

From: Mark Patterson

Subj: Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act – HB352/SB362

The MTA should consider more creative and reasonable changes to commuter bus service to meet budgetary shortfalls than simply cancelling routes, particularly routes that are the only choice for commuters going to certain locations. For routes from Calvert County or Southern Anne Arundel County to Washington, DC, of five different routes (810, 820, 830, 840, and 850), only Route 850 serves Southeast DC with convenient access to the Washington Navy Yard and the US Department of Transportation (US DOT), as well as many other commercial businesses and government agencies. Additionally, Route 850 is the only commuter bus route from Calvert and southern Anne Arundel that stops at the Suitland Federal Center (Census Bureau), and Navy Yard and Suitland Metro Stations.

Fiscal realities may require an extensive review of the costs associated with the different commuter bus routes and their ridership. However, ridership numbers that were used to make determinations for route cancellations that do not reflect the most recent weeks in 2024 are not accurate reflections of the demand and commuter use of Route 850 buses, and probably other routes. Ridership on Route 850 has been increasing gradually since the end of the COVID pandemic and notably higher over the past several weeks and months. As government agencies and commercial businesses are still transitioning back to an office presence for their employees, cancellation of a route is premature. Because the MTA website does not have Commuter Bus ridership past January 2020 (<https://www.mta.maryland.gov/performance-improvement>), I did not see data publicly available to review current ridership trends.

Current plans to cancel routes 850 and 810 without modifying other routes to service the locations that route 850 and 810 serve does not support the intent of the commuter bus program. While the goal of MTA may be to restore MARC train and Commuter Bus service to pre-pandemic levels as stated on the MTA website (<https://www.mta.maryland.gov/strategic-plan>), as citizens we understand the challenge of managing service in an austere fiscal environment. However, to accomplish MTA's Ridership Goal, as stated on their website, to "Improve existing service to help increase ridership on all MTA modes", cancelling routes without providing another option is not good customer service. Additionally, along with the Ridership Goal, MTA has a Ridership Improvement Plan that succinctly states: "Continually improve the customer experience by increasing on-time performance, and the overall level of MTA customer service. Additionally, focus on connecting more people with jobs and opportunities in the region by meeting the changing needs of new and current job centers and residential developments."

Southeast Washington, DC is a prime location for residents of southern Anne Arundel and Calvert County to find entry-level jobs and advance their careers. Ensuring Southeast Washington, DC, particularly the areas served by Route 850 at the Washington Navy Yard and US DOT, along with the Navy Yard and Suitland Metro Stations should be a priority to support the [MTA's Strategic Plan](#) and its Focus Areas, especially Centering Equity, Providing Reliable, Efficient Transit Services, and Planning for a Sustainable Future. Ensuring that commuter bus service to Southeast DC continues after modifications to the overall commuter bus schedule are complete will enable citizens in Southern Anne Arundel and Calvert County to afford accepting entry level positions that could be the impetus for improving their

quality of life, remove automobiles from the heavily travelled and congested Route 4, and reduce greenhouse gases and pollution.

If routes 850 and 810 are cancelled as proposed, then at least one of the three remaining routes (820, 830, and 840) should be modified to serve Southeast DC. Routes 820, 830, and 840 now serve the exact same areas (exact same bus stops) in Washington, DC with only differences in their origins and destinations (in Southern Anne Arundel and Calvert County) and time of arrival and departure. Even though these routes (820, 830, 840) may have their route frequency reduced to save money under MTA's current proposed commuter bus service changes, one or more of the routes should also be modified to serve Southeast DC with stops at the Suitland Metro, Navy Yard and US DOT.

MTA should also launch a comprehensive advertising campaign to attract riders to the commuter buses. This may apply everywhere, but it certainly is relevant for southern Anne Arundel and Calvert County. From my own experience, most people are unaware of the commuter buses serving Washington DC and they discover them through co-workers or neighbors. If MTA seeks to advance their Strategic Plan and the Focus Areas mentioned above, there should be more public awareness of services outside the larger metropolitan areas.