



COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH

Testimony in **Support** of Light Rail Connecting Downtown Bethesda and New Carrollton

AA/DEIS for the Purple Line to the Maryland Transit Administration

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Chevy Chase

My name is Stewart Schwartz and I am the Executive Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. We are an eleven-year old regional organization working in Maryland, DC and Virginia and were founded by this region's leading conservation groups. We are focused on ensuring transportation and development decisions are made with genuine community involvement and accommodate growth while revitalizing communities, providing more housing and travel choices, and conserving our natural and historic areas.

We strongly support the Light Rail alternative directly connecting downtown Bethesda with Silver Spring, Langley Park, the heart of the University of Maryland on Campus Drive, Riverdale Park and the New Carrollton transit center.

Our endorsement follows detailed analysis of the study findings including the bus alternatives cited by the Town of Chevy Chase. We recognize the local concern over the near-term loss of trees. We are an environmental organization and we know that your community is filled with strong environmentalists. It is our conviction that the light-rail alternative along the Georgetown Branch right-of-way is the best and greenest alternative. It is critical for protection of our environment.

The LRT option moves the most people in the shortest time, diverts more auto traffic, consumes less energy, emits less pollution and greenhouse gases, and is far more effective at promoting revitalization and other non-auto trips by walking and biking. The classic Chesapeake Bay Foundation report, Network of Livable Communities, demonstrated that a network of transit and transit-oriented development would significantly reduce driving and traffic, while also reducing the loss of land, forests and filtering so necessary for saving the Bay.

Global warming is the greatest environmental threat that we face. And rising energy prices – inevitable with less oil and world growth – threaten our economy, competitiveness and national security. Both require that we reduce energy and emissions from transportation. Transportation alone accounts for about one-third of total greenhouse gas emissions and is among the fastest increasing sources. Over the last few decades, the amount of driving -- vehicle miles traveled -- increased three times the rate of population growth. A primary cause of this disproportionate increase in driving is due to the spread-out patterns of development and community designs that require more and longer vehicle trips. These sprawling patterns of growth also destroy farmlands and woodlands that help store carbon.

In California, the state legislature and the governor signed a law that addresses how transportation and land use must be changed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (SB375). The legislature found:

“Greenhouse gas emissions for automobiles and light trucks can be substantially reduced by new vehicle technology and by the increased use of low carbon fuel. However, even taking these measures into account, it will be necessary to achieve significant additional greenhouse gas reductions from changed land use patterns and improved transportation.”

The investment in light rail will help anchor our older communities, enhance property values, and bring new housing and business opportunities. The permanency of high quality light rail on this alignment will foster job growth in Silver Spring and Prince George’s County, while connecting workers to jobs in Bethesda and the Red Line Corridor -- creating an option that will reduce traffic. While we are confident that light rail is the appropriate technology for this corridor, we also strongly support increased investment in conventional and rapid bus service in suburban Maryland and the region. It is a perfect complement to the Purple Line light rail service.

We also recognize the impact of transit investments on communities like Langley Park. That’s why we are actively working to support preservation of affordable housing and assistance to local businesses and urge state and local policies and funding for these programs.

In conclusion, we enthusiastically support the Purple Line light rail option that offers the most direct connection between New Carrollton and downtown Bethesda. The high quality light rail service offers great benefits to the community and our region in terms of transportation choices and speed, energy efficiency and emissions reduction, and economic development. The Purple Line light rail should be a top priority for Maryland and our region.

Thank you for your consideration.