

O'Malley Backs Modified Red Line Plan

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Gov. Martin O'Malley announced Tuesday his backing for an east-west Red Line plan that has won the support of the Baltimore city and county governments: light rail with some tunneling, but not enough to satisfy critics.

The plan, chosen over several rapid bus options, will be sent to the federal government to compete for funding. The line would run from the Woodlawn area of Baltimore County to the Johns Hopkins Bayview medical campus in East Baltimore.

O'Malley made a similar announcement about a Washington suburban project known as the Purple Line. That project would cost \$1.5 billion, while the Red Line proposal would cost \$1.63 billion.

The governor's Red Line choice endorses what is known as Alternative 4C: light rail in a tunnel under downtown, Inner Harbor East, Fells Point and Cooks Lane but otherwise on the surface.

In announcing the project, O'Malley noted two important modifications to the proposal. First, the MTA would move the portal where the light rail tracks come out of the ground in Canton from near the intersection of Aliceanna and Boston streets to near the American Can Company, several blocks east. Additionally, the tunnel under Cooks Lane would run for a mile on a single track, with eastbound and westbound trains taking turns, O'Malley said.

The decision to use a single track in that tunnel is a cost-containment measure adopted to bring the project into compliance with federal cost-benefit guidelines. Another change made by the Maryland Transit Administration is to consolidate two planned stations into a combined Howard Street/University Center station.

Alternative 4C has drawn vehement opposition from neighborhoods where the trains would run at street level, along Edmondson Avenue in West Baltimore and Boston Street in Canton. In stark contrast with the celebratory atmosphere at the announcement of O'Malley's Purple Line decision at the New Carrollton Metro station, the governor's event at the West Baltimore MARC station attracted hecklers who interrupted his remarks several times with boos and catcalls.

But the governor's choice is the clear favorite of Baltimore business and political heavyweights. Among those joining O'Malley at the Red Line announcement were U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings, Baltimore City Council President Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Greater Baltimore Committee President Donald C. Fry and representatives of Mayor Sheila Dixon and Baltimore County Executive Jim Smith.

The 14-mile Red Line would connect with the city's existing transit network, including the MARC Penn Line at West Baltimore, the existing light rail line at Howard Street and the Metro subway through a walkway to Charles Center.

The Purple Line would be a 16-mile light rail track from Bethesda and New Carrollton that supplements the existing Metro subway and the MARC Penn and Camden lines.

Both projects could be started as early as 2013 and opened in 2016 if they received prompt federal approval, according to Maryland Department of Transportation spokesman Jack Cahalan.

