

**Greater Farmland Civic Association (GFCA)
Informational Meeting Regarding Ride-On Service in the Neighborhood
Meeting Notes**

The informational meeting of the GFCA was convened at Farmland Elementary School on Wednesday, March 12, 2014 at 7:30 PM by Co-President Ed Rich. Approximately 60+ community members attended the meeting. Officers and Board Members present included: Co-Presidents Ed Rich and Elliot Applestein, Treasurer Tom Walsh, Secretary Peggy Slye, Marta Vogel, Toby Levin, Kevin Novak, and Lisa Woll.

The purpose of this meeting was to meet with representatives of Montgomery County's Ride-On services and Montgomery County Police Community Relations to obtain information on and discuss the process for the possibility of establishing, on a trial basis, a Ride-On service in the GFCA area and to give the community an opportunity to ask questions about the service in general and Ride-On's process for determining whether to establish the service.

Tracy Miller, Chair of the GFCA Transportation Committee, and Ed Rich moderated the discussion and presented questions that were raised by community members via the GFCA listserv and community survey on this topic, as well as those provided by community members who attended this meeting.

Representatives from Ride-On were Deanna Archey, Senior Planner for Ride-On, Montgomery County Department of Transportation and Stacey Colleta, Passenger Services Representative, Montgomery County Department of Transportation. Also present was Dana Stroman, Community Relations Officer for District 2, Montgomery County Police Department.

Opening Presentation by Deanna Archey

Tracy Miller started the meeting by asking Deanna Archey to explain to the community the process by which new Ride-On routes in Montgomery County are developed, reviewed or revised and ultimately either approved or rejected. Ms. Archey explained that new and revised routes are developed as proposals, which are then considered against various criteria and discussed with input from the community.

The initial screening criteria include several considerations, e.g., 1) whether there is an existing service in or near the area; 2) whether this service could be diverted or modified into the neighborhood without requiring additional resources (this is the case of the existing Ride-On Route 42, which could be modified for service in the GFCA area without requiring additional resources.); 3) the type of service requested, i.e. every 30 minutes throughout the day or peak travel time (rush hour) service only during weekdays; and 4) whether the streets to be utilized for the proposed route or change in route can safely accommodate Ride-On service. Route changes go into effect three times per year – September, January or May.

If the initial screening criteria are satisfied and the community is interested in considering a Ride-On route in their area, a new route is proposed with a preliminary route map and a series of public, community outreach sessions are conducted to solicit community feedback, which can be provided in various ways throughout the process. A planning phase would follow in which the specific details of a proposed new route would be developed and a final approval cycle would follow.

Explanation of Process From the GFCA's End

In response to a question about the process by which our community will make a decision on whether to go forward with Ride-On, GFCA Board members stated that the GFCA would not make any type of decision on the issue of Ride-On in the community. GFCA's role is simply to facilitate the discussion on a structured basis so that the entire community can participate. This meeting is just part of a broader discussion process. Moreover, the GFCA Board would not have the authority to make a decision on bringing Ride-On into the community. Ride-On will have to determine whether there is a community consensus before taking any actions.

The GFCA Board will be exploring a process by which every household in the GFCA area has an opportunity to weigh in on the potential service, perhaps by mailing a postcard ballot to each home in the community.

The GFCA Board will distribute the results of the online community survey, which generated close to 300 responses, to the community in the near future. The survey results were mixed, with some residents favoring and others opposing bus service through the neighborhood.

Discussion/Question-and-Answer Session With Panelists

Overall Process/Requirements

Q: How would the process for decision making work? Ride-On works with the community and looks for community consensus. Ride-On looks at traffic patterns and street width (i.e., whether the streets on a proposed route are wide enough for emergency vehicles, such as fire trucks). A working session is then convened to consider all the details of a proposed route or route change. Following the working session, the public forum process begins, which consists of a series of public and community meetings at which the details of the proposed route or route change are presented and public comments are invited. Records of each meeting are kept open for seven days for the submission of additional comments. Once agreement is reached on the details, a final public meeting is advertised 30 days in advance of the scheduled date, the final plan is presented and final comments are received and reviewed. The route change then goes to the County Council for approval. Advance notice is also provided prior to the commencement of operations for any new or modified route.

Q: Are there minimum ridership requirements? Yes, Ride-On sets a goal of 10 riders per day within the community for initial start-up.

Q: Is there ongoing monitoring of ridership? Yes, for new services, ridership is monitored for an 18 month period, which is considered a trial period. When we are evaluating the overall service of a route we look for those routes to average at least 10 riders/hour. If ridership does not reach that threshold, it will be re-evaluated and may be ended.

Q: Is ridership measured by persons or by fares collected? Since Ride-On offers free service to certain groups of citizens during specific hours, i.e. seniors from 10AM-3PM and students during morning and afternoon hours, ridership is determined by actual riders rather than fare collection. The driver records the number of free riders in addition to the fare box counter.

Q: Do you have statistics on ridership demographics, i.e. seniors, students, commuters, etc.? The Ride-On system provides almost 30 million trips per year. Metro and Ride-On conduct surveys every three years to determine usage and ridership patterns and preferences; a new survey is forthcoming so available data would not be current.

Q: How does Ride-On evaluate overall community support or opposition to a proposed route? Ride-On hopes that community consensus will be achieved during the development and consideration processes. The GFCA Board engaged with Ride-On to learn more about the process for considering a new route in the community, and the information session held tonight is intended to provide more insight into that process. Ride-On expects to participate in other forums with the community before making a decision.

Q: How is the budget for Ride-On administered, i.e., if one community is provided with a new or modified route, does it mean that another community would be denied? The modification, which could be proposed to the Route 42, would not require any additional resources and therefore would not create any impacts for other communities. The current budget would cover a modified Route 42; no additional funds would be needed.

Q: What would the next steps be in the process at this point? From a Ride-On perspective, there is a preliminary route proposal on which everyone is free to comment. However, from the broader perspective, it is important to find a way to solicit a broad range of community comments in order for Ride-On to determine overall community sentiment on this issue and the first step in that process is to identify an appropriate communication method for soliciting that input.

Q: Have there been any regulatory changes over the years since the earlier Ride-On service entered our community? No, regulations have remained the same. Metro is responsible for running service on the main corridors and Ride-On serves inside the communities. There have been no changes on the road width measurements.

Q: Does Ride-On have a standard survey to sample community sentiment? No, Ride-On usually works with community associations for that purpose.

Q: From Ride-On's perspective, what constitutes community consensus? If the community response is split 50%-50% or 51%-49%, does that constitute consensus? Ride-On seeks to find community consensus. If there is a split response or a large division of views, Ride-On's Division Director would review the findings before making a decision.

Q: What would happen if the community did not approve? Ride-On Route 42 would remain in operation along its current route on Montrose Road.

Q: Does Ride-On coordinate with other agencies for para-transit services, such as Metro Access? Ride-On does not provide any type of 'on-demand' or specialized services. Ride-On does coordinate with Metro Access.

Q: How often would this issue be revisited if it were not agreed or approved? There is no timetable for revisiting these issues. Ride-On works with communities who have requested services and only as requested.

Q: What happens if, after the 18 month trial (or other period), the service is discontinued? Would the stops and concrete pads be removed? Ride-On waits until the trial period is completed and the service is agreed for continuation before installing pads at the stops. If a route is discontinued at some later time, pads are removed.

Buses

Q: Which bus type and size would be used? Generally, the buses are approximately 8.5 feet wide and 30 or 40 feet long. By comparison, a full size sedan is approximately 6.8 feet wide. The exact bus used on any given day on any given route depends on what buses are available for service at that time. Ride-On operates 335 county-owned buses. Ride-On has discontinued using the smaller buses they previously used.

Q: What is the size of these vehicles compared to a school bus? These buses are similar in size to a school bus, but not as wide, taking into account mirrors on school buses.

Q: What is the environmental impact of the buses in use? The buses are consistent with EPA guidelines and include natural gas, clean diesel, and hybrid electric vehicle types.

Q: What is the noise level created by the buses? The newer buses are quieter than school buses; however, some of the older buses create more noise.

Q: When do you phase out older model buses? Ride-On maintains an aggressive vehicle replacement schedule. While the life-span of a bus is generally considered to be

15 years, Ride-On replaces buses on an average of six years of service per vehicle, due to the extensive use of these vehicles.

Q: How many seats are on the buses? How are the vehicles equipped? The 40-foot buses have 30-35 seats, while the 30-foot buses have 25-27 seats.

Q: Are the buses accessible for the handicapped, strollers, wheelchairs etc.? The buses offer a low floor (i.e. at curb level) and so ramps are not needed for wheel-chair accessibility. The buses comply with Federal ADA requirements; wheelchairs fit through both the front and rear doors; buses offer either low/curb level floors or ‘kneeling capability.’

Safety Concerns

Q: What about security aboard the buses? Buses have cameras on board; the tapes are reused/replaced on a seven-day cycle. Buses are also GPS equipped and drivers are in contact with Ride-On headquarters via radio. Ride-On has established emergency procedures, and drivers are trained in their implementation.

Q: Do you maintain statistics on emergencies; are there many such instances? Yes, statistics are maintained but are not immediately available at this time. Ride-On could provide them in the future. Very few emergencies have taken place. [After the meeting, we requested the statistics and Ms. Archey provided them: System-wide, there is an average of 29 assaults annually and 479 passenger incidents annually.]

Q: Does Ride-On maintain statistics on the accident rate for drivers? Yes, but those statistics are not immediately available at this time. Ride-On could provide them in the future. There are three Ride-On depot locations in Montgomery County, and each area reports these statistics. Drivers receive training in safety, customer service, and accident avoidance in addition to emergency procedures. All have received commercial driver’s licenses. [After the meeting, we requested the statistics and Ms. Archey provided them: System-wide, there is an average of 527 accidents annually, including damage to property.]

Q: Is there a relationship between crime, i.e. an increase in crime, and the presence of Ride-On in a given community? Officer Stroman of Montgomery County Police Community Relations responded to this question. There are no statistics to show that crime is related to or increased by the presence of Ride-On in a community. When suspects are interviewed following a crime, use of public transportation is not found to be a usual occurrence. Vandalism is usually found to be committed by residents in a community or friends of the residents in a community. Burglaries are also not typically tied to the use of public transportation. While often committed by those not from a given area, suspects typically flee the scene in a car, truck or other similar vehicle. Community Relations investigates crimes, seeking patterns that might affect public safety.

Officer Stroman also made comments on crime in the community, noting that this area has a much lower crime rate than similar areas in the county. She also noted that to the

extent there have been crimes, it is generally thefts from parked vehicles in the community. She urged community members to remove valuables from their vehicles, keep vehicles locked at all times and to report any suspicious emergency activities to the police at 911 or to contact police on the non-emergency hotline 301-279-8000 to report any other concerns.

Bus Stops

Q: How many stops are generally provided along a route, and where are they placed? After Operations Planning designs a proposed route, stops are determined at approximately 750-800 foot intervals with stops on both sides of the street; natural sites or breaks are evaluated and cross walks are considered. Stops must be ADA compliant, meaning buses must be able to pull up to the stop right against the curb (so a wheelchair could roll right in, for example); stops must allow space for buses pulling in and pulling out.

Q: Are stops on individual homes' property? County right of way property is used for stops; where sidewalks exist, the stop is placed between the sidewalk and the curb. Where there is no sidewalk, the county right of way does extend from the street several feet onto property. County right of way extends 15 feet from the curb on either side. Ride-On looks for the "least difficult" locations to install stops. Ride-On makes an attempt to preserve the households' parking spaces and to put the stops between properties so that it is less onerous to one household; Ride-On monitors the streets at different times of day to determine where cars typically park, etc.

Q: What physical markers are used to indicate stops? Concrete slabs/pads are installed at bus stops after the trial period and once the route has been finalized. The bus stop pad must be on a flat and level surface. Shelters and/or walls are not routinely provided unless required by the topography. It is not envisioned that this community would need many stops or that shelters or walls would be built.

Q: Will parking be banned along the route? No, wider roads within a community are selected for the route, so banning parking is not required. Lane widths for primary residential streets with parking on both sides are 11 feet. Ride-On does evaluate the width of roads required for any route to assess accessibility and safety for the bus to travel in the community. However, approximately 60 feet of "no parking" areas are required along the street in front of bus stops to allow buses to pull in and out safely.

Q: Are there trash cans at the stops? No, trash cans are only provided when a nearby facility, i.e. restaurant or convenience store, requires that; trash cans are not typically provided in neighborhoods.

Q: Does Ride-On ensure snow removal along the route? Ride-On routes are given priority attention for snow removal.

Q: Are residents required to remove snow from Ride-On stops? No, however there are limited resources for Ride-On to clear all 5,000 bus stops. Sheltered stops are cleared

first, along with any stops that serve disabled or wheelchair riders, and non-sheltered stops thereafter.

Q: Does Ride-On coordinate with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) with regard to stops? No, but MCPS sometimes does use the same stop locations.

Q: Does this create any dangers or problems for students? No, that is generally not a problem.

Q: Does Ride-On offer parking lots? Yes, there is a Park and Ride lot on Hoya Street (near the Pike & Rose complex under construction); permits are required to park in that lot; but there is no charge.

Hours of Operation

Q: What are the usual hours of operation for Ride-On? The current route 42 and most routes operate every 30 minutes from 5 AM until 10 PM daily.

Q: Can a community request modified hours for a portion of the route? Yes, that is part of the development and planning process and is always up for discussion.

Q: Is a peak hours only (i.e., rush hour) service an option? Yes, that is an option. It is important to note that a peak-hours only service also does not include weekend service.

Fares

Q: Does Ride-On accept SmartTrip cards? Yes, Ride-On does accept Smart Trip cards.

Q: What is the general fare for Ride-On? General fare, with the use of a SmartTrip Card, is \$1.70 per ride; the charge is higher, i.e., \$1.80, without the use of a SmartTrip Card. No rush hour surcharge applies to Ride-On. A possible fare increase may follow Metro fare increases.

Info on Route 42

Q: How was the Route 42 developed? Route 38, which originally ran between Wheaton Plaza and Montgomery Mall, was divided last January, and the present Route 42 was created running from White Flint Metro to Montgomery Mall. The division of the route has also improved the on-time performance of both segments of the route.

Q: How does Route 42 relate to the original Route 38? The Route 42 is about half of the original Route 38.

Q: Are there any neighborhoods similar to the GFCA area with Ride-On Service? Yes, the neighborhood off Seven Locks Road and Post Oak, including Gainsborough Road has Ride-On service, which is also a part of the Route 42.

Q: Are there any community issues on the Post Oak/Gainsborough route? No, no issues at this time. The route is ADA compliant. There is a school in that area and MCPS works with Ride-On to establish safe routes for students who walk to school.

Q: Was Route 38 reliable in terms of on time performance? The route was very long and not reliable regarding time for that reason; splitting the route has improved the on-time performance.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 PM.