

PURPLE LINE RESIDENTIAL WAYNE AVE AREA ISSUES - YEAR-END STATUS REPORT
From the Residential Wayne Avenue Working Group for Purple Line Design Issues
December 2015

1. SUMMARY

This is a report on the status of ongoing work on Purple Line design issues of concern to the residential communities along Wayne Avenue. This snapshot is offered now because Purple Line construction is scheduled to start in 2016, at a location to be determined along the Purple Line's 16 mile route.

Many neighbors from multiple civic and citizen associations along Wayne Avenue have been working cooperatively on these issues since the Purple Line final designs became public in 2013. This collective represents communities from the edge of Downtown through Sligo Creek to the edge of Long Branch, and is called *The Residential Wayne Avenue Working Group for Purple Line Design Issues*.

The Working Group studies design aspects of the Purple Line, researches light rail systems in other cities, shares information, and works with multiple state, county, and federal offices to fix unintended design consequences in order to make the PL safer and better for our residential neighborhoods.

When acting with the Group, its members take extra steps *to make sure they are **never** being "for" or "against" the Purple Line.*

Some in the group champion the Purple Line and some oppose it, but all unite in the common interest of doing a reality check for the neighborhoods on Purple Line plans and identifying issues that the communities agree could use improvement. They work hard to develop community consensus, and they remain open-minded about solutions.

They have acquired a reputation of being **"reasonable people asking reasonable questions"** both of which are reflections of their communities.

Their mission is to make sure, from a resident's perspective, that the Purple Line is compatible with this verdant, residential area without turning it into an industrialized hardscape. MTA and Purple Line planners say that is what they want too, but, sometimes, residents can see what a planner does not. The Working Group works to reconcile the two.

The shared hope among officials and residents is that Wayne Avenue will become an exemplary residential boulevard as the Purple Line seamlessly integrates into our residential street scene.

"Seamless" means avoiding iron fences all along the curbs so that all activities that happen now – private front yards, pedestrians, bikers – will co-exist as light rail joins them. This plan for the residential areas along Wayne Avenue is unique on the Purple Line.

But some "unintended consequences" have emerged, such as, the surprise near-doubling of Wayne Ave at Dale Drive when it was supposed to remain a four-lane street; the scheduled loss of every tree to construction; the failure to include a single measure to mitigate ear-piercing Wheel Squeal which will be heard for 1000 feet; and rising alarm that more steps are needed for pedestrian protection – especially at the schools – and none are planned or budgeted.

Officials do not disagree with the issues we bring, but finding solutions for this State-level project requires real political will from multiple levels and that is where we have experienced a wild variable.

For the purposes of this report, the Working Group is also referred to as “COMMUNITY REPS.”

- **Points of information about construction:** *The primary focus of the Working Group/Community Reps focus and this Status Report is the permanent impacts of the Purple Line. A separate consultative process focusing on construction issues is being developed.*
- *Authorities tell us that government officials, the actual builders and residential representatives will work together on systems and notifications for our residential neighborhoods to survive temporary disruptions from construction.*
- *A note about SCHOOLS: The County and MTA have firm agreement (initiated and secured by Montgomery County) that construction at County school properties, including our schools at Wayne and Dale, will be limited to times that school is NOT in session.*

2. STATUS OF AREAS OF FOCUS FOR THE WORKING GROUP/COMMUNITY REPS

The Community Reps work on a number of concerns simultaneously with different officials or combinations of officials. These issues were discussed most recently at a meeting hosted by Montgomery County on October 7, 2015 to take stock of progress in various areas. Much of the information in this report comes from that meeting.

Nearly all of the officials present at this meeting have been directly involved in the ongoing discussions since 2013. Participants included:

- Representatives of key Wayne Ave communities (residential associations and PTSAs)
- The Acting Director of Transportation of Montgomery County (MC DoT), Al Roshdieh, and key MC DoT staff for planning, public transit and traffic control
- Several of County Executive Ike Leggett’s senior staff
- Representative of Congressman Chris Van Hollen
- Staff observers from Councilmembers Elrich, Hucker, and Riemer
- State of Maryland Purple Line project planners and staff

Pedestrian safety is an unaddressed and looming issue of alarm

- The neighborhood seeks a comprehensive plan for pedestrian crossings and safety all along Wayne Avenue and Bonifant Street.
- Despite requests, there is now no such plan and no budget for it.

The expansion of the intersection at Wayne and Dale is unacceptable

- **The county insists that it must let the State go ahead with the near-doubling of the width of Wayne Avenue at Dale Drive, but the neighborhood has resoundingly rejected this plan**
- Planners say it is necessary for traffic flow and traffic safety
- Residents say it is worse to create great danger with such lengthy crosswalks at the schools
- This is at an impasse and needs a creative solution
- The County will hold a neighborhood public meeting soon to seek “input” on this issue.

The neighborhood objects to the “13-Foot Wall” at Wayne and Dale

- **The neighborhood demands an alternative to a long 13-foot high wall planned for Wayne and Dale** to brace up the school property once Wayne Avenue is expanded.
- This is at an impasse. If Wayne is widened, the wall must hold up the parking lots.

‘Wheel Squeal’ along Residential Wayne is a near-certainty, but there is no mitigation plan

- There is *no progress* on the neighborhood position that State planners make a priority of mitigating Wheel Squeal which has the potential to be for a 1000 feet from the tracks.
- Other Purple Line neighborhoods are getting expensive “acoustic walls” to tamp train sounds but such walls can’t be placed on open residential streets like Wayne. Purple Line has developed no noise plan at all for Wayne and Bonifant and says it won’t even study the effects until there are “real conditions” to test, but those “real conditions” won’t exist until the Purple Line is nearly built which will be years from now.
- The neighborhood insists on study now (e.g., computer modeling) and that remedies are built into the design from the outset. Remediation later will be disruptive and costly.

Placing Power Substations next to homes damages property values and they must move

- There is *progress* on finding a more appropriate location for the power substation (Q6) needed between Sligo Creek and downtown, but there is no movement on repositioning the substation (Q7) away from the homes at Flower and Arliss.
- These are the **ONLY TWO** power substations on the entire Purple Line that were plopped right down next to homes where they would diminish the home values. Yet money was spent to purchase properties in other parts of the route to prevent that from happening.

The numbers of utility poles on Wayne and Bonifant must be managed so Purple Line poles don’t exacerbate the already-existing problems of “visual clutter” and sidewalk obstacles

- The neighborhood seeks action because a forest of total poles could result on Wayne and Bonifant if everyone continues to put up as many poles as they want, wherever they want.
- *Progress:* Any solution is dependent on participation by the utilities. County Executive Ike Leggett’s senior aides told us in October that Mr. Leggett himself will get involved and talk to the utilities about finding solutions to avoid the forest of poles problem.

Trees along Wayne Avenue can be spared by more careful planning

- **Purple Line agrees that Wayne is a “hot button” area** where every large tree along including those at the school is marked for destruction by construction clear-cutting. (These are facts spelled out in the contractual mechanical drawings that are online.)
- *Progress:* Purple Line has now agreed – after County pressure – to an arborist to review the plans and also to instruct builders to use more careful methods near trees.
- Residents also want to see a replanting plan and a budget for it (currently, there is neither), and they want replanting accelerated to start in stages rather than waiting ‘til the whole Purple Line is built, which is the current plan.

The stormwater management plan must prevent runoff into Sligo Creek

- The community is concerned that required stormwater management would actually be executed far from Wayne Avenue outside the PL boundaries, with local runoff ending up in Sligo Creek. Meeting the runoff requirement in another area is legally permissible but that

doesn't protect Sligo Creek and the area wants the Creek protected with so much construction scheduled to happen on both sides of it and the tracks that cross it.

The imbalance of investment across the County is not yet redressed and must be, in the interests of the Wayne Avenue area residents

- This was the heart of the petition which the neighbors signed in overwhelming numbers
- The neighborhood insists that the State, with its lion's share of the PL budget, and Montgomery County to its lesser extent, invest taxpayer money equitably to make the Purple Line safe and to make it aesthetically compatible in the Wayne area— just as they are each investing in other Purple Line areas.
- *This has not yet happened for the Wayne area.* While our citizens expect to see simple equitable investment without begging for it, the PL budget already contains mitigation items for other parts of the county on some of the same issues that are concerns for us.

Other issues that are under discussion:

- Concerns about the State's PL policing arrangements, especially for night time security
- The state's recent elimination of the PL's "arts" and aesthetics budget, and our suggestion that the County might step into that gap (which the County says it will consider).

More detailed information on these issues, especially particulars about the implications of expanding the Wayne and Dale intersection, will be prepared and shared in advance of the County's intended community meeting to discuss that intersection. That meeting is not yet scheduled but is expected during these winter months.

3. EMERGING ISSUES: MAINTAINING OUR AREA'S RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER WHILE ADDING LIGHT RAIL IS A CHALLENGE NEEDING CLEVER SOLUTIONS

Every State of Maryland Purple Line study determines and accepts that our area from downtown past Sligo Creek, has residential characteristics that are unique for a Purple Line neighborhood. We are unique because light rail will dissect an established, residential small-scale neighborhood by adding light rail on an open main street.

We are also unique because cars and trains will share the same lanes on that open residential street.

For most of the PL route, trains will be in their own lanes, separated from people, traffic and structures by distance and/or fences in protected lanes on former rail beds or on large busy commercial streets. "Lane sharing" will occur in only three spots on the Purple Line other than Wayne Avenue, and all three are in non-residential settings: On the University of Maryland campus in College Park and for short segments on two large wide roads in Prince George's County in commercial areas.

The residential Wayne Avenue area is the only place on the entire Purple Line where trains and traffic will run in line with one another in "mixed lanes" or "shared lanes" while passing within feet of 50 private homes and front yards, more than 40 private driveways, a half-dozen neighborhood streets, within feet of the community residence of more than 150 seniors, two churches, parks, a popular library and the campus of 1500 students younger than 14, a route with few crosswalks and fewer traffic lights.

- **FACT:** “Mixed lanes” are rare on light rail systems in general. It is a low double-digit percentage how many miles of all light rail systems anywhere operate light rail vehicles in mixed lanes, in shared lanes, with other traffic. Where they do “mix”, they are on streets with far more traffic lights at intersections and signalized crosswalks.
- It is very unusual and might be unique in the United States – we cannot find any other comparable situation on any light rail system anywhere in the United States after two years of looking – where light rail cars of the length of the Purple Line’s (nearly 100’ long each) – will share lanes in so active and compact a residential setting.
- Other places that share lanes on smaller streets tend to use a shorter, lighter vehicle, which is generally 66 feet long. H Street NW in DC, a setting comparable to Bonifant and Wayne in many ways, is using the shorter 66-foot car. The light rail in the residential areas of Media, PA, where streets look almost identical to Wayne Avenue in both size and housing, also uses the smaller-sized 66-foot cars which are more flexible and can stop in shorter distances.

Because of the size of the cars Purple Line plans, the neighborhood is asking the State to build in more special protections than it has to date to make the Purple Line compatible with, and not competitive with, people and residential activity so we can keep Wayne and Bonifant NOT-fenced off.

4. PARTICIPANTS IN OUR DIALOGUES

Community Representatives

These Reps – from multiple Wayne Ave area civic and citizen groups – found each other through mutual concerns when the Purple Line’s actual designs went public in 2013. They formed a voluntary collaboration to scrub and study the technical drawings inch by inch and tree by tree. They convened to trade information and to work in mutual support.

There are participants from Park Hills Civic Association (PHCA), Seven Oaks-Evanswood Citizens Association (SOECA), East Silver Spring Citizens Association (ESSCA), Sligo-Branview Community Association, and from the Sligo Creek Elementary School PTA and the Silver Spring International Middle School PTSA, with ongoing connections to the Friends of Sligo Creek and to the Silver Spring Library Advisory Committee/Friends of Library and other local groups.

This collective also was instrumental two years ago in supporting creation of a county-wide coalition of residential associations and neighborhood associations, from Chevy Chase to Langley Park, all of whom were looking to do exactly the same thing: Get practical about the designs and seek adjustments to make the Purple Line work better in their neighborhoods.

These groups were all running up against a brick wall as individuals, until they joined together for the sole purpose of making sure the neighborhoods were HEARD. The Wayne Avenue neighborhoods were represented in that county-wide collective by their elected civic/citizen association officers and designees. This became known as the Coalition of Purple Line Neighborhoods (COPLN)

All of these community reps were determined to contribute to the process, and not just demand of it, to bring solutions and creative ideas to the table.

The Wayne Avenue Community

The strongest asset in these endeavors has been the persistence of the residents of the Wayne Avenue area. High levels and high volume of Community response at moments of critical mass in this process has been and remains the key agent of influence.

Every time in the last two years when the Community Reps in the Working Group asked the wider Wayne Ave community to step up and speak out, it has done so in large numbers and with clarity. That has ensured a seat at the table. That has kept officials engaged.

The community turned out for game-changer community events with officials. The community rallied for focused campaigns when emails and/or letters were needed.

Most effectively, hundreds and hundreds – in a matter of 96 hours – signed the Change.org petition to Governor Hogan of spring 2015, demanding that investment for the Purple Line in the Wayne Avenue area is equitable with what is already planned for other parts of the Purple Line route. This petition opened officials' eyes to the extent of neighborhood awareness of and rejection of the disparity.

The issues of the Wayne Avenue area are now squarely where they should be – on the agenda of officials. Officials and politicians at every level of government, who used to just drive by, now know EXACTLY where the Residential Wayne Avenue communities are. This is all because of the people of these communities

- *Residents here have shown with consistency and character that they will work hard and fairly, and put community ahead of personal advocacy.*
- *We have abided by the principles that a fair question about the Purple Line is not an assault on the Purple Line, and that suggesting something could be done better is not an assault on public transportation but is raised in support of good public transportation.*
- *All of this has contributed to a rise in credibility for the Wayne Avenue area and its issues.*

The community must stay engaged as construction nears and occurs. Our place at the deliberative table is not automatic – it is not a permanent condition. Vigilance can always be friendly, but it must be unfailing.

Elected Officials

The Wayne Avenue community has asked elected officials to engage on our issues; it has received a wide range in the quality and quantity of their responses.

Dozens of agencies and actors are involved in the Purple Line because it is a multi-billion-dollar public-private public works project in a densely populated corridor spanning multiple jurisdictions. The Working Group has interacted directly with great numbers of those entities, but the Working Group has put its focus on developing ongoing and serious engagement from our elected officials.

The community seeks to have our elected officials make sure our issues get the fair hearing that those issues have not been getting, and to make sure that the investment of public monies in the Wayne Avenue area is equitable with that in other Purple Line areas, which it is not.

- *The greatest help for the Wayne Avenue vis-a-vis the Purple Line has come consistently from County Executive Ike Leggett, from his senior staff and senior officials in the County Executive Branch, even though this is primarily a state project.*
- That help has come from *County Exec Leggett personally* and from his senior advisors and includes high levels of personal involvement from the Acting Director of MoCo Department of Transportation, Al Roshdieh, and his senior staff.
- The County Executive's senior staff spent considerable time assisting with the issues of Wayne Avenue. They also created county-wide platforms to work on practical solutions when it became clear that similar concerns echoed all through the residential neighborhoods of the Purple Line. When the neighborhoods were all too often at an impasse with Purple Line's state planners, the County stepped up to mediate solutions.
- *Congressman Van Hollen* has proved an important, impartial, and ongoing honest broker. He has done it in person at crucial moments, and he has made sure that there has been consistent close monitoring of the process by his staff, including their attendance at nearly every important meeting and their contacts with us in between, staff who understand this project at every level and who provide invaluable and responsibly impartial observations.
- There has also been that same continuing observation and invaluable while impartial advice from the office of *Senator Mikulski*.

The County Council: Activity has been limited to a few members despite wider outreach, and response involves encouragement more than action. There has been some personal attention and concern from some members, some inquiry into issues, but NO engagement on any level comparable to what has occurred within the County Executive Branch.

- This is a state project but there is considerable County money committed and there are multiple areas in which the County Council could help. To date, nothing binding has come from the Council, or been legislated, despite the Council's potential influence with the State, and the neighborhood's concerns about topics in the Council's remit, such as environmental infringements and protection from up-zoning around the new Dale Drive PL station.
- There has been continuing engagement with a few very invested *Council staff* from the offices of Councilmembers Elrich, Riemer and Hucker, who have stayed current and well-versed on our issues, and who are present as observers at many of the meetings with Purple Line officials.

Our District 20 State Delegation. Annapolis is where our issues need strong champions because the Purple Line is a state project of billions of dollars, and one of our most important area issues is that public funding and investment is disproportionately low in our area.

- Engagement by our state delegation from our District 20 (one senator and three delegates, one of whom is Chair of the House Ways & Means Committee) has been quiet and of limited support. Several have met with the Wayne Ave Working Group and have given hearing to concerns. Several have also attended some public meetings hosted by the County or MTA. But there has not been any action on the delegations' part beyond expressing concern.
- The involvement of the state delegation with the neighborhood's concerns is disproportional to the impact of this massive Public Works project on the area. Nor does it measure up to the levels of personal and staff energies expended by the County Executive branch and federal elected officials, who have been creative in finding ways to engage with this state project, and with us, and to bridge the two.

5. NEXT KNOWN STEPS FOR THE PURPLE LINE ALONG WAYNE AVE

A) Awarding the entire contract and starting construction

The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) is currently reviewing the final bids from the four private sector groups competing for the 30-year contract to build, operate and maintain the Purple Line. **MTA has said the contract will be awarded sometime in early 2016.** Construction is scheduled to start in 2016. It is not known when construction begins on Wayne Avenue.

B) Pressing for solution other than doubling the size of the Wayne and Dale intersection

The COUNTY says it will hold a special meeting in early 2016 for the Wayne Ave area to get community input about the expansion planned for the Wayne and Dale intersection. This meeting is in response to the rejection by such a large volume of the community to the size of the expansion. The Community Reps are waiting for the County to set a date.

The County's position is that it must make this intersection the new, enlarged size to maintain traffic flow and to ensure traffic safety because there are specific complications of cars looking to "beat the train" when a light rail station is situated right in busy intersection.

C) Creation of "Community Input" platforms with the winning contractor for the long run

The "winning" private company as a requirement of the contract will form a community input process for the duration of the Purple Line construction, with neighborhoods grouped by sections of the Purple Line. Communities will be grouped in sections along the Purple Line for this input process. Our suggested "section" runs from SS Transit Center all along Wayne across Sligo Creek, up to Long Branch.

There is no contractual stipulation or clarity on what the company, as a builder-operator contractor to the State, is supposed to do with community input or when the process starts. The State is, and will remain, the ultimate authority regarding the Purple Line.

END