

# Push is on for Montgomery light rail

■ Coalition of elected leaders and community activists join forces to squelch a Corridor Cities Transitway bus line

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As the state prepares to decide the mode of transportation that will be used for the Corridor Cities Transitway, a group of community activists and elected leaders came together on Monday to promote light rail.

"We need it now. We need the CCT to be a high-volume rail line, not a low-volume bus line," Rockville Mayor Larry Giammo said during a news conference at the Shady Grove Metro station as a mass of morning commuters boarded trains and buses.

The 14-mile state project, which has been planned in Montgomery County for 30 years, will connect the Shady Grove station and Clarksburg with either a light-rail system or an express bus route.

State transportation officials are poised to decide which mode of transit it will be next summer. A bus route will cost an estimated \$539 million; the light rail about \$865 million.

"It ought to be a light-rail project, which will attract more riders," said U.S. Albert R. Wynn (D-Dist. 4) of Mitchellville.

Other officials agreed. "I have never seen economic development around a bus stop," said Sen. Robert J. Garagiola (D-Dist. 15) of Germantown. "It needs to be rail."

Thirty-one elected officials, community activists and candidates for state and county office signed a petition of support for a light-rail line.

The group also unveiled a marketing campaign for the project, declaring the CCT is "Good to Go."

Maryland's Secretary of Transportation Robert L. Flanagan said Monday that the Department of Transportation is reviewing both options. "It is our responsibility to develop the best light-rail alternative and the best bus-route alternative," he said.

It is too early to know which will be best, Flanagan said. "There

is a role for public officials in advocacy and there is a role for public officials in decision making," he said. "That second role will come next year, for all of us."

A planned route goes from Shady Grove Road, west through King Farm in Rockville, passing Kentlands and Lakelands in Gaithersburg along Great Seneca Highway. The route then heads north along Quince Orchard Road to Interstate 270 and on to Clarksburg, stopping at the Comsat building, just south of the Clarksburg Town Center development.

The first phase is slated to include stops in the Rockville and Gaithersburg areas.

"We've got about 82,000 people in Germantown," said Del. Charles E. Barkley (D-Dist. 39) of Germantown. "It's about time that we find a way to get them on mass transit."

Upcounty advocates pressed for a more direct route between Shady Grove and Clarksburg, with stops in town centers instead of "isolated parking lots."

The route, they argued, bypasses the town centers of Clarksburg, Kentlands, Lakelands and Crown Farm in Gaithersburg. A trip from Germantown to Shady Grove that now takes 15 minutes by express bus would take 29 minutes according to current plans, upcounty advocates wrote in a statement.

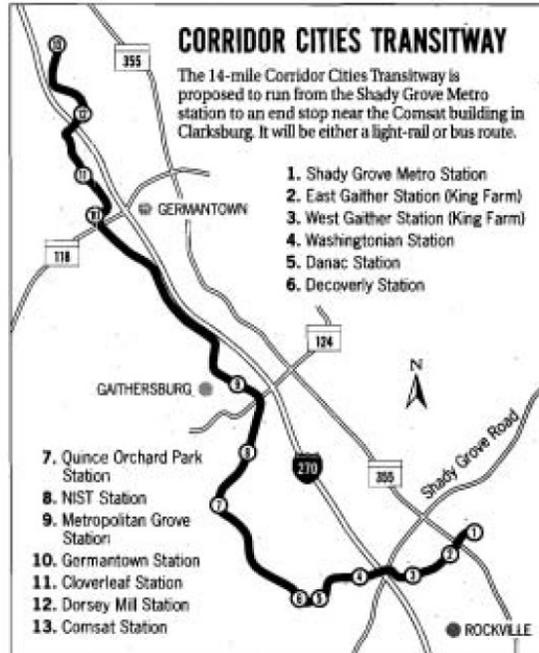
"We need accessible rapid rail, not a slow bus to nowhere," Clarksburg civic leader Greg Fioravanti said.

Although state and county officials said the project has no public opposition, there are residents who don't like the proposed route.

Susan Gross, who lives in the Washingtonian Towers near the Crown Farm property, signed a petition with 203 other people that asked for an alternate station to be considered farther from the housing complex on Fields Road citing traffic and safety concerns.

"This would place the transit station adjacent to the proposed shopping center, and would allow citizens to use mass transit and walk along Rio and Washingtonian Boulevards to access Rio," according to the petition, which was delivered to Gaithersburg city and state transportation officials in June.

"What we are most concerned about is the fact that Decovery Drive is going to end right at the entrance of our building," said



SOURCE: MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

REUBEN DALKE/THE GAZETTE



Montgomery County Councilman Michael J. Knapp adds his name to a petition pledging his support for light rail along the Corridor Cities Transitway between Shady Grove and Clarksburg. BRIAN LEWIS/THE GAZETTE

Gross, who is president of the Washingtonian Tower Condominium Association. "That will bring all kinds of additional traffic. This would bring a major street right to our entrance. With it comes the transit center which brings all kinds of traffic, noise, crime and

everything like that." The state is studying an option that would move the alignment — now planned to run diagonally through Crown Farm — to a route that doesn't disrupt the parcel designated for a high school. That plan would extend Decovery Drive.