

The **Red Line**: what now?



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Acknowledgements

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CPHA's Red Line: what now? Forum

Summary & Next Steps

September 2015

I. Introduction

On September 15, 2015 Citizens Planning & Housing Association (CPHA) held its “Red Line: what now?” Summit at the University of Maryland at Baltimore BioPark. This report is a summary of the event. It also includes recommendations for improving the Baltimore Region’s transit system. The event consisted of a panel of transit experts and regional leaders, a question and answer session, and a live polling exercise. More than 100 individuals representing a wide range of interests attended. One of the key recommendations from the forum was to create a coalition to support improvements to the region’s transportation system.

This event is a follow-up to the CPHA workshop this past June that sought to outline the top planning, housing, and community development issues for the Baltimore area. By coincidence, the workshop occurred at the same time Governor Hogan announced he was canceling the Red Line project and moving those funds to road projects, almost all of which are outside the Baltimore area. For a summary report of this workshop see: <http://www.cphabaltimore.org/cpha-workshop-where-do-we-go-from-here/>

II. The Panel

The panel was moderated by WBAL TV reporter and CPHA board member Jayne Miller. It consisted of:

- Delegate Brooke Lierman, State Delegate for the 46th Legislative District
- Brian O’Malley, Executive Director of the Central Maryland Transportation Alliance
- Bill Cole, President and CEO of the Baltimore Development Corporation
- Dru Schmidt-Perkins, Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Maryland
- Councilman Nick Mosby, City Councilman for the 7th District
- Senator Catherine Pugh, State Senator for the 40th District
- Baltimore County Executive Kevin Kamenetz

Maryland Transportation Secretary Rahn was invited, but could not attend.

III. Background

The Red Line was to be a 14 mile light rail transit line that would have gone from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services in Woodlawn and travel through West Baltimore, downtown, Fells Point, Canton, and Highlandtown before ending near Bayview Hospital. It would have connected with two MARC train stations (commuter rail), the metro subway, and light rail and carried 50,000 riders daily. The Red Line would have represented a \$2.9 billion dollar investment in Baltimore City and County. It was to be the first step in a comprehensive rail system that would have covered the region. The line had been in planning for over 10 years and had progressed through the very competitive Federal New Starts transit program.

It was during CPHA's last community summit in June that panel moderator and CPHA board member Jayne Miller announced that Governor Larry Hogan had canceled the Red Line. The Administration also moved all of the State funding to highway projects. Almost all of these projects are outside the Baltimore area, leaving no money for the City and very little for Baltimore County. Several of these road projects are in areas dominated by agricultural and forest land, will serve a limited transportation purpose, and are likely to induce sprawl. The Federal funds went back to the Federal Government for use in a different state.

Governor Hogan's decision to cancel the Red Line was devastating to Baltimore in many ways. The line would have run through some of Baltimore's poorest communities and provided access to major employment centers. For residents of West Baltimore, the Red Line provided hope that it could revitalize their communities. Developers were looking forward to the many opportunities for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) along the line. The Red Line would also have been welcomed by Millennials seeking a car-free lifestyle and helped the city attract more of this demographic.

At a joint hearing held by the state legislature, Maryland Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Rahn announced that not only was the Red Line canceled, but there would be no new money for transportation in Baltimore, as all the money from the Red Line had been spent in other areas of the state. The federal funds for the project are also now gone, since the project is canceled. However, Secretary Rahn has said that Baltimore's public transit system will be improved. Many have questioned how this will occur without any new funding.

CPHA held this transit summit in order to bring leaders from around the region together in an effort to determine what the next steps should be for public transportation improvements in the Baltimore area.

IV. A History of CPHA Involvement in Transit

Founded in 1941, CPHA has long been Baltimore's civic engagement and planning organization, mobilizing ordinary citizens to get involved in improving our region. Transit improvements have been a priority for CPHA since at least 1971 when the Annual Report for that year mentions: "A subcommittee of the CPHA Transportation Committee is looking closely into plans for Baltimore's mass transit system and a series of recommendations can be anticipated [in 1972]."

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, CPHA operated the Transit Riders League, mobilizing transit riders to work for better service. The Transit Riders League, which at one time had over 1,000 members, published reports on the need to improve bus on-time performance, and successfully worked to reduce the farebox recovery requirement for Baltimore area transit.

CPHA has supported the Red Line since its inception in the 2002 Baltimore Rail Plan. As a part of its work promoting this important project, it brought leaders from communities along the proposed Red Line corridor to other cities so they could see the positive impact transit can play. CPHA also joined with our many partner organizations in advocating for transit with elected officials.

The loss of the Red Line was a major disappointment. This situation means those that care about transit in the Baltimore Region and its related benefits (better access to jobs, community and economic development, etc.) need to significantly increase efforts to improve transit in the region. The forum was a first step in mobilizing regional leaders to work for better transit.



V. Panel Discussion

The panel began with moderator Jayne Miller asking Brian O'Malley to give a brief overview of how we got to our current situation. Mr. O'Malley started by asking how many in the audience had seen the original 1968 Regional Rail plan. More than half of the attendees raised their hands. He then went on to explain that the first leg of our subway line opened in 1983, and the first part of our light rail line was constructed in 1992.

In 2002 a new Baltimore Regional Rail Plan was released. Its top priorities were the Red Line and a subway extension to Morgan State University. Through a careful and deliberative process, planners and advocates decided to focus on building the Red Line as the first priority for implementing this plan. Mr. O'Malley emphasized that the Red Line was never meant to be a standalone project. It was supposed to integrate with a comprehensive regional transit system. Now with its demise there is a large hole to fill in the Region's transit system.



With this background the diverse group of panelists touched on a number of issues, which are categorized below.

A. Regional Approaches and Job Access

Baltimore County Executive Kevin Kamenetz mentioned that the Red Line was framed as only a Baltimore City issue, significantly reducing its political support. The idea is to make it so that other regional jurisdictions would feel like, “they have skin in the game.”

The need for regional cooperation also came up in the question and answer session when an audience member asked if Baltimore City was losing its political clout. In response, one of the panelists mentioned that Baltimore City has lost more than 20 seats in the State Legislature since the year 2000. County Executive Kamenetz responded that while the City may be losing its clout, the Region still makes up a large portion of Maryland’s population.

Executive Kamenetz said that as the Board Chair of the Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC), he asked for BMC staff to develop their own plan for a transit alternative. This report is due in October.

The regional issue was also clearly connected to job access. Baltimore Development Corporation CEO Bill Cole mentioned transit is important for economic development in many ways. He said that development plans for the former Bethlehem Steel plant at Sparrows Point in Baltimore County would require transit access for employees. He also mentioned the difficulties of providing transit access for employees in the BWI area. Even within Baltimore City, there is difficulty providing transit access to major employers like Amazon and Horseshoe Casino. He also mentioned that finding funding for improving transit is a key issue.

Councilman Mosby also discussed the issue of jobs by pointing to how his mother had to get up at three or four in the morning to take several buses in order to reach her job at the Social Security Administration in Woodlawn. When asked about the Penn-North area, known for its good transit due to Metro Subway access as well as being along several major bus lines, he responded that while the Penn-North area is transit-oriented, it does not do an adequate job of connecting to jobs. He also said that poor transit access and service disproportionately affects poorer communities.

The discussion about losing the Red Line also highlighted the lack of connectivity in the Region’s transit system and the need to address this issue.

B. The Hogan Administration’s View of Baltimore’s Transit Needs

Dru Schmidt-Perkins mentioned that 1000 Friends and CPHA filed a Public Information Act request to the Maryland Department of Transportation, seeking to find out what analysis of the Red Line had been done prior to its cancellation. Based

on what was returned, it appears no review nor analysis of the Red Line was ever undertaken despite the repeated promises of Transportation Secretary Rahn. Ms. Schmidt-Perkins also noted the Administration's response to the Public Information Act itself was telling. Under state law, Public Information Act requests are to be filled within 30 days, but the Hogan administration did not respond until after 49 days. Even then, no communication was provided on conversations between the Governor and the Secretary of Transportation.

C. How to Change the Transit Funding Situation

Given the Hogan Administration's lukewarm views on transit there was discussion of how transportation funding in the state of Maryland could be changed. Delegate Lierman said that transit is funded differently in Maryland than any other state in the country. She also mentioned how MTA needs a board of directors. Several panel members suggested that there needs to be some sort of accountability for how we spend transit funds. Senator Catherine Pugh called for a way to take the politics out of transit funding. Dru Schmidt-Perkins stated that 1000 Friends was working with CPHA and others to develop legislation for Maryland to require objective measures and an improved process for ranking and selecting transportation projects for funding. The legislative requirement that fares cover 35% of Baltimore area transit operations, known as the farebox recovery rate, was also mentioned as a major hindrance to better transit.

D. What Can Be Learned from the Red Line and What Needs to Happen Next

Several panelists suggested that there should have been an alternative to the Red Line in place. However, Brian O'Malley noted that the state spent \$280 million on just planning for the Red Line, and it would not have made any sense to implement a parallel process as an alternative.

Mr. O'Malley also said that alternatives exist in the form of the Bus Network Improvement Project (BNIP) and the MARC Growth and Investment Plan. According to O'Malley, the decision of the Hogan Administration to not fund these projects shows they simply chose to spend the money on highways, rather than on transit options.

There was also a discussion about the need for improvements to Baltimore's bus system. Bill Cole said the MTA bus lines need to be completely overhauled, and that just changing a few bus lines will not adequately address the system's problems. O'Malley explained that is exactly what BNIP set out to do but that no one knows what is in it since it has not been released. Delegate Lierman also said that the planned revisions to the bus system that will soon be announced will most likely be "BNIP light."

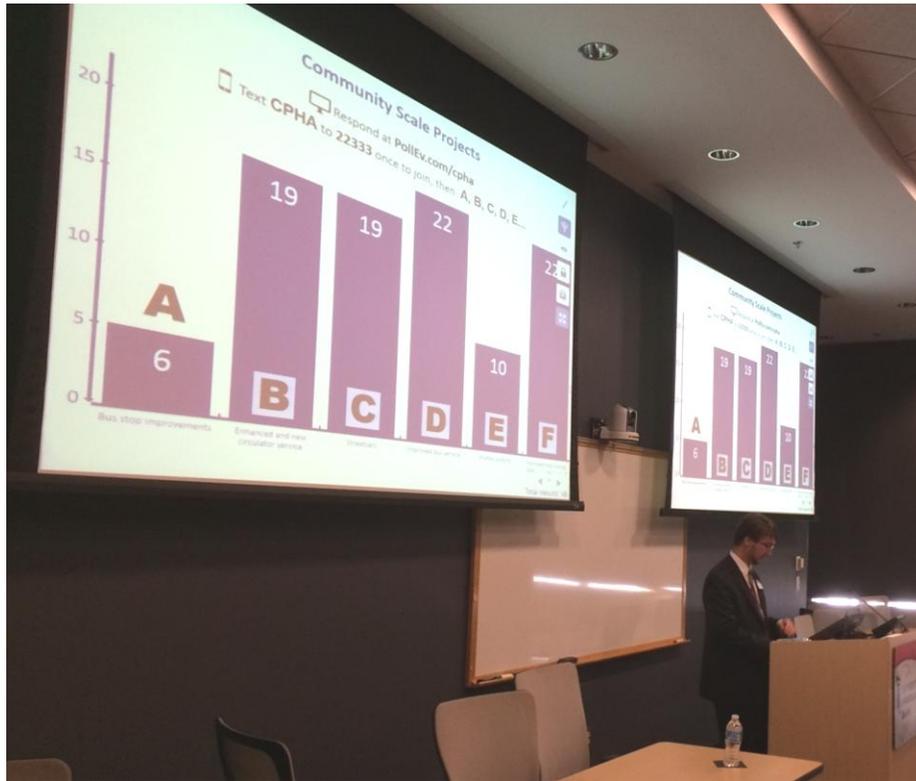
The question of legal strategies for dealing with these issues also came up. There was a discussion about how to get the full BNIP recommendations released, since the administration thus far has been unwilling to respond to any of the requests to share them with the public. Additionally, there was a discussion about a challenge to the Red Line's cancellation through Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits decisions that have a disparate impact on protected classes. The Red Line was planned to go through many primarily African-American communities, improving job access for these neighborhoods – while the new highway funding is primarily serving predominantly white rural areas.

At the end of the question and answer session, Cynthia Shaw, president of the Lyndhurst Community Association in Edmondson Village, expressed frustration over the Red Line's cancellation. Ms. Shaw and her neighbors worked closely with Red Line staff in pushing for improvements to their community that would be coupled with the new transit station. But with the Red Line now cancelled, she no longer has anyone to work with in improving her neighborhood. Given the lack of community development resources along much of the Red Line's route, the project's community liaisons were the principle mechanism through which residents along the line could have their voices heard in shaping their community. Although the line has been cancelled, these residents still want to improve their neighborhoods, but now do not have anyone to turn to in voicing their ideas and concerns.

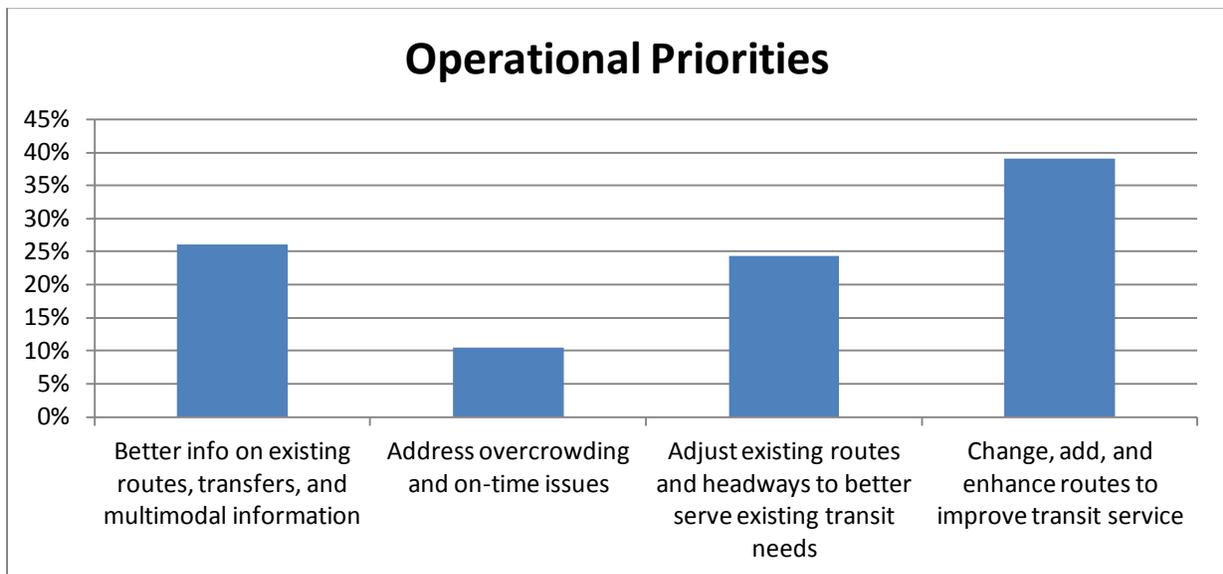
In many ways, Ms. Shaw's situation characterizes many others in Baltimore. The Red Line brought hope to Baltimore that we could finally have an interconnected transit system that provided mobility and opportunity for community development across the region. But just as Ms. Shaw and her neighbors still need a way to have their voices heard, Baltimore still needs an effective transit system.

Looking to the future, some in the audience made the point that a better transit system is important to keep and attract Millennials. Many younger people do not want to depend on a car for their transportation and prefer the types of cities served by transit.

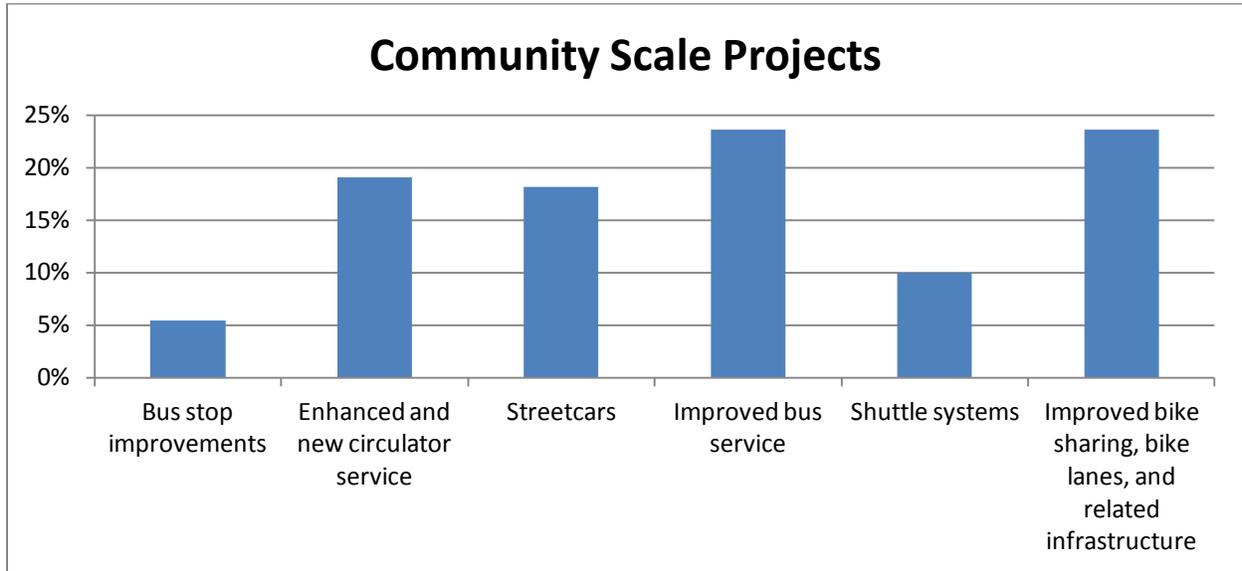
VI. Audience Polling



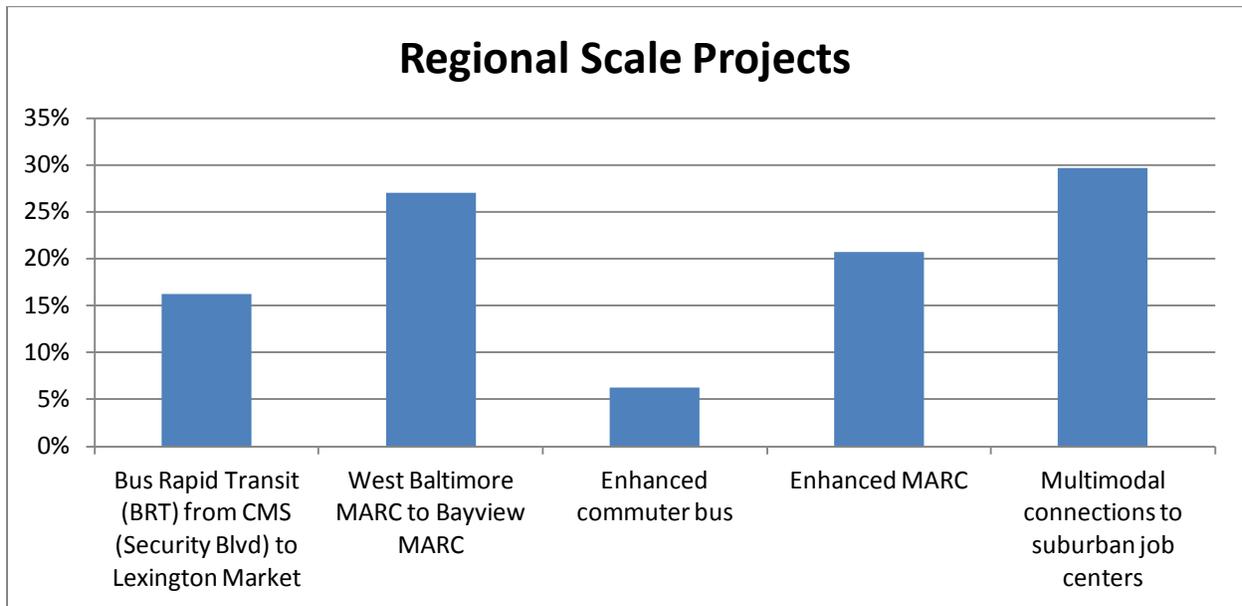
As part of the event, CPHA asked participants to use their phones to conduct an online poll to rank their priorities in four crucial areas: transit operational priorities; community scale (i.e., neighborhood level) project priorities; regional scale project priorities; and policy, planning and legislative priorities. The results are shared below.



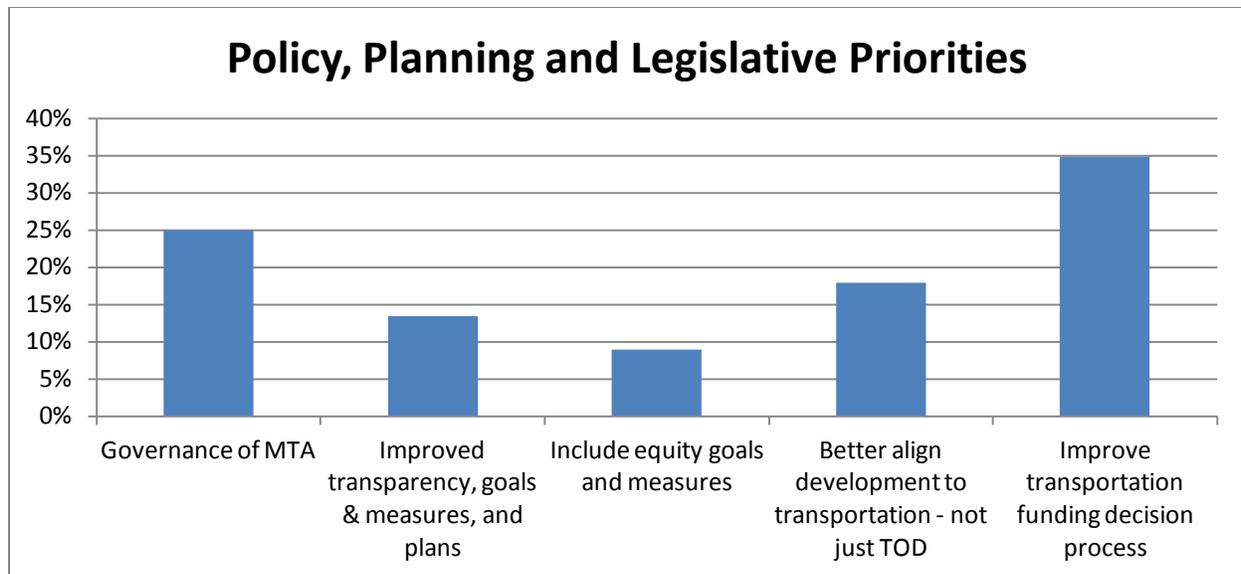
“Change, add, and enhance routes to improve transit service” was a clear #1, indicating that people want more than incremental improvements to the system.



At the community scale, “improved bus service” and “improved bike sharing” tied for #1, while circulators and streetcars were not far behind.



“Multimodal connections to suburban job centers” was the favorite in this category, while using the West Baltimore and Bayview MARC to improve east-west connectivity was a close second.



“Improve transportation funding decision process” came out as a strong priority here, with the 2nd choice being MTA governance.

We also discussed an emerging coalition of organizations focused on improving transit in the greater Baltimore region. The audience was then invited to offer their own answers to the question, “What should be the priorities for this coalition?”

Responses included:

Ideas on how to work together as a region, including – increasing connectivity from a regional perspective and creating an integrated regional public transit system; analyzing regional control of system and creating regional governance structures for decision-making and taxing power; and getting regional buy in and broad regional participation, including engaging regional business and institutional leaders.

Ideas on addressing the political climate around transportation decisions, including – developing political clout and educating voters about transportation issues; educating elected officials and holding them accountable to their positions on improving transit; supporting Delegate Lierman’s current MTA bill, and working with Executive Kamenetz and Senator Pugh as part of the coalition; doing grassroots organizing / community outreach, especially surrounding legislative and budgeting issues at the state level; meeting regularly as a coalition; and involving other communities, such as arts and culture, in the process.

Ideas for changing transportation governance and decision processes, including – changing the MTA governance structure; making legislative changes to the transportation funding process at the state level, including working with the state delegation to pull back funds from highway projects to re-allocate to public transportation; and creating a dedicated transit funding source.

Ideas for specific investments, including – not giving up on the Red Line; increasing the commuter tax benefit; a comprehensive metro; integrating existing infrastructure for short-term improvements; making place-based transit investments; and promoting rail transit.

Themes that the coalition should prioritize, including – equity, access, opportunity, collaboration, climate issues, and bringing together transit choice and transit equity goals.

Other recommendations included looking at models like European cities and the Free Rail District in Portland, OR; launching social media campaigns, particularly with Millennials; labor reform at MTA; and creating a plan that has short, medium, and long-term goals.

VII. Conclusions & Next Steps

The forum brought leaders and activists together for an in depth conversation on transit needs for the Baltimore region. Not only does this conversation need to continue, we must also follow through with action. In particular, there is a clear need for a regional coalition to work for improved transit.

The issues discussed ranged from the community scale to the Baltimore Region. There was the discussion about how the Red Line station area planning was already helping communities at the block scale, how that is now gone, and the need for this work to continue somehow. Panelists and the audience also talked about improving the existing bus system: from basic signage, maps, and other communications, to updating routes, getting additional busses, etc. Improving access to jobs in the City and the suburbs was a big part of the conversation. The conversation also addressed the need for a better connected transit system in the Region. This included different options for an east to west connection, and being able to get from one mode of transit to another. Both the panel and the audience spoke about the need for diverse regional support for transit in general and for helping to advance improvements. There was also discussion about the need for legislation to address issues at the state level. These points were reinforced by the electronic polling that was done at the end of the event.

In summary, our event found the following:

- The bus system needs more than better maps, outreach, and other tweaks. Instead, it needs some of its lines adjusted, more buses, and in some cases, additional routes.
- At the community or neighborhood scale, an improved bus and bike system was favored over circulators, shuttles, and improved bus stops.
- Regionally, the audience thought a West Baltimore MARC to Bayview MARC connection, as well as multimodal access to suburban job centers, were most important.
- On the policy front, the audience felt that MTA governance and improving transportation funding decisions were most important.
- Moving forward with a coalition that both supports existing transit and advocates for needed improvements was the biggest recommendation of the day.

While evolving, CPHA, 1000 Friends of Maryland, CMTA, and others are working to create a coalition to work on the key issues raised during the forum. This includes outreach and education with stakeholders on improving the Region's transportation system. It also includes working on potential legislation to address several of the key issues that have been raised. We encourage people and groups to join us in this effort, which is called Transportation for Maryland. You can contact us directly or follow this budding coalition on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/Transportation-for-Maryland-324026632612/timeline/>

VIII. Coverage of the Forum in the Media

See the following links for the media coverage of the event.

- A. *Baltimore Business Journal*:
<http://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/news/2015/09/16/spurned-red-line-supporters-try-to-figure-out.html>

- B. *WBAL*:
<http://www.wbal.com/news/forum-discusses-red-line-alternative-options/35289046>

- C. *Community Architect Daily*:
<http://communityarchitectdaily.blogspot.com/2015/09/that-overnight-trip-wbal-jane-miller.html?m=1>