

Residents' fears of Red Line displacement prompt Greater Baltimore Committee rebuttal

Joe the Plumber, meet Reuben the Barber. [Remarks about the Red Line made by Edmondson Village Shopping Center haircutter Reuben Crosland](#) and published in the Baltimore Brew recently seem to have touched a nerve in some high places.

Both *The Baltimore Sun* (which has supported the light rail project in editorials) and, yesterday, the [Greater Baltimore Committee](#) (the blue-chip alliance of business and civic leaders whose preferred route for the Red Line became the official route) took the time to contradict Crosland's cynical observations on the project. What didn't they like?

"Crosland says the Red Line will displace residents," the Sept. 3 Brew article noted. The Red Line is for "suburbanites," Crosland said, arguing that new development stimulated by the project would raise property values and taxes and drive away low-income homeowners and have the same effect as the 1970s-era "Highway to Nowhere," which resulted in the demolition of several majority African-American neighborhoods.

"In fact, Red Line light rail Alternative 4C — the "preferred alternative" supported by Gov. O'Malley, Congressman Elijah Cummings, and the [Greater Baltimore Committee](#) — will not displace any residents," the GBC's Gene Bracken wrote, in an email to the Brew yesterday.

The Brew's "Neighborhood Voices from the Red Line Route" series was pretty much just that: an attempt to convey, with mini-profiles from the most-affected neighborhoods, the range of opinion, pro-and-con, east-side and west-side, to the proposed \$1.6 billion, 14-mile transit system. The package included a variety of points-of-view and man-on-the-street reactions. But it was Crosland's perspective, quite common among his neighbors, that got the Sun's and the GBC's attention.

Here's what they said:

From Gene Bracken, Executive Director of Communications, Greater Baltimore Committee (9/9/09):

Today, I read your piece on Reuben Crosland, who contends that the Red Line will displace residents — just as did the "highway to nowhere."

FYI, in fact, Red Line light rail Alternative 4C — the "preferred alternative" supported by Gov. O'Malley, Congressman Elijah Cummings, and the Greater Baltimore Committee — will not displace any residents. Actually none of the Red Line alternatives would have displaced any resident.

There are, no doubt, residents along the Red Line route who believe otherwise, but the assertion is not supported by the actual Red Line plan.

Below is what MDOT says about displacement on its community issue FAQs posted on the Red Line web site. BTW, Cummings addressed the displacement issue in his off-the-cuff remarks at the Aug. 4 Red Line announcement at the West Baltimore MARC station. Here's a link to a digital recording of Cummings' impassioned defense of the Red Line:

*(<http://www.gbc.org/news/080409-Red%20Line%20announcement/080409-Red%20line%20announcement-Cummings-6m54sec.wav>)
It takes a while to upload, but his comments on displacement are at the very beginning of this clip.*

Meanwhile, here is what MDOT says about displacement on the Red Line web site's FAQ section (<http://www.baltimoreredline.com/community-issues>):

"WILL ANY HOMES OR BUSINESSES BE TAKEN TO BUILD THE RED LINE?"

One of the goals of the Red Line study is to identify transit alternatives that avoid the purchase and relocation of homes and businesses. There are no homes we have identified that need to be taken as part of the Red Line for any of the options currently being studied.

Various options allow for the construction of the Red Line without taking any businesses. However, some of the options may require the displacement of up to three or four businesses along U.S. 40 on the west side of Baltimore, including the Social Services Building at Hilton Parkway, the Sunoco and Hess Stations at Franklinton Road and the Furniture and Mattress World store near the West Baltimore MARC Station."

Bracken stuck to the facts and seemed to "get" that these were residents' "voices" and not the Brew's. Meanwhile, the Sun's transportation reporter/blogger Michael Dresser not only disagreed with Crosland's argument but scolded the Brew for, it seems, even presenting it. Here's what he said:

"I'm frankly puzzled by the fact the Brew would publish a Neighborhood Voices article perpetuating the falsehood that the Red Line would displace residents. You can criticize the project on any number of valid grounds, but that article did nothing more than spread disinformation. Correcting that impression in a separate article doesn't cut it. Giving a lie and the truth equal time isn't fairness.