

# Ride On Newsletter      February 2024

## What is the 'S' Service Schedule?



When snow, storms, or other special circumstances occur that affect Ride On's ability to follow normal weekday schedules, bus service may operate under the 'S' Service Plan. But how does it work? We've answered some frequently asked questions to give you a better understanding of the 'S' Service Schedule.

### What Routes Will Operate Under the 'S' Service Plan?

Ride On will operate all its weekday routes with some service.

### How Will Service Under the 'S' Service Plan Differ From Normal Weekday Service?

The link [here](#) shows the first and last trips for different parts of the day for each route under the 'S' Plan. Check your route for details. The chart also gives an estimated range for how often buses may run on each route, depending on road conditions. Under this plan, we are trying to provide service on each route with trips evenly-spaced apart and no major gaps in service. Buses will be operating under very difficult circumstances, so any times listed are approximations.

### **What Are the Fares When the 'S' Plan is in Effect?**

There is no change in fare policy on 'S' Plan days.

### **What Happens if There is a Storm or Special Circumstance on a Weekend or a Holiday?**

On **weekends**, Ride On will deploy resources, buses and operators, based on the normal Saturday and Sunday schedule requirements. We do not expect, however, normal service performance under severe storm or snow conditions. As with the weekday 'S' Plan, we will try to provide service on all those routes scheduled to operate that day, with trips evenly-spaced apart and no major gaps in service.

On **holidays**, the routes will operate as previously announced, usually meaning a Saturday, Sunday, or holiday schedule. However, the 'S' Plan could be implemented on that day if weather conditions dictate the need.

### **When Will I Know if Ride On is Operating on the 'S' Service Plan?**

The announcement to operate an 'S' Service Plan will be made by 4 a.m. on the day the plan goes into effect, but rapidly changing weather conditions might require a change during the day or evening, e.g. when 2 inches of predicted snow turns into 8 inches. Ride On social media platforms will often be first to announce a switch to the 'S' Service Plan, so make sure to follow @RideOnMCT on Instagram, Facebook, or X. Listen to local radio or television stations for an announcement that Ride On will be operating its 'S' Service Plan, or check the County's website at [www.rideonbus.com](http://www.rideonbus.com). Other transit services in the area may use the term "S Schedule," so listen for information about "Ride On's 'S' Service Plan".

### **Will Ride On Use the 'S' Service Plan Countywide, Even If Roads are Clear in Some Areas or Conditions Improve?**

Once the decision is made to operate the 'S' Service Plan, it will be in effect countywide all day, until 2 AM the next day. We do this because it would be extremely difficult to get our hundreds of buses and drivers back to their regular, more complicated daily operation. Normally at Ride On, buses and their operators move from route to route over the course of a day; during the 'S' Service Plan they remain on the same route all day long.

### **Will There be Route Detours?**

There could be detours on your route because of icy hills or other locations that become dangerous during bad weather. Detours will be listed on the County website at [RideOnBus.com](http://RideOnBus.com) under "Delays & Detours," or call 311.

Your patience is appreciated as Ride On provides the best service possible during difficult conditions. For more information, call 311 or visit the County's website at [RideOnBus.com](http://RideOnBus.com).

## Maryland Governor Rescinds Transit Budget Cuts



Governor Wes Moore announced on Tuesday, January 16 that he was restoring \$150 million in previously proposed transportation cuts; \$17 million of which is for MCDOT. This restoration of funds is for a 12-month period starting July 1. The proposed cut to the state's six-year transportation spending plan was \$3.3 billion. To fully restore state transportation funds to local governments, known as Highway User Revenue, \$52 million of the \$150 million is allocated. Also, to fully restore locally operated transit systems operating grants another \$26 million will be allocated.

To bring the budget to balance, Moore and team relied on four types of plans which are as follows:

- “Rebasing” funding levels. For programs whose budgets increased during the pandemic, it was proposed to cut funding back closer to pre-pandemic levels.
- Reallocating money between areas. The governor proposed moving money from underutilized areas of the budget into other needs. For example, some special funds sit in accounts that accrue interest. The money made from that interest, instead of sitting in the account, can be transferred to the state's general fund.
- Borrowing more money. When the state's budget was flush with cash the past few years, some of that cash was used for construction projects instead of borrowing money and spreading the cost over several years. The state is returning to borrowing more money for construction projects, but is still within guidelines for maximum borrowing.
- Tapping the Rainy-Day Fund. The governor proposes to pull \$150 million out of the state's savings to pay for transportation needs on a one-time basis. The account maintains a \$2.34 billion balance.

The overall budget would have had a deficit of about \$1 billion without those cuts and adjustments, according to Moore administration officials. Now the budget has a very slight surplus of about \$103 million.

## SmarTrip Card Programs: Something for Everyone



Did you know that there are different types of SmarTrip Cards? WMATA and Montgomery County Ride On have various programs to ensure that using Ride On is accessible and affordable for everyone. To learn more about our SmarTrip Programs, read our interview with Fare Media Program Specialist Coletta Mercado.

### **What is a SmarTrip card?**

A SmarTrip card is a reloadable card used to pay Metrorail, Metrobus, and Regional Transit Partner fares, such as Ride On, as well as parking at Metro facilities. SmarTrip also allows the ease to tap-and-go on iPhone and Apple Watch via Apple Wallet or Android using Google Wallet. With SmarTrip in your mobile wallet you can pay for your train, bus, and parking wherever SmarTrip is accepted, keep track of your balance, and skip the fare vending machines.

### **How old do you have to be to obtain a SmarTrip card? Where can I go to pick up a SmarTrip card?**

A SmarTrip card is required for each rider ages 5 and older. If you need a SmarTrip card, they can be obtained at the blue fare vending machines at Metro stations as well as at the Silver Spring TRiPS store, the Mobile Commuter Store, and the Montgomery County Division of Treasury - Rockville. Montgomery County Public Libraries also offer SmarTrip cards for Youth and Seniors only.

### **What are the benefits of having a Senior SmarTrip card?**

[Senior SmarTrip cards](#) are now free. A Senior SmarTrip card allows seniors age 65 and up to travel at reduced fares on Metrorail, Metrobus, and regional buses that accept SmarTrip. In Montgomery County, fares are free at all times on all MCDOT buses plus a select number of Metrobus routes. Senior SmarTrip transfers from Metrorail are free to Ride On bus and \$0.50 to Metrobus.

### **To obtain a Senior SmarTrip card what do I need to provide?**

You will need to provide proof of age such as state ID, birth certificate, or passport and complete an enrollment form.

### **How can people with disabilities obtain a Disability SmarTrip card? What are the benefits of having a Disability SmarTrip card?**

Customers with a disability and age 65 and up are eligible for the Senior SmarTrip card. For Customers with a disability under age 65, they can obtain a [Reduced Fare SmarTrip Photo ID Card](#) at either the Transit Accessibility Center, or at the TRiPS Commuter Store. To apply, they will need a valid government-issued photo ID card, and one of the following: an original, Reduced Fare Application for People with Disabilities in English or Spanish signed by a licensed medical professional within the past 60-days; Medicare (not Medicaid) card for individuals under age 65; Veteran Disability Certification letter with 60% or greater disability rating per the original letter issued by the Department of Veteran Affairs; a DD2765 Uniformed Services card; Audiogram performed within the past five years with a pure tone average of 70dB or greater in both ears regardless of hearing aids.

### **What is the Youth Cruiser SmarTrip card?**

The Youth Cruiser SmarTrip card is a SmarTrip card exclusively for students and youth of Montgomery County. The card allows residents, ages 5 to 18 (older if still in high school) to participate in the [Kids Ride Free program](#), which provides free rides on all MCDOT buses and most Metrobuses within the County.

### **Where can someone go to obtain a Youth Cruiser SmarTrip card?**

The [Youth Cruiser SmarTrip card](#) can be obtained at all branches of the Montgomery County Public Libraries, the Silver Spring TRiPS store, the Mobile Commuter Store, and the Montgomery County Division of Treasury - Rockville. Additionally, many schools offer the Youth Cruiser SmarTrip cards to their students, which makes obtaining the card even easier.

### **Can someone use the Youth Cruiser SmarTrip card on the Metrorail? If so, what are the steps to do so?**

The Youth Cruiser SmarTrip Card can be used on the Metrorail. Like all other SmarTrip cards, value or money would need to be added to the card. Youth Cruisers should follow the instructions to add fare to their cards directly from the bus farebox or from an add value machine at Metro stations. The process typically involves selecting a button that lets the machine know that you wish to add value, tapping the SmarTrip card at the fare vending machine or farebox, adding the value, and then tapping the card again to finalize the transaction.

# Transportation Association of Maryland Holds Annual Legislative Reception



The Transportation Association of Maryland (TAM) is a statewide nonprofit association supporting the transportation industry in Maryland. Every year they host a Legislative Reception for the return of Maryland legislators back in session. This is a time to speak with the delegates and senators about issues affecting Maryland transportation. There were four priority issues TAM wanted to focus on which are as follows:

## 1. **Preservation of Local Transit Funding**

Despite already being cut by 20% in FY21 in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Maryland Department of Transportation's (MDOT) FY24-FY29 Consolidated Transportation Program proposed cutting aid to local transit by a further \$52.7 Million, a 40% reduction. This represents a dangerous and inequitable abandonment of state support for local transit over the past five years, which has serious effects on the viability of local transit in Maryland. State funding for local transit is critical to maintaining local service, including the critical paratransit operations that Marylanders rely on to access jobs, medical care, and basic quality of life. The preservation of historic levels of state transit funding is critical in the coming session.

## 2. **Driver Assault Legislation**

Assaults on public transit operators has increased significantly, especially during the pandemic. The Federal Transit Administration data shows that operator assaults per trip have increased fourfold from 2009 to 2020. In 2023, SB 693 / HB 1049 passed, requiring MDOT MTA to submit an annual report on assaults on Maryland public transit operators by December 1 each year.

## 3. **Senior Rides**

This program, which relies on volunteer drivers to transport over 26,000 low and moderate-income seniors per year, was funded at a flat level (\$187,000) since FY

2014 until TAM secured a \$50,000 increase for the FY24 year. Funding set at a level sufficient to fully fund all current grantees, \$500,000 is requested.

#### 4. Unrealistic Transition Plans

TAM recognizes the importance of sustainable and efficient public transportation systems. TAM shares the goal of reducing emissions but opposes state mandates that require local transit agencies to purchase zero-emission vehicles as a one-size-fits-all solution on a strict deadline. The transition to zero-emission vehicles is a commendable long-term objective, but it must be carried out with careful consideration for the unique circumstances and challenges faced by agencies across the state. Mandates will place an undue financial burden on already cash-strapped agencies and compromise the quality and accessibility of public transportation services for communities. TAM advocates for a more flexible and realistic approach, allowing transit agencies to flexibly transition to zero-emission vehicles as part of a well-thought-out, adequately resourced, and locally tailored strategy.

The event ended with remarks from Lt. Governor Aruna Miller (a former MCDOT employee) about proposed legislative measures and thanking TAM for the work they do within the transportation community.

## Ride On Celebrates Rosa Parks, Transit Equity Day, and Black History Month



As we welcome in the month of February, not only do we celebrate the achievements and contributions of African Americans during Black History Month, but we also take a moment to commemorate Transit Equity Day on February 4th. This day holds particular significance as we pay tribute to the historic act of defiance by Rosa Parks, the "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement," who refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955. Parks'

courageous stand against racial segregation ignited a wave of protests, ultimately leading to Supreme Court decision to desegregate public transportation systems.

Transit Equity Day serves as a reminder of the pivotal role public transportation played in the struggle for equal rights. Rosa Parks' refusal to leave her seat was a catalyst for change, sparking a movement that resonated far beyond the confines of a bus in Montgomery. As we reflect on this momentous event, let us also recognize the ongoing work toward achieving equitable and accessible transit systems for all communities. By commemorating Transit Equity Day, we reaffirm our commitment to fostering inclusive public transportation that serves as a vital connector, bridging gaps and promoting equality.

During the month of February, our transit community acknowledges and celebrates the resilience, strength, and achievements of African Americans. As we honor the legacy of Rosa Parks, let us strive to create transit systems that echo her call for equality and justice. As we continue to ride our local transit systems today, let's continue to build a future where public transportation is a symbol of unity, accessibility, and progress for everyone, regardless of their background or identity.

## **Ride On Celebrates National Engineering Week: Driving Innovation Towards a Greener Future**



As National Engineering Week approaches, Ride On takes pride in highlighting our commitment to innovation, sustainability, and engineering excellence. National Engineering Week is an ideal moment to recognize the unsung heroes behind the scenes—our engineers, who play a crucial role in shaping the future of public transportation.



National Engineering Week is an annual celebration during the third week of February that recognizes the contributions of engineers to society, promotes the field, and showcases advancements. It was founded by the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) and features nationwide activities and events, aiming to inspire future engineers. This year's theme, "Welcome to the Future," spotlights "celebrating today's achievements and paving the way for a brighter and more diverse future in engineering."

At the forefront of our environmental initiatives is the ongoing commitment to reducing our carbon footprint. National Engineering Week provides an opportunity to reflect on the innovative engineering solutions that have propelled Ride On toward a more sustainable future. One of the highlights of our green initiative is the incorporation of electric buses into our fleet. These state-of-the-art vehicles are a testament to engineering innovation in the transit sector. The Brookville Smart Energy Bus Depot stands as a groundbreaking project integrating microgrid and electric vehicle charging infrastructure. This unique initiative is the largest transit solar charging infrastructure project in the United States and provides renewable energy to power Ride On's expanding electric bus fleet. As we transition towards a more sustainable public transportation system, electric buses play a pivotal role in reducing emissions, improving air quality, and contributing to a greener community.

As we celebrate National Engineering Week, Ride On is not only reflecting on our engineering achievements but also looking forward to the exciting innovations that lie ahead. Our commitment to sustainable engineering practices remains unwavering as we continue to explore new technologies and strategies to create a transit system that benefits both our riders and the environment. Ride On proudly joins the nation in celebrating National Engineering Week, recognizing the indispensable role of engineers in driving positive change. Together, with our riders and community, we're engineering a better transit future.

## **A Ride On Guide to Montgomery County Museums**



Still too chilly to spend much time outside? Take advantage of these last days of winter by learning and exploring at one of Montgomery County's many museums! When you take Ride On to a local museum, you can beat the hassle of fighting traffic and finding a spot, while saving money on parking fees and gas. Wherever you're going, remember to use the [Ride On Trip Planner](#) app to plan your trip and get there fast!

Read on for our guide to local museums, and which Ride On Routes will get you there.

- **[National Capital Trolley Museum](#)**: Ride into D.C.'s past on a piece of history and experience for yourself the transit systems that built and served communities across the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia for a century (1862-1962). Enjoy exhibits and presentations at the Visitor Center, then come aboard their living collection of historic street cars for a ride down one mile of woodland track in beautiful Northwest Branch Park. Take Ride On Route [39](#) to get to this charming piece of transit history.
- **[Glenstone Museum](#)**: Glenstone is a place that seamlessly integrates art, architecture, and nature into a serene and contemplative environment. Glenstone assembles post-World War II artworks presented in a series of refined indoor and outdoor spaces designed to facilitate meaningful encounters for our visitors. Passengers who arrive at Glenstone on Ride On Route [301](#) will be offered guaranteed entry during operating hours; this bus drops visitors off directly in front of the Arrival Hall.
- **[Clara Barton National Historic Site](#)**: The Clara Barton National Historic Site in Glen Echo, Maryland was established in 1974 to honor the life and work of Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross. This historic gem includes nine acres of land and Ms. Barton's own 38-room residence, which served as an early headquarters of the American Red Cross. To get there, take Ride On Route [29](#).
- **[Kid Museum](#)**: Looking for something for the younger members of your family? KID Museum is our region's pioneering experiential museum and educational makerspace. They "foster the 'Mind of a Maker' in kids and youth, empowering the next generation with the skills to invent the future". To get there, take Ride On Routes [29](#), [30](#), [32](#), [34](#), [36](#), [47](#), or [70](#). And remember, kids ride FREE on all Ride On buses throughout the county with the [Youth Cruiser SmarTrip card](#)!
- **[National Museum of Health and Medicine](#)**: The National Museum of Health and Medicine was established during the Civil War as the Army Medical Museum, a center for the collection of specimens and artifacts for research related to trauma and pathology. The museum's mission to preserve and explore the impact of military medicine spans more than 150 years and includes each major U.S. armed conflict. To get there, take Ride On Routes [4](#) or [5](#).

## **Interview with New Transit Advisory Group Member Alison Hope**



### **How long have you been riding with Ride On and what year did you begin?**

I started riding Ride On the summer of 2021 when I moved back to the DMV from the West Coast. Before flying east I gave my car to my daughter in Oregon and hope to never own a car again.

### **Why did you start riding Ride On?**

I started riding buses and of course Metro to ease my carbon footprint, to encourage me to be active, to reduce my stress levels, to reduce my expenses, and to get to know the DMV again. I have lived in the area about a third of my life starting in the 1950s.

### **What routes do you ride the most and for what reasons?**

I lived in downtown Silver Spring my first two years back, and my most frequent Ride On routes were the 5, 20, and 28. Last summer I moved to Rockville and my most frequent routes are the 6, 26, 46 and 96.

### **What do you like the most about riding with Ride On?**

I like that they are smaller than Metrobuses and usually not crowded. Since I'm a senior, I also like riding for free.

### **How do you view your role as a Ride On Transit Advisory Group (TAG) member?**

I want to listen to other members and try to help encourage ridership. Increasing ridership will become very important over this coming summer when several Red Line stations east of the park will be closed for Purple Line construction. The nightmare alternative would be out-of-control traffic as people revert to driving for their commute, and as many of them return to the office after working from home for four years.

### **How likely are you to recommend Ride On to someone else?**

I recommend buses all the time, but often get pushback about things people have seen/smelled when they ventured onto the buses. I understand their resistance, but honestly unpleasant rides are so infrequent I don't consider them an issue. If I were to find myself in a bad situation I would just get off and take another bus or get an Uber/Lyft. I'm a senior, more or less retired, and appreciate the help Ride On gives my budget.

## Ride On Winter Tips



Taking public transportation is a great alternative to avoid the hassle of driving in poor weather conditions. Our valued customers can count on [Ride On](#) to be safe and reliable, getting you to your destination while you stay warm and relaxed in our buses.

The safety of our customers continues to be our top priority. Here are seven safety tips we recommend you take while riding with us during the Winter weather:

- **Plan for extra time in your commute.** Winter weather conditions such as snow and ice may cause delays to the bus schedule. Planning extra time may ensure that even with the delays, you can get to your destination on time.
- **Dress accordingly.** Be prepared to wait extra time for the bus to arrive. As a result, what you wear is crucial to staying warm while waiting on the bus or walking to your destination.
- **Consider getting a virtual SmarTrip Card.** Our hands tend to suffer the most during the Winter weather because they are usually exposed due to activity. With a virtual SmarTrip card, you can simply use your phone to pay for fares while still wearing your gloves. It also saves you time looking for the physical card while staying contactless during this time. The virtual SmarTrip card is available for iOS and Android.
- **Be Visible.** It gets dark early so be sure to make yourself visible to an approaching bus. Hold a flashlight or use your cell phone's light so that the bus operator can see you at the stop. If possible, wear reflective apparel or safety items (bands, pins) for more visibility on your coat or clothing.
- **Stand clear from the curb.** Standing close to the curb is dangerous, especially during inclement weather. Buses may slide on snow as they approach the curb. Be sure to stand clear from the curb until the bus comes to a complete stop and is ready for boarding. NEVER stand in the street.
- **Be careful when boarding and stepping off the bus.** Wait for the bus to come to a complete stop before trying to board. Bus steps can become slippery from snow. Try to clean the snow off your shoes before boarding. Be

sure to always use the handrails while getting on or off the bus and take your time.

- **Use our Trip Planning App.** Plan your trip, check bus arrival times, and get alerts when your stop is approaching with the new Ride On Trip Planner app. The app is available for download for iOS and Android devices, and in a desktop version. Download the app [here](#).

## **Of Note**

### **Transit Advisory Group is Recruiting**

The Transit Advisory Group is actively recruiting new members! If you or someone you know is interested, especially those who are disabled, high school students or bilingual, please visit our TAG webpage [here](#) to apply to be a member. Your membership is free, and you will have a chance to make a difference within Montgomery County. Let your voice be heard!!

### **'Love Flash' Buses Bring the Love in February**

Embrace the spirit of love with the [Ride On Valentine's Flash Bus](#), a heartwarming addition to the Flash fleet adorned with festive decorations and a touch of romance. This special bus brings a unique and cheerful atmosphere to your commute, spreading love throughout Montgomery County. MCDOT made Valentine's Day a little more exciting this year by hosting a Flash contest from February 1-14 for a chance to win two \$50 gift cards, one for the winner and one for their Valentine. Let love blossom as you ride with Ride On this Valentine's season!

### **Youth Cruiser SmarTrip Card Events**

The Youth Cruiser card is a SmarTrip card for Montgomery County residents under 19 years old that provides free rides on all MCDOT buses and most Metrobuses within the County. The Ride On marketing team is promoting our cards by going to high schools in the county to inform students about the benefits and register them to receive the cards. We have been to three schools so far and registered over 100 students. Five schools are on the calendar in the coming months, and we are continuously adding more schools. Middle schools will be our next focus.

Students can also get the cards at their school or county libraries. More information can be found [here](#).

### **What is the Transportation Association of Maryland?**

The Transportation Association of Maryland is a 501(c)(3) organization representing 104+ member organizations and 20,000+ individual members. TAM is the legislative voice and vigilant eyes and ears of the transportation industry in

Maryland. TAM's mission is to strengthen community transportation in Maryland through advocacy and professional development.

## **Transit Trivia!**

Test your familiarity with Ride On's routes, services, and more with our transit trivia! The answer will be in next month's edition of our newsletter so make sure you tune in next month to see if you answered correctly!

In what year did Ride On launch its first electric buses?

1. 2018
2. 2019
3. 2020
4. 2021

For the most up-to-date service information, riders should follow @RideOnMCT on [X](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), and [Instagram](#). In addition, information is available at RideOnBus.com, by subscribing to receive email alerts at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/govdelivery](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/govdelivery), or texting MONTGOMERY RIDEON to 468311 to receive text alerts.

For information on MCDOT programs and services visit [montgomerycountymd.gov/mcdot](http://montgomerycountymd.gov/mcdot), follow @MCDOTNow on [X](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and [subscribe](#) to MCDOT's "Go Montgomery!" newsletter.

Title VI: Montgomery County assures that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, as provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Rights Act of 1987, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity.