

Howard County Budget Hearing
Dec 11, 2017
by Paul Verchinski

Good Evening

First of all the Howard County Citizens Association would like to thank you for signing the legislation that now provides the aging in place tax credit and for the expansion of the livable homes property tax credit. This has helped many county residents that own their homes to maintain their homes.

I am here mostly to talk about and request full funding for the Howard County portion of the RTA. My former job experience at the federal transit administration as the Director of Planning has a direct bearing on the need for transit in Howard County. I have commented on the proposed five year central Maryland Transit Development Plan. The organizing principle for the TDP is that transit in Howard will be a preferred choice and not an option of last resort. Currently it is not and the following needs to happen through full funding of the following through your budget:

1. Purchase new replacement buses until all over age buses are retired,
2. Purchase additional buses for the recommended service expansion
3. Incentivize older adults (this demographic is doubling in size) to take fixed route service by providing it free which should then reduce the call for additional paratransit service which is very expensive.
4. Continue the Howard county grant to neighbor ride that mainly provides rides for older adults to medical appointments by volunteer drivers, and
5. Require performance measures and associated financial penalties for the poor and unreliable service currently being provided by the RTA private contractor, and finally but most important,
6. Develop a 20 year transit plan for Howard. with no long term planning, any road will get you there and it will cost you in the long run.

The Columbia downtown development is predicated on a new transit center that will be part of transit oriented development. This needs to be a transit to site and not a drive to site. Expanding service through better frequencies, reliable buses, and a new East-West transit way from gateway across the US 29 bike/pedestrian bridge is sorely needed and the costs will be far less than a complete highway redo of the gateway/route 175 intersection.

To summarize, we need funding for a reliable transit system. This will not happen thru either state or federal funding but only thru Howard county funding. Be pleasantly surprised if there is state or federal funding.