

Both Md. Hands Out For U.S. Transit Aid *Baltimore, D.C. Area Plans Pursued*

By KATHERINE SHAVER
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Maryland governors abide by a cardinal rule: Whenever possible, avoid choosing between the voter-rich political rivals of Baltimore and the Washington suburbs.

Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) appears to be heeding that rule in pursuing federal transit money to build both a 14-mile Red Line through Baltimore and a 16-mile Purple Line between Montgomery and Prince George's counties. State officials say the governor is expected to announce the state's plans — the routes and choice of light-rail or bus rapid transit — for both projects next month and to begin seeking federal money this fall.

But many transit experts say good timing could help O'Malley's please-all approach prove just as pragmatic as political. In recent years, the competition for federal transit money has been so fierce and the process so cumbersome that a state was considered fortunate to clinch money for one rail or bus line, let alone two. Now, calls to increase transit funding, both from the Obama administration and key lawmakers on Capitol Hill, are raising hopes in Maryland and across the country that affording two — or more — transit projects at once could be more doable than ever.

"Normally, picking between a Baltimore and Washington project is a political briar patch," said Mike Morrill, a political consultant who was an aide to Maryland Gov. Parris N. Glendening (D). "But this may be a time, with the [Obama] administration's focus on public transit, when we can make both regions winners."

Donald C. Fry, president and chief executive of the Greater

Baltimore Committee, a business group advocating for the Red Line, said O'Malley's approach

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shouldn't hurt either project's chances. Baltimore already has subway and light-rail lines; the Red Line would run east-west between the city and suburbs.

"I don't know that it's being political as much as being realistic," Fry said. "There's been a lack of investment in transportation at the federal and state level for decades. As a result, we have this need for multiple lines. I think that's what is driving this."

Both projects have been studied as light-rail and rapid bus systems, but political support in both regions is strongly behind light rail, in part because some say train tracks spur more development.

Maryland officials said they must seek funding for both now because meeting complicated federal planning requirements can easily take five years. Moving ahead while friends are in high places could help. The state's former transportation secretary, John D. Porcari, who championed both a Red and Purple line, is now deputy U.S. transportation secretary.

"Both Baltimore and the Washington area are ready for more transit," said Beverley K. Swaim-Staley, Maryland's acting transportation secretary. "We've certainly heard nothing from the [Federal Transit Administration] to say we shouldn't move forward with two at the same time."

FTA spokesman Paul Griffo said it's "not uncommon" for states to get more than one transit project funded at a time. Recently, Virginia received money for the Dulles rail extension and a Norfolk transit project, and New York, Colorado and Utah have also been successful.

"If two projects satisfy federal criteria and they have a lot of support, there's no reason that they couldn't both receive federal funding at the same time," Griffo said.

But Maryland officials aren't shopping for rail cars anytime soon. The competition for money is still tough, and Congress is debating where additional transportation money would come from. Nationwide, more than 100 transit projects are being planned, Griffo said. Out of the two dozen or so that compete for federal money every year, he said, typically two to five move ahead.

Cities across the country are asking for multiple transit projects as their populations grow and land for roads dwindles. Many regions are seeking — and getting funding for — multiple projects that would use transit lines to focus that growth, said Art Guzzetti, vice president of policy for the American Public Transportation Association. Projects often "find a natural order" when one hits a snag, such as a legal challenge to planning studies, he said.

Maryland officials said they also plan to pursue federal money for the 14-mile Corridor Cities Transitway near heavily congested Interstate 270 through upper Montgomery. However, that project's planning has fallen behind the Purple and Red lines. Its biggest hurdle: Local politicians and business groups want light rail, but state studies show only the less-expensive rapid bus option would meet federal requirements for cost-effectiveness.

The leading Purple Line plan is estimated to cost \$1.68 billion, and the most popular Red Line plan is projected to cost \$1.63 billion. Maryland officials say they can't afford to build either unless the federal government pays at least half.

"If we had one, it would be a heavy lift" to get federal money, said U.S. Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-Md.). "With two, it's more challenging. And with three, it's another issue. But each of these projects is justified in its own regard."

The projects face other hurdles. Like the Corridor Cities



Transitway, the Red Line plan with the most political support does not satisfy federal cost-effectiveness rules. State officials say they are updating ridership forecasts and redesigning the transit line to cut costs.

Both also face stiff opposition along their most likely routes because the trains or rapid buses would mostly run along local

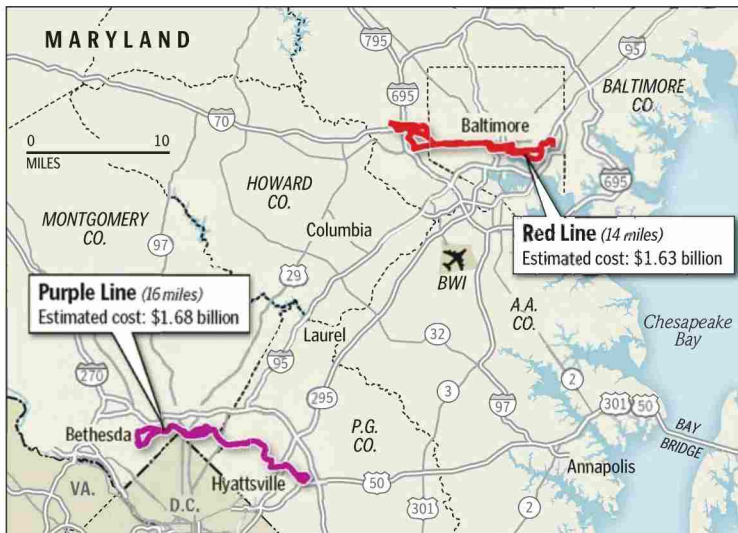
streets — through neighborhoods, crowded downtowns and, in the Purple Line's case, through a country club's golf course and along a popular wooded recreational trail.

"I don't know what competition we'll be up against," said Henry Kay, Maryland's deputy administrator for transit planning. "But if you don't enter the race, you can't win it."



BY MANUEL BALCE CENETA — ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gov. Martin O'Malley's administration is seeking federal funding for both a Purple Line in the Washington suburbs and a Red Line in Baltimore.



BY LARIS KARKLIS — THE WASHINGTON POST