

"Federation Corner" column  
The Montgomery Sentinel - January 26, 2012

### **County to get two transit facilities...sooner or later**

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In response to a question at the January 9 public budget forum in Bethesda, County Executive Isiah Leggett announced that the opening of the new Silver Spring Transit Center was being pushed back once again.

The facility, to be named for former U.S. Senator from Maryland Paul S. Sarbanes, was set to open in December of 2011. But it was discovered that the cement covering the reinforced steel structure is of insufficient depth in more than half a dozen spots on the third floor. It is feared that repeated freezing and thawing during successive winters could undermine the integrity of that part of the building.

The Transit Center was originally scheduled to open in spring 2009 at a cost of \$75 million. After some early delays, construction on the facility began in September 2008 and costs had already risen to \$94 million. At that time, it was anticipated the facility would take two years to complete. The opening date has now been pushed back more than seven times, and the cost is expected to total more than \$100 million.

When it opens the facility will bring together Metro, Ride On and WMATA Metrobuses, MARC trains, MTA regional commuter buses, Van-Go shuttles, intercity bus lines, University of Maryland shuttles, taxis and other transportation services.

The contractor must address the improperly laid cement and still complete work on the underground ventilation system. But county officials do not expect the latest delay to increase Montgomery's costs. The facility is currently set to be finished in March or April of this year, and to open in June after a sixty-day test of the grounds by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority and the Maryland Transit Administration.

One puzzling aspect of this latest setback in the Transit Center's opening is that the contractor, Foulger-Pratt, proudly announced in a May 16, 2011 press release that the company had earlier "hosted the traditional BBQ lunch for construction workers and guests to celebrate the topping out of the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit Center. About 300 people joined the February celebration to mark completion of the three-story structure which includes 16,000 cubic yards of concrete, 2,000 tons of rebar, and 90 caissons sized up to 72" in diameter."

One wonders why it took some eleven months after the "topping out" celebration to discover the problem with the depth of the concrete on the third floor. Or has it been known for some time but only recently revealed to the public? Whatever the answer, the project is now set to be completed some three years later than originally planned, and at nearly 150% of the original cost estimate. So much for the accuracy of planning for transit projects.

Another county construction project planned to improve the adequacy of transit service is the North County Maintenance Depot. The 200,000 square foot bus depot would allow the county to expand bus service north of Gaithersburg, and was slated for a site on Whalen Lane near the Montgomery County Correctional Facility.

Ever since he took office in December 2006, County Executive Leggett has stated that the county could not increase service by purchasing any more Ride On buses, even if it could afford to, because it would have no place to park them until the North County Maintenance Depot is built.

The facility was set to be constructed in two phases on a 128 acre site adjacent to the Clarksburg Jail. When completed, the Depot would accommodate 350 buses, a fleet services facility to maintain the buses, and a highway maintenance facility to replace depots in Derwood and Poolesville which would accommodate 90 pieces of heavy highway maintenance equipment. The facility would also contain office space for operational and administrative staff.

Higher than expected costs delayed the project until 2013. Then in July of 2009 the Planning Department staff voiced concern about constructing the Maintenance Depot in the Special Protection Area of the Ten Mile Creek watershed, which has a 15% cap on amount of impervious surface allowed. Text on the project's webpage on the Department of General Services website states, the Planning Board "recommended DGS explore alternative sites outside the Clarksburg Special Protection Area for the North County Maintenance Depot project."

According to the DGS Division of Building Design and Construction webpage, "the site selection process has begun and will be conducted by the Site Selection Committee which is chaired by the Upper County Regional Service Center (UCRSC) Director and consists of representatives from the community, County user agencies and resource staff. The committee has met to start the process and establish site evaluation criteria. Further developments in the site selection process for the North County Maintenance Depot project will be posted on this site as it progresses. Site selection process is ongoing. First Site visit tour is scheduled for January 23, 2010."

There is this final entry on the North County Maintenance Depot webpage--"Due to CIP budget constraints, the project will be deferred to Fiscal Year 2017."

While the volunteers on the Transit Task Force are researching possible routes and sources of funding for a countywide bus rapid transit (BRT) system, they might also consider helping identify a new site for the North County Maintenance Depot. The county will need some place to park all those state-of-the-art streamlined rapid transit vehicles they hope to purchase.

*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)*