

INTERSECT

NEWSLETTER

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Federal Metro Funding Bill Proposed, Transit-Oriented Development Undermined

By Cheryl Cort

Congressman Thomas Davis (R-VA) introduced a funding bill to provide \$1.5 billion to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority – WMATA or Metro. This is considered a major step forward towards shoring up the future of the transit agency. The bill offers to pay for the federal share of Metro's capital needs to keep up with increased ridership through 2015 and completes most of the federal support sought by the "Metro Matters" capital program, which was funded by local governments in October 2004. The bill requires local governments to dedicate a funding source to meet their half of the capital funding needs.

Inserted into the funding bill were stipulations intervening in three redevelopment projects moving forward at Metro stations. Rep. Davis, joined by Maryland Congressmen Chris Van Hollen and Al Wynn offered language to undermine transit-oriented development plans at the Vienna, Takoma, D.C., and Largo Metro stations.

At the Vienna Metro, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors preliminarily approved a redevelopment plan to create a mixed-use transit village with over 2000 new housing units where 61 homes stand on 56 acres adjacent to the Metro station. Seventy-five percent of the new homes and all of the commercial space will be within one-quarter mile of the Metro station. As required as part of the project's approval, the developer has been working with residents and the county to prepare a state-of-the-art transportation demand management plan which aims to reduce vehicle trips related to the new development by 46 percent for residential and 25 percent for office uses. The bill would prohibit the disposition of a 3.75 acre parcel next the Metro station, considered crucial to the overall redevelopment project.

Concerning the Takoma, D.C. Metro station, the bill bars the disposition of the Metro site until Metro has met with Takoma Park, Maryland representatives and ensured that

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Urban Designers Present Tools for Tysons Corner Make-Over

By Cheryl Cort

Speaking to an audience of over 100, leading urban designers discussed how the quintessential automobile-oriented "edge city" Tysons Corner, could be made over into a humane, walkable place. Anticipating Metrorail service, the forum was convened to learn about design solutions that could convert Tysons Corner into an environment that can support transit use and walkability. The June 21 event held in McLean, Virginia was co-sponsored by the McLean Citizens Association, WRN, Coalition for Smarter Growth, and Great Falls Group of the Sierra Club, Great Falls Citizen Association and the Audubon Naturalist Society.

Stewart Schwartz with the Coalition for Smarter Growth introduced the session by referring to a Chesapeake Bay Foundation study that showed that the region's traffic could be decreased through a growth pattern that focused on transit-oriented development and D.C.'s redevelopment. "Tysons Corner is the issue of the year," Schwartz said. "As
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Route Selected for Intercounty Connector Highway in Maryland

By Lisa Gress

On July 11, Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich announced that the state had chosen the proposed southern route for the Intercounty Connector (ICC). The six-lane, 18-mile long toll-highway would connect I-270 and I-95 north of the Beltway. The highway, with a price-tag of \$3 billion, would be the first major new road built in the Washington region in a generation.

Official and independent studies have shown that the new highway will fail to reduce congestion on surrounding roads and will draw development away from the region's core.

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WRN advocates transportation investments, land use policies, and neighborhood designs that enhance existing communities and the environment of the Washington D.C. region.

Cheryl Cort, editor; Stephen Wade, Lisa Gress; contributing writers.

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the project provides for “sufficient bus bays so that the development of the property will not cause a direct increase in traffic, congestion, or pollution in neighborhoods surrounding the station” and “preserves and enhances public green space on the property.”

While development of the Takoma Central District Plan was contentious, residents, community groups, environmental and smart growth organizations and D.C. officials ultimately supported the plan to create new housing, shops and a village green at the Takoma Metro station. Some Maryland and D.C. residents oppose redevelopment of the passive open space at the station and do not believe that Montgomery and D.C. transit planners have reserved sufficient space for potential future bus service.

Ironically, the funding bill’s undermining of transit-oriented development at the three Metro stations will have a detrimental impact on the system’s financial soundness. Arlington’s Rosslyn-Ballston corridor and experience elsewhere have proven transit-oriented development’s importance to making a transit system more financially viable through increased ridership and more off-peak riders. Transit-oriented development also provides substantial reduction in automobile use by generating more walk, bicycle and transit trips rather than private automobile trips to the Metro and other activities, reducing regional traffic, and air and water pollution.

Parking-oriented Metro stations, such as Vienna, are significant contributors to morning peak period overcrowding on Metrorail as spaces fill up early in the morning, and alternative access is often scarce, according to a Chesapeake Bay Foundation study. For stations where riders can access the station throughout the day due to proximity to nearby shops, homes and offices, paying customers increase revenues to the system by using underutilized capacity on otherwise empty trains.

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“The State Highway Administration’s study clearly shows this alignment adds cars to the Beltway. What is the community benefit of spending \$3 billion to add traffic to the most heavily traveled highways in the region?” asked Brian Henry of the Audubon Naturalist Society. He continued, “According to the state’s figures, millions of drivers every day on major commuter routes throughout the region would see no benefit if an ICC is built.”

Additionally, the highway would displace 58 homes and cut through parkland, wetlands and threaten a spawning area for brown trout. The chosen route has previously been rejected by the federal government during an environmental review.

At the same time that the state is proposing to spend \$3 billion on a highway that will fail to address traffic congestion, it is cutting bus service in Baltimore to save \$5 million. Transit and smart growth activists have emphasized that the amount of money spent on the ICC will threaten other transportation projects. “If this project moves forward, not only would much needed transportation improvements across the state be delayed for years, but we’d be paying for a toll-highway which does nothing for the most heavily traveled roads in the Washington region. Is it fair to ask every Maryland household to cough up \$1,417 for the ICC which does so little?” said Laura Olsen, Assistant Director for the Coalition for Smarter Growth.

A study commissioned by area environmental and smart growth groups showed that there are more effective, efficient and cost-effective means to move people throughout the region without an ICC. The study, “Intercounty Connector: Performance and Alternatives,” weighed various alternatives against the ICC using factors such as time spent in congestion, average trip length, vehicle travel on local roads and highways, and air pollution. To view the study, visit www.savecommunities.org.

Public Transportation Yields Financial Benefits for D.C. Region and Households, Report Shows

By Lisa Gress

The Washington area ranks fourth lowest in household expenditures for transportation, according to a report on a survey of 28 metropolitan areas. The report found that Washington area residents spend only 15.4 percent of their household expenditures on transportation, well below the average of 18.2 percent. The Houston area had the highest percentage of expenditures devoted to transportation at 20.9 percent.

The report concluded that households in regions that have invested in public transportation spend less on transportation. *Driven to Spend*, the report released by the Surface

Transportation Policy Project and the Center for Neighborhood Technology, utilized information from the latest Consumer Expenditure Survey (2003).

Although the Washington region’s extensive transit system offers substantial transit options including Metrorail, Metrobus, VRE and MARC commuter rail and many local bus services, only 13 percent of commuters get to work by means other than an automobile. “The Washington area has managed to keep our average transportation costs on par with the rest of the country because of our excellent transit

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system. However, not enough people have the opportunity to live in convenient, walkable neighborhoods with good transit access. Until we focus on creating more walkable communities and jobs at transit stations close to where people live, we will continue to see the transportation burden rise,” said Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth.

The study also found that lower income families spend a much larger percentage of their budget on transportation than households with higher incomes. “The location of jobs and housing is critical for everyone, and especially for moderate and lower income families in our region. When jobs are inaccessible by transit, people are forced to spend an extreme amount of their income buying, insuring and maintaining cars just to keep a job,” said Cheryl Cort, WRN. The report stated, “households earning less than \$50,000 spend on average 3 times more per year on transportation than they do on retirement, pensions and Social Security.”

The report found that transportation expenses are second only to housing costs for the average household. The Washington region had the sixth highest cost of housing of the 28 metropolitan areas that were surveyed. Residents in the Washington area spend an average of 53 percent of their expenditures on the combined costs of housing and transportation. Due to the Washington area’s low transportation costs, the combined household expenditures for housing and transportation places the area in the middle of the group ranking 17th out of 28. The full report can be found at www.transact.org

Defense Job Shift Would Increase Traffic, Cost State and Local Governments

By Cheryl Cort

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC)’s proposal to move over 31,000 Department of Defense jobs out of the region’s core to distant locations met with strong criticism from smart growth advocates, Virginia and D.C. officials. The largest share of these jobs is the over 17,000 jobs in leased office space in Arlington, Virginia.

Under the BRAC proposal, by 2010, the Council of Governments estimated that a total of 35,000 jobs -- including defense contractors who follow military facilities -- would move from the region's core. Most of the jobs would be shifted from transit-accessible locations in Arlington and D.C. to military bases outside the Capital Beltway.

“The proposed shift...could be a traffic disaster if jobs are moved to locations distant from transit,” according to Stewart Schwartz, Coalition for Smarter Growth. Addi-

(BRAC *Continued on page 4*)

Zimmerman Outlines Arlington’s “Most Intractable Problem”: Affordable Housing

By Stephen Wade

At a May 26 WRN Forum, Arlington County Board Member Chris Zimmerman discussed recent challenges to the county’s efforts to incorporate affordable housing as part of new development. Zimmerman observed that Arlington is enjoying the fiscal reward of smart growth but housing affordability is emerging as an acute problem. He explained that Arlington is working to strengthen its efforts to preserve and create affordable housing despite a court challenge and attacks from the Virginia General Assembly on its policies.

Arlington recently convened a working group of 23 developers, housing advocates and public officials (including Zimmerman) called the “Affordable Housing Roundtable,” that is negotiating a compromise approach that would provide affordable housing (or fees in lieu) in new high-rise developments along the county’s two Metro corridors, Zimmerman explained.

The core dispute centers on who owns the value that is created when developers are granted the increased density that exists between what is allowed by-right and the increased amount possible under the General Land Use Plan (GLUP). The county insists that this is a publicly created value, while private property owners consider it their entitlement. Zimmerman sees the divergent landowner and community expectations leading to a compromise where property owners may contribute (either units or cash) to affordable housing production or preservation in and around the county’s two Metro corridors.

In December 2004, a circuit court struck down the county’s newly adopted 10 percent affordable housing guidelines, which would have asked developers to voluntarily provide 10 percent of their high rise buildings as affordable as part of a site plan process which gives developers substantial increased density over by-right levels. Arlington County planned to appeal the decision. In February 2005, the Virginia General Assembly nearly passed bills to curtail Arlington’s and Alexandria’s efforts to provide affordable housing through the development review process. The bill and the appeal were dropped by mutual agreement and the roundtable process was created to address solutions acceptable by both parties.

The success of the two Metro corridors, in terms of smart growth and livability, has created unprecedented demand thereby driving up housing prices and putting pressure on low and moderate-income families. The compact, mixed-use development along the two corridors is recognized as the

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most walkable jurisdiction in the country with a low car ownership rate and the lowest property tax rate in the Northern Virginia.

Currently, 40 percent of the population is non-white and one third speaks a language other than English. County officials and housing advocates view affordable housing policies as essential to maintaining the racial and economic diversity of Arlington while creating such a desirable place to live and work.

Arlington County is currently making a number of other efforts to stem its affordable housing crisis. Along with a number of other policies and programs, the county has one of the only locally funded rent subsidy programs in the region and one of the strongest housing trust funds in the region. It has supported a number of recent affordable housing developments including Woodbury Park, Rosslyn Ridge, Gates of Ballston, and First Baptist, all near the county's Metro corridors. These developments, however, have been highly contentious and show the difficulty of creating affordable housing.

"Arlingtonians support diverse communities and affordable housing. The fight is about how you do it," Zimmerman.

A full public hearing on the anticipated compromise to be reached by the Affordable Housing Roundtable is tentatively scheduled for the October 15 County Board meeting. For more information see: http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/CPHD/housing/hpp/CPHDHousingHousing_infoRoundtable.aspx

Gas Proposal Threatens West Hyattsville Metro Station Redevelopment

By Cheryl Cort

The Washington Gas Company is proposing a liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility at its 21-acre Chillum Road property, located 1,500 feet from the West Hyattsville Metro station. Natural gas in its liquid form is particularly dangerous, according to the Sierra Club. Other LNG facilities provide far more buffer from surrounding uses than is possible at this inner suburban site.

The gas company is proposing to convert its Hyattsville property using a change in the zoning special exception that allows the current use of the property, attempting to bypass public hearings and greater scrutiny of the new, more hazardous use.

Community members, smart growth and environmental ad-

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tional traffic and inefficiencies would be created by increasing the distance between the Pentagon and numerous supporting offices and staffs, Schwartz said.

Federal employees are the largest users of Metrorail and are significant users of Virginia Railway Express. This shift would take thousands of commuters off transit and put them onto already overburdened roadways, according to a study by the Council of Governments.

The cost to state and local government in Virginia for new roads and other infrastructure could be significant. Since these are not new jobs, the job shift could mean a net economic loss to the state and its taxpayers, according to Schwartz.

The proposed shift in jobs comes shortly after the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) again ranked the Washington area as one of the most traffic plagued regions of the country. TTI also reported that transit investments and usage have been critical to cutting the time area commuters spend in traffic.

Proposals by Senator Warner and others to extend Metrorail to Fort Belvoir are viewed as costly and inefficient because they would have too few stations, and not connect to compact job centers, leading to inadequate ridership, according to Schwartz. On most military bases, offices are scattered, and the distances from a transit station (especially if outside the gates) will be too long to encourage walking and transit ridership. The Fort Belvoir area also lacks a fine-grained local road infrastructure which will lead to a significant increase in traffic on arterial roads.

Workers who live in Prince George's County and D.C. are also likely to suffer as well. According to a Brookings Institution study, these residents already have to deal with unbalanced regional job growth which continues to move jobs outward to locations far from homes in these two jurisdictions. Between 1990 and 2000, jobs increased by 20 percent in on the region's west side (west of 16th Street), and one percent on the east side of the region, the report found. Prince George's residents already face some of the longest commutes in the country due to the lack of jobs in the County.

Instead of moving tens of thousands of military-related jobs to scattered locations that are inaccessible to transit, Schwartz urged the Defense Department to find innovative design solutions to the security threats so that defense facilities can remain within walking distance of transit, and near to services.

"Conserving government resources and reducing fuel consumption are equally important components of our national security," he said. For more see: <http://www.smartergrowth.net>

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rail comes to Tysons, how do we design it and how can it reduce traffic?" said Schwartz.

Urban Designer Rob Goodill with Torti Gallas CHK, Inc., a leading new urbanist design firm, showed examples of Torti Gallas' efforts to create walkable station areas at Metro stops in D.C. and Montgomery County. He demonstrated through projects at White Flint and Twinbrook Metro stations that suburban roads and parking lots can be transformed into places that "embrace and humanize" the street. He showed how redevelopment on parking lots can provide inviting public plazas, and a fine-grained street network. He explained how public realm features should differ for a grand civic space in front of a Metro station entrance, a mainstreet, and neighborhood streets and courtyards. Goodill showed how designs can provide the transition from a higher intensity urban mix of office, retail and residential buildings, to quiet residential neighborhoods.

Jeff Speck, Director of Design for the National Endowment for the Arts, discussed how Tysons Corner is considered the poster child for the sprawling edge city. He explained that Tysons Corner is the statistical equivalent of a city but that its collection of stores, offices and housing do not amount to a city. "Statistics do not make a city," he said. The conventional modern planning model used to create Tysons Corner promoted automobility and generated tremendous amounts of traffic, Speck explained. While many major arterial roads will probably never be pedestrian-friendly streets, some parts of Tysons can be converted into pedestrian-friendly places, he said.

Speck identified four principles for encouraging people to walk and take transit. First, people need a reason to walk – uses must be mixed. Second, walking must be safe. This means roadways must be physically designed to feel and be safe for pedestrians. Vehicle speed is a key factor in pedestrian safety. Design features that foster safety include two-way traffic, narrow street widths, and on-street parking. Third, walking needs to feel comfortable. Pedestrians feel comfortable in a space that has definition and offers a sense of enclosure rather than a wide open space. Last, attractive walking environments need to be interesting, offering shops, engaging storefronts, stoops and other features that are oriented towards pedestrians. Speck also said that some new streets needed to be inserted into the sparse suburban street network to create an urban grid.

Speck observed that these pedestrian-friendly features can work at any density, but that transit does not work at every density. When public amenities or transit are being offered, this suggests a threshold number of homes, shops and offices, just to make it affordable, Speck said. Speck advised that new transit stations only be located where stops can be

made pleasant, walkable places. He noted that a train station with a parking lot does not improve anything.

Geoffrey Ferrell presented an innovative approach to regulating land use called, "form-based coding." This approach seeks to create the guidance to achieve the design concepts suggested by Speck and Goodill. Ferrell explained that current zoning practice is out of balance with what is important to creating good places. Good intentions in planning documents do not translate into good places because the rules and regulations do not offer clear guidance on how buildings relate to the street and other public spaces, he said. Ferrell suggested changing the priorities of existing zoning rules to focus more on the form of the building, secondarily on management, i.e. "when the band stops playing" at night, and last on use and density, which conventional zoning hyper-controls. Ferrell considers design guidelines only "lipstick on the pig" of rules that do not work. He instead proposed "form-based codes" which address building height, regulating maximum and minimum; siting, a build-to line rather than a setback; and elements that specify how the street and building interior interact. Ferrell showed how a form-based code can be developed and is used in three easy pieces. He emphasized that form-based codes should be developed for a whole area and should be created through a charrette process with "citizen planners."

Audience members asked how these ideas could be or are practiced in Fairfax County. Speck suggested that earth berms, common in Tysons Corner, are wasted space and could be turned into "street-hugging" lower levels of buildings. Ferrell also noted that buildings have short life spans of sometimes 10 years, offering the opportunity to tear them down and reconfigure the space. Several audience members' questions focused on how to fix existing arterials like Routes 7 and 123 so they can be safer for pedestrians, and how to address traffic congestion in general. Some streets might be too big to fix for pedestrians, Ferrell said, while others can be reconfigured. Goodill explained that roadways are designed primarily for moving cars and current engineering practices do not value pedestrian-friendly design or place-making. Schwartz commented that since most vehicle trips are non-work related, there are many opportunities to capture trips in smaller areas by taming some streets and creating a mixed-use environment. He also said that the regional and area jobs/housing balance was critical to addressing the traffic problem.

As a result of this event, which was attended by Fairfax County Board Chairman Gerry Connolly, the County Board adopted a resolution calling for the study of form-based codes as a tool to promote walkable communities in the county.

**Terrorism and Public Transportation:
Transit is Safer Than You Might Think**

By Lisa Gress

Public transit is an extremely safe mode of travel with “total per passenger-mile fatality rates approximately one-tenth that of automobile travel,” according to a recent report by Todd Litman of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute. Litman cautions transit riders not to overreact to recent terrorist activities by reducing transit use and switching to another mode of travel, such as driving. He notes, “Transit terrorism would cause more total casualties and harm to society if individuals respond to attacks by shifting from public transit to less safe modes.” Even when fatalities from terrorist attacks on transit systems are included, public transportation is still safer than driving, according to the report.

Because transit incidents that involve injury or death are rare, they often receive national or international attention while injuries or deaths from automobile accidents are so common, they are featured only on the local news, if at all. Terrorists intend for their attacks to be high profile to attract intense media coverage and to create fear and confusion. Although the risks are serious and should not be ignored, transit riders should not decrease their overall safety by switching to another mode of travel, Litman’s study suggests.

Litman also found that urban regions that emphasize transit have a far lower per capita traffic fatality rate (including automobile, transit and pedestrian deaths) than regions that are automobile-oriented, even when transit terrorist risks are included. Litman states, “Shifting travel from automobile to transit, and creating more transit-oriented communities, increases safety for transit passengers and other road users. Total per capita traffic fatality rates tend to decline as transit ridership increases in a community.” The report can be found at www.vtppi.org.

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vocates, and local officials have raised serious concerns about the appropriateness of such a facility so close to thousands of residences and the Metro station. Concerned groups have raised the issue that the proposed LNG use is inconsistent with the West Hyattsville Transit Overlay District Zone Transit District Development Plan which calls for the addition of 2,600 new homes.

Hyattsville Councilman Mark Matulef said the LNG facility “would crush the hopes of Prince George’s County, the cities of Hyattsville and Mount Rainier and the existing residents and small businesses around the West Hyattsville Metro Station. This area has the promise of a village center of homes, offices, stores and parks,” according to a letter to the Prince George’s Gazette (May 12, 2005).

Prince George’s County Planning Board is decided this week that the zoning application should receive a public hearing. For more, see Item #15 at:

<http://www.mncppc.org/pgco/planning/agendas/agcurrnt.htm#ScheduledItems>

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesdays through August 24, 7:15-10:30 PM. The National Building Museum will host the Reel Architecture Film Series examining the relationship between architecture and film. The screenings are free of charge and will take place in the Museum’s Great Hall and auditorium. Doors will open at 7:15 pm; films will begin at 8:15 pm. Live local bands will perform from 7:30 pm to 8:00 pm. 401 F Street NW (Judiciary Square Metro). For more information, visit www.nbm.org or call (202) 272-2448.

Thursday, September 8, 3-6 PM. Arlington County Affordable Housing Roundtable meeting. 1100 N. Glebe Road, Suite 1500, Arlington, VA. For more information, http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/CPHD/housing/hpp/CPHDHousingHousing_infoRoundtable.aspx

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