

"Federation Corner" column
The Montgomery Sentinel - June 28, 2012

Hearing to be held July 12 on proposed new transit system

by Jim Humphrey
member, MCCF Executive Committee

In a press release issued on May 26, County Executive Isiah Leggett and the 15-member Transit Task Force he appointed announced they will hold a public hearing to seek comments on the plan developed by the Task Force to establish a 160-mile rapid transit system in Montgomery County. The hearing will be held Thursday, July 12 from 7 to 9 p.m. in the 1st floor auditorium of the County Council Office Building, located at 100 Maryland Avenue in Rockville.

Individuals and representatives of organizations who sign up to testify at the hearing will be given 2 minutes to deliver their oral comments, and are encouraged to bring a written copy of their testimony to submit.

County Executive Leggett announced the launch of his Transit Task Force (TTF) on February 24, 2011, assigning it a mission of making a comprehensive rapid transit system a reality in the county. The CE created the task force to advocate for developing and implementing a system that is consistent with state transportation objectives and complements regional transit operations.

"By establishing this task force, I am keeping a commitment I made in my 2010 inaugural address to the residents of Montgomery County," said Leggett. "The Task Force will devise a practical roadmap that will guide us to fully implementing the transit we both want and need to keep our county competitive in the 21st century."

The Task Force is a public/private partnership with 20 members appointed by the CE and chaired by Mark Winston, a lawyer in private practice and former member of the Maryland State Transportation Commission and State Roads Commission. Also appointed to the TTF were Council member Marc Elrich, current Council President Roger Berliner who chairs the Council's Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment Committee, and Dan Wilhelm who serves as Chair of the Transportation Committee for the Montgomery County Civic Federation.

Other Task Force members include Planning Board Chair Francoise Carrier; Marilyn Balcombe with the Corridor Cities Transitway Coalition; State Delegate Brian Feldman (D-15); State Senator Rob Garagiola (D-15); Jonathan Genn, attorney for the planned Percontee development; David Hauck of the Sierra Club; Art Holmes, Director of the county Department of Transportation; David McDonough with Johns Hopkins University; Darrell Mobley of the Maryland Department of Transportation; Henry Montes from the Latin American Advisory Group; Rich Parsons, a development consultant with Parsons & Associates; Steve Silverman, Director of the county Department of Economic Development; Craig Simoneau from the City of Rockville government; Tina Slater, President of Action Committee for Transit; county Assistant Administrative Officer Tom Street; U.S. Representative Chris Van Hollen; and Francine Waters with Lerner Enterprises.

Some controversy arose when the Transit Task Force presented its Final Report and Recommendations to County Executive Leggett in late May, bypassing critical steps in the TTF Work Plan that called for release of a draft report and the conducting of a public hearing on that draft prior to adoption of a Final Report. Although Mr. Leggett has already accepted the Task Force's Final Report, the press release for the July 12 hearing notes that all testimony delivered at that hearing, and written comments submitted to the CE by email, will be entered into the record. The Civic Federation is requesting that all public

testimony and comments, and Task Force responses to the testimony and comments, be published as an Appendix to the TTF Final Report.

Also generating a fair amount of controversy are the TTF recommendations for financing the \$1.6 billion construction cost and annual maintenance required for the proposed rapid transit vehicle (RTV) system. All proposals involve special taxing district funding, but options range from collecting needed revenue by taxing only those owners of property located within one-quarter mile of an RTV route to taxing owners of up to 90% of all properties in the county. Recommendations also involve seeking some State and local government funding, and possible investment from major real estate projects in the county and other private parties.

The proposed RTV system will use vehicles that will operate like "light rail on rubber tires" and is more typically referred to as bus rapid transit. To the maximum extent possible, the network will have separate, dedicated lanes in which the vehicles will operate, with an emphasis on creating a network with both north-south and east-west connections.

Following the conduct of the July 12 hearing and any sessions needed to consider and respond to public testimony and comments, the Transit Task Force will continue to meet, on an "as needed" basis, to advise the County Executive on implementation issues which may arise during the expected 9 to 20 year construction phase for the RTV system. The text of the TTF Final Report and the website for the Transit Task Force can be accessed through links available on the homepage of the Civic Federation website at www.montgomerycivic.org.

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