November 1, 2021

Mr. Chris Conklin
Director, Montgomery County Department of Transportation
101 Monroe St, 10th Floor,
Rockville, MD, 20850

Subject: Comments on Ride-On Reimagined Study!

Ride On has been serving Montgomery County residents for over 40 years. Sierra Club Montgomery County Group supports MCDOT's proposal to assess current and future transit networks in the county, with the goal of recommending significant changes.

"Reimagining" transit service by conceiving of a single revitalized, integrated network comprised of various lines -- Ride On, ExtRa, Flash, Flex, WMATA bus and rail, MTA commuter bus, University of Maryland shuttle, Bethesda Circulator, Purple Line, planned Bus Rapid Transit corridors, and the future Corridor Cities Transitway – is a valuable endeavor. As our transit networks become more connected, we believe it will entice more residents out of their cars, which aligns well with our goal of reducing GHG emissions in the very near future.

We offer these comments:

POLICIES & GUIDELINES: Set the framework for fare policies in the future.
>   We support free fares, all day, every day.

BUS NETWORK ASSESSMENT/Market Analysis

>   --- We agree with evaluating the need for transit to local colleges, schools, recreation centers, libraries, and major parks (especially – Wheaton Regional; Fairland Recreation; Martin Luther King, Jr; Cabin John; South Germantown Recreation). The county should also evaluate access to grocery stores, food banks, health care providers, and other county and non-profit service providers.

>   --- For Early Voting and Election Day, the system should provide access to voting centers via Flex buses.

BUS NETWORK ASSESSMENT/Technology: Evaluate status and best practice for real-time info deployment/accessibility.

>   Currently, accurate real-time data for Ride On is only available in the MCDOT Ride On app. However, people want mobility tools that capture real-time data for **all** their transit options in one place.

>   Can Ride-On provide real-time data in a format compatible with the much-used TRANSIT app? With TRANSIT app, riders can see accurate departure times for multiple nearby lines (Ride On, Metrobus, Metrorail), as well as see bike- and car-share connections. With real-time data, people can time their walk to the stop. With real-time data for all transit options in one place, people can better plan their trips, which will boost transit use.

BUS NETWORK ASSESSMENT/Operations/Fleet

We support the transition to zero emission buses (battery electric and hydrogen fuel cell). We support innovative strategies to attract and retain bus operators.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Can the county give mini-grants to organizations who have connections and cultural fluency to provide outreach into transit-dependent communities? These organizations could also be a source of invaluable feedback to further improve the system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The public would benefit from accessible data (i.e., not a pdf) regarding percent on-time performance, missed trips, full buses, average number of weekday riders, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduced by riders not using cars, and GHG emissions reduced by operating electric buses. Also informative would be a map showing how many residents live within a 10-minute walk of a transit station, overlaid with how many live within a 10-minute walk from a high-frequency station. Not only will these data make visible the well-connected service provided by this system, but also highlight how transit benefits the environment.

We await with interest the results of the Ride On Reimagined Study.

Sincerely,

Shruti Bhatnagar, Chair   Tina Slater
Sierra Club Montgomery County, MD   Transportation Committee Chair
Shruti.bhatnagar@mdsierra.org | 240.498.3459   slater.tina@gmail.com

Sierra Club Montgomery County, P.O. Box 4024, Rockville, MD 20849