

April 11, 2025

## **WRITTEN TESTIMONY REGARDING THE BUDGET FOR RIDE ON TRANSIT SERVICES**

From Suzanne Ludlow, Silver Spring

Dear President Stewart and Members of the County Council,

As a long-time Montgomery County resident, a retired city manager, a certified city planner, and a current member of the County's Transit Advisory Board, I would like to speak in support of the proposed budget for Ride On Transit Services.

In particular, I support fully funding Ride On operations and personnel and I strongly support the proposed move to Zero Fare bus service.

I have always supported fare-free bus service. It is fairer to pay for public transit from taxes. I will happily pay more in taxes to have a transit service that works for everyone.

We are at a time in this country when many people are having their livelihoods impacted by federal job cuts and social service program cuts. Cars, food, and household expenses will all cost more with the proposed tariffs. Montgomery County residents who are harmed will need access to low cost public transportation as they try to find new jobs or are forced to take longer trips to reach needed services.

Besides the essential good of the Zero Fare Policy, the cost to upgrade the fare machines in the buses is very high. Rather than finding the necessary amount to do the needed replacements, it makes economic sense to move to the fare-free service this year.

Although I have had the chance to ride Ride On buses for years, the last year has been eye-opening as I have used public transportation with an electric mobility scooter, crutches and/or a cane. I have been able to attend meetings and sporting events despite my disabilities primarily because accessible public transit was available to me. It's not completely easy, but it's doable.

Attention to accessibility needs to remain a key part of Ride On operations. Being able to physically get to a bus stop and then get on board requires attention from Ride On and a variety of County departments. I am hopeful that removing the fare boxes will improve the space I need to maneuver my scooter from the doorway into the main bus aisle. In any event, I find that by the time I get my scooter situated, I realize I've forgotten to show my farecard. As a senior, I ride free anyway, and the transit operators don't worry about me. For anyone with

mobility devices, packages, children or other distractions, making the bus fare-free is one more step to reduce the stress of riding Ride On.

When I first lived in Montgomery County in 1978, Ride On was new and only went a few places on meandering routes. Now, much of our county is well-served by a variety of public transit options. The changes outlined in *Ride On Reimagined* will make another quantum leap in transit availability – the kind of transit service that allows everyone to be able to go to work, play and shop no matter their situation or physical location. Please do not put the plans in *Ride On Reimagined* onto a back burner. Transportation improvements always cost money, but the value from the improvements returns to the County many times over. I support this plan.

Years ago, when I asked my son where was he thinking about going to college, he responded. “I don’t know, but it has to have good public transportation.” I knew I had done right as a mom with that answer! It speaks to the truth that a community with good public transportation is a community where people want to be. Thank you, Montgomery County, for being one of those places.

Again, please support the proposed funding for Ride On and the move to a Zero Fare bus system.

Thank you.

Suzanne Ludlow, AICP, CPM

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