

Dr. William E. (Britt) Kirwan, Chancellor  
University System of Maryland

May 12, 2010

Dear Dr. Kirwan:

We are writing to express our deep concern about the University of Maryland's steps against transit access to campus. While we fully support UMD's proposed summer trial closing of Campus Drive to cars, we take issue with the proposed diversion of transit vehicles off Campus Drive and onto Regents Drive. The transit component of the current plan will greatly hinder area transit this summer. Beyond that, it puts the university on a long-term trajectory that is not supported by professional transit planners, is inconsistent with the Campus Master Plan and works at cross purposes to the Maryland Transit Administration's plans for the Purple Line.

TRANSIT PLANNING: UMD does not have any transit planners on staff and has openly admitted that no transit planners were consulted during the crafting of the proposed trial closure. Larry Glick, WMATA's chief Maryland bus planner, has expressed serious reservations about diverting four of his agency's bus routes onto Regents Drive where they will be snarled in car traffic that is itself diverted from Campus Drive. According to Glick, such a rerouting will have *"consequences that extend for miles away from the university."* WMATA is highly supportive, on the other hand, of a trial closure of Campus Drive that maintains the agency's current routes, while removing the thousands of single-occupancy automobiles that impede the efficient movement of its transit vehicles across campus and are the major reason for the degraded pedestrian environment at the core of the campus.

CAMPUS MASTER PLAN: UMD's proposed summer trial closure does not enhance the Campus Master Plan's objective to *"improve the campus' integration into the regional transit system network,"* nor does it further the goal to *"maximize use of alternatives to driving."* The trial closure is described by the UMD administration as an implementation of the latest Campus Master Plan which they say has envisioned a *"traffic-free, pedestrian-friendly zone"* or *"pedestrian walking mall"* on Campus Drive since 1991. Indeed, the Campus Master Plan does support the closure of Campus Drive to cars and envisions an internal "campus bus loop" that uses the roadway and links up with regional bus transit at the periphery of campus. With that said, UMD is not proposing to implement an internal "campus bus loop," and even if it were, we have very serious concerns that transit ridership will diminish if such a plan ever materialized. We believe this plan will:

- result in a net reduction in transit ridership to campus, in direct contradiction the UMD and State of Maryland goals
- intensify the current conflict between cars, transit and pedestrians on campus
- inconvenience off-campus transit riders by dropping them off at the periphery of campus; necessitating longer walks or forcing bus transfers where none exist today
- ultimately lead to the need for multiple transit hubs around campus that will confuse riders, complicate transfers and suppress ridership

- create serious safety concerns by putting vulnerable members of the campus community in unsafe areas at night
- reduce the accessibility of campus to the physically challenged
- disproportionately affect the lower income members of the campus community

THE PURPLE LINE: The 2000 Campus Master Plan directs UMD to:

*"take advantage of special opportunities off campus. Specifically, the plan provides flexibility for interaction with a Purple Line in the Washington area metro system... Though specific metro stop sites have not yet been designated, it is assumed that at least one Purple Line station will be located on or adjacent to campus, with the exact siting dependent on the final route of the Purple Line. The university intends to advocate for a metro system that offers maximum access to the campus."*

This ten year old plan predates the state's public, multi-year, multi-million dollar Purple Line planning process. The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) has worked with UMD for nearly ten years on potential alignments through campus and has spent a tremendous amount of time and resources investigating alternative campus at-grade/tunnel alignments, addressing university concerns about pedestrian safety and studying the potential effects of electromagnetic interference on campus research activities.

These studies, conducted at the behest of UMD, have shown that an at-grade Campus Drive alignment is the only feasible east-west route through campus. A tunnel under the Morrill quad is unaffordable in the current FTA funding environment and is therefore not a viable alternative to the Campus Drive alignment. Predicating USM and UM support for the Purple Line on such a tunnel is a kiss of death to the Purple Line, which is a crucial element of Prince George's County's economic development strategy. That is why discussion about the alignment through campus has gained the attention of the entire political establishment in Prince George's County.

Lost in this discussion is the promise of the Purple Line to provide relief to the growing disruption of traffic congestion to the campus and surrounding community. The university banishment of transit from campus contributes to a worsening in this intolerable situation.

MTA has proposed a series of options to avoid and mitigate electromagnetic interference. Despite their stated unequivocal support for the Purple Line, UMD continues to insist on an infeasible tunnel through campus. Continuing to maintain this position is inconsistent with the normal principles of academic inquiry and is tantamount to a rejection of the entire 16-mile project. Michael Madden, project manager for MTA's Purple Line study, recently reiterated MTA's belief that an at-grade Campus Drive alignment is the only prudent and feasible option on campus:

*"If the Purple Line is not built on Campus Drive, we don't know where else on campus it could be. We've emphasized that the Purple Line needs to be fully integrated into university plans."*

UMD administrators are describing the summer Campus Drive closure trial as having "*no connection with the Purple Line*" and have not consulted the MTA on their plans. Despite these assertions, the Purple Line has everything to do with the 500-750 buses that run down Campus Drive every day throughout the year. The light rail is envisioned to replace and consolidate several WMATA and Shuttle UM routes and tie in with the campus' main transit hub at its current location on Campus Drive in front of the Stamp Student Union. It can improve the environment in the center of campus by replacing diesel buses with higher capacity, quieter and less polluting light rail vehicles. It is poor transit planning to ignore the Purple Line and re-route buses in a way that doesn't support the proposed light rail. The summer bus trial needs to be conducted with the Purple Line in mind.

As UMD embarks on its 2010 update to the Campus Master Plan we urge that this process take into account the realities of the Purple Line planning process: namely that an at-grade Campus Drive alignment is the only achievable option. It is critical that MTA planners are included in every step of the process.

Furthermore, given the tremendous benefits that the Purple Line will bring to the campus community and the larger region, the UMD administration must become an ardent champion and outright supporter of the Purple Line. The first step towards that unequivocal support is the closure of Campus Drive to cars while keeping the buses where they are.

Sincerely;

Ralph Bennett, Acting President  
Purple Line *NOW!*

Ben Ross, President  
Action Committee for Transit

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UMD Student Government Association

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Honorable Senator Ben Cardin  
Honorable Congresswoman Donna Edwards (District 4)  
Honorable Congressman Steny Hoyer (District 5)

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