January 20, 2016

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
County Executive
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear County Executive Leggett,

We are writing today concerning the future of the county’s Rapid Transit System (RTS).

We wish to thank you again for your leadership on advancing RTS, which is central to our community’s smart growth future. Your leadership on this issue has been, and remains, critical. While we believe that an Independent Transit Authority has the possibility of providing transit effectively and efficiently, we did not believe that sufficient groundwork had been laid with the broader public to support an Independent Transit Authority, nor had concerns about the breadth of its authority been sufficiently addressed. Nonetheless, we remain firmly committed to moving forward expeditiously with RTS.

We are concerned that we are losing momentum on this critical issue at a critical time for our county. Investing in transit is key to maintaining Montgomery County’s economic competitiveness. Our neighbors in Northern Virginia have invested in the Silver Line, the Route 1 Metroway, and are making bold plays to improve the I-66 corridor. Without adequate transit, responsible economic development will not happen in our community.

We continue to believe that a six-pronged approach to advancing Phase 1 of RTS (MD 355 North and South, U.S. 29, and Veirs Mill) will move us closer to our transit future.

1. **Marketing and branding**
   You have said, and we agree, that we need to conduct serious work to market and brand the RTS to the public. If that work has been ongoing, however, we have not seen the evidence of it. Please let us know your plan for marketing and branding the system during 2016, and let us know how we might be helpful in these efforts. Central to the effort must be a strategy for the public to understand that RTS is not “just another bus.”

2. **Fund planning and preliminary engineering in FY17-FY22 CIP**
   According to the state’s calculations, the dollars needed to complete planning and preliminary engineering would fall along the schedule provided at the end of this letter. To make a firm commitment of the importance of high-quality Rapid Transit for advancing our economic development goals at White Flint and White Oak, for providing improved transit mobility along the heavily utilized Veirs Mill corridor, and for addressing our community’s serious congestion problems, we need to complete this work expeditiously. We note that you have provided only $2.6
million over FY17 and FY18 for RTS, which is not sufficient to cover the state’s estimates for the cost of 30% design. We are interested in knowing how you plan to provide the necessary resources to advance planning on the project in a timely fashion.

3. **Develop a real and viable financing plan**
   As part of the White Oak Master Plan, the Council directed the Executive to develop a financing plan within two years. That plan is due to us this coming fall. In the meantime, we would appreciate an update on the development of that plan as we consider our priorities in this year’s budget.

4. **Push Maryland Transit Administration to develop more rapid timeline and to work with partners**
   While sufficient time needs to be given for the engineering and the public process to play out, this project cannot be built on a traditional timeline. The future of our county cannot be held up for decades as we trudge through the usual steps needed to secure federal approval and funding. MTA has said that they are open to exploring a more aggressive timeline, and we are asking that you push them to present us with the terms under which they could move faster than the schedule they presented to us on December 3. That schedule had operations not commencing on MD 355, Veirs Mill, or U.S. 29 until the middle of next decade. That is simply too long to wait. Additionally, WMATA has repeatedly reached out to our county with offers to help in this process; they are a valuable resource and we should work with them on these projects.

5. **Ensure that the MTA does not “over-engineer” RTS**
   We also ask that you make a strong case to MTA not to over-engineer the project, as the State Highway Administration did on Georgia Avenue North. Rapid Transit’s greatest benefit is that it can provide effective, reliable transportation at significantly reduced cost, if designed properly. At the same time, we recognize that cost-cutting that significantly diminishes the quality of the transit product—what is often called “BRT creep” in the transit community—will not serve our community well, either. We ask that you and your staff advocate for an engineering approach that guarantees the most required dedicated right-of-way possible, while avoiding unnecessary expenses. Attached is a paper that explains clearly how Eugene, Oregon was able to design high-quality BRT within right-of-way and financial constraints. This project can be an important model for our efforts here.

6. **Continue to dedicate high-level staff to effort**
   Given the importance of the Rapid Transit System to our county’s future, we need continued focus from the Executive Branch on moving this forward. High-level staff in your office and the Department of Transportation need to continue to lead the charge on this initiative, and to work closely with our offices to ensure that the Council can continue to implement, and build support for, these needed transit investments.

Thank you for your consideration of this six-pronged approach to advance our shared objectives of a Montgomery County that has world-class transit, strong economic development based around that transit, and reduced automobile congestion and pollution. We stand ready to work with you, and look forward to your response.
Sincerely,

Roger Berliner  
Councilmember, District 1  
Chair, Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy, and Environment Committee

Marc Elrich  
Councilmember, At-Large

Tom Hucker  
Councilmember, District 5

Sidney Katz  
Councilmember, District 3

Nancy Navarro  
Councilmember, District 4

Craig Rice  
Councilmember, District 2

Hans Riemer  
Councilmember, At-Large

CC: Tim Firestine, Chief Administrative Officer  
Al Roshdieh, Acting Director, Montgomery County Department of Transportation  
Glenn Orlin, Deputy Council Administrator


### Appendix A: FY17-FY22 CIP Investments

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