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Subject: Draft Notes from MTA/Cycling Advocates meeting

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Date: Tue, April 26, 2011 8:43 am

To: "Michael Jackson" <mjackson3@mdot.state.md.us>

Cc: "John Hovatter" <JHovatter1@mta.maryland.gov>

"Charlie Murphy" <chas.murph@gmail.com>

Dear Michael

Thank you for arranging the meeting at the Hall of States building concerning bicycles and MARC. The advocates were impressed by MTA's transparency, and we appreciate their public service and their expertise.

Attached are my notes from the meeting, which we will probably post on a website once they have been revised. I may summarize the notes in a blog post [...] which would then get picked up by the three main bicycle web sites in the area. Although the meeting filled in some gaps in our understanding, we were still left uncertain about a few points which are listed under the headings "Questions asked that the officials were unable to answer," "Questions where we remained confused," and "Questions we forgot to ask." Clarifications there would be especially helpful. I have also yellowed a few details such as speed of trains.

I realize that reviewing notes from a meeting tends to be a chore and if you prefer that I just move forward I will understand. At the risk of discouraging you from opening the attached file, I'll include below the most important stuff below:

News

1. Mr. Brown said that bike lockers at MARC stations are mostly filled to capacity (But Mr. Hovatter said not at Point of Rocks)
2. MARC officials believe that bikes should be allowed on board if and when Saturday service starts on the Penn Line.

Key questions.

1. What are the safety problems (if any) with putting bicycles in empty cars, that is, cars with no passengers that some trains have.
2. What are the safety and other problems with keeping one car closed for a segment of a run, for a train that is operating at less than 10-50% capacity?
3. Could we have the data on lockers used and not used at the various stations? We were a bit confused on whether all the lockers are rented?

Thanks

Jim

BACKGROUND –our understanding going in to the meeting

MTA has long said that allowing bikes on trains is economically infeasible because

- (a) the speed of MARC trains means that a bike is a potentially fatal projectile within a train car unless it is securely tied down.
- (b) Engineers have been unable to devise means for securing bikes without permanently removing 3 to 5 seats from the car for every pair of bikes that could be potentially accommodated.
- (c) All of MARC's cars are rotated into standing-room only Penn Line trains; so taking away seats for bicycle transportation can not be justified under existing mandates

Accepting that premise, MBPAC's Commuting and Transportation Committee has been asking MTA since 2005 why bikes could not at least be included in

- Off peak trains have some cars closed, by placing bicycles in cars that are otherwise completely empty.
- Segments of other trains, by closing off some cars in the train for the first few stops or the last few stops (e.g. morning trains from Perryville to Aberdeen, or Union Station to Seabrook)

More recently, advocates have had other questions, such the possibility of allowing bikes in occupied cars along the slower CSX lines.

WHAT MTA OFFICIALS TOLD US

Surprising or newsworthy

1. The bike lockers at MARC stations are mostly filled to capacity
2. MARC officials believe that bikes should be allowed on board if and when Saturday service starts on the Penn Line.

Questions asked that the officials were unable to answer

1. What are the safety problems (if any) with putting bicycles in empty cars, that is, cars with no passengers. (Titus asked this question 3 times, with a focus on closed cars on the trains that depart after 7:30 PM. Michael Jackson said that he was skeptical that the demand would be very great, and then the topic was shifted.)
2. Related to the previous question. What are the safety and other problems with keeping a car closed for a segment of a run, for a train that is operating at less than 50% capacity. Specifically: Morning trains (with at least 5 cars) from Union Station as far as Seabrook; and from Perryville to Aberdeen. This question was an extension on the closed-car question and seemed to get lost or misconstrued as we grappled with that question.

Mid-Day Penn Line limitations

1. The Penn Line uses the smaller [just Camden or Brunswick also?] trains. So they tend to be more full than one would otherwise assume. This is necessary because trains must be inspected every day. The inspections take place at Baltimore Penn Station (and Brunswick?)

Train speeds:

The Penn Line goes up to 110-125 mph with the electric engines. Between Union Station and New Carrollton, the Penn Line trains can get up to 90 mph and the diesel trains get up to 75 mph.

The Camden line is slower. Trains stopping at Riverdale, College Park, and Greenbelt reach top speeds of 60 mph; trains that are non stop between Muirkirk and DC reach 75 mph.

The threshold speed that makes holding a bike on a car full of passengers infeasible depends on the grade of the track: The Penn Line and Metrorail are built for passenger trains and forward speed is the main consideration. MTA officials have no problem with WMATA's judgment that bikes in one of those trains going at speeds up to 60-70 mph would not be a problem. But Penn Line trains go faster than that. A speed above 70-80 mph requires bicycles to be tied down.

Camden and Brunswick line trains do not, but their track is of a much lower grade. There is much side to side jostling. As a result, the potential for serious projectile problems in an accident is much greater. It was clear from the discussion that bikes slipping out of the hands of passengers is more likely on the CSX lines than on Metrorail.

The officials did not elaborate on whether (or if so how) the poor track grade makes bikes a serious projectile problem at 60 mph. They did say that projectiles were a safety issue that was highlighted by the NTSB report in the aftermath of the Kensington tragedy. Titus mentioned that both Metrorail and the CSX trains seemed to run at about the same speed with the same potential for a head-on collision. The MTA officials pointed out that head-on collisions were not the only way a projectile can be a problem, but the alternative ways were not explained.

More on the projectile issue.

MTA officials agree that bikes would not be the only projectiles on MARC trains, and that MARC does not police those other potential projectiles. In particular, travelers to BWI regularly bring all manners of luggage that is not placed in the luggage bins and could cause similar accidents. Really large bags that do not fit on the overhead storage racks are unlikely to be projectiles, but other unregulated items could be.

Bike Parking.

MTA is more optimistic that there will be opportunities to improve bike parking, and would like to work with us on that.

We asked how much the lockers are used, and they said that the lockers are almost all rented.

They cautioned that they can not simply add lockers everywhere. The lockers cost \$3000 each. Moreover, they do not always have space. Not even for U-racks, let alone bike lockers in some cases. In Montgomery County, the local government—not MARC—controls the station. We did not discuss the price of lower-cost alternatives, but as a general rule, the lockers are the only option that would keep a

bike out of the elements on MARC property. Bike parking on nearby property is too site-specific and would probably have to be pursued by others, but MTA did not rule out providing a subsidy to such facilities were they to be developed.

The officials did not comment on the principal that it would be reasonable for MARC to invest as much for a bike parking space as for a car parking space (or even \$70 more per year to account for the bike parking fee).

The officials agreed that bike parking should generally be added when parking lots are expanded. There are a number of parking lot expansions being pursued. They did not tell us where, the number of automobile spaces, or the number of bike parking spaces being added.

The officials are interested in additional ideas for pursuing bike parking and would love to have a another meeting if we are able to come back with more concrete options to move forward on that issue.

MTA was disappointed that bike lockers at Point of Rocks when unused. It was unclear why usage there was expected.

The 2000 report.

The report was never officially released because MTA dropped the project. They keep struggling with putting the people on the trains, which makes everything else a lower priority.

That is a continuing challenge. Recent schedule changes added 1000 seats a day.

Need to understand how MARC operates. It is capacity constrained. What they do is ping-pong back and forth. If the 8:30 train has plenty of room. Might be packed in a previous. Need to have 108-109 cars. They have 123 cars.

Other issues

Stairs and steps onto trains are a common source of injury, even without bikes.

Michael Jackson recommends that MTA sell folding bikes, such as through the MTA web site.

Michael Jackson wants to do a survey of bike parking needs.

Michael Jackson opposed the idea of offering bike lockers along with a monthly ticket, but would favor giving ½ off on the second locker for those in a 2-bike scenario.

Along the Brunswick Line, Amtrak will carry a bike for \$5.