



Town Council

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Testimony of Town of Chevy Chase Councilmember Linna Barnes
November 18, 2008

I am Linna Barnes, member of the Town of Chevy Chase Council and former Mayor. I appreciate the opportunity to present comments to the hearing panel and the Town will be submitting formal written comments prior to January 14, 2009.

The Purple Line's two primary goals are to create a more efficient transportation system and to encourage economic development. While we applaud these goals in concept, we are extremely concerned that the State, by designing an east west connection that is potentially \$1.6 billion dollars, is putting all its eggs in one transportation basket when the transportation needs throughout Montgomery County and the rate of growth north of Bethesda in particular are astounding. According to the Highway Mobility Report, May 2008 put out by the Maryland National Park and Planning Council, two-thirds of the forecasted growth is anticipated in the northern half of the I-270 corridor, with other high growth locations at the Naval Medical Center and the White Oak facilities of the Food and Drug Administration.

Some of the transportation needs we feel could be jeopardized by an expensive Purple Line:

- The Corridor Cities Transitway that will remove thousands of cars from I-270 daily, improve commute times and provide needed transit options to such burgeoning transit-oriented communities such as Germantown and Clarksburg.
- Rockville Pike at North Bethesda Town Center – where a 1.2 million square foot project is planned on 32 acres and at the White Flint Mall area where major development is also planned. Anyone who has driven the Pike knows it is already beyond congested. We commend Marc Elrich for taking the lead on developing a creative use of bus rapid transit for the area and would urge the county to explore his proposed system further and move quickly to implement it.
- The BRAC action relocating Walter Reed to National Naval Medical Center where 4,000 new visits are expected daily. State, local and federal assistance for alleviating projected congestion seems piecemeal and inadequate at best.

The report I mentioned earlier notes that of the 10 most congested intersections in the county, several are in this part of the county (Conn and East/West Highway, Conn and Jones Bridge, Rockville Pike and Cedar Lane). A Purple Line that connects to Bethesda on the Master Plan alignment will only help with congestion at one of those interactions; the Jones Bridge Road Bus Rapid Transit could help with all three.

In looking at the DEIS, we are extremely concerned that the full costs for light rail on the Master Plan alignment are not fully articulated and we will be requesting further documentation of those costs. We are also concerned about the actual costs to the county not only for the building of the line but longer term costs for maintenance and operations. We would like to know how the State was able to keep the high end LRT costs at \$1.6 billion, when they were originally projected to be between \$1.6 and \$1.75. It is all but a little suspect because the \$1.6 billion puts the cost effective measurement at \$23.71, just under the \$24 FTA threshold.

We call upon our elected officials to show real leadership – fiscal responsibility, creativity in finding solutions to today's transit needs and in planning for tomorrow's. It is time to modify a nearly 20 year old plan -- we really can't afford one glitzy project that State studies have shown will primarily just shift people from one transit mode to another so we can get between point a and point b quicker. The transit needs in this county are enormous. Yesterday's high-end Purple Line dream should not soak up the dollars required to address tomorrow's real transit needs around the County.