



Montgomery County's Advocates for Better Transportation

P.O. Box 7074, Silver Spring MD 20907 • admin@actfortransit.org

Montgomery County Council
Stella Werner Council Office Building
100 Maryland Ave.
Rockville, MD 20850

April 7, 2026

Re: Transit Services FY27 Operating Budget, Capital BikeShare, Vision Zero, Special Taxing Districts, and Chevy Chase Library Redevelopment

Dear Council President Fani-González, Vice President Balcombe and Councilmembers:

The increasingly [unaffordable costs of car ownership](#) makes it clear that frequent and reliable transit is an essential service and not charity. The Action Committee for Transit (ACT) calls on this County Council to prioritize bus frequency and reliability in the FY27 Operating Budget for Transit Services. Frequency and reliability are the characteristics of transit service that offers more freedom and access to opportunities. ACT is encouraged that Ride On's total ridership increased to 19.2 million in FY25 from 18.4 million after the start of free fares and the Great Seneca Transit Network, but this is still far away from the 26 million riders the system had in 2016. Moreover, the budget is an opportunity for the county to demonstrate it considers Capital Bikeshare and Vision Zero as necessary components of a comprehensive approach to transportation.

Improve Ride On Frequencies, Fund the Bus Priority Program, and Metro Lift

The [Transit Services](#) section of the budget shows expected revenue of \$264.4 million, but only \$212.8 million is allocated for activities that provide transit service. The budget shows 13 "position consolidations" without a service impact; however, it is not clear in the budget how these consolidations are consistent with providing frequent service.

Montgomery County should adopt an official policy that no Ride On bus should arrive more than thirty minutes after the bus before it. There are still routes running in excess of 30 minutes. Examples include Ride On routes 100, 5 and 8. This service level is the first step in the direction of headways that will be 20 minutes at maximum for any route no matter the day of week or time during the hours of operation.

Frequency now should be prioritized before expensive and environmentally harmful intersection improvements on roadways. Moreover, operating budget funds should not be used for future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) capital expenditures. **Montgomery County would be better off running express buses now on planned BRT routes.** Residents should not be told to keep waiting for frequent bus service that is dependent on the completion of large capital projects the county struggles to afford and is not increasing ridership now. ACT also urges Councilmembers to remember that an infrequent bus can

be deadly. Residents cross dangerous roads trying to catch a bus that may not come again for a long time.

An alternative to expensive capital projects is the Bus Priority Program. This program is funded from Mass Transit Revenue instead of bonds. The Bus Priority Program delivered the permanent bus lanes on University Boulevard and at the Germantown Transit Center. In addition to bus lanes that improve transit service for residents soon, the program can also pay for transit signal priority, queue jumps, and safer bus stops. **Dedicated bus lanes can be economically implemented by repurposing existing lanes as was done with the Georgia Avenue bus lanes.** This is a relatively more affordable option to provide reliable bus service sooner on planned BRT routes such as New Hampshire Avenue.

In keeping with the goal to make transit service as affordable as possible in the near term, the county should maximize promotion of [50% discounted fares](#) for WMATA buses and rail. Ride On is free but the residents that benefit the most from zero fares still need to connect to Metro. Residents that meet the eligibility requirement may already be interacting with county government or partners to access services. This interaction is an opportune time to help more people.

Capital BikeShare

Montgomery County is not taking enough advantage of the great resource that is Capital Bikeshare for first and last mile trips. Capital Bikeshare's ridership is [outpacing](#) similar systems across the country. But while DC and other suburbs have been adding docks, Montgomery has been losing them. First and last mile trips can be accommodated with micromobility solutions that are more cost and time effective than cars. **A prudent investment in Capital Bikeshare would bring the county up to the standards being set in Arlington and Fairfax.** The proposed dock installations below are excellent candidates due to the housing, retail, and other amenities in their vicinity:

1. The Forest Glen Metro.
2. The Wheaton Metro entrance across Georgia Avenue from the busbay. This will spare residents from having to cross Georgia Avenue to return their bike after having borrowed it from the dock at Elkin Street and Amherst Avenue.
3. An east-west connector station in Kemp Mill and Kensington.
4. The intersection of the Bethesda Trolley Trail and the Tuckerman Lane protected bike lane.
5. The new Westbard Square development.
6. The corridor from Wildwood through Montgomery Mall to take advantage of the Old Georgetown Road bike lanes.

Montgomery County could also redouble its efforts to encourage ridership by proactively marketing Capital Bikeshare's [discounted yearly membership](#) for eligible residents. Residents receiving SNAP, SSI, utility bill assistance, Medicaid, and assistance from other partner programs listed on the [Better Ways to Work](#) webpage may qualify and could already be interacting with county government to receive services. This is an opportunity to inform residents of an affordable transportation option as a standard procedure. It is an action that moves our county further along to a more equitable transportation system.

Vision Zero Through Lane Narrowing

We know the most dangerous roads in Montgomery County are arterials controlled by the State Highway Administration (SHA). Unfortunately, this means county government does not have sole authority to redesign those roads. **But we can explicitly state that lane narrowing is a goal of Vision Zero in its section of the Operating Budget on arterials under Montgomery County's control.** [Lane narrowing](#) is a proven public health measure that makes everyone safer by reducing vehicle speeds. Narrowing lanes opens up opportunities to repurpose traffic lanes for buses and sidepaths that create safer and more inviting built environments for pedestrians and cyclists.

Special Taxing Districts

ACT appreciates the need for exploring new ways to raise revenue for transit, active transportation, and building communities near transit. We agree with Council President Fani-González's decision to delay consideration of the new taxing districts until the Infrastructure Funding Workgroup issues its report in June. The County Council needs to find out all the details and objectives of any new tax. Pages 25 and 132 of the Operating Budget state the new revenue can be used for new roadways such as Observation Drive Extended. **Any new tax revenue should not be used to build new roads or widenings.** Public transit and safer infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists should not compete for money with road building that contradicts Thrive 2050 and the Climate Action Plan.

Chevy Chase Library Redevelopment

The County Executive's Capital Budget recommended a renovation of the existing Chevy Chase Library that appeared contingent on additional bonding space made available by special taxing districts proposed in the Operating Budget. Although consideration of the special taxing districts is being delayed until after the budget, ACT reasserts its position from our February 8, 2026, Capital Budget letter supporting redevelopment with housing and a new library.

Renovating the existing library could be far more costly than comparable library refresh projects, while redevelopment offers the chance to provide a modern library partially subsidized by much-needed new homes only a few blocks from a future Purple Line station. Building housing on county-owned land also makes it possible to offer deeper affordability and subsidies for these homes due to savings on land costs. The Chevy Chase Library project should be viewed as part of the effort of getting the land use near the Purple Line right. It will be proof that the leadership of this county will press ahead with opening up opportunity-rich neighborhoods to more people instead of maintaining

the exclusionary status quo.

Thrive 2050, the Pedestrian Master Plan, the Climate Action Plan, and the Bicycle Master Plan all point in the direction of a county where public transit and active transportation are convenient, safe, and attractive options for getting around. Public transit and active transportation will be critically important for residents going to grocery stores, jobs, schools, libraries, healthcare, and to our parks. As challenging as the budget is, it is an opportunity to continue building transit-oriented communities where people are not financially harmed by car dependence. It is an opportunity to take the climate crisis seriously by building a more sustainable county.

Sincerely,

Michael Larkin
Vice President, Action Committee for Transit