

Delays on the Green, Blue and Orange lines

Prince George's County and Metro are trying to get development started where the trains stop

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By Sarah Krouse
Staff Reporter

Prince George's County has 15 Metro stations, two commuter rail stations and more than 2,000 acres of developable land within walking distance of the stations. But if you don't have a car in Prince George's, good luck getting around.

As other jurisdictions in the region welcome more and more development around their Metro stations — the planning phenomenon known as transit-oriented development — Prince George's is still stuck on the tracks.

Only recently have signs emerged that the county could soon join its neighbors in welcoming transit-oriented development. The reasons for optimism: The county just approved a new mixed-use zoning option that specifically addresses development nodes near transit, and the new head of joint development for the Metro system has pledged to focus the agency's efforts on Prince George's. The county also has begun a countywide planning process (dubbed "Envision Prince George's County") that envisions a safer, greener county 20 years down the road.

Developments around Prince George's Metro stations have been at a disadvantage since Metro was little more than a network of colored lines on paper, said Zachary Schrag, a historian at George Mason University and author of "The Great Society Subway: A History of the Washington Metro."

The scarcest resource in Prince George's County is land within walking distance of rail.

The SRSOZ will be very valuable here!



This is precisely why the SRSOZ State Rail Station Overlay Zone empowers local government to be the developer of the public realm and re-engineers “TDR’s” in the first logical, economically rational, functional implementation.

Arlington and Montgomery counties had clear employment hubs and highways to guide their rail lines, while Prince George’s was left to ponder which residential neighborhoods to serve, eventually relying on existing rights of way from the old B&O and Pennsylvania railroads that once steamed through its wooded terrain, Schrag said

Waiting by the tracks in Prince George’s County

Prince George’s County should be a transit-oriented developer’s dream with more than a dozen Metro stations, two commuter rail stations and thousands of developable acres within walking distance of a stop. Here’s a sampling of development activity near Metro stops in the county.

GREENBELT

■ Greenbelt Station Town Center

Status: Stalled

A mixed-use development that would have delivered 270 residential units, 800,000 square feet of retail space, a million square feet of office space, a conference center and a hotel. The project is currently the subject of a lawsuit between Metro and Greenbelt Ventures. The developer paid \$40 million to take over the project from the initial developers, Metro-land Developers, in 2006. Greenbelt Ventures claims Metro has backed out of its side of the deal.

COLLEGE PARK

■ M Square Research Park

Status: Planned and partially complete; 2.5 million square feet of research

space planned on 124 acres near the College Park Metro.

PRINCE GEORGE’S PLAZA

■ University Town Center

Status: Planned and partially complete

A nearly 50-year-old plan envisioned by developer Herschel Blumberg. It includes 1.4 million square feet of office space, 200,000 square feet of retail space, a 910-bed student housing complex and two condominium buildings with more than 200 units between them. Blumberg wants to develop a second site north of the current development for the Department of Health and Human Services.

■ Mosaic at Metro Apartments

Status: Complete

Equity Residential

and Metro built a 260-unit apartment project across from the station.

NEW CARROLLTON

■ MetroView at New Carrollton

Status: Planned

On about 17 acres that it owns, The Carl Williams Group plans to build 2,400 apartments, condominiums and brownstones, about 200,000 square feet of upscale retail, 3 million square feet of office space and a 300-room luxury hotel.

■ Four Points Sheraton

Status: Partially complete

AHM Properties, Arel Architects and J.G. Garcete Co. are working on a development that has already delivered a 197-room Four Points Sheraton with 6,000 square feet of

retail space and an 80,000-square-foot retail and office building. The group plans to construct a 96-unit condominium building and 24 townhouses, but that portion is on hold.

■ New Carrollton study

Status: TBD

A 2004 Metro study envisioned more than 8,000 residential units, 8.7 million square feet of commercial space and 60 acres of open space.

CHEVERLY

■ Addison Row at Cheverly Metro

Status: Planned

On 34 acres south of the station, Douglas Development Corp. plans up to 2,000 multifamily units, a hotel, 650,000 square feet of office space, a recreation center and 120,000 square feet of retail.

LARGO TOWN CENTER

■ One Largo Metro

Status: *Planned*

Peter Ng Schwartz Management plans to build 966,517 square feet of office space, 9,743 square feet of retail space and a 13,300-square-foot day-care center. Largo hopes the Department of Health and Human Services will take some space.

CAPITOL HEIGHTS

■ Capitol Gateway

Status: *Under construction*

The D.C. Housing Authority, A&R Development Corp. and Henson Development Co. are collaborating on a 61,000-square-foot Shoppers Food Warehouse and 761 multifamily units.

BRANCH AVENUE

■ Metroplace at Town Center complex

Status: *Completed in 2007*

Metropolitan Development, K. Hovnanian Homes and Centex brought 327 town-

houses, 86 condos and 397 apartments to 49 acres near the Metro station.

SUITLAND

Suitland Manor

Status: *Planned*

Mid-Atlantic Real Estate Investments has plans for about 2.5 million square feet of office, retail and residential space on 28 acres it owns near the Suitland Metro. It was the only developer to respond to a county request for proposals in February.

NAYLOR ROAD

■ Naylor Station

Status: *Planned*

Ironwood Realty Partners plans to turn a strip mall into a commercial, retail and residential mixed-use development that could have space for a federal tenant. It may be a draw for a tenant that would work with the Department of Homeland Security, which is moving its headquarters to St. Elizabeths.

“In some ways, all roads led to the Pentagon,” Schrag said. “And the bridges, of course, pull people to key points. In Montgomery County, you have a funnel-shaped county that leads into the city.”

To be sure, a few of Prince George’s more prominent stops along the Green Line have attracted development. Witness the University Town Center near the Prince George’s Plaza stop and university-centric developments near College Park.

But for every station that has seen a backhoe — or even just a planning study — there is a Cheverly, Capitol Heights and Naylor Road still in need of extra transformative attention.

A PROBLEM OF PERCEPTION

Even with the recent changes, it will be tough to erase more than 30 years of history and perceptions.

“While Prince George’s has these Metro stations, a lot of developers view the county as a place with a lot of open land, so most development has happened on greenfield sites,” said **Cheryl Cort**, policy director for the **Coalition for Smarter Growth**. “It’s easier to lay out new subdivisions than it is to think about fitting a project into a place that is surrounded by existing communities with existing roadways,” she said.

Poor communication between state and local jurisdictions has played a major role in hindering the development of well-planned street layouts that create a sense of place, Cort said. “There is real a development of well-planned street layouts that create a sense of place, Cort said. “There is real a need for the county and state to work together more effectively to re-evaluate road design standards.”

The SRSOZ solves this powerfully, efficiently, effectively, economically.

The private sector — the developers who need to build on their own land near stations or partner with the transit agency — has also held a dim view of the joint development process and department at the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. The department works to foster development on agency-owned land.

But **Steve Goldin**, a New Jersey native who took over Metro’s joint development and real estate six months ago, hopes to change both the perception of the department and the joint development process.

Goldin acknowledges that county and Metro dysfunctions have hobbled the process in Prince George’s, and, like others, he said there may have been some envy of Arlington’s Rosslyn-Ballston corridor and Montgomery’s Bethesda station, where transit-oriented development has flourished.

But Goldin stressed that Metro does want to work with Prince George’s. Since joining Metro, he has met twice with county leaders to gauge their interest in identifying potential developers for Metro sites within the county.

*The public realm is government’s job!
The SRSOZ empowers them to deliver!*

READY TO GET ROLLING:

Steve Goldin wants to change the bidding process for developments on Metro property, which he says should improve the perception of joint projects and get more developers interested in them.



JOANNE S. LAWTON

“We want to go where there is land and a willingness politically — and that is Prince George’s County,” Goldin said.

BUILDING MOMENTUM

The most recent meeting between Goldin and the county was on March 11 and involved about 40 people from Metro, the county and the state of Maryland.

The meeting was largely meant to clarify each entity’s priorities and players.

“You always want to build a team first,” Goldin said, pointing to the number of people involved —and issues to be resolved — in putting together a successful transit-oriented development, from planners and transit staff to actual developers.

On March 9, the County Council approved a higher-density zone for tracts near transit. That will allow developers to build larger, and therefore more profitable, mixed-use projects in those corridors.

“Malpractice!” — this is a perfect example of the “duct tape band-aid” dysfunctional unilateral local “solution” rather than the needed systemic redesign that the SRSOZ delivers.

Ideally, Goldin said, he would like to issue requests for qualifications, or “RFQs,” for the 35.7-acre New Carrollton station and the 7.6-acre Naylor Road stop by July. But first he wants to change the bidding process to make it faster and more appealing — as in less expensive — for developers.

The current joint development process received a scathing review from Metro’s board of directors under previous department head Joel Washington’s leadership in 2007.

Under Goldin’s plan, which needs the board of directors’ approval, all bidders would lay down deposits but the winning developer would repay the deposit to the bidders not selected.

That pot of money would go toward hiring joint development staff specific to that project.

Goldin said the new process should help change the view that Metro partnerships are frustrating money pits.

“When we have meetings with Metro staff and jurisdictional partners, we need to [help them] understand that capital goes where it gets returns,” Goldin said. “If you don’t allow for the return, the development doesn’t happen.”

SECOND-GUESSING

One person not present at Goldin’s meetings so far: County Executive Jack Johnson, who was recently unsuccessful in his attempt to replace current county planning Chairman **Samuel Parker** — a key figure in development — with his deputy chief administrative officer, **David Byrd**.

The effort irked many in Prince George’s county because it would have tied the hands of the next county executive if Byrd had been approved for a four-year term.

Byrd maintains that the effort was proper and said a staff member had been sent to one of the meetings.

He called the head-counting trivial.

“Having a council member there doesn’t mean anything,” Byrd said. “What we need to know is does the council think these projects are as important as we do?”

The **County Council has also taken its share of blame for stalling developments**. The council has previously approved industrial uses near transit — like the concrete plant near the Cheverly Metro station — and many of the council’s other decisions have been perceived as anti-growth.

*The SRSOZ has a simple, clear, unassailable objective:
Maximize sources and destinations of pedestrians within walking distance of rail stations.
Design — the experience of place — is what matters.*

“A lot of times we go into projects pulling the council along,” Byrd said. “We need its help to move these things forward.”

Council Chairman **Tom Dernoga** did not return calls for comment. And, citing political constraints, Director of Economic Development **Kwasi Holman** deferred questions about Metro developments to Goldin.

Holman’s passive approach has elicited as much criticism as Johnson’s political antics and the council’s approach have.

And, while developers welcome the new higher-density allotments for transit areas, they have to wonder what took so long.

The new zoning policy first appeared on the Prince George's planning board's agenda in 2007 and has gone through several iterations over the years, said **Ragaei Abdelfattah**, the county's planning supervisor.

Planners then conducted two years of discussions with stakeholders, including developers, council members and people living near the identified growth areas.

"Change is always a concern," Abdelfattah said.

While the zoning process may have been a long slog, not much would have been built recently anyway, he said. "Recessions are a good time to plan, so that when you get out of them, you have the tools and environment that allow development to proceed."

*Remember Mr. Obama's new chief of staff, Representative Rahm Emanuel, ...
"Rule one: Never allow a crisis to go to waste,"
We need re-engineering — not just "planning" — the SRSOZ is the answer.*

Goldin also wants to have projects ready to roll as we come out of the recession.

"I think we are actually a little late to be in the planning process," he said. "I want to come out of the box when the market is turning up and have a feeding frenzy for these projects."

See a list of development projects here.

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