MEMORANDUM RECOMMENDING EXPANSION OF MARYLAND AREA REGIONAL COMMUTER TRAIN SERVICE

by
Bryan Wheeler

A capstone project submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Public Management

Baltimore, Maryland
April, 2016

© 2016 Bryan Wheeler
All Rights Reserved
ABSTRACT

This capstone is a memorandum for a Maryland Democratic legislator proposing a policy to expand Maryland Area Regional Commuter Train Service (MARC) weekend train service on MARC’s Camden and Brunswick Lines. The memorandum looks at the history of MARC train service, as well as the current state of MARC service, alternative options to MARC train service, and the public’s attitudes and habits toward public transportation. This memorandum also looks at the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed policy and provides a political analysis of the policy. The memorandum recommends expanding MARC train service on weekends for the Camden and Brunswick Lines.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Action Forcing Event</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. History of Commuter Rail in Maryland</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Background</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Options to MARC and Public Transit Habits of Marylanders</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Attitudes and Habits on Public Transportation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current state of MARC</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Players</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Policy Proposal</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Authorization</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Implementation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Policy Analysis</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths of this Policy</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaknesses of this Policy</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Political Analysis</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Recommendation</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Vita</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MEMORANDUM FOR a Democratic Maryland Legislator

SUBJECT: Expansion of Maryland Area Regional Commuter Train Service to Weekends for Camden and Brunswick Lines

DATE: April 15, 2016

I. Action Forcing Event:

The Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) train began weekend service on its Penn Line in December 2013, which connects commuters between Washington, D.C.'s Union Station and Baltimore's Penn Station.1 “Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) Administrator Robert L. Smith said he was pleased”2 with the initial weekend ridership levels and expects ridership to increase, which will give MTA “a good gauge of the level of interest in about 3 to 6 months.”3 MARC continues to offer weekday service on its other two lines, the Camden Line between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. and its Brunswick Line between Martinsburg, W.Va. and Washington, D.C., but has not announced plans for weekend service on either line.4

---


3 Ibid.

II. Statement of the Problem:

The District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia (DC–MD–VA) metropolitan area is home to the worst automobile traffic of any large urban area in the United States of America.\textsuperscript{5} The average amount of wasted hours that motorists have spent in traffic in the DC–MD–VA metropolitan area has increased from 18 hours in 1982 to 67 hours in 2011, more than any other large urban area in the nation.\textsuperscript{6}

According to former Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley’s office, infrastructure funding has “remained unchanged since 1992”\textsuperscript{7} and that “a dollar for transportation in 1992 is only worth about 30 cents today.”\textsuperscript{8} Governor O’Malley’s office has stated that “travel on Maryland’s roads has increased nearly 40 percent in the past two decades and is expected to increase another 20 percent by 2030.” In an effort to decrease congestion on Maryland roads and increase infrastructure spending, Governor O’Malley and the Maryland General Assembly passed into law the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013, “which will provide $4.4 billion in infrastructure over the next six years for transportation projects across Maryland.”\textsuperscript{9} Part of this new investment in Maryland


\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{9} “Creating Jobs and Reducing Congestion: Investing in Maryland’s Infrastructure,” The Office of Maryland State Archives, accessed June 13, 2015,
included the start of weekend service along MARC’s Penn Line, which started in December 2013, as well as plans to expand “service on the Camden line”\textsuperscript{10} and replace “old and unreliable locomotives throughout entire [the] entire MARC system.”\textsuperscript{11} At the time that Penn Line service was expanded to weekends, MARC’s other two train lines, the Camden and Brunswick Lines, weekend service was not introduced.

As Maryland works to upgrade its infrastructure, another form of rail transit in Maryland aside from MTA’s MARC, Amtrak, has seen an increase in demand and saw record levels of ridership in Fiscal Year 2013.\textsuperscript{12} Situated on Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor line, Amtrak’s most popular line,\textsuperscript{13} Baltimore’s Penn Station, BWI – Airport, and Washington, DC’s Union Station are three of Amtrak’s top 25 busiest stations.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{III. History of Commuter Rail in Maryland:}

The Maryland Transportation Administration (MTA) has been operating a commuter rail service branded as Maryland Area Rail Commuter (MARC) since 1984.\textsuperscript{15}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.\\
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.\\
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.\\
\textsuperscript{15} Matt Van Hattem, “Maryland Rail Commuter (MARC),” Trains.com, June 30, 2006, http://trn.trains.com/sitecore/content/Home/Railroad%20Reference/Passenger%20Trains/2006/06/Maryland%20Rail%20Commuter%20MARC.aspx?sc_lang=en.}
Maryland’s commuter rail system dates as far back as 1830, when the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad first began operations on what is now MARC’s Camden Line,\textsuperscript{16} which runs between Washington, D.C.’s Union Station and Baltimore’s Camden Station.\textsuperscript{17} Coincidentally, the Camden Line happens to be “the oldest rail passenger route in the U.S.”\textsuperscript{18} Today MARC operates three separate commuter lines: the Camden Line; the Penn Line, which runs along Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor between Washington, D.C.’s Union Station and Perryville, Md.;\textsuperscript{19} and the Brunswick Line, which operates between Martinsburg, W.Va. and Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{20} Both the Camden Line and Brunswick Line were originally operated by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, while the Penn Line was originally operated by Conrail.\textsuperscript{21}

In 1974, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad made the case with the State of Maryland that its local commuter lines in the state “were unprofitable, and unless a subsidy could be provided, they would likely have to be discontinued.”\textsuperscript{22} Initially, “the Maryland Department of Transportation offered a partial subsidy”\textsuperscript{23} to the Baltimore & Ohio

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Railroad, but a just year later, “entered into an operating agreement, where the state would make up the operating deficit and provide the railroad with rolling stock.”24 In 1976, the Maryland Department of Transportation began funding Conrail’s operation of what is now the Penn Line on Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor.25

In 1978, the Maryland created the State Railroad Administration26 for the purpose of overseeing “commuter rail subsidies using state and federal funds, purchase new commuter rail equipment, and subsidize state short lines.”27 The Maryland legislature voted in 1981 “to continue financing the commuter rail services as long as passenger fares paid for 50 percent of the trains’ revenue.”28 As a result of the Maryland legislature’s decision, the Maryland Department of Transportation “upgraded service on the [Baltimore & Ohio Railroad lines] with refurbished locomotives and cars.”29 In 1992, the State Railroad Administration’s “functions later were assumed by the Mass Transit Administration,”30 which is now the Maryland Transit Administration. MARC, as it is today, is a part of the Maryland Transit Administration.31

24 Ibid.

25 Van Hattem, “Maryland Rail Commuter (MARC).”


27 Van Hattem, “Maryland Rail Commuter (MARC).”

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 “Department of Transportation – Origin,” Maryland State Archives.

Today, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad no longer runs operations for the Brunswick and Camden Lines, and Conrail no longer operates the Penn Line. In 1983, “Amtrak took over the Northeast Corridor service”\(^{32}\) and shortly after, Amtrak and the Maryland Department of Transportation reached an agreement to run commuter services on what is now the Penn Line.\(^{33}\) The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad has since merged with CSX Transportation.\(^{34}\) Today, MARC trains are “operated under contract by Amtrak and CSX Transportation.”\(^{35}\)

Since the Maryland Transportation Administration assumed operations of MARC, its most notable expansion project was completed in December 2001, when MARC “began service on a 13.5-mile extension of its Brunswick Line”\(^{36}\) between Frederick, Md and Point of Rocks, Md. The federally funded project cost $56 million\(^{37}\) and was completed to ease congestion on the Brunswick Line between Martinsburg, W. Va. and Washington, D.C.\(^{38}\)

---

32 Ibid.
35 Van Hattem, “Maryland Rail Commuter (MARC).”
36 Ibid.
Above: Service between Frederick and Point of Rocks began on December 17, 2001.

While infrastructure spending has remained unchanged since 1992, as Governor Martin O’Malley noted, ridership on MARC trains has increased significantly. Prior to the state subsidizing Conrail’s Penn Line and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad’s Camden Line and Brunswick Line, there were roughly 5,000 riders per day. By 2000, that number had reached roughly 20,000 riders per day. In 2012, MARC averaged over

---


41 Ibid.

**IV. Background:**

The purpose of this background section will be to consider whether or not there is a necessity to extend MARC train service to weekends along the Camden and Brunswick Lines. First, I will examine what the current alternative transportation options are to both the Camden and Brunswick Lines and the costs and commute times. Second, I will consider the public’s attitudes and habits are with respect to public transportation in the region. Third, I will review what the current state of MARC train service is and whether or not previous attempts to expand MARC train service have been successful. In addition to this, I will look at the key players in Maryland that will play a role in any future expansion of MARC train service.

**Alternative Options to MARC and Public Transit Habits of Marylanders**

Alternatively to MARC train service along the Brunswick line, the most viable commuting option coming from the Western suburbs of Washington, D.C. is Interstate I-270, which connects to the Beltway, which loops around the inner suburbs of Washington, D.C. in both Maryland and Virginia. As for commuting options between
Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, three alternative routes between the two cities other than MARC are AMTRAK, bus, or automobile. By automobile, the two direct routes between the two cities are I-95 and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, which are 44.7 miles and 38.8 miles respectively when you calculate the distance between Union Station in Washington, D.C. and Penn Station in Baltimore.\textsuperscript{44} The AMTRAK route runs along the same route as MARC’s Penn Line and takes roughly the same time as a commute along MARC, but is more costly. An average ticket between Baltimore’s Penn Station and Union Station in Washington, DC is $13,\textsuperscript{45} and must be purchased in advance. By bus, the best option is to take a Greyhound bus, which takes roughly an hour and a half between Washington, D.C.’s Union Station and Baltimore’s Inner Harbor.\textsuperscript{46} Figure 2 below, shows what the cost of transportation is for individual riders between Baltimore, MD and Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{44} These distances were calculated using Google Maps, Google Maps, accessed June 13, 2015, https://www.google.com/maps.


### Figure 2: Cost of Transit for individual riders between Baltimore, MD and Washington, D.C.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of transit</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>1-2 gallons of gas, Parking costs</td>
<td>57 min. without traffic</td>
<td>44.7 miles I-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54 min. without traffic</td>
<td>38.8 miles BW Pkwy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus (Greyhound)</td>
<td>$12.50&lt;sup&gt;47&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>90 min.</td>
<td>Same as Car transit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amtrak</td>
<td>$13</td>
<td>45 min. (Approximately)</td>
<td>Equal to MARC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARC</td>
<td>$7&lt;sup&gt;48&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1 hr. (Approximately)</td>
<td>Equal to Amtrak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Public Attitudes and Habits on Public Transportation

Though roads in the region are congested, overall, Marylanders and D.C. Metro area commuters are keen on using public transit. According to one study, the National Household Transportation Survey (NHTS), “Maryland has the fourth-highest level of transit usage in the country, behind only DC, New York, and Massachusetts.”<sup>49</sup> Based on the NHTS study, 30 percent of Marylanders use transit, while nine percent of them use transit regularly.<sup>50</sup> In another study, the American Community Survey, “14.3 percent of Washington-area residents commuted to work via public transportation during the three-


<sup>50</sup> Ibid.
year period covering 2010-2012.”\textsuperscript{51} Based on that study, the Washington Metro area transit usage is “higher than areas that are often thought of as more transit-friendly, such as Boston (12%), Chicago (12%), and Philadelphia (9%).”\textsuperscript{52} One important thing to note about the American Community Survey’s data on the Washington metropolitan area was that regardless of income level, the areas that had the highest transit usage were in cities and neighborhoods that “have frequent, high-capacity transit service.”\textsuperscript{53} Noting that fact, although the MARC does not have train service that would compare to the frequency of service that the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority’s Metrorail, which runs 7-days a week and averaged 721,804 weekday riders, MARC has made incremental improvements to the frequency of its service.

\textbf{Current state of MARC}

The initial weekend MARC train service along the Penn Line started on December 7, 2013 and was authorized through the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013 that the Maryland General Assembly, led by Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. and House Speaker Michael E. Busch, passed and then signed into law by Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley in 2013.\textsuperscript{54} As part of the law, the state made plans to invest an average of $800 million per year between 2014 and 2019 on


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

transportation, totaling $4.4 billion overall.\textsuperscript{55} Though investment through the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act totals $4.4 billion, only $100 million of that went towards MARC Train spending.\textsuperscript{56} Of that $100 million, it was estimated that the cost of expanding weekend MARC service on the Penn Line was $48 million.\textsuperscript{57} Also necessary to facilitate the expansion of MARC service along the Penn Line were negotiations with Amtrak to coordinate and find available times in which MARC trains can run.\textsuperscript{58} MTA, like it did with Amtrak as part of the rollout with weekend service, has had to coordinate with CSX Transportation when revising schedules along the Brunswick line.\textsuperscript{59} As part of the bill, MTA also increased the fares for MARC $1 per ride in summer of 2015.\textsuperscript{60}

In addition to adding limited train service to the Penn Line on weekends, MARC has recently expanded its Camden Line as well during weekdays. According to the Maryland Transit Administration, the move, which was made in March 2015, was made “as part of an initiative to boost connections between University of Maryland's campuses


\textsuperscript{57} Hedgepeth, “Weekend MARC Trains.”


The move was in part made because the Maryland state legislature charged the University System of Maryland Board of Regents and thus both universities with developing a plan to have an even greater impact on the state, its economy, the job market, and the next generation of innovators.

When the expanded service started, Democratic Maryland State Senator James Carew Rosapepe declared it was a “big deal” and stated, “Washington has the worst congestion in the United States. Baltimore has the fifth worst congestion in the United States, so between Baltimore and Washington, we've got a lot of traffic.”

Over the last several years, MARC ridership levels are up, including for weekend service on the Penn Line. In 2010, the MTA reported that the average daily ridership was over 32,600 passengers system-wide. By 2014, MTA’s average daily ridership system-wide had increased to nearly 36,000 passengers. MTA also noted in its 2014 Annual Report that MARC “completed its first full year of weekend service on the Penn Line, with significant continuous growth in ridership.” In addition to the regular weekend service along MARC, due to customer demand, MARC has expanded its opportunities on

---


64 Ibid.


67 Ibid, 7.
weekends along the PENN Line in two areas. First, after its first year of weekend service was complete, MARC added “bike car service starting in December 2014.”⁶⁸ MTA states that “responding to customer demand to increase travel opportunities for bicycle riders,”⁶⁹ it permanently doubled “the number of MARC Penn Line weekend trains equipped with a bike car.”⁷⁰ Second, MTA decided in 2016 to expand “MARC capacity for Washington’s month-long National Cherry Blossom Festival.”⁷¹ This decision came after high levels of ridership during the festival in 2015, in which “MARC carried 16,350 riders on the festival parade weekend, 10,650 of them on the day of the parade.”⁷² MARC notes that the average ridership on weekends for the PENN line ranges from 5,000 to 5,500.⁷³

Given that ridership levels along the MARC have increased on the Penn, Camden and Brunswick Lines overall the last few years, it is apparent that more and more people are making the choice to use public transit in the region. In addition to increased ridership levels overall on all three MARC Lines, we have seen MARC service extended to weekends on the Penn Line. Weekend service on the Penn Line has been so successful that MARC has rolled out additional service to meet demands. Whether it has been the addition of bike train cars, or expanding weekend service for special events like

---


⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.


⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ “MTA Doubles Bike Car Service On MARC Weekend Penn Line,” Maryland Transit Administration.
Washington, D.C.’s Cherry Blossom Festival, MARC has responded to customers demand. With an increase in MARC ridership levels, a successful rollout of weekend service along the Penn Line, the Camden and Brunswick Lines are the next logical step in expanding MARC service overall and it appears that there is a demand for more service.

**The Players:**

**Maryland Governor Larry Hogan:**

Maryland’s political landscape changed in its last election season when a Democratic successor to former Governor Martin O’Malley, Lieutenant Governor, Anthony Brown, was defeated in Maryland’s November 2014 gubernatorial election by Republican candidate Larry Hogan. Hogan, who won his campaign by “relentlessly promising to roll back tax increases and chart a new direction for the state,” enjoys very favorable approval ratings. According to a poll conducted by the Washington Post and the University of Maryland, Governor Hogan’s approval rating, as of April 6, 2015, is at 66 percent in the state. Among Democrats, Governor Hogan has an approval rating of 56 percent.  


76 Ibid.
Maryland General Assembly

While Governor Hogan enjoys favorable approval ratings, the state legislature does not. According to the same poll conducted by the Washington Post and the University of Maryland, just 48 percent of Marylanders approve the Democrats in the Maryland General Assembly, while 38 percent of Marylanders do not approve of the job Democrats are doing in the state legislature. Comparatively, 57 percent of Marylanders approve of how Governor Hogan has worked with the state legislature. As for the makeup of the Maryland General Assembly, “the state is divided into 47 legislative districts, with each district represented by one senator and 3 delegates.” Democrats hold 33 of the 47 Maryland State Senate Districts, while Democrats hold 91 of the 141 delegate seats. As mentioned previously, the Democratic majority House of Delegates is led by House Speaker Michael E. Busch, while the Democratic majority Senate is led by Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. As discussed earlier, both House Speaker Busch and Senate President Miller Jr., along with former Democratic Governor Martin O’Malley, were key to the passing of the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013, which established weekend train service on the Penn Line.

77 Ibid.
V. Policy Proposal:

Just as MARC train service on the Penn Line was expanded two years ago to include weekend service, the following proposal will expand train service along the Camden and Brunswick lines to include weekend service. Under this proposal, MARC will utilize existing infrastructure in place along both the Camden and Brunswick lines to achieve this. To fund this proposal, a transportation bill will be introduced to the Maryland General Assembly proposing the allocation of $96 million in funds for this project.

While the current weekend service along the Penn Line includes both nine Northbound and nine Southbound trains on Saturday and six Northbound and Southbound trains on Sunday,⁸¹ the weekend schedules for the Camden and Brunswick lines would not run as often. As part of this proposal, for the Brunswick line, MARC would schedule eight Eastbound and Westbound trains on Saturdays and five Eastbound and Westbound trains on Sundays. For the Camden line, MARC would schedule six Eastbound Northbound and Southbound trains on Saturday and four Northbound and Southbound trains on Sunday. In addition to a regular weekend schedule, this proposal will include a rollout of weekend MARC service that will coincide with sporting events and special events in both Baltimore and the District of Columbia. For instance, if there is a Ravens game on a Sunday, transit customers will have the option to travel along MARC’s Camden line to and from the game.

Additionally, as part of this proposal, there will be the option for customers to purchase a weekend ticket to ride all MARC trains that will be valid from Friday after 9 AM – Sunday evening when the last MARC trains run. This new weekend ticket option will be priced 1.5 times the current price of a one-way ticket fare along MARC. As part of this proposal, adults that have purchased a weekend pass will be able to travel with up to three children at no additional cost.

**Policy Authorization**

The policy authorization mechanism for this proposal will be a new transportation bill that will be introduced to the Maryland Senate (2016 Transit Act). As mentioned in the background above, the initial weekend service for the MARC was authorized through the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013. The Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013 was passed by the Maryland General Assembly and then signed into law by former Governor Martin O’Malley. Like the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013, the proposed expansion of MARC service under to the Camden and Brunswick lines under the 2016 Transit Act would need to be passed by the Maryland General Assembly, and then signed into law by the Maryland Governor. For the 2016 Transit Act to go into effect, or become law in Maryland, the Governor would have to sign the proposed bill. Should the Governor veto the bill, a veto could be overridden by the General Assembly if three-fifths of both the Senate and House of Delegates choose to vote to override the Governor’s veto.

---


83 Ibid.
Policy Implementation

With the understanding that this proposal’s implementation will require the 2016 Transit Act being passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Hogan, the first step will be to consider how this $96 million project will be funded. As mentioned above, while the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013 totaled $1.2 billion, $100 million of that funding went to MARC projects, and $48 million of that $100 million went toward weekend service on MARC’s Penn Line. Just as the weekend Penn Line service was funded using the gas tax, to fund weekend service along the Camden Line and Brunswick Lines, the 2016 Transit Act will include a slight increase in the gas tax to raise the $96 million necessary for the project.

To facilitate the transition to full weekend service along the Camden and Brunswick Lines, MTA will also have to coordinate with Amtrak and CSX Transportation to find appropriate times that MARC could implement its proposed schedules on each line. As mentioned above, MTA coordinated with Amtrak to find times on weekend days to schedule MARC trains along the Penn Line, and has previously had to coordinate with CSX Transportation when revising schedules along the Brunswick Line. MTA will also need to work with Amtrak, CSX Transportation, the City of Baltimore, and the District of Columbia government to accommodate special events such as Ravens games, Orioles games and other special events.

---

VI. Policy Analysis:

Should this policy proposal move forward and the General Assembly and Governor sign the bill into law, MARC service will be expanded to weekends along the Camden and Brunswick Lines. Additionally, customers will now have the option to purchase a weekend ticket that is 1.5 times the cost of the regular one-way fare of a MARC ticket.

**Strengths of this Policy:**

It has been well over two years since the MTA rolled out its expansion of MARC to the Penn Line between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. As mentioned above, while service has not matched that of weekday ridership, MTA claims that the ridership is strong and growing.\(^8^5\) With growing ridership, MARC continues to offer additional or new services to weekend Penn Line service such as additional bike train cars and extra trains during events such as Washington, D.C.’s cherry blossom festival. Given that MARC has already expanded its train service to the Penn Line, moving forward, MTA has a clear model of success that it can follow to expand service to both the Camden and Brunswick Lines.

As part of the proposal mentioned above, MARC trains would be scheduled to run less frequently than the Penn Line’s current weekend service, which, as mentioned above, runs nine times on Saturdays Northbound and Southbound and six times respectively on Sundays. As part of this proposal, for the Brunswick Line, MARC would schedule eight

Eastbound and Westbound trains on Saturdays and five Eastbound and Westbound trains on Sundays. For the Camden Line, MARC would schedule six Eastbound Northbound and Southbound trains on Saturday and four Northbound and Southbound trains on Sunday. The purpose of this rollout is to match the average ridership among each MARC line. While the MTA is still conducting its latest study on MARC ridership, previous studies have shown growth to be up on all three lines, but that ridership growth was highest along the Penn Line, followed by the Brunswick and Camden Lines respectively. By proposing train schedules corresponding with the demand and growth along each of MARC’s train lines, this policy proposal will be able to meet the demand for MARC train service on weekends effectively and efficiently.

As the current infrastructure for MARC’s weekday service along the Camden and Brunswick Lines is already in place and would serve as the same infrastructure under the proposed weekend service, this proposed policy is rather efficient from that standpoint. Like the expanded weekend service along the Penn Line, no new train lines will need to be planned to facilitate the weekend service.

In addition to there being no additional infrastructure necessary to implement this proposed policy, when one considers the costs of this project, the price of expanding weekend service along the Camden and Brunswick Lines is comparable to what the cost of expanding weekend service to the Penn Line was, and much less than other


transportation bills that have been signed into law. As mentioned above, Maryland authorized roughly $48 million to expand the Penn Line to include weekend service. Here, the cost of this proposed policy to expand weekend service to both the Camden and Brunswick Lines will be $96 million, making the cost of each line on average $48 million. Because the infrastructure for MARC weekend service is in place, the cost of this proposed policy is significantly less than that of other transit projects in the state. For instance, new analysis has indicated that Maryland’s Purple Line project, which was discussed briefly above, could have costs potentially reaching $2.65 billion.  

In addition to the proposed weekend service, the proposal will give MARC passengers the option to purchase a weekend pass that costs 1.5 times the cost of a one-way MARC train ticket and allow adults purchasing tickets to travel with up to three children at no extra cost. This part of the proposed policy is comparable to what the Chicago-area commuter service, Metra, offers. While this may seem counterintuitive to raising funds to pay for the proposed weekend service along all three of MARC’s train lines, the goal of this part of the policy is to increase ridership along MARC. As ridership increases along MARC, another goal, reducing congestion on Maryland’s highways, may be achieved as well. In order to make Marylanders choose MARC over driving, MARC needs to be an affordable option and this part of the policy is crafted to do exactly that. As highlighted above in Figure 2, MARC is cheaper for customers than Amtrak, but the cost of operating an automobile is comparable if not cheaper than taking MARC. By

---


offering a weekend pass that is good for an extended weekend starting after Friday after 9 AM, after rush hour, through Sunday and free for children, MARC would be offering a fare for weekends that is cheaper than currently available for MARC customers.

As the American Community Survey that was highlighted above found, Washington, D.C. area commuters “will commute via public transit where transit is readily available.” \(^{90}\) Additionally, that survey, as noted above, concluded the areas that had the highest transit usage were in cities and neighborhoods that “have frequent, high-capacity transit service.” \(^{91}\) By expanding service along the Camden and Brunswick Lines to weekends under this policy, that same environment for high transit usage can be achieved in the cities that are served by both train lines.

Alternatively, another option aside from this policy proposal would be to take no action at this time. Simply put, it could be decided that weekday service along the Camden and Brunswick lines is all that is necessary for these train lines. This option would come at no extra cost and MTA could continue to focus its efforts on weekend service solely to the Penn Line. While Penn Line service on weekends is not exactly new, having just passed its second year, not enough time may have passed yet and the details on ridership in MARC’s latest survey it is conducting \(^{92}\) may prove that weekend service is not as successful as MTA first claimed. \(^{93}\)

\(^{90}\) Versel, “Who rides (and will ride) transit in Greater Washington.”

\(^{91}\) Ibid.

\(^{92}\) “MARC Train Ridership Survey,” Maryland Transit Administration.

Weaknesses of this Policy:

A key weakness of this policy proposal is that it will require a new authorization in order to be enacted. Just as The Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013 required, which expanded MARC service on the Penn Line to weekends, the 2016 Transit Act will require the approval of both the Maryland General Assembly and the signature of the Maryland Governor. This is not a guarantee, as will be discussed later in the political analysis. Alternatively to this approach, there could have been consideration in developing this policy proposal to use a previous authorization, such as the Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2013, to move forward with a proposed expansion of weekend service on the Camden and Brunswick Lines. As originally approved, there were $4.4 billion in funds under the Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2013, and it could have been possible to develop a policy proposal that shifted funds from a different project. For example, highway repairs or the acquisition of new busses could be scrapped in favor of the 2016 Transit Act, which will expand weekend MARC service. Instead the proposed policy requires a new authorization and an introduction to the legislative process in Maryland.

To implement this policy proposal, $96 million in funds will be required to expand weekend service on MARC to the Camden and Brunswick Lines. While the expansion of the MARC train service to weekends on the Penn Line cost $48 million, the end result was a more robust train schedule on both Saturdays and Sundays, featuring nine Northbound and Southbound trains on Saturday’s and six trains on Sunday’s respectively. Under the 2016 Transit Act, a less frequent train service is being proposed,
and at the same cost per line as what was paid for under the expansion of the Penn Line’s weekend service.

While there is currently no weekend MARC service on the Camden and Brunswick Lines, the question is, will the scheduled frequency of trains under this policy proposal be enough to make MARC an attractive option for customers? As mentioned in the strengths of this policy section above, the goal of this policy proposal will be to reduce congestion on Maryland’s highways and increase ridership on MARC. The current competition to the proposed weekend service on the Camden and Brunswick Lines, as mentioned above, is using an automobile to take either I-95 and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, or I-270 respectively. Given that the option to use an automobile offers no scheduling restraints, will the schedules as proposed be enough to entice new riders?

An additional challenge to this policy proposal’s implementation may be the need to coordinate with Amtrak and CSX Transportation. This in particular may be an issue on the Brunswick Line. When working to revise its Brunswick Line in 2012 to meet customer demand, MARC had a conflict with CSX Transportation over adding additional trains to its schedule.94 At the time, MARC was trying to add two additional trains to its schedule at the time, which consisted of 18 trains daily. CSX would not “allow MARC to add trains until the State of Maryland builds a third track.”95 MARC currently runs nine trains on weekdays Eastbound and nine trains Westbound, or the same amount of trains

94 Schoenbaum, “MARC listens, improves draft Brunswick Line Schedule.”
95 Ibid.
as it ran in 2012.96 While the proposed policy would offer would only schedule eight Eastbound and Westbound trains on Saturdays and five Eastbound and Westbound trains on Sundays, which is less than during weekdays, it is not clear whether CSX Transportation would be able to accommodate as many trains on weekends as it does on weekdays.

Though it is not necessary to propose new train lines under this proposal as the Camden and Brunswick Lines have infrastructure largely in place, that infrastructure is aging. For example, along the train route between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. is the Baltimore & Potomac Tunnel (Tunnel). The Tunnel, which was completed in 1873,97 is in such bad shape that some estimate it will not last more than a decade and a half.98 To replace the Tunnel, costs are projected to cost at least $1.5 billion.99 These costs are seemingly unavoidable at this point as the Tunnel serves “85 Amtrak trains, 57 MARC commuter trains and two freight trains each day.”100 While expanding MARC service to weekends across all three of MARC’s train lines would be beneficial to passengers, it could very easily be argued that expansion should not be focused on until repairs are made to the current infrastructure.


98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

In addition to the weaknesses that are already highlighted, there is the chance that this policy proposal may have unintended consequences. One such unintended consequence of expanding MARC train service on weekends may be that the proposed policy may meet resistance from MARC employees. While it has been a long time since MARC commuters have been affected by a strike, it has indeed happened.\textsuperscript{101} In the event that there were a labor dispute between MARC and the employees, loyal MARC customers may look elsewhere for commuting options, such as using their automobiles or even Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority’s Metrorail.

\textbf{VII. Political Analysis:}

In order to move forward with the 2016 Transit Act, it is important to identify the key opponents and allies in Maryland’s political landscape. The key opponent to any increase in spending, especially for a public transportation project, is Governor Hogan. As was noted before in the background, Hogan is widely popular in Maryland and has focused his efforts as governor on cutting spending. As a Democratic legislator proposing this policy, you have plenty of allies in your party in both the House and Senate of Maryland’s General Assembly. In this section, I will focus on Governor Hogan’s record on transportation spending and projects in Maryland, while identifying the key allies in the House and Senate that are critical to passing any transportation bill. In addition to this, I will also examine what the public at large’s views are toward public transportation.

While Republican Governor Larry Hogan has talked about making cuts to Maryland's gas tax, which helps fund transportation spending, the reality is that that is not the case. Governor Hogan has actually not made the cuts that he has claimed he would either when he campaigned for as Governor or has said he would do in office, which may be due to the reality that both houses of the Maryland General Assembly remain Democratic strongholds. It is those Democratic majorities in both the Maryland Senate and Maryland House of Delegates that have actually curtailed any attempts to cut transit funding. While Hogan has discussed making cuts before, it appears that there is room for negotiation between Democrats and the Republican Governor given that when it comes down to it, the Governor has actually done very little to cut expenditures in Maryland’s $16 billion overall budget.

Overall, since Governor Hogan took office, it would appear that his stance is to spend less on transit, and he has at times even considered cutting costs or cutting the "Purple Line" project altogether. As was mentioned in the policy analysis section above, the Purple Line is a multi-billion dollar project, while the proposal to expand MARC service on the Camden and Brunswick Lines, as proposed is under $100 million

---


103 Ibid.


at $96 million. Though Governor Hogan seemed to be opposed to any increased spending on transit when he campaigned for Governor, and very skeptical of the Purple Line, Hogan ultimately approved the plans to move forward with the project\textsuperscript{107} and has even shown interest in building new transit infrastructure. In early June 2015, Hogan, on a trade mission to Japan, “agreed to work with Japan and seek federal funds for a study of what it [would] take to build a maglev line”\textsuperscript{108} between Washington, DC and Baltimore. The project, which is estimated to cost $10 billion, would put a maglev train between the two cities, and with traveling speeds capable of more than 300 miles per hour, a trip could take as little as 15 minutes.\textsuperscript{109} A key to selling the Governor on the proposal to expand MARC service to weekends on the Camden and Brunswick Lines is that the benefits outweigh the costs and the proposed policy is far cheaper than both the Purple Line and the Maglev project between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. While the proposed 2016 Transit Act would represent an increase in MARC spending, the infrastructure for the proposed expansion in service, albeit aging infrastructure, is largely in place and plans to expand it should be more palpable for the Governor from a cost standpoint than a new project altogether.

Though the Governor is potentially a key opponent to the proposed 2016 Transit Act, the Maryland General Assembly has plenty of Democratic allies in both the Senate


\textsuperscript{108} David Alpert, “Maryland's governor thinks the Purple Line is too expensive, but wants to build a $10 billion maglev. Huh?” Greater Greater Washington, June 4, 2015, http://greatergreaterwashington.org/post/27001 marylands-governor-thinks-the-purple-line-is-too-expensive-but-wants-to-build-a-10-billion-maglev-

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
and House of Delegates. As mentioned previously, Democrats hold 33 of the 47 Maryland State Senate Districts,110 while Democrats hold 91 of the 141 delegate seats.111 Leading the opposition to the Governor’s previous plans to cut taxes are Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. and House Speaker Michael E. Busch. Since Governor Hogan first took office in 2015, Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. and House Speaker Michael E. Busch have taken a strong stance against Governor’s plans to cut taxes and cut education and transit spending.112 Early on in his term as Governor, Miller “rejected Hogan’s call for repeal of a provision of the 2013 transportation bill that automatically increases the state gas tax to keep up with inflation.”113 That provision, as it was written, was included “to ensure that the Transportation Fund, largely funded by the gas tax, does not lose buying power when nervous lawmakers decline to raise the levy.”114 Any plan to actually move forward with the 2016 Transit Act will rely on the support of both the Senate and House of Delegates. As noted previously, Senate President Miller and House Speaker Busch were the key in the Maryland General Assembly to


113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.
passing Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013, which was the bill that expanded MARC service to weekends on the Penn Line.115

Outside the political world, the public at large for the most part has a favorable view of public transportation. In a 2012 poll by the National Resources Defense Council, it was revealed that 75 percent of Americans are unhappy with their current options for public transportation, which leave them driving more often than they would like.116 Interesting enough, that poll found that while Democrats and urban residents were more likely to favor public transportation to new highway projects, Republican and rural residents also still favored public transportation to new highway projects.117 Of those surveyed, 55 percent of individuals would “prefer to drive less, but 74 percent say they have no choice.”118 To address this, 64 percent of those polled believe that “their community would benefit from an expanded and improved public transportation system, such as rail and buses.”119

In Maryland, the public has had varying opinions about the most recent major public transportation project, the Purple Line. For instance, in a 2015 poll conducted by the University of Maryland and the Washington Post, the multi-billion dollar Purple Line project had less than half of statewide approval, with just 49 percent in favor of the

115 “Governor O’Malley, Senate President Miller, House Speaker Busch Sign Transportation Act,” Maryland Department of Transportation.


117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.
project, while 43 percent were opposed to the project.\textsuperscript{120} The poll revealed that those that favored the Purple Line were people that were likely to use it if it were built, with 83 percent of individuals that say they would use the Purple Line, either regularly or just occasionally, in favor of the project.\textsuperscript{121} For those who say they would seldom use the Purple Line, 56 percent believed the project should move forward.\textsuperscript{122} The poll also revealed that only 27 percent of individuals “who say they never expect to ride the line”\textsuperscript{123} favored the Purple Line, versus 65 percent of those in that category who believe that the project should be halted.\textsuperscript{124} For those not in favor of the Purple Line, the poll revealed that demographic was largely Republican, lived in rural areas of the state and were elderly.\textsuperscript{125}

The key to selling this bill to Governor Hogan, the Maryland General Assembly and the public at large is its cost versus the benefit to Maryland citizens. While Governor Hogan has been critical of the Purple Line project, and some of the public at large who never expect to ride the Purple Line favor the project being cancelled outright, expanding MARC service on the Camden and Brunswick lines to weekends appears to face less hurdles towards its approval. For one, as proposed, the 2016 Transit Act would cost Marylanders $96 million, which is less than 25 times the cost of the Purple Line. In


\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
addition to the cost, MARC’s infrastructure is largely in place and expanding service to
weekends on the Camden and Brunswick Lines would not bring about the kinds of
challenges from the public that the Purple Line has, such as right-of-way challenges126
and eminent domain issues.127 As we have found with polling data both nationwide and
in Maryland, there is a desire for more public transportation options, and those in
Maryland that support such initiatives are likely to be people who will have the
opportunity to use public transportation. While the Purple Line stretches from part of
Montgomery County to Prince Georges County,128 the Brunswick Line spans all the way
from western part of Maryland to Washington D.C., while the Camden Line spans from
the urban corridor between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. Thus, it is clear that the
footprint of MARC system-wide extends far beyond the footprint of the Purple Line.

Initial weekend service on MARC’s Penn Line cost the state $48 million dollars.
As proposed under the 2016 Transit Act, expanding weekend service to the Camden and
Brunswick Lines would cost $96 million. For very little cost in comparison to the multi-
billion Purple Line project or the $10 billion Maglev project between Washington, D.C.
and Baltimore that Governor Hogan has entertained, Maryland, in return, will have
dedicated rail service on weekends spanning all three MARC train lines. Given that

126 Lauren Kirkwood, “Md. high court: Landowner has no claim to Purple Line right-of-way,” The Daily
Record, January 22, 2016, http://thedailyrecord.com/2016/01/22/montgomery-co-owns-purple-line-right-
of-way-md-top-court-says/#ixzz45N2dQvv1.

127 Benny L. Kass, “Housing Counsel: Property owners should know their rights in eminent domain cases,”
property-owners-should-know-their-rights-in- eminent-domain-cases/2014/04/24/ff215cde-c4d6-11e3-
b574-f8748871856a_story.html.

128 “Purple Line,” Maryland Transit Administration, accessed April 9, 2016,
Maryland residents tend to favor transportation projects that they will use, or have the opportunity to use, Governor Hogan and the Maryland General Assembly can be sold that supporting this proposed policy will have the support of the public. For a project that with a relatively low price tag it is fair that the 2016 Transit Act could be characterized politically as less controversial and risky than a project such as the Purple Line.

VIII. Recommendation:

When weighing the strengths versus the weaknesses of the proposed policy, which would extend MARC train service on the Camden and Brunswick Lines to weekends, it is recommended that the 2016 Transit Act should move forward. While MARC expansion of weekend service between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. along the Penn Line has been successful the last few years, MARC service is limited to only weekdays along the Camden and Brunswick Lines. While Marylanders rank 4th in the nation in public transportation usage, the opportunity for growth in the state continues. Given that the American Community Survey indicates that transportation usage is highest in neighborhoods which “have frequent, high-capacity transit service,”\textsuperscript{129} the next logical step is to expand service in areas where infrastructure is already in place: MARC trains.

While new projects such as the Purple Line in Montgomery County and Prince George’s County and high-speed maglev trains between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. have price tags that reach into the billions, initial expansion of weekend service along MARC would cost just under $96 million. In addition to the relatively small price tag, the

\textsuperscript{129} Versel, “Who rides (and will ride) transit in Greater Washington.”
2016 Transit Act already has a model for success with the expansion of weekend service along the Penn Line.

Though there are potential challenges to this project, such as coordinating with Amtrak and CSX Transportation to make weekend train service on the Camden and Brunswick Lines possible, these challenges pale in comparison to the types of challenges that the Purple Line faces moving forward. While MARC adding additional train service on weekends may strain an already aging infrastructure in need of repair, it is already clear that those costs are already necessary for sustainability system-wide. Though the state will have to consider its plans to repair and replace MARC’s aging infrastructure in the near future, as we have seen with the expansion of service to weekends on the Penn Line, weekend service is entirely possible and there is customer demand for such service.

While Republican Governor Hogan has a record of attempting to cut spending for transportation, this project’s cost, when weighed with the benefits, is an attractive option for the heavily Democratic Maryland General Assembly. This proposed expansion in MARC train service will continue to build on what Senate President Miller and House Speaker Busch already built with the passing of the Transportation Infrastructure Investment Act of 2013, which expanded Penn Line service to weekends. Given that Americans and Marylanders in particular desire more options when it comes to public transportation, the 2016 Transit Act, when costs are taken into consideration, moving forward with this proposal should be characterized as a low-risk, high reward policy and a policy that is recommended.
Curriculum Vita

Bryan Wheeler was born in Topeka, Kansas and now lives in the District of Columbia with his wife Ashley and their cat Marley. He holds a bachelor’s degree in communication studies from the University of Kansas. Bryan has worked for over four years as an Energy Industry Analyst at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. His work at the Commission primarily focuses on matters involving rates and tariffs in the Eastern U.S. and other matters related to the following Regional Transmission Organizations/Independent System Operators: PJM Interconnection LLC, New York Independent System Operator, and ISO New England Inc.