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## Montgomery County task force to address funding for rapid transit

High-speed bus system among top priorities

by Erin Cunningham | Staff Writer

With the Washington, D.C., region ranked among the worst in the nation in traffic congestion, a new group in Montgomery County will study ways to plan and fund countywide rapid transit systems.

County Executive Isiah Leggett (D), who formed the new Montgomery Transit Task Force last week, said the 20-member group will focus on all modes of transportation, including the Corridor Cities Transitway, the Purple Line and a Bus Rapid Transit system.

Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) has called for light rail along the Purple Line, a transit line between Bethesda and Prince George's County; the Corridor Cities Transitway, which will run between Shady Grove and Clarksburg, could accommodate either light rail or Bus Rapid Transit.

Separately, Councilman Marc B. Elrich (D-At large) of Takoma Park has called for the construction of 120 lane miles of rapid bus lanes, or Bus Rapid Transit, on major north-south and east-west roads, which would run more like light rail but would cost far less to build and operate.

Elrich, a member of Leggett's transit task force, said his proposed bus system likely could be completed before other proposed transit projects because it costs less to construct — about \$480 million.

The cost of building light rail along the Purple Line has been estimated at about \$1.8 million.

While the bus system is still under review, and a study is expected later this month, Elrich said preliminary reports have been positive.

"The system really makes sense," said Elrich, who proposed a bus system four years ago.

He said the task force is going beyond studying the feasibility of the system, and instead is trying to solidify county support for his idea.

"We already know there is a problem," he said. "We know we sit in traffic too long and that we need better transit to travel around the county. This task force is designed to solve the problem."

Leggett says he supports Bus Rapid Transit, but wants to understand from the study how affordable the project is and how practical it would be in certain areas of the county.

Leggett said the task force will study how the county can best advance all transit options, not just bus.

Council Vice President Roger Berliner (D-Dist. 1) of Potomac says the county's future is in mass transit, especially rapid transit systems.

He said people have a negative perception of buses, so he is hoping they begin to think of Elrich's rapid bus proposal more like transit projects such as light rail.

"One of the beauties of this is that it can happen in the next four years," said Berliner, who chairs the council's transportation committee. "This can really happen."

This month, Maryland and Montgomery County hope to begin a final environmental impact study, to be completed by fall 2012, and the preliminary engineering phase of the \$1.5 billion Purple Line project. Permission from the Federal Transit Administration is needed before the work can begin.

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