

INTERSECT

NEWSLETTER

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COMPUTER ASSISTANCE WANTED

WRN is seeking a volunteer who can trouble shoot a donated computer's software loading problems. Please call Deborah Katz at (202) 667-5445 or email debkatz@megsinet.net.

WRN FORUM: SMART GROWTH AND HOUSING – AFFORDABLE ONLY TO THE WEALTHY?

With Dr. Margery Austin Turner of the Urban Institute. Wednesday, December 6th, 6:30 - 8:30 pm. See Calendar section for details.

ELEVENTH HOUR OUTER BELTWAY PUSH YIELDS POSITIVE ALTERNATIVE

At the November 15th Transportation Planning Board (TPB) meeting, the region's elected officials moved to assert more leadership in regional transportation studies that consider land use as part of transportation planning. Resisting pressure by the Greater Washington Board of Trade to focus on a single highway, the TPB embraced a more comprehensive look at transportation and land use problems.

While the Board of Trade asked the TPB to delete references to transportation planning that considered local land use plans, the TPB unanimously approved the resolution offered by Maryland representatives after reaching consensus with Virginia members during a work session prior to the Board meeting. This resolution will amend the 2000 Constrained Long Range Plan adopted at the October 18th meeting, and the TPB's technical

committee will lead the study.

The new study will “evaluate alternative options to improve mobility and accessibility between and among regional activity centers and the regional core.” While this study will examine “additional highway and transit circumferential facilities,” it will do so in the context of considering adopted land use plans, travel demand management strategies, primary and secondary impacts to land use, established communities, open space, transit ridership, economic impacts on the core, and vehicle miles traveled.

The local media and the Board of Trade, however, have incorrectly characterized the TPB resolution as a study of a new highway crossing north of the American Legion Bridge to the exclusion of all else. Despite this characterization, WRN and other smart growth advocates view the study as an opportunity to examine strategies for promoting transit-oriented development and reducing vehicle miles travelled, particularly in the Beltway corridor where rail transit offers more hope for relieving traffic congestion in the long run than new highways. At the public comment period on November 15th, WRN President Cheryl Cort suggested that the TPB look into replicating innovative regional land use and transportation studies such as Envision Utah for the Salt Lake City area and the LUTRAQ analysis for Portland, Oregon. See <http://www.envisionutah.org/> and <http://www.friends.org/resources/lutraq.html>.

WALKING AND BICYCLING GET UNPRECEDENTED BOOST IN MARYLAND AND D.C.

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FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

WRN advocates transportation investments, land use policies, and community designs that enhance existing communities and the environment of the National Capital Region.

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Comments and articles welcome.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of WRN.

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As a result of legislation approved by the 2000 General Assembly, Maryland recently appointed its first high-level bicycle and pedestrian director, who reports directly to state Secretary of Transportation John Porcari. This is the highest level bicycle/pedestrian position in the country. And in the District, at a November 2nd address at the National Building Museum, Mayor Anthony Williams laid out a comprehensive plan to improve the environment for bicyclists in the District. Among his priorities are ensuring that the Metropolitan Branch Trail, a major bicycle/pedestrian trail running north and south on the east side of town, is properly incorporated into the design of the future New York Avenue Metrorail station. He also expressed support for a trial of non-rush-hour car-free zones on upper Beach Drive in Rock Creek Park on weekdays. He announced the creation of a city bicycle planner position, one of the main goals of which will be to update the city's outdated and poorly implemented bicycle plan. His goals to stripe at least 10 miles of bike lanes per year, to repave the District's badly deteriorated streets, and to install at least 100 bike racks per year also give bike and alternative transportation advocates reason to cheer. You can thank Mayor Williams by writing mayor@dcgov.org.

THE MERITS OF MAGLEV DEBATED AT WRN'S OCTOBER FORUM

BY DEBORAH KATZ, WRN COORDINATOR

The pros and cons of building Maglev (Magnetic Levitation high speed rail) between Washington, D.C. and downtown Baltimore were debated at a lively WRN forum on October 2. Speakers Phyllis Wilkins of Maglev Maryland and Jamie Kendrick, Transportation Coordinator for the Citizens Housing and Planning Association, provided an informed discussion of what the region could lose or gain by investing in Maglev.

Wilkins began with the benefits of a Maglev line, which include attracting tourism, conventions, and high-tech jobs to the region. Also, Wilkins said that the speed of the trip (16 minutes one-way) would attract drivers off the roads and thus help relieve traffic congestion. Project planners are studying the possibility of using Maglev to move freight, reducing truck traffic on roads. The line is intended to be part of a larger project linking cities along

the East Coast, thus further helping to relieve congestion on interstate highways and, perhaps more important, redirect demand for air travel. Maglev has lower maintenance costs than other high speed rail technology, Wilkins said.

The project is among seven in the country competing for federal funding, with final selection expected in 2003. If the Baltimore-Washington project is chosen, the plan calls for the train to begin operations in 2010, two years before the 2012 summer Olympics, which the region is bidding to host. According to official studies, ridership is projected at 35,000 people per day, many of whom would be curious tourists. At a one-way ticket price of about \$26, Maglev would be price-competitive with Amtrak's Metroliner service (\$33 one-way) and Amtrak regular service (\$17 one-way). A one-way ticket on MARC, which runs on weekdays only, costs \$5.75. Proponents say that eventually the Maglev line would be self-supporting.

The cost of the project is estimated at \$3 billion to \$3.6 billion, including building parking facilities. Most of the financing would come from issuing \$1.7 billion in bonds. The federal government would provide \$950 million and Maryland state and local governments \$500 million (\$50 million per year for 10 years). Private sector investment in station retail components and station area development are anticipated to generate another \$533 million.

Mr. Kendrick acknowledged some of the other benefits, which include construction and development jobs around the stations, neighborhood revitalization around Union Station and the station area selected in Baltimore, and the potential for spinoffs in science and technology. However, he expressed three major concerns: cost, ridership, and technology. He stressed that Maryland is already facing a transportation deficit of \$27 billion over the next 20 years. The Maglev study alone is costing Maryland \$3 million this year and \$12 million over the next 5 years. There is a long list of unmet local transportation needs, and Maglev is directly competing with these priorities. He suggested that the estimate for constructing and operating the Maglev line could go up and that Maryland would then have to devote even more money to the project.

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Kendrick questioned the 35,000 passenger projection, noting this number is twice that of current MARC ridership. He asked how many people will be willing to spend \$52 round-trip on Maglev versus \$10.25 on MARC, even with monthly passes at reduced fares? He said that with Baltimore's huge access-to-jobs problem, expanding the local rail and bus transit network should be the State's higher priority. He also questioned Maglev's ability to relieve traffic congestion, noting that in the D.C. region, while the Maglev line might relieve congestion in the I-95 corridor, he didn't see it doing much for the Capital beltway, I-66, or I-270. Kendrick expressed doubt about the time savings with Maglev, saying people will still need to drive to the station and park. He noted MARC is working to reduce its express Baltimore-Washington run time from 41 to 35 minutes.

Kendrick questioned the viability of the Maglev technology, noting that it has been in existence for 30 years but has yet to be implemented commercially. Another audience member commented that we should give Amtrak's high speed rail alternative, Acela, a chance, saying that while there have been delays beginning operation, in the end it would be much less expensive than Maglev (the Acela service increases speed by using rail cars that tilt as they go around curves and by reducing the curve in certain stretches).

A member of the audience reiterated Kendrick's contention that Maglev funding should not compete with local and regional transit service. Rather, the commenter said, with its capacity to whisk passengers from D.C. to New York in an hour, Maglev should compete with airports or other high speed rail projects. This could free up airports for long-distance rather than regional flights. The federal government should provide a much greater share of the funding needed for Maglev, just as it has to build the country's system of highways, canals, and airports. Kendrick agreed, saying he would be more likely to support Maglev if it is part of a larger East Coast system and any operating losses are covered by the federal government.

Kendrick also touched on environmental justice considerations of the project, which include spending the

money on betting connecting minority communities to jobs, housing, and services and the potential that the Maglev track will run through minority communities. Ms. Wilkins responded that project planners are trying to avoid going through communities, which has resulted in a more curvy path and thus the trip is not as short as it could be.

WRN President Cheryl Cort, who facilitated the discussion, urged that Maglev be used to make the surrounding station areas in D.C., BWI Airport, and Baltimore more walkable, pedestrian-friendly and better connected to local rail and bus transit. Station areas should be well-designed, human-scale, and have a mix of uses, including residential, and not include giant parking lots of 6,000 - 8,000 spaces, as is being discussed.

For more information, visit Maglev Maryland's website at <http://www.bwmaglev.com> or contact CPHA at (410) 539-1369 and ask for the white paper, "Considerations on Maglev in the Baltimore-Washington Corridor."

WRN ROUND-UP

WRN would like to express its sincere thanks to retiring Board member Fred Sissine, Mayor of Mt. Rainier, MD. Mayor Sissine brought two important perspectives to the WRN Board: that of a Prince George's County resident and a leader of a small inner-beltway community working to revitalize itself. At the same time, we welcome three new Board members. Janet Welsh Brown, a District resident, is a former senior associate at the World Resources Institute and former executive director of Environmental Defense. Ms. Brown brings considerable organizational development experience to the Board, as well as a growing interest in affordable housing issues. Ms. Bianca Delille, also a District resident, will lend her expertise as a communications consultant for environmental, transportation and health advocacy projects. She also has a background in grant-writing. Ms. Mary Katherine Ishee is an attorney with the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources by day and has been active on land use issues in Fairfax County, VA. She brings energy and enthusiasm for WRN's mission to promote thoughtful, integrated land use and transportation planning and community design in the Washington region.

Montgomery County Transportation Policy Report (TPR) Public Forums. The purpose of the TPR is to recommend transportation policy for the County for the next 25 years. The study is comparing the effect on traffic congestion of various combinations of roads, transit, and land use changes (promoting mixed-use communities near transit). So far the balanced land use (BLU) scenario, which relies more on transit and locating jobs and housing near transit, has been shown to be more effective than a heavy road-building program for reducing growth in traffic congestion while saving thousands of acres of farmland. Come learn more and support the smarter growth alternative! Mon, Nov. 27, 7-9 pm - Bethesda. - Tues, Nov. 28, 7-9 pm - Burtonsville - Mon, Dec. 4, 7-9 pm - Germantown - Thurs, Dec. 7, 7-9 pm - Rockville. For more info, visit www.movemontgomery.org/public.htm.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mon, Nov. 27, 7:30 pm - Allied Civic Group (Montgomery County, MD) General Membership Meeting on "Smart Growth - What does it really mean and what does it look like?" with Cheryl Cort, WRN President and Manager, Urban and Regional Projects, Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Mid County Regional Services Center, 2424 Reedy Drive, Wheaton, MD (near Wheaton Metro), public parking across the street. Turn right past front desk. Contact: Cynthia Polson Rubenstein, (301) cynthiapolson@erols.com

Wed, Dec. 6, 6:30 - 8:30 pm - WRN Forum: Smart Growth and Housing – Affordable Only to the Wealthy? Does smart growth and redevelopment mean the displacement of moderate- and low-income residents? Dr. Margery Austin Turner of the Urban Institute, lead author of "Towards a Balanced Housing Strategy For D.C. and Its Region," will lead a discussion on local trends in housing affordability and provide insight on strategies for maintaining and increasing affordable housing. 6:30 pm Refreshments, 7 pm Program. Sumner School, 1201 17th Street, NW, Washington, DC (at the corner of 17th and M,

In other news, WRN has been active on a number of issues in the District, in particular related to affordable housing. This fall WRN testified twice before the Committee on Consumer and Regulatory Affairs of the D.C. Council. WRN provided detailed comments on nuisance property legislation, in particular opposing language that would have resulted in apartment buildings being closed down due to delinquent utility payments by landlords (this language was withdrawn). On October 11th, WRN testified in favor of retaining the District's current rent control program and advocated that the District develop a comprehensive housing strategy. WRN reiterated its support for a split-rate property tax as a way to promote affordable housing and job creation in D.C.

Continuing its efforts to promote walkable neighborhoods near transit, WRN also testified in favor of a proposal to build 13 townhouses half a block from the Tenleytown Metro station. In southern Prince George's County, WRN gave a presentation to the Greater Accocek Citizens Association on the principles of transit-oriented development and possibilities for Oxon Hill, MD, an inner suburb of Washington, D.C. WRN member Evan Lewis staffed an exhibit table at the October 14th Metro Festival in Oxon Hill, where a diverse crowd of hundreds called for a Metro station and quality redevelopment of Oxon Hill's commercial downtown.

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