

The Purple Line – Is the Proposal for Our Community the Mass Transit Solution Silver Spring and Montgomery County Need?

Gas prices are at historic highs, county population is increasing, and the threat of global warming grows more dire with each passing month. It's clear our community and region need effective mass transit that will dramatically cut the number of cars on the road, unclog our streets, and reduce carbon emissions.

But the Purple Line – as it is currently planned, especially on Wayne Avenue and through downtown Silver Spring – isn't the sensible mass transit that we need.

State and County planners favor a Purple Line that runs at street level through our neighborhood and downtown Silver Spring. Specifically, they favor light rail trains running at street level from the new Silver Spring Transit Center, down Bonifant Street, crossing Georgia Avenue, continuing to Fenton Street and cutting across the property of the new planned library at Bonifant and Fenton and stopping there, then running diagonally as a 5th stream of traffic into the intersection of Wayne and Fenton, down the center of Wayne Avenue past the entrance to the Whole Foods parking lot, and continuing on Wayne past Dale Drive to the other side of Sligo Creek Parkway.

Our neighborhood association, SOECA, asked that a tunnel under Wayne be fully studied and added as one of the alignments to be fully evaluated in the MTA's Draft Environmental Impact Statement / Alternatives Analysis (DEIS/AA) being released this fall. MTA did not add the tunnel option to the study.

What will the Purple Line mean for our neighborhood and downtown Silver Spring?

This street level route will worsen already horrendous traffic congestion for blocks on Georgia, Fenton, and Wayne and throughout downtown Silver Spring. Slow moving trains up to 180 feet long – the equivalent of 4 ½ Metro buses – will cross Georgia Avenue and enter the intersection of Wayne and Fenton on the average of up to every three minutes from one direction or the other during extended rush hours, at likely speeds of no more than 5 to 15 miles per hour. An ill-designed route through the downtown will make it more difficult to access and travel through the downtown, affecting all of nearby Silver Spring.

Shared traffic lanes, which the State is planning, will further congest the area as trains and cars compete for road space. These shared lanes will increase the train's travel times, confuse drivers, and make accidents more likely.

Wayne Avenue will be substantially widened to accommodate long new left turn lanes of several hundred feet in length (including tapering) at Fenton, Cedar, Dale Drive, and Sligo Creek Parkway, and the proposed station at Dale Drive. Approximately 60 percent of the length of Wayne between Fenton and Sligo Creek Parkway will be widened. At Fenton and at Dale, the intersections will be widened to 70 feet, the width of Colesville Road. The recently rebuilt and widened bridge over Sligo Creek will be torn down and rebuilt and widened again.

This widening will increase traffic capacity on Wayne. Traffic itself will then increase to fill this expanded capacity. Wayne will have more, not fewer cars, with the Purple Line that is being designed.

Street widening will also result in diverting more cars onto Dale Drive and Sligo Creek Parkway on their way to Colesville Road.

This spillover traffic cannot be adequately controlled by more neighborhood traffic management plans. Current plans are not enforced.

There will be elevated noise levels on Wayne and in our neighborhood, up to 20 times an hour, from trains passing, braking at lights and stations, high-pitched "wheel squeal" on the curves along Wayne, possibly clanging bells or beeping as trains near stations and lights (as in other light rail systems), and amplified announcements on the trains and possibly at the stations.

Two traffic and/or parking lanes on Bonifant will be taken to create dedicated train lanes on Bonifant, and what was originally intended to be green space in the city center on the new library's property will instead be used for the train and station.

The planned Purple Line station at Dale and Wayne – with platforms 200 feet long, 14 inches high, and about 15 feet wide – will result in:

- ♦ Widening of the intersection to either 70 feet or 90 feet, depending on whether the station has one or two platforms.
- ♦ No left turns from Wayne on to Dale for cars traveling toward downtown Silver Spring when a train is in the station.
- ♦ Compromised safety of students walking to and from Sligo Creek Elementary and Silver Spring International Middle schools.
- ♦ Potential rezoning of the area. Community sector plans will likely be re-opened as a result of the Purple Line. Through zoning text amendments, the County Council can also change zoning for the neighborhood at any time. Because the county favors "transit-oriented development" near transit stations, higher density residential and commercial development along Wayne and at the intersection of Wayne and Dale will be the likely outcome of any changed zoning. The same could happen within the residential community east of the planned stop at the new library.

Significant Widening of Wayne Avenue – MTA Plans

to Accommodate Additional Lanes, Dale Station, and Technical Requirements in the Route that MTA Prefers

(approximate numbers, as best measured from MTA engineering drawings and supplemented by other MTA representations)

Widening would encompass:

Nearly two-thirds of that portion of Wayne on which the Purple Line would run – from Fenton to 900 feet east of Sligo Creek Parkway, where the train would veer off Wayne

Nearly 60% of the length from Fenton to Sligo Creek Parkway

Virtually all of block from Fenton to Cedar and continuing for more than 150 feet east of Cedar

Continuous widening at Dale (including intersection) – approximately 1,200 feet in length

Continuous widening at Sligo Creek Parkway (including intersection) – approximately 1,350 feet in length

Current and MTA Proposed Widths (from west to east):

Fenton to just before Whole Foods parking lot entrance (currently 54 feet) – planned 70 feet (same width as Colesville), then tapering to 54 feet and then increasing to 59 feet

St. Michael's Church to Cedar (currently 48 feet) – planned 59 feet (including phasing in)

East of Cedar, for 165 feet in length (currently 48 feet) – planned 57 feet, tapering to 48 feet

West of Dale, for 525 feet in length (to Dartmouth) (currently 47 feet) – planned 60 feet (including phasing in), then phasing in to 70 feet, and reaching 70 feet in width 50 feet before intersection

East of Dale, for 625 feet (currently 47 feet) – planned 70 ½ feet for first 420 feet (for center station platform, including 150 feet of pedestrian median from Dale to beginning of station), then tapering to 48 feet over next 200 feet (Note: If two side station platforms at Dale, then street will be widened to 90 feet.)

West of Sligo Creek Parkway, for 425 feet (currently 46 feet) – planned 59 feet (including phasing in)

East of Sligo Creek Parkway, for 900 feet, up to near Manchester Pl., before Eton Rd., where train veers off Wayne (currently 37 feet) – planned 59 feet for first 255 feet, then tapering to 48 feet

The Purple Line in Silver Spring and Our Region

A street-level Purple Line in downtown Silver Spring and on Wayne Avenue will create many problems for those who use a number of businesses and facilities in our community. MTA says it has attempted to address the following, but it does not have adequate solutions for them:

Whole Foods parking lot – access will be more difficult, especially for left turns into the lot from eastbound traffic on Wayne on a shared lane with trains and for right turns out of the parking lot back into the same shared lane.

Wayne Avenue garage – traffic turning left out of the garage will become an even greater problem with trains further congesting the Wayne and Fenton intersection.

Wayne Avenue entrance to the large parking lot at Sligo Creek Elementary and Silver Spring International Middle Schools. MTA has said that it will need to close that entrance and re-route cars on to Dale Drive and onto the neighborhood behind the schools.

The planned bike Green Trail – MTA has proposed combining it with the sidewalk on Wayne into one path to save space, but this would make it less safe for both pedestrians and bikers.

Wayne Avenue will be the only portion of the 16 mile Purple Line that runs along a residential street. The negative impacts to our neighborhood from the Purple Line will be permanent, and cannot be reversed – or even “mitigated” – by planting new trees, improving street signage and lighting, and redesigning the athletic field at the schools. These are measures that some have suggested, that are intrinsically unrelated to a mass transit system, and all of which could be done today without the Purple Line.

At an estimated cost of nearly \$1.5 billion in tax dollars, shouldn't we get a mass transit system that does more than replace the existing bus system in Silver Spring and the region?

The Purple Line the County and State are planning, including the route they appear to favor for Silver Spring:

Won't take cars off the road. MTA statements and data indicate that just 15 to 20 percent of Purple Line riders will come from cars. The rest already use buses and Metro. Only a few thousand cars will be removed by 2030 as the result of the entire route.

Won't reduce traffic congestion. MTA says that relieving traffic congestion isn't a primary goal of the project.

Isn't part of Metro. With 21 stops running at street level along most of the 16 mile route, the Purple Line has morphed from what was originally conceived to be Metro-like rapid transit to a slower moving streetcar that in downtown Silver Spring would most likely increase, not decrease, gridlock in one of the County's most congested areas.

Won't be especially fast. Based on MTA's projected travel times and information on Metro's web site, it will be 8 to 10 minutes quicker to take Metro from Bethesda to New Carrollton – the two ends of the Purple Line route – with a change at Metro Center, than to take the Purple Line between the same two locations. It will be extremely slow through downtown Silver Spring

Will displace some existing bus lines and bus stops.

What Can We Do?

Earlier this year, our neighborhood voted strongly against a street level route Purple Line route. In September, the State will release its study, that is, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/ Alternatives Analysis (DEIS/AA), which unfortunately will not have a tunneled Wayne Avenue alternative route included. Later in the fall, the Planning Board and the County Council will vote on the route they think the Purple Line should take between Bethesda and Langley Park. By January 2009, Governor O'Malley will have picked the route for the entire 16 miles of the Purple Line between Bethesda and New Carrollton. This is our last chance to let our elected officials know that we strongly oppose a street level route through our neighborhood and downtown Silver Spring.

It is very important now to write to County, State, and Federal officials, as well as the media, letting them know:

- ◆ We need mass transit that actually takes cars off the road (not just riders out of buses and into streetcars), reduces traffic congestion, and cuts carbon emissions.
- ◆ At nearly \$1.5 billion dollars, the Purple Line, as being planned through Silver Spring and the region, will not accomplish any of these goals.
- ◆ A street-level route along Wayne Avenue and through downtown Silver Spring will worsen gridlock through one of the County's most congested areas.

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