T&E COMMITTEE #2
January 24, 2011

MEMORANDUM

January 21, 2011

TO: Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment Committee

FROM: Glenn Orlin, Deputy Council Staff Director

SUBJECT: Briefing – bus rapid transit (BRT)

Because the design and operation of BRT systems vary widely, a succinct definition is hard to come by. The following descriptions together help outline BRT's scope:

> *"Bus Rapid Transit can best be described as a combination of facility, systems, and vehicle investments that convert conventional bus services into a fixed-facility transit service, greatly increasing their efficiency and effectiveness to the end user."* (Federal Transit Administration, Bus Rapid Transit Demonstration Program, December 2002).

> *"Bus Rapid Transit...[is] a flexible rubber-tired rapid-transit mode that combines stations, vehicles, services, running ways, and Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) elements into an integrated system with a strong positive identity that evokes a unique image. BRT applications are designed to be appropriate to the market they serve and their physical surroundings, and can be incrementally implemented in a variety of environments."* (Transportation Cooperative Research Program (TCRP), Report 90, Bus Rapid Transit, Vol. I, 2003)

Full world-class BRT systems typically include continuous reserved bus lanes, passenger fare payment at station entryways, high-level boarding platforms for level entry to buses through multiple wide doors, real-time passenger information systems, and a high level of systems operations management. When well designed, such systems can move 8,000-40,000 passengers per hour per direction, as much as metro systems. Partial BRT systems may be designed to simply convey public transit buses along a right-of-way faster than general traffic, with a series of "queue jumpers"—additional lanes at intersections allowing a bus to bypass the backup from traffic signals—or by operating express buses in part on high-occupancy-vehicle (HOV) or high-occupancy-toll (HOT) lanes. Many European cities have created another variant of partial BRT called "Buses with High Level of Service" (BHLS). BRT has become an increasingly popular means for improving transit around the world because in most circumstances it can provide faster and more reliable transit service at a more affordable cost per mile than rail modes, which also means that a more extensive BRT system can be built and operated at a lower cost than for rail.

There are no full BRT systems yet in the Washington region. Montgomery County does have services that include some BRT elements; for example, Metrobuses use the I-270 HOV lanes. Additional elements of a BRT are in various stages of development. The Council has programmed $6 million for preliminary engineering of the master-planned Veirs Mill Road (MD 586) BRT between Wheaton and Rockville; the County is entering into a memorandum of understanding with Maryland Department of Transportation to perform this work. Similarly, the Council has funded $5 million for preliminary engineering of the master-planned Georgia Avenue (MD 97) Busway between Glenmont and Olney.

The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) has nearly completed preliminary engineering for the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) between Shady Grove and Clarksburg. MTA has not yet determined whether the CCT will be a busway or a light rail line. The Council and Executive have recommended light rail.

Committee Chair Berliner has requested that the Committee receive presentations from two panels. The first panel consists of four experts with national and international experience planning BRT systems:

- **Michael Replogle**, Global Policy Director and Founder, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy: overview of BRT globally and its relevance to Montgomery County opportunities.

- **Brendan Finn**, Senior Transport Consultant, ETTS - European Transport and Telematics Systems Ltd.: European experience with BHLS (Buses with High Level of Service), a form of light BRT relevant to the U.S. context.

- **Sam Zimmerman**, Urban Transport Advisor, World Bank and former Director of Planning for the Federal Transit Administration: North American best practices for the design and operation of BRT systems.

- **Jack Gonsalves**, PB Consult: Eugene, Oregon BRT network, system plan and experience.

The second panel will speak specifically to the potential for BRT in Montgomery County:

- **Marc Elrich**, Montgomery County Councilmember: his initial proposal for a BRT system in Montgomery County.

- **Evan Goldman**, Federal Realty Investment Trust: the proposal for BRT on Rockville Pike through White Flint, and its relationship to planned redevelopment.

- **Al Roshdieh**, Deputy Director, Montgomery County Department of Transportation: progress and schedule for the ongoing Countywide BRT Study.