

City Council Candidates Forum: “Leadership for Improving Transportation”

Candidate questionnaire transportation.doc

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Mary Pat Clarke has served 27 years on the Baltimore City Council, including 8 years as president. Introduced Council’s first legislative bicycle package, including Complete Streets. Helped found Action In Maturity (AIM), providing affordable transportation for the City’s elderly. Working with City schools to expand MTA “S-Card” hours for students.

- 1. What is your vision for transportation in Baltimore to meet the needs of our economy, provide access to opportunity and to connect people to the places they need and want to go? What will you do to achieve this?**

As the Baltimore City Council approaches the enactment of Baltimore’s first new zoning code in 40 years, we are urged to promote adequate public transit, car-sharing enterprises, safe walking environments, and a serious bicycle culture by transitioning to adopt off-street parking requirements which support a more Complete Streets approach to transportation.

We cannot have drivers stranded for lack of adequate parking, especially at work and home. We need safe and adequate parking in new developments and transparency in “doing the math” when calculating shared spaces according to the alternate timing for various uses. But the Complete Streets zoning approach is growing and the acres of asphalt shrinking as the nature of transportation and parking slowly transition to the balance required for meeting this cultural, economic, and environmental shift.

Like it or not, Baltimore is suddenly on its own. The Red Line defunding has tragically set us back on the public transit front, with no Act 2 in sight. The MTA’s Baltimore Link initiative is “high time!” encouraging in its intentions, but bus patrons fear that key crucial routes are disappearing into a new network of fewer and more distant stops, delayed transfer connections, and no practical efficiencies to show for the disruption. My “vision” here is that patronage practicalities must be accommodated to successfully link with ridership needs.

Right now, Baltimore needs to focus even more on attracting new and expanding jobs to the City itself, so our unemployed can get there --- on bikes, in carpools, on bus routes without transfers, and even by walking. For job opportunities beyond the beltway, private and public van pool services are required. To own cars for the trip, our mid-skill workers require auto insurance rates based on driving records, not zipcodes. The day of rate reform has arrived if we are serious about regional job opportunities. My commitment is to keep working locally, with trips to Annapolis in support of Red Line, Act 2, and renewed support for fair auto insurance as key to a Complete Streets strategy for regional job growth.

- 2. Would you support using Baltimore City's general funds to improve transit? What would be your spending priorities?**

State and federal budgets are the appropriate source of funding for such major undertakings. I support the efforts of our City delegation to the Maryland General Assembly in seeking increased transit funding for the City. The State owes the City millions in compensation for pulling the plug on the hundreds of millions lost by defunding the Red Line and its leveraged federal match.

Even if successful and not actually a setback for patrons and neighborhoods, improving MTA bus service is the State's long overdue and direct responsibility. But such rearranging of deck chairs on the Titanic is hardly the Armada of Compensation owed to resuscitate the 21st century transit system the City was so recently and successfully negotiating with regional partners to meet a major phase of our major transit requirements.

I do support local compensation as required for major transit matches. And I do support local general funds to keep the Circulator in full operation and planful expansion. The parking tax money used to support the Circulator could otherwise be used as general fund support across the City budget. Investing in the Circulator instead is one of my general fund priorities, along with a proposed system of looping van services to connect high population centers with Circulator routes.

I also annually appeal to Housing for funding through the federal CDBG program to keep the non-profit AIM program expanding its transportation services for AIM's low-to-moderate income senior citizens, a majority of whom are transported to and from the transit-isolation of subsidized housing developments. AIM is well positioned to provide that looping van service to afford regular access to Circulator routes.

- 3. Over 40% of Marylanders live in the greater Baltimore region. How would you work through the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board or through partnerships with neighboring jurisdictions to bring improvements to the regional transportation network?**

Baltimore has a growing cadre of trained job seekers whose employment can be of mutual benefit to our surrounding subdivisions. In general, our job seekers cannot afford to live in the suburbs, and many will always prefer to live among City families and friends. Meanwhile, the region's subdivisions often need City workers to grow their businesses and prosper.

I support private/public transportation networks between City training and job referral programs, including the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED), and regional employers with unmet employee needs. Affordable and dedicated van service could serve as each employment center's "transportation network." Coordinated systems of such networks warrant promotion and business-by-business expansion among BRT Board's members.

4. One of the four transportation goals from the Opportunity Collaborative's 2015 Regional Plan for Sustainable Development was "Create more opportunity for mid-skill workers to commute to family-supporting jobs via public transportation." Most of those jobs are outside the City. How would you work with regional partners to achieve that goal?

Unless City employees are departing for work from efficient transportation hubs and arriving at similar hubs a short walk from the job, I would prefer to work on the van programs described in my answer to question 3 above and on attracting more jobs to the City itself. One advantage of the van is its critical mass of City-based employees whose camaraderie should encourage job retention. One challenge of the public transportation strategy is the difficulty in most parts of the City of getting out of the City on accessible and reliable transit. Another is the isolation of going so far from home everyday to unfamiliar surroundings without support systems at hand. Kindred van groups of City-based employees would encourage individual employee retention and well-vetted new job referrals.

5. What actions as a Council Member would you take to make the MTA more responsive to the city's unique needs?

As MTA can attest, I am working already to connect MTA with their patrons in various parts of my district, each part concerned about specific Baltimore Link routes on which they rely.

On November 30, at the Hampden Community Council (HCC), MTA's Gregory Holmes and his associates presented to the community on the "disappearing" #27 line, answered questions, distributed Baltimore Link Comment Cards, and agreed to smaller working group meetings with HCC's Traffic Committee.

I also asked for a meeting in another area of my district, where the "disappearing" #8 is at issue. In response, MTA's Gregory Holmes announced that each City Council district will have its own MTA/District community meeting in January. Ours will be at the Waverly Library near Greenmount Avenue, ground zero of #8 outrage. After that, a #8 working group will hopefully form and meet with MTA to resolve that issue. These two groups will also deal with associated routes at issue, and I will be part of those meetings in which details are discussed and resolutions negotiated.

6. How will you address possible concerns of your constituents when efforts to improve bus routes and enhance the network efficiency result in changed routes, possible longer walks to stops etc?

I have worked with the #61 patron group and MTA. Results have been encouraging. We met a few times to share problems and updates, negotiated and provided feedback by email, and (at the time) resolved the major scheduling and missed connection problems. I plan to use the same approach with the small #27 and #8 community groups and MTA.

7. Please briefly describe the role of bikes and pedestrians in your vision for a better local and regional transportation system? And what changes do you think Baltimore should make to achieve these goals?

bicycles

Baltimore's "bike potential" is powerful and will be realized only when as the infrastructure proves safer and more efficient and when the driving public grows more conditioned to sharing the road.

I have worked with the City's bicycle community for years, including the introduction and enactment of legislation which included Complete Streets, Bicycle Bill of Rights, required police training in the traffic rights and regulations pertaining to bikers, required onsite bike parking by employers and in the development of new business and residential complexes, and required installation of perpendicular street grates as part of all street reconstructions. Many of the parking space requirements have been rolled over into the proposed new Baltimore zoning code with the input of Baltimore bike organizations.

The City is committed to developing the interconnected bike routes required for efficient bike travel and commuting. What the City must do to ensure safety is better train our police officers in the rights of bike riders so that accidents are properly reported and afforded the same seriousness as vehicle accidents.

Most urgently, Baltimore must campaign publicly to educate the public on bicyclists' importance to the local transportation mix and our economy, their key role in our Complete Streets mix, and their rights on the road, including within shared and dedicated bike lanes.

pedestrians

A similar campaign is necessary to protect our pedestrians, especially children along school routes and at locations where they gather, like playgrounds; and, our elderly, especially at intersections near congregate senior citizen residences --- where prolonged signalized walk cycles should be required.

Such a campaign must include public education to comply with the State law requiring a full stop for the entire pedestrian crossing of an unsignalized crosswalk. Drivers are obviously uneducated in this law, putting pedestrians at risk. In California, I was amazed that drivers come to a stop when they see a pedestrian even approach a crosswalk. I am told that strict police enforcement upon the law's enactment set the stage for such compliance. In Baltimore, we need to re-set the stage with public education and similar concentrated enforcement so our pedestrians can rely as confidently on this protection.

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