



Ride On News & Information

Ride On Review Newsletter

Interview with Dan Hibbert, Chief Division of Transit Services



Q. As the Chief of the Division of Transit Services, please explain your role and its direct impact in the County.

A. As the Division Chief for the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) Transit Services, I lead a team of dedicated staff that provides to the residents of Montgomery County a transit service that operates seven days a week across the entire county. Our mission is to provide safe and reliable transit services. My role is to ensure that we consistently provide this important service every day for every customer.

Q. With the uncertainty of the pandemic, what is the biggest challenge facing the Division of Transit Services today?

A. The COVID-19 pandemic has been extremely challenging, but Ride On has never shutdown during this period due to the diligent efforts of all the MCDOT Transit Division staff working through the pandemic. My biggest challenge is ensuring the safety of our customers and operators through enhanced cleaning of the buses, providing face coverings for our customers and operators and limiting the number of customers on the buses to reduce overcrowding to provide a safe environment.

Q. The Flash bus service launched during COVID-19, an unforeseen epidemic affecting the World. Has it impacted your vision of the Flash? If so, how?

A. The Flash service on Route 29 has been well received by our customers on the east side of Montgomery County. We continue to see growth in ridership and the overall system is working extremely well under difficult circumstances during the pandemic. Our vision is that the bus rapid transit program will grow in the county and the Flash service has demonstrated that there is a demand for innovative, safe and efficient transit service in the county.

Q. The Flash boasts colorful 62-foot-long buses, the longest in our current fleet. What can you tell us about the vision behind the length?

A. MCDOT conducted an extensive review of bus rapid transit programs across the country and developed a competitive procurement program with all the major bus manufacturers and selected the bus manufacturer NOVA Bus because of the design of the bus and the innovative features provided to ensure a quality BRT program.

Q. The Flash is the first in the region to have bike racks inside the buses. What brought about this decision instead of having the racks in the exterior, like most buses?

A. The Flash service was designed to ensure easy accessible access to the buses with wider doors, near level boarding and accessible platforms for the customers. By placing the bike racks inside the bus, we were able to reduce the time spent boarding and alighting with a bike from the bus and ensure the safety of the bicyclist with the use of an interior bike rack.

Q. Montgomery County recently rolled out its first four all-electric, zero emission Ride On buses. What drove this choice and what has been the feedback so far?

A. Montgomery County under the leadership of County Executive Marc Elrich has developed a plan to reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2035, part of that plan is to develop and implement a zero-emissions bus fleet. MCDOT staff submitted a grant application to the Federal Transit Administration for four fully electric buses which was awarded. The feedback on the first buses has been very positive and MCDOT will be installing another 10 electric buses next year as the program grows. It is anticipated that as buses are replaced careful consideration of all types of zero emission buses will be evaluated.

Q. In response to the pandemic, Ride On was one of the first transit services to suspend fare collection and implement rear door boarding. What prompted those decisions and when will fare collection resume?

A. To ensure the safety of our operators and our customers, we suspended fare collection early in the pandemic and as well as requiring rear door boarding to reduce the crowding in the front of the bus. MCDOT will be installing state of the art bus operator plexiglass partitions around the bus operator compartment in January 2021, with a completion of all buses by the end of January, once the buses have the partitions installed Ride On will begin collecting fares.

Q. Operation of Ride On Flex – the National Association of Counties award winning on-demand transit service - was suspended due to the pandemic? Why was the Flex service suspended, while other Ride On bus service continue to operate?

A. We were very excited to start the FLEX service in July 2019 and saw the growth in ridership from the start of service. However, given the interior space in the smaller buses, and the limited seating to ensure safe spacing and the greater potential for COVID exposure the service was suspended, we hope to start the Flex service in the spring of 2021.

Q. New safety policies have been implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to keep our customers and employees safe. Which of these policies would you consider retaining post the pandemic?

A. We will be reviewing all the implemented COVID 19 safety protocols and determine what procedures are necessary to retain to ensure the safety of our customers. MCDOT Transit services will continue to follow industry standards for safe service and as well all guidelines for transit service established by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Q. Do you have any additional comments for our customers and County residents?

A. The MCDOT Transit Services team is dedicated to providing transit services that you can count on. We understand that we are part of the fabric of this incredible community and we will do everything we can to be there when you need us. I am extremely proud of the work of every member of this team.

Ride On Safety Measures During the Pandemic – Part One: Processes & Procedures

The outbreak of Coronavirus has forced organizations and businesses to re-evaluate their safety measures and implement new strategies in efforts to ensure the safety of employees and customers by helping to stop the spread of the virus and that is what the Montgomery County Department of Transportation has done. This article is the first of a four-part series on what MCDOT has done and is doing during this health crisis.

With a quick response to the COVID-19 pandemic, MCDOT has followed the Center of Disease Control (CDC) guidelines to ensure the safety of our employees, riders, and the general public.

Safety Measures in a COVID-19 World:

- Restricted the number of passengers on the bus to ensure proper social distancing
- Provided face masks in all our buses for riders at no additional cost for the protection of themselves and others
- Enhanced cleaning of bus interior, exterior, filtration and ventilation systems with a hospital grade anti-viral disinfectant cleaner

Specific steps implemented included:



- Provided non-essential and high-risk employees telework and other options to eliminate travel to workplaces.
- Established and maintained communication with state and local health officials to determine current mitigation levels in the communities served.
- Followed CDC's guidance on what bus transit operators, rail transit operators, transit maintenance workers, and transit station workers need to know about COVID-19.
- Assigned workers at high risk of severe illness duties that eliminates or minimizes their contact with passengers and other employees, and/or offered them paid administrative leave.
- Conducted worksite hazard assessments to identify COVID-19 prevention strategies and followed the strategies.

Promoted healthy hygiene practices:

- Enforced everyday preventive actions. Provided employees with appropriate personal protective equipment (masks and gloves) as necessary and as available.
- Communicated with the public about the importance of hygiene, covering coughs and sneezes, and using cloth face coverings. Posted signs on how to stop the spread of COVID-19: properly

wash hands, promote everyday protective measures, and properly wear a face covering.

- Ensured adequate supplies of PPE's to support healthy hygiene behaviors for employees and bus passengers.

Intensified cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation:

- Nightly and mid-day cleaning of all buses with a hospital grade anti-viral cleaning agent.
- Cleaned and disinfected frequently touched surfaces at least daily or between use as feasible.
- Cleaned and disinfected the operator area between shifts.
- Avoided using or sharing items that are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected, such as disposable transit maps and timetables – made them available electronically.

Used gloves when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash and wash hands afterwards.

- Nightly cleaning of filters and ventilation systems - ensure they operate efficiently and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible such as by opening windows and doors.



Promoting social distancing:

- Instituted measures to separate or create distance of at least six feet between all bus occupants to the extent possible:
 - Suspended fare collection and asked bus riders to enter and exit the bus through rear doors, while allowing exceptions for persons with disabilities and strollers, and installing plastic chains to cordon off the front section of the bus for operator safety
 - Reducing maximum occupancy of buses, increasing bus service frequency on crowded routes, as appropriate
 - Installing physical barriers, such as sneeze guards and partitions (for operators) on transit vehicles is planned
- Closed communal spaces in break rooms; staggered use and clean/disinfect in between uses.
- Trained all employees in safety and preventive measures.

Checking for signs and symptoms:

- Conducting daily health checks including temperature screening of all bus operators and road coordinators
- Encouraging staff who are sick to inform their supervisors and stay at home.

When employees become sick:

- Immediately sent home employees with symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, or shortness of breath).
- Informed those who have had close contact to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home, self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- Established procedures for safely transporting anyone sick to their home or to a healthcare facility.
- Notified local health officials, staff, and customers (if possible) immediately of any possible case of COVID-19 while maintaining confidentiality consistent with applicable federal and state privacy laws.

MCDOT joins American Public Transportation Association's (APTA) Health & Safety Commitments Program

Since the beginning of the health crisis, Ride On has been taking the necessary measures to ensure the health and safety of our employees and customers, while maintaining the highest quality of service. With a safety campaign already in place, MCDOT took it a step further by joining the [American Public Transportation Association's](#) (APTA) "Health and Safety Commitments Program," the public transportation industry's overarching pledge to passengers that the public transit systems industry is taking all the necessary measures to operate safely as the nation recovers from the pandemic.

"Our highest priority during the COVID health crisis is to ensure the safety of our Ride On drivers and passengers," said MCDOT Director Chris Conklin. "As we continue to restore transit services that were temporarily cut back at the start of the pandemic, MCDOT's commitment is unwavering. We are proud to join with other transit systems across the nation to take all the steps necessary to restore transit service and maintain the public's trust".

The program was designed to help public transit agencies put in place their own, individualized policies and practices that transit users have shared they want and expect amid the growing concerns of COVID-19. Over 2,200 riders were surveyed as part of the research. From this research, the industry identified four key areas that transit systems need to address to earn riders' confidence:

- Following public health guidelines from official sources
- Protecting each other by requiring face coverings and other protection
- Keeping passengers informed and empowered to choose the safest times and routes to ride
- Putting health first by requiring riders and employees to avoid public transit if they have been exposed to COVID-19 or feel ill

By signing on to the APTA Health and Safety Commitments Program, along with more than 200 other public transit systems, Ride On is actively working to instill confidence in riders about our commitment to protecting health and safety but we cannot do it alone.

A key component of the Health and Safety Commitments Program is the shared responsibility of transit systems and riders to follow the safety commitments and guidelines. This is important because riders not only rely on public transit systems for transportation purposes but also must put in place safety guidelines and follow them, as systems rely on riders to protect themselves and each other by respecting these safety rules.



The health and safety of our employees, riders, and community will always be the top priority for Ride On as we agree to stay current with changes to these commitments as guidance and science regarding the pandemic continues to evolve. We pledge to continue to do our part as we expect you to do yours. **We are all in this together** as we fight for a normal life again.

In Memoriam: Remembering Mr. Michael Miller - Transportation Association of Maryland's (TAM) 2020 Unsung Transit Employee Award

April 15 was a sad day for the Montgomery County Transit family as County flags were lowered to half-staff to honor Mr. Michael Miller, a County employee who died from complications due to COVID-19. He was the first Montgomery County employee whose death was attributed to the virus.



"I'm very sorry to report the death of our first County employee due to COVID-19," said County Executive Marc Elrich. "The loss of a valued County employee is hard on everyone, especially during these difficult times."

Mr. Miller, who was 60 years old, started working for the County in 2011 and helped to manage the Ride On bus fleet for MCDOT.

"Mike worked hard every day to make sure buses left the depot in good condition, and on time, to serve the residents of Montgomery County," said MCDOT Director Chris Conklin. "All of his co-workers in the Silver Spring/Bethesda Depot and the Department of Transportation are mourning the loss of a great friend and colleague."

Mr. Miller was a member of the MCDOT Transit Services Division based in the Silver Spring Depot.

"He was particularly appreciated for his infectious smile and caring personality, his dedication to his fellow co-workers and his job duties." MCDOT Depot Chief Andre Lucas said,

"He was much appreciated for his willingness to go above and beyond at any moment to get the job done."

Montgomery County operations have been following increased cleaning measures, and practicing social distancing measures, during the COVID-19 health crisis.

After learning an employee was diagnosed with the virus, established procedures were followed throughout the Silver Spring Depot. Workspaces were isolated and cleaned. Members of the depot work team were notified about potential exposure to COVID-19.

The [Transportation Association of Maryland](#) (TAM) awarded Mr. Miller the TAM's 2020 Unsung Transit Employee Award in September. Mr. Miller's wife Donna received the award in his honor during a small ceremony in Silver Spring on Saturday, December 12.

Flash Launch: Maryland's First Bus Service of Its Kind

Montgomery County Department of Transportation launched the "Flash" on October 14, a new and improved bus service connecting passengers from Burtonsville to downtown Silver Spring. After a small ceremony in Silver Spring, all 16 of the Flash's brand new 62-foot-long buses went into action, running every 15 minutes throughout the day from 5:30 am to 11:45 pm and 7 to 8 minutes where the orange and blue routes overlap during rush hours.

The Flash buses are one of a kind, as the longest in the MCDOT fleet, the first bus in the region to have bike racks inside of the bus as well as the first in the region to install a fully automated wheelchair securement system, allowing passengers in wheelchairs to secure themselves onboard. At full capacity, the bus will carry up to 80 passengers, but limited capacity is currently in place to ensure proper social distancing. While boarding at its easy to find, unique stations with weather protection, pre-payment stations and real-time transit information, riders can use the interactive screen with public interest information available in seven languages.



To learn more about the Flash, visit ridetheflash.com

MCDOT Launched First in the Region All Electric Zero Emission Buses

September 3rd was a remarkable day for Montgomery County, as we witnessed the launch of our first four Ride On electric buses in efforts to reduce transportation emission and build a greener county.

Following the launch ceremony, the zero emission electric buses went into service on Routes 18 and 25, serving parts of Langley Park, Silver Spring, and Takoma Park.



These 35-foot buses were manufactured by Proterra and funded by a \$1.75 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration Low or No Emission Competitive Program. Each bus is approximately four to five times more efficient than diesel and yields an estimated annual fuel savings of nearly \$100,000 for four vehicles.

The goal is to add 10 more electric buses to the Ride On fleet by 2022 as part of the County's plan to build a more sustainable transportation fleet and eliminate greenhouse emissions by 2035.

For additional information, please read the media release at <https://bit.ly/2KrZAYJ>

Of Note

Ride On Hosts its First Virtual Public Forum

MCDOT Transit Services (Ride On) hosted its first virtual public forum on November 19 at 6:30 p.m. about proposed Ride On service changes affecting the Watkins Mill Interchange and Black Hill Development areas. As part of our commitment to provide safe and reliable transit services, Ride On always invites public comments and feedback on any proposed service changes. These valuable public comments and feedback are always considered in our effort to implement a service, which provides the best opportunity to meet the needs of the community.

Leading the session were Division Chief, Dan Hibbert and Chief of Planning and Implementation, Phil McLaughlin, who went over the Ride On route changes for the public's consideration.

Ride On will place the final decision regarding the proposed service changes on our website at www.rideonbus.com. Individuals who are interested in watching the public forum can do so by clicking on this link: <http://ow.ly/uz1f50CEgZx>

Transportation Options for Older Adults and Adults with Disabilities

Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) held an online learning session on Nov. 18 about the many transportation options and recourses available to older residents and adults with disabilities.

The session can be viewed at any time at <http://ow.ly/VSF750CFaH5>

For more information about the subjects covered in program, interested participants can contact: MCDOT Contact: Sam Oji, 240-777-5895 or samuel.oji@montgomerycountymd.gov
DHHS Contact: Shawn Brennan, 240-777-1350 or shawn.brennan@montgomerycountymd.gov

Metrobus riders return to boarding through front door, paying fares on Sunday, January 3

Metrobus will resume fare collection and front-door boarding beginning Sunday, January 3, as part of Metro's pandemic recovery plan that aims to preserve service and transit jobs.



The current rear-door boarding policy was implemented in March under Metro's comprehensive plan to protect frontline employees at a time when less was known about the coronavirus and its means of transmission. Because the farebox and SmarTrip equipment is located at the front of the bus, the Metro Board authorized the temporary suspension of fare collection.

For additional information view full news release: <http://ow.ly/VTXa50COFlo>

For the most up-to-date local transportation information, follow @MCDOTNow on Twitter, follow @RideOnMCT on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, visit MCDOT's transportation resource page for COVID-19, or subscribe to MCDOT news releases and Ride On Services at www.MontgomeryCountyMD.gov/govdelivery

Find more information about Ride On, go to RideOnBus.com. Sign up for [email alerts](#) or text alerts by texting MONTGOMERY RIDEON to 468311, or follow Ride On on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#).



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