

ILLUSTRATION BY MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

By ANDY ROSEN
andy.rosen@mddailyrecord.com

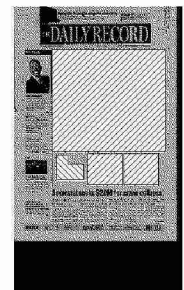
Baltimore's planned Red Line and the Purple Line envisioned for Montgomery and Prince George's counties appear to be in exactly the same place this summer. For each, the **Maryland Transit Administration** is preparing to make moves this fall that bring each project closer to being ready to compete for crucial federal cash.

But though the state appears to be moving steadily through the planning

process — shifting from conception to detailed planning of specific lines — some are wondering how much progress Maryland is really making toward construction, with just a small portion of the state share of each project put aside.

James C. Dinegar, president and CEO of the **Greater Washington Board of Trade**, said his main concern is not that one project will be built before the other, but that none will be

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built at all, given recent cuts to state transportation budgets.

"I have concern about whether the state can do any of these things," he said, adding that Maryland has to find new ways to pay for transportation if it is going to make needed infrastructure improvements.

All told, the state has planned to spend \$80 million over six years for the Red Line and \$81.6 million for the Purple Line. A third planned project, the Corridor Cities Transitway in the western Washington suburbs, had \$40.4 million earmarked for it. But that's all money to plan and engineer the projects.

There's nothing put aside for construction. Last year, the state delayed \$55 million in construction spending on the Red Line planned for 2014, and has also put off \$44 million in spending to acquire right of way for the project.

In total, the MTA estimates that the Red Line, an east-west link between Woodlawn and Southeast Baltimore, would cost \$1.5 billion. The Purple Line, which would run from Bethesda to New Carrollton, could cost around \$1.4 billion. The Transitway, which would run along Interstate 270 between Gaithersburg and Clarksburg, could carry a price tag around \$770 million.

Each project is expected to get half of its money from the Federal Transit Administration, and each project will need federal approval to get that cash.

Henry Kay, deputy administrator for planning and engineering with the MTA, said it's true that the state hasn't put money aside for the projects, but that's common during the planning stages of major transportation projects.

"We don't have a plan at this point, because we're not at that point," Kay said of the state funding process. "Both of these projects are following the normal development process."

Focused on federal money

He said the state is now focused on getting federal money for the projects, and that will determine how they proceed. He said the state is more likely to

break the projects into chunks, rather than skipping one or another. Projects must be designed in individually viable pieces, he said.

Donald C. Fry, president and CEO of the **Greater Baltimore Committee**, said he believes there's enough momentum behind both the Red Line and Purple Line, and that he believes the state will find a way to pay for it. But he also said he does not feel there's a mechanism in place now to pay for those improvements and other transportation projects in the state. The GBC is studying alternative ways of paying for transportation, he said.

Fry said he thinks new federal help will come along for the projects as Congress revisits the way it evaluates transit projects starting this fall.

"The state's going to have to do the same thing, and the elected officials know that," he said.

Though state officials are moving forward with both at the same pace, keeping transit advocates on the same page around both beltways, Baltimore wants its Red Line no matter what happens to the Purple Line.

Within the next month, the MTA is expected to announce a plan for each of them, choosing from a number of alternatives that have been floated so far.

Later this year, both the Red Line and the Purple Line need to go before the Federal Transit Administration to move into their final environmental study and planning stages. Though those FTA approvals are not competitive, the dash for federal construction money that is expected to come about two years later will be. And part of the process for evaluating each project will be to look at the state's ability to pay to operate the lines.

Delayed spending

The gasoline and vehicle titling taxes that are the two major sources of transportation money in the state have been hit hard by the recession and gas cost increases, and the **Maryland Department of Transportation** has cut or delayed more than \$2 billion from its transportation spending plans

over the past year.

Del. Murray D. Levy, D-Charles, who sits on the **House Appropriations Committee** and is vice chairman of the subcommittee that controls transportation spending, said it's appropriate for the state to plan for several projects. Still, he said if the state is going to pay for major upgrades to its transportation system, it's going to have to increase its own transportation revenues.

Levy said the state needs to add more rail to the system, not just in metropolitan areas but also in quickly developing locations like his home county. To do that, though, he said the state needs transportation funding sources that are less dependent on automobiles.

The delayed Red Line construction money was a part of the Transportation Department's cuts over the past year. Kay, at the MTA, said the state still plans to spend that money, but it made sense to push it back because there wasn't money in place for the years beyond 2012.

Levy said there are only a few options to raise money for new rail: a broad tax, a tax in areas that would have new transit or an increased share of the cost by riders who pay at the farebox. If there's a will, though, Levy said there's a way.

"If you look at it through the lens of the fiscal situation today, you'll say, 'Well, nothing's ever going to happen,'" he said. "It makes sense to be looking at this now. These are 10- to 20-year projects. It's my opinion that in order to move forward with the integrated transportation system that we need, we have to revisit how these things are funded."

Deeper divisions in Maryland

Many say it's a good idea to plan several projects at the same time. That way, states can avoid internal debate over whether the most important project has been put forward. The divisions could be deeper in Maryland in such a situation, because this is one of the few states where the transit system is run statewide instead of by

regional authorities.

"It makes sense to us as a very transit-dependent part of the country ... to have a very ambitious agenda," said Kay. "The fact that they're in the same state and they're being proposed by the same agency is the only thing they really have in common."

Art Guzzetti, vice president for policy at the **American Public Transportation Association**, said transit systems commonly propose several projects at once. Though they may not get federal money at the exact

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same time, the fact that one project gets federal cash should not preclude another, he said.

It would be different if a state were to propose several competing or redundant alternatives, said Guzzetti.

"In the end, you push all three because you want to show that there's something for everyone. This isn't just for strategic purposes, but that is a part of it," he said. "One of the seeds will fall on fertile soil before the other two do, and so be it, but the other two are right behind it."

It's difficult to judge which project would get the best federal treatment at this point, because the way that the FTA judges projects and the amount of money available could change significantly as Congress takes up a new surface funding authorization in September.

Considering cost effectiveness

U.S. Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin, a Democrat who sits on the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee, said there may be some shifts, though he believes cost effectiveness is likely to remain a big consideration. However, Cardin said he also sees the potential for other factors to be included, such as environmental effect, in terms of the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

For the two projects in the Washington suburbs, Cardin said he thinks the federal government should take into consideration the effect that

federal facilities have had on growth in that area. In Baltimore, he said the metropolitan area has waited patiently for its turn to get new transit.

"I think they're each different, and it does present a challenge in terms of the competition for federal funds," Cardin said, but he added the state is making a wise decision in preparing for all three. "I think going for all three will not have a negative impact on what the state can receive."

U.S. Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, D-Md., said he thinks the new authorization bill is likely to shift some of the cost-effectiveness requirements to criteria including the effect on congestion as well as greenhouse gas emission. He said he thinks both projects can move together through the federal process. He said he'll be pushing for both.

"We have to do everything in our power to provide safe, reliable and affordable transportation," Cummings said.

Baltimore overdue

In Baltimore, regional business advocates said they hope the state can do both projects, but if it can't, the Red Line is most important.

Otis Rolley III, president and CEO of the **Central Maryland Transportation Alliance**, said the Baltimore region is overdue for more investment in its transit system, and that ought to weigh in the region's favor.

"I do think it's pretty much our turn. Our number one priority is the Red Line," he said, but noted that it would be best for the state to get everything it asked for.

"I don't think it hurts the MTA and the state to be armed and ready with all of these projects," he said. "What it does is puts pressure on all of us to speak with one voice."

To watch a video tour of Canton led by an opponent of the planned Red Line, visit this story on our Web site and click on the embedded video.

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JAMES C. DINEGAR
Greater Washington Board of Trade

The case for the Purple Line

The Purple Line would connect and create economic engines that were inconceivable when Metro was planned. No longer does everyone aim to "go downtown." There is vibrancy and opportunity closer to home. Mass transit needs to connect there. The Purple Line offers the region excellent opportunity for transit-oriented development and offers people access to more opportunities throughout the region. The Greater Washington Board of Trade sees this same opportunity in rail to Dulles.

This region is growing, not as a mega-city, but as a cluster of economic strongholds that must be linked and accessed. In suburban Maryland, the Purple Line will get that done.

— **Jim Dinegar, president and CEO, Greater Washington Board of Trade**

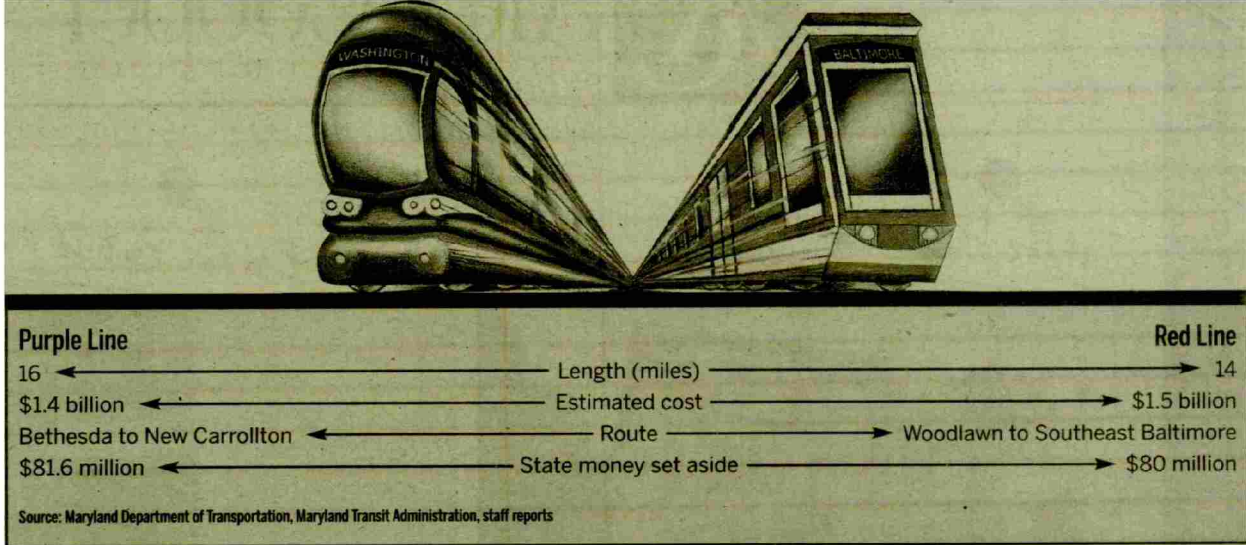
The case for the Red Line

The east-west Red Line would transform the Baltimore region's current fragmented rail transit into an integrated system that would greatly expand rail transit options for the region's residents and support projected economic growth with 21st-century transit solutions.

The Red Line will:

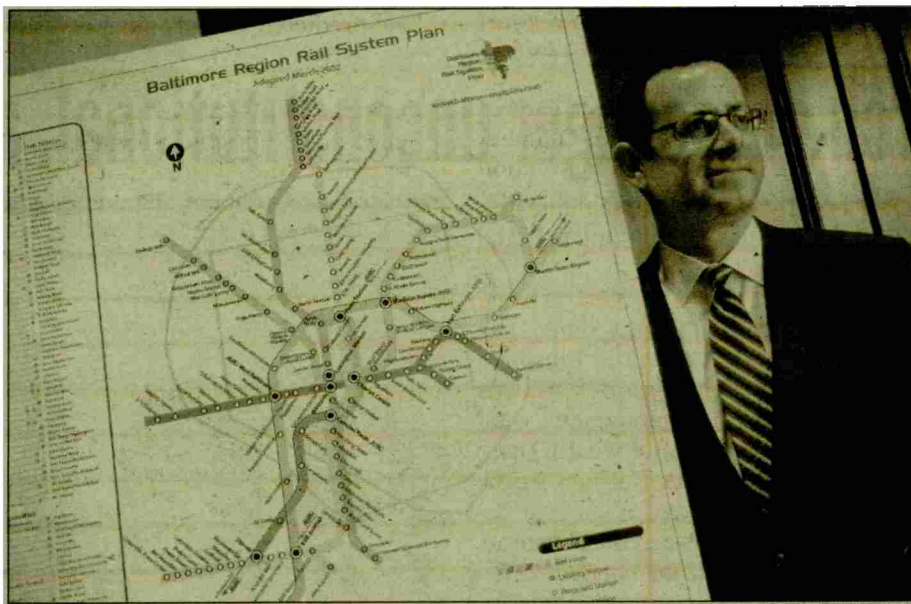
- Connect Metro heavy rail, existing light rail, and MARC commuter rail to D.C.;
- Reduce east-west corridor travel times by 48 percent;
- Reduce costs for current automobile commuters by 30 percent-50 percent on average;
- Attract 42,000 commuters daily, resulting in 67,000 less vehicle miles traveled; and
- Generate an economic benefit of \$3.5 billion, in business and jobs.

— **Donald C. Fry, president and CEO, Greater Baltimore Committee**



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James C. Dinegar, president and CEO of the Greater Washington Board of Trade, says Maryland has to find new ways to pay for transportation if it is going to make needed infrastructure improvements.



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