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The Case Not Made: Local Bus-Rapid-Transit (BRT) and the Independent Transit Authority (ITA)

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November 6, 2015



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Traffic Congestion & Lack of Transportation Investment are Real Problems

Our Regional Transportation Networks are:

- Heavily Congested
- Under-built
- Unsafe & Falling Apart
- Not Aligned with Today's Travel Patterns

For most County voters, congestion is THE #1 ISSUE, and if we stay on our present course, things will get MUCH WORSE

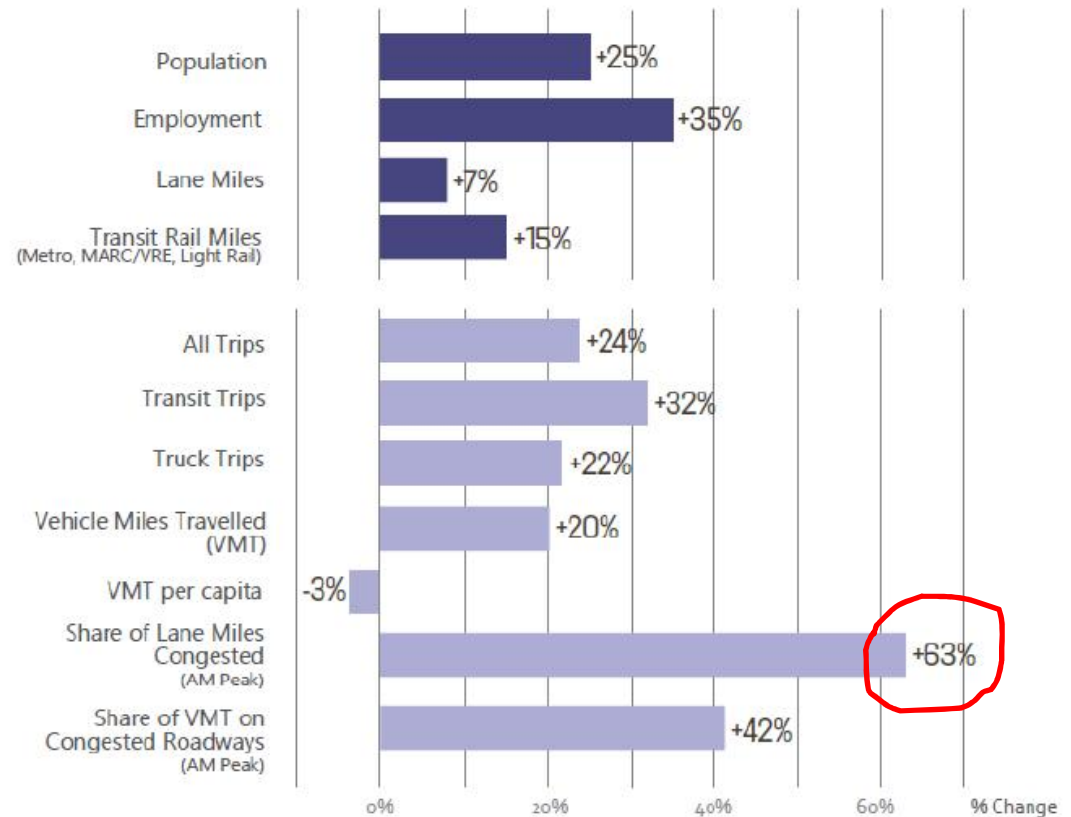


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Current “Constrained Long-Range Plan” Falls “Way” Short

Our Future Under the 2014 CLRP

- **Current plans for 2040 FAIL to address a projected 63% INCREASE in congestion – above current levels...**
- *This is NOT sustainable*
- *Key Question: Since current plan is inadequate, what ELSE should we be doing?*





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New Transit and Road Capacity is Needed Under ANY future Growth Scenario

- Economic growth in Montgomery County and the region has slowed, but cannot be supported with our current networks
- Traditional funding sources likely to remain constrained
- Hence the need to think outside the box – as the County Executive’s ITA proposal did



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But is a Local BRT Network and an Independent Transit Authority (ITA) the Best Option?

- Task Force charged with improving proposal to authorize ITA that failed last legislative session
- Many objections were heard about both at the public hearings on the ITA proposal this year
- Task Force Report was released – with a minority report and several dissenting statements
- County Executive is not introducing legislation (this is a good thing)



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Rapid Transit Task Force has Focused on Two Key Questions:

1. Assuming a County-wide BRT system *is* the best possible use of \$2.2 billion in transportation funds, what parts of it should we focus on first and how fast can we get it done?
2. Assuming the proposed ITA *is* the right financing structure for funding and operating a major new county-wide Bus-Rapid-Transit (BRT) system, how can this proposal be improved?



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Two key Questions the Task Force was NOT Asked – But should have been:

1. *Is a \$2.2 billion local BRT network really such a high priority – relative to other investments we could make with that money – that it justifies this level of increased taxation (outside the Charter limit) and elaborate new financial and operating structures like the ITA?*
2. *If so, is the proposed ITA the best financing structure for funding a major new system like this, or are there better alternatives?*



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That These Questions Were not Asked Points to Serious Flaws in County Transportation Planning

It is extremely unusual for any proposal to spend \$2.2 billion to advance this far in the process without:

1. A formal Alternatives Analysis FIRST
2. Any data indicating that it would have a positive impact on congestion

INCREDIBLY – Neither of these elements was there



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On the First Question the Task Force Should have Been Asked: Is local BRT the best use of transportation funds?

- **The answer is a resounding NO.**
- Expert studies reveal strong consensus on what our region's transportation priorities should be – there are several projects under study that would dramatically reduce congestion, improve safety & boost transit ridership – and some even pay for themselves
- Local BRT has some merit – but is not a high priority
- No credible study data indicates any positive impact on congestion – net effect may be more delays, not less – so why all the focus on this?



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ITA Proposal's Sole Focus: A Local BRT System Most of Us Wouldn't Use

Local BRT doesn't address our dominant travel patterns, or any of the County's worst traffic bottlenecks (all of which are on major highways) that local BRT would not impact:

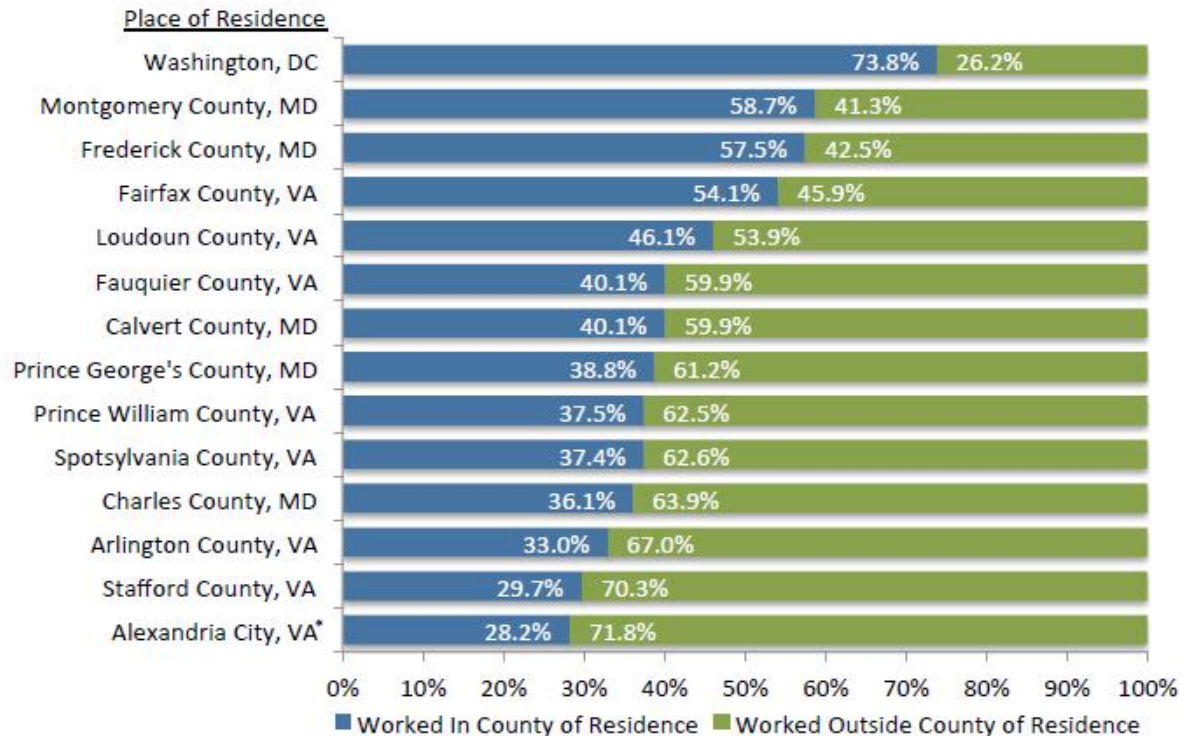
- Most projected BRT riders are already using transit
- 75% of daily trips are non-commuting; 10% are freight; Local BRT addresses virtually NONE of this demand
- Local BRT only serves local trips, but dominant travel patterns are suburb-to-suburb & multi-jurisdictional
- Montgomery imports 200K workers each day from other jurisdictions; exports 41% of resident workers



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Regional Commuting Patterns – Regional Connections Are a Much Higher Priority

Figure 1: Place of Residence by Location of Workplace, Washington MSA



Source: 2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimates
* Alexandria City is treated as a county by the US Census Bureau



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Major Flaws in ITA Proposal: Focused on Wrong Priorities

Limited focus on Funding a Local BRT Ignores Higher Priority Investments:

- A long list of other priorities would have more positive impacts on congestion, reduced cut-through traffic, & job growth, but have been delayed for years
- Some are multi-modal in nature, provide far more transportation benefits, and are largely self-financing
- Far more economic value per dollar invested, no need to raise taxes, so why so much focus on local BRT?



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Projects with MUCH Greater Impact on Congestion Ought to be Our Top Priorities

For example, we could spend \$2.2 billion on:

- Fixing I-270 – a multi-modal corridor study is currently on hold – This project dramatically reduces congestion for 250,000 people/day, eliminating tons of emissions
- Fixing the American Legion Bridge and 270 spurs – over 300,000 people/day would see dramatic traffic relief
- Both would vastly increase transit usage, many times more than local BRT, by running regional express-bus or BRT in new dedicated lanes; Other Master planned projects too.



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On the Second Question: Is this ITA structure the best way to finance BRT?

- **Again, the answer is a resounding NO.**
- No other jurisdiction in America has created a local ITA – dozens have created regional authorities – but none are local (Perhaps that should tell us something?...)
- Lots of better ideas out there: Using existing County authority to create special tax districts, if needed, a more incremental approach that doesn't involve new taxes and sidestepping the Charter limit, etc.



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Other Funding Options That Should Have Been Considered

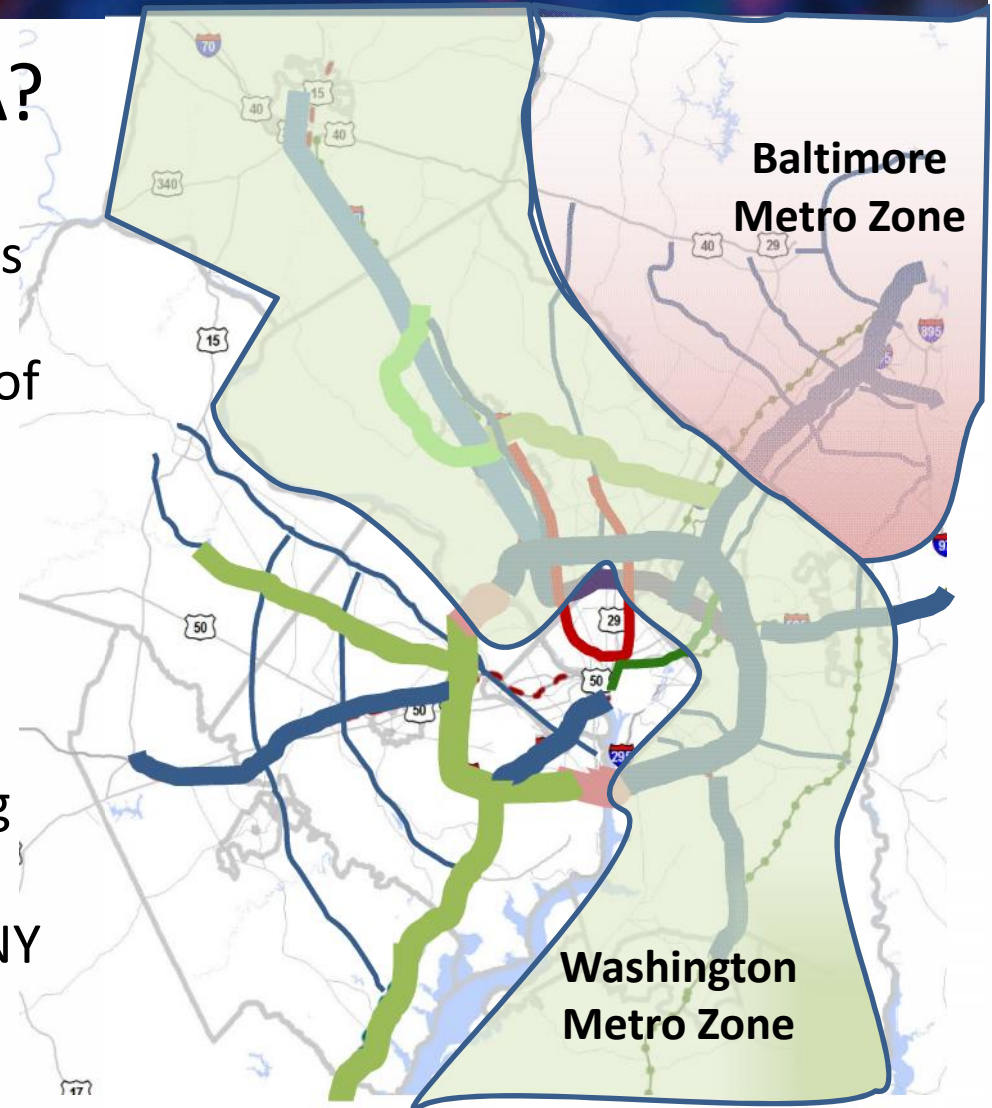
- Create a statewide infrastructure bank, with ability to finance major new projects leveraging new and existing funds from federal, state, local and private-sector sources; & toll financing
- “Regional Transit Authority” (RTA) to fund multi-jurisdictional projects with more impact, guided by performance metrics, limited to investing in only the most cost-effective projects



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Thinking Bigger: Why RTA?

- Adds \$580 million/year in new transportation \$\$, with lower rates and a broader base than ITA
- Could fund lots more: local share of Purple Line, CCT plus BRT to Frederick, 29 plus BRT to Howard
- Metro – new dedicated revenue source for Metro improvements
- Regional connectivity – New BRT system – using Express Toll Lanes (ETLs) on 270/ALB/495 for funding
- More accountability for results
- **MUCH GREATER IMPACT THAN ANY LOCAL BRT SYSTEM CAN DELIVER** on Mobility, Accessibility, Jobs





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The ITA Proposal Raised Several Other Major Concerns

- Property tax impacts are potentially huge – Ignoring voter mandate & circumventing Charter limit
- Limited accountability to elected officials/voters
- Open-ended costs for unclear deliverables, no performance metrics
- County workforce impacts, labor concerns
- Complex structure, duplicating existing county functions (Ride-On), simpler solutions available
- Unclear if/how much this system reduces congestion



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Task Force Revised ITA Proposal: Report Addressed Some Concerns

- Limited scope of potential tax increases
- Addressed labor issues
- More clearly defined County authority
- Recommended more phased approach



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Task Force Report Did Not Address Other Core Issues

- Lack of BRT system performance data, no performance metrics, no persuasive data on transportation benefits
- Potential duplication, cost and inefficiencies in creating a separate agency for one mode in a multi-modal system
- County already has ability to fund local BRT corridors incrementally
- Lack of broad civic, business, or labor support; and intense opposition to ITA concept from many quarters made passage in Annapolis highly unlikely



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Major Flaws in the County's Transportation Planning and Prioritization Process

“Alternatives Analysis” is standard practice when deciding a \$2.2 billion project – for good reason – it should be done on BRT:

- Conduct detailed modeling analysis on the proposed BRT network, testing it against alternative scenarios/other investments we could make with the same money, and a “no-build” baseline scenario, then share the results with the public
- Identify the most cost-effective investments, through this “Alternatives Analysis” process, then identify funding sources and explore financing options
- This is the process for any major project (It was done for the ICC, Purple Line, CCT, Glenmont Metro, etc. – not for BRT)



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Key Conclusions:

1. The need for increased investment in transportation infrastructure in our region is urgent, immediate and very real
2. Transportation priorities ought to be set based on real-world data, alternatives analysis, performance metrics, and genuine public input -- NOT interest-group politics and ideology
3. Citizens cannot be expected to support new taxes if there is no value proposition in terms of real, measurable traffic relief, improved access, and better quality-of-life
4. A better way forward: Do a real “alternatives analysis,” think outside the box when it comes to funding, and be honest with citizens about what it will take to keep our community moving
5. THEN you can ask for their support to help pay for it



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Final Thoughts – To Cheer Everyone Up

- This County's (and the Region's) transportation policies are completely off the mark
- As a region, we are headed straight off a cliff on the #1 most important issue to area voters – following a plan we know doesn't work
- So where is the URGENCY? Where is the LEADERSHIP?... It has to come from us
- These problems are solvable, so let's get moving on solutions that work
- It's time to make some noise... we must demand better!

[Visit: MDTransportation.org for more on this soon]