

"Federation Corner" column  
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### **Transit Task Force update**

by Dan Wilhelm  
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*NOTE: The author of this column, Dan Wilhelm, was appointed to the Transit Task Force as the Montgomery County Civic Federation representative.*

The Transit Task Force created by County Executive Isiah "Ike" Leggett has been holding meetings since March 23 of this year. The Task Force formed five working groups, most of which have been active over the summer. A summary of meetings and copies of presentations given at the meetings can be found at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Apps/cex/transit](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Apps/cex/transit).

On August 17, the Working Group on Design Attributes presented its recommendation, which was accepted by the entire Task Force. The proposed Rapid Transit system would consist of sleek and stylish Rapid Transit Vehicles (RTVs) that are in the same class as Metrorail, and not like our local buses. The system of routes and stations would be designed to a gold standard, which exceeds those of any current transit system in the US.

The Task Force, realizing that compromises will be required as the system is being designed and built, identified and categorized attributes that would guide the design into five priorities, from absolutely essential to desirable. One absolutely essential attribute is to have physically separated, dedicated RTV lanes throughout the entire network, to the extent possible, so that travel times are nearly the same as auto travel.

The Task Force realizes that right-of-way restrictions will not always allow dedicated lanes. However, it is surprising what appears to be possible, since many large business and commercial property owners appear to be willing to provide the land to support this goal. We had a briefing from the White Flint Partnership and VIKA Consulting about the 1.5 mile segment on MD 355 that is covered by the White Flint Master Plan. They showed that dedicated lanes should be possible in this area. The City of Rockville is also considering dedicated RTV lanes from the point where the White Flint Partnership stops to downtown Rockville as part of Rockville's master plan update.

On August 17, the Working Group on Routes and Development presented a recommendation, also accepted by the entire Task Force, concerning the routes that should be included in a mature RTV system. The Working Group built upon the County DOT study called Countywide Bus Rapid Transit, and the final report is dated July 2011. The report can be found at: [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dotmpl.asp?url=/content/dot/index.asp](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dotmpl.asp?url=/content/dot/index.asp).

The study identifies sixteen routes that satisfy the study criteria. (The designs contained in that report only considered what is possible within the existing right-of-way.) The Task Force agreed that the sixteen routes should be part of the system but added seven additional routes or segments that it felt were needed to provide good connectivity throughout the urban and suburban areas within the county. Not all of the routes will be in the RTV system initially, but those that are not would initially have more frequent enhanced local bus service.

All of these routes will be considered by the Planning Board in their recently initiated update to the master plan of highways. It is also recognized that the existing RideOn and Metro Bus routes would need to be changed and integrated with the RTV system. Part of that redesign would involve

increasing the number of feeder buses. Note that the RTV system assumed the Metrorail, Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transit systems will be built.

Work is underway to better define the RTV system costs than were estimated in the Countywide Bus Rapid Transit report. Work is also planned to address a public/private partnership for financing and paying for the RTV system. The County Executive staff is actively looking for new maintenance depot locations and organizing these depots to maintain both RTVs and RideOn buses. The Task Force thinking is that Federal funding will not be used for the RTV system since there is so little money available from the Feds, and because we want the system implemented much faster than Federal funding could support.

I am very pleased by the active membership and shared vision of those on the Task Force. Note that the membership of County Executive's Task Force listed on the web site includes State Transit Administration, County Planning Commission, County DOT, County Council, WMATA (Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority), the City of Rockville, along with a number of citizen and business groups.

*The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to [theelms518@earthlink.net](mailto:theelms518@earthlink.net)*