

Light rail is functional, could improve

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Baltimore's light rail and trolley system is meant for locals more than tourists. The cars stop at platforms that would be of little interest to those from out of town unless they had business with the city government or just wanted to ride the elevators to get a better view of the Inner Harbor. Unlike the system in New Orleans, which has been around for more than 100 years, ours has evolved into more of a locally functional status than a sightseeing tool. Still, improvements can be made, as we hear from one reader who sends along a five-step plan for improving inner-city transit.

1. Howard Street from Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to Pratt Street should become a transit-way (no cars), and a third track should be added to the corridor for additional capacity. The signals should be modified in this corridor to give priority to the trolley and light rail.
2. The Grand Boulevard being planned for Pratt Street should include a trolley line that would branch out of Howard Street at Pratt and travel past the Inner Harbor, through Harbor East and Fells Point and down to Canton.
3. The proposed Red Line from Woodlawn should be a light rail/trolley, following the Route 40 corridor and making its way to the northern end of Howard Street. It could use the Howard Street transit-way with the additional capacity of the track added in item No. 1 to travel to Pratt Street and down to Canton along the harbor.
4. The Penn Shuttle should travel between Penn Station and Camden Yards via Howard Street, with limited stops in between. This could encourage Penn Line riders to use the Camden Line, which is almost empty when the trains leave Dorsey bound for Baltimore.
5. The Charles Street Trolley should have a rail-to-rail connection near Penn Station/Mount Royal so trains to and from Johns Hopkins and Homewood can move over to Howard Street, down to Camden Yards and even over to Canton via Pratt Street.

This makes a lot of sense. I would think, though, that adding some bus bridges between the end points might make it even more usable. The problem comes with any transit system when you ask passengers to get off one mode and transfer to another (or two). This means passengers must gather their belongings and wait for the next vehicle to arrive.

No quick or easy answers will solve this complex problem, but ideas like these might jump-start the conversations and get something done. As we have noted, there will always be someone or some group that feels put out or inconvenienced, but the result might benefit all.

Questions, comments, random musings? Write to Steve@SprawlandCrawl.com

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