers (people who could travel by automobile) and off-peak travelers. Riders will pay more for motorized transit when they receive increased value from more frequent service and other amenities. Public transit needs to become the convenient travel mode of choice.

The number of passenger trips per day is currently at a relatively low on Howard Transit, and the cost of the service delivery is relatively high (on a per person basis). It should be noted that this is not unusual; public transportation is a labor intensive service and Howard County is not a financially stressed community.



Moreover, most of the Howard Transit routes operate on limited 60 [60 minute] service. Increased frequency will increase ridership.

Public transportation throughout the country, with the exception of the major cities such as New York, must find funding support from options other than solely through the farebox.

- **Employer Subsidies & Business Support**

Howard County employers need to get involved as partners to offer employee subsidies as a work benefit. At the same time, bus routes and stops need to be where people live and where they work. The Howard County Chamber of Commerce represents over 700 business organizations of all sizes in the County, and the Chamber supports this concept. The Office of Transportation and other groups within County government including the PTB need to encourage the business communities to become advocates for convenient, frequent, effective, and efficient public transportation. This can be done through local chambers of commerce.

- **Regional Dedicated Funding/Typical Options (Fuel, Property or Sales)**

Many regional transportation operations rely on funding through various taxes such as fuel, property or sales. In many examples, especially in the most successful, this funding is dedicated to public transportation.

While tax has become a “four-letter word” in connotation, achieving the increases outlined in this report cannot be accomplished through most other revenue or funding options. Whether it is directly through the County or through another funding source, additional funding must be secured to meet the existing and projected transportation demands. To be effective, the additional funding must be *dedicated*.

The most common types of dedicated funding for public transportation are fuel, property or sales taxes. Securing a significant amount of funding would be possible with an almost indiscernible increase in the existing taxes. While increasing the fuel tax may be considered regressive for the lower-income residents, any increases in the property and sales tax might not be as impactful as they would be tied to the value of property and the cost of purchases.

Sales taxes often result in the greatest volatility with fuel following. Property tax would be relatively stable. There are also options for sales taxes that can lessen the impact on lower-income residents. For example, the tax is not included on food purchases. Accounting would be fairly straightforward as fuel, property and sales taxes are already in play in Maryland.



Regional Dedicated Funding/Alternative Options

A number of other regional transportation funding options are found in various jurisdictions including:

- **Vehicle Registration Fee**

Adding fees for larger, heavier or more expensive vehicles should be considered to fund public transportation. By adding a small fee to the registration of each vehicle throughout the region a significant amount of revenue could be achieved. Where vehicle registration fees exist (i.e. Maryland) an additional levy for public transportation in Howard County or Central Maryland is much easier to implement; special accounting will be required as the additional funding would be dedicated to the jurisdiction or region.

- **Utility Fee**

While adding a small fee to utility accounts in the County or region may have value, historically, both surveys and focus group responses have identified this option as having low public acceptance. It had the greatest level of opposition of all options presented. At the same time, it is among the easiest fee to implement as identification of the accounts, and the accounting for the funding, would be very straightforward.

- **Employee Fee (often only larger employers)**

Every discussion of public transportation funding, at some point, includes questions regarding the reluctance of businesses, who primarily benefit from public transportation, to participate financially. By placing a fee on each employee through the employer would create significant funding for public transportation which can be achieved and the employers can receive a tax credit. This type of fee is not regressive as it does not impact any individual. Employers could be exempted if they provide their employees with a transit voucher.

- **Road Tolls**

While an option, this is probably not likely in Howard County or the region as the existing tolls are all located in the City of Baltimore, north along I-95, and on Route 200 connecting Howard and Montgomery counties. At the same time, express bus lanes could be added on I-95 that would give better transportation than the private car, encouraging transit use.

- **Vehicle Travel Fees**

A form of road pricing that charges motorists for each mile traveled. Such fees could vary based on vehicle type (i.e. based on fuel efficiency). As with other taxes and fees that are variable, vehicle travel fees can significantly change. For example, a spike in the cost of



fuel can lead to a significant reduction in the amount of vehicle travel which could lead to a significant reduction in the amount of funding.

- **Establish and/or Increase Parking Fees**

The region is already seeing fees for certain roadway and premium parking. This could be extended gradually to premium parking at HCC, in downtown Columbia as it develops, as well as other potential sites. Although there may be some opposition to parking fees, people will pay for what they value. We need to change the mindset that parking does not have a cost. HCC spends large amounts of funding to build garages that compete with funding for education and public transportation.

- **Parking Space Fee**

An interesting concept, a fee assessed to each of the residents based on the number of parking spaces throughout the County. The potential revenue from such a fee could be significant and the funding would be extremely stable.

- **Transportation Impact Fees**

Also referred to as development cost charges, these are fees for new developments or re-developments to support public transportation. The revenue from developments and re-developments is (1) based on the number of developments and re-developments that are occurring which can fluctuate significantly based on the state of the economy, incentives, etc., and (2) while typically supported by the public such fees are often opposed by developers. Transportation impact fees are one of the more equitable fee options.

- **Land Value Capture Fees**

These are special fees assessed in areas where public transit is provided. This fee can be combined with transportation impact fees and focus on new developments or re-developments. A likely location would be a transit oriented development (TOD), but depending on how the tax is structured, it can be regressive.

Regional Dedicated Funding/Alternative Options

This could be a future option in Howard County as transportation centers or stations are built. The selling of air rights to build over a center/station can produce a steady funding stream. Such air rights fees are relatively stable. Station air rights fees are one of the more equitable fee operations for residents.



Advertising

Recognizing that revenue would be limited, advertising on the buses, on the shelters, in and on the transportation centers/stations (when constructed), on public timetables, and on system maps should be seriously considered.

In Howard County advertising on shelters is currently prohibited. It would require a legislative action on the part of the County Council. However, advertising is permitted in/by cities and counties across the country. It is a source of additional revenue and advertisers pay not only for the ad space, they also purchase and install the shelters. This is significant in light of the great need for more shelters across Howard County.

Conclusion

This report includes recommendations for public transportation service improvements that are an integral element in the overall County transportation system. There is no question that high quality public transportation services can provide various economic, social and environmental benefits, including direct user benefits and various indirect and external benefits.

Implementing transportation improvements requires additional funding. Although some federal and state funding may be available, to improve public transportation in the County and throughout the region to the point that it can make a difference to the discretionary traveler, we will need new sources of revenue.

As part of the report to Howard County – “Rethinking Public Transportation in Central Maryland” – that led to the creation of the Regional Transportation Agency of Central Maryland (RTA) references were made in two reports from the Center for Transportation Excellence (CTE) indicating that even in today’s economic climate, over 75% of the ballot measures to increase funding for public transportation succeeded. Although referring to years 2010 and 2011, the results have not changed. In 2013, of 15 ballot measures, 11 passed in support of public transportation funding, 73.3%!

The key to achieving dedicated funding is outlined in several reports, including one from the CTE. In general, they require a solid plan (i.e. where will transportation improvements occur, down to the street and bus stop level), political will, strong outreach, and a single voice. While there were many reasons for the creation of the RTA, none were as important as the last requirement -- establishing a single voice.

Once the Commission, the group of appointed representatives from each of the participating jurisdictions in the RTA, begins to meet and create a presence, the single voice will be achieved and the opportunities for securing dedicated funding will be maximized.

The various options included in this section are diverse. However, to truly meet the demands and opportunities for public transportation today and tomorrow, those options that will provide the



greatest amount of consistent revenue should be strongly considered. Additionally, it is important to consider more than one option.

While no one is interested in increasing taxes, the improvements in public transportation services included in this report cannot be achieved through today's funding, at least not without a monumental increase in funding from Howard County government. Without dedicated funding, even an increase through Howard County would be subject to the interests and desires of the County administration and the County Council -- both which could change budgets radically based on revenues and interests.

Finally, it is extremely important to understand how insignificant any tax or fee increases would be on County residents while at the same time having a huge impact on the County's public transportation operations. Most regions in the country, for example, might implement a \$ 0.01 tax per gallon which, for a standard fill-up, is \$0.15. Yet that \$0.01 tax brings in millions of dollars that improves fleets, increases transit services such as frequency, helps build bus rapid transit lines/stations, etc.

As interest in the recommendations in this report increases, the need to identify funding sources will occur. At that time, the benefits of any of the options can be developed and should be included as the high point in developing/marketing the funding options. Until then, a basic premise must be understood: only through dedicated funding sources can the improvements specified in this report be achieved.