



Montgomery County's Advocates for Better Transportation

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Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave.
Rockville, MD 20850

April 9, 2025

Re: FY26 Operating Budget - Transportation

Dear Council President Stewart, Vice President Jawando, and Councilmembers:

The Action Committee for Transit (ACT) urges this County Council to prioritize bus frequency and reliability in the FY 26 Operating Budget. More of the recommended revenues cited on page 54-6 of the Transit Services budget should be directed at running all-day express bus service on planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) routes until BRT is constructed. Additional relief buses to fill in when a bus breaks down and street lighting improvements at bus stops are necessary to ensure system reliability and passenger safety. Areas of the County where the [Ride On Reimagined study](#) showed declining ridership and long waits cannot be left in a holding pattern while the lengthy rollout of BRT continues. This will result in declining ridership and declining trust in Montgomery County government.

ACT acknowledges there are positive steps being taken to improve transit. The expansion of Ride On service through the Great Seneca Transit Network is an important initiative that will open up access to employment opportunities in the life sciences corridor. ACT's Capital Budget testimony recognized the importance of the US 29 Flash route extension into Howard County and the bus lanes on the University Boulevard corridor. However, these improvements cannot mask real problems that are getting worse. The on-time performance target in the FY 2018 budget was 88.9%. The current target in the FY 26 budget is 71.5%. This level of service depresses ridership. On a per capita basis, Ride On ridership has declined 43% since the end of 2007.

More residents will choose to drive if buses are forced to sit in traffic. The electrification of the bus fleet is necessary to address the climate crisis, but it will not be sufficient to meet our County's climate goals if people drive instead of relying on infrequent buses. ACT's Capital Budget testimony called for more dedicated bus lanes to resolve the problem of buses in mixed traffic, but we cannot ignore the consequences of insufficient funding for transit services. County planning documents espouse a great vision for public transit, but the budget does not support that vision to the fullest potential.

Time spent waiting for a bus that arrives late or never is not only an inconvenience. It limits access to housing near transit. The Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) is a nationally recognized leader for combining transit-oriented communities with housing affordability. Bus routes near HOC properties should not suffer any cutbacks. Doing so contradicts the County's general plan to build more transit accessible housing, and it does not advance the goal of transit equity stated in the budget.

Frequent transit also means access to food. There is a [direct link between food insecurity and the lack of transportation options](#). As a volunteer at Shepherd's Table, I am aware there are clients relying on public transit. I learned there are clients afraid to ride the bus because they do not have any money in their pockets. The proposal for free fares is an anti-poverty measure. However, a free bus is not a replacement for an infrequent bus or one that never arrives. A free bus does not make up for the fact that an infrequent bus is literally deadly. People cross dangerous roads attempting to catch a bus that will not come again for a long time.

ACT acknowledges the financial and political challenges facing Montgomery County. Nevertheless, with hard times facing residents due to federal job and budget cuts, more people will be unable to afford a private car and maintain it. Buses will be critically important to our fellow community members who need transportation to jobs, libraries, healthcare, and to our parks. Riders waiting a long time for a bus should not wait any longer for the freedom transit frequency offers. Our climate cannot wait longer for transportation alternatives that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Sincerely,

Michael Larkin
Vice President
Action Committee for Transit